



# *'There's lots of suffering in here, but some people are suffering more'*: Age, Gender and the Pains of Imprisonment

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# Abstract

Older offenders are the fastest growing group in the prison population in England and Wales. While most age groups of prisoners have been falling the number of prisoners over the age of 50 has continued to increase. Older prisoners have different needs to the general prison population; however, at the time of writing, the government has yet to implement a policy outlining standards of care for this group of prisoners.

This thesis is the result of and nine-month long ethnography that took place in two prisons, a man's, and a woman's, in England from June 2017 to February 2018. It explores the challenges faced by older people in prison, and how this lack of policy impacted on the older prisoner population. It also examines if those difficulties were experienced equally by the older men and women or if, in a system designed for young men, there were gendered differences in the challenges they faced.

The findings highlight how the older men and women suffered from three additional pains of imprisonment as a result of their incarceration: the Pains of Isolation, the Pains of Loss and the Pains of Ageing and Deteriorating Health. These additional pains, experienced by the older people, were exacerbated by a prison system that did not make any accommodation for their additional needs. However, these ageing pains of imprisonment were not felt equally by the older prisoner population. There was a gendered aspect to many of them and the older women experienced additional gendered ageing pains of imprisonment. Where possible, the older people attempted to mitigate their ageing pains of imprisonment; by forming social networks, by working, or by finding a benefit to their incarceration. However, their ability to use their limited agency was impacted by the policies of the prison regime.

This thesis considered if institutional thoughtlessness assisted in understanding why older people were experiencing additional ageing pains of imprisonment; but concluded that, as a concept, institutional thoughtlessness could not sufficiently explain why these prisoners' needs were overlooked. Moving beyond institutional thoughtlessness, the thesis explores the concept of institutional ageism and how it manifests itself at a macro, meso and micro level; concluding that the ageist policies of the prison service were making the time of older people in prison more difficult and increasing their additional ageing pains of imprisonment. Moreover, when these ageist policies intersected with gender, the ageing pains of imprisonment were experienced more keenly by the older women.

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# Glossary

- ADLs - Activities of Daily Living
- App – A paper-based application filled in by prisoners to request information
- CBT - Cognitive Behavioural Therapy
- CJS – Criminal Justice System
- CM - Custodial Manager
- HMIP - Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons
- HMPPS – Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service
- HMPS – Her Majesty's Prison Service
- HRT – Hormone Replacement Therapy
- IEP - Incentives and Earned Privileges
- IR – Incident Report
- IMB – Independent Monitoring Board
- MDT – Mandatory Drug Testing
- MOJ – Ministry of Justice
- MOD – Model for Operational Delivery: A document that support prisons in understanding their population and delivering the prisons function
- NOMS – National Offender Management Service
- NRC - National Research Committee
- PADLs – Prison Activities of Daily Living
- POD – Kiosk system that allows prisoners to access administrative items such as order canteen, look at account balances or visit booking. It is accessed via a fixed tablet terminal on the wing
- Pin Credit – credit placed onto a telephone account that allows prisoners to make phone calls to pre-approved numbers
- PSI – Prison Service Instruction
- PO – Prison Officer
- PSO – Prison Service Order
- RECOOP - Resettlement and care for older ex-offenders and prisoners
- Red Bands – Trusted prisoners who are given prized roles in the prison

- ROTL – Release on Temporary Licence
- TRAKA – Electronic key cabinet system that allows authorised users to access keys
- VEDS - Voluntary Early Departure Schemes
- WHO – World Health Organisation
- YOs – Young Offenders (young adult prisoners aged 18 – 25)

# Chapter One – Introduction

Over the last thirty years England and Wales, alongside other Western liberal democracies such as the United States of America (USA) and Australia, have seen their prison population increase dramatically (Sentencing Project, 2015; Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016). In England and Wales, the prison population doubled between 1993 and 2012 (Ministry of Justice, 2020). Not only did the prison population increase, but its demographics also altered, and the prison population aged. Offenders aged over 50 were the fastest growing group of prisoners. Between 2001 and 2012 the proportion has more than doubled, increasing from five per cent in 2001, when they numbered 3,284 (Home Office, 2003) to 12 per cent in 2012 when the population of prisoners over 50 had reached 9,880 (Ministry of Justice, 2013a).

In recent years there has been a slow decline in the number of prisoners in England and Wales, reducing at a rate of 1.1 per cent per year and in 2020 prisoner numbers reached their lowest levels since 2006. However, while most age groups have been falling the number of prisoners over the age of 50 have continued to increase. Men and women over 50 in prison now constitute 17 per cent of the prison population and on 31st December 2020 they numbered 13,109 (Ministry of Justice, 2021a). Given the huge increase in the older prisoner population it would be reasonable to expect that the prison service would have instituted a specific policy for older people in prison. However, at the time of writing, they had not.

## No Policy for Old Men (or Women)

The Ministry of Justice is the government department that has overall responsibility for the prison service. It sponsors the executive agency of Her Majesty's Prisons and Probation service (HMPPS). HMPPS itself then sponsors the executive agency of Her Majesty's Prison Service (HMPS). HMPS is responsible for the running of public sector prisons in England and Wales. Although the government does not have direct responsibility for the prison estate and its policy, the intent and overarching aims of what happens within the prisons in England and Wales is masterminded by the government. Its reasoning for not instituting a policy for older prisoners has been that older people are not homogenous and therefore their individual needs should be addressed, rather than adopting a blanket policy for older people (Ministry of Justice, 2013b).

Clearly, despite age being a protected characteristic under the 2010 Equality Act, older prisoners have not been deemed to require any policies to assist with their additional needs. This stance, for older people, is at odds with policies produced for other groups of prisoners such as women, young offenders and transgender prisoners. These groups could also be described as being heterogeneous yet there have been strategies and policy frameworks issued for these groups.

## Intermittent Interest in Older Prisoners

Over the last 20 years, while the older prisoner population has increased, there has been intermittent interest in older people in prison from both the government and other interested political bodies. The case of older people was most notably first raised in a report by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons

(HMIP) in 2004, *'No Problems – old and quiet',* a title taken from an entry written on a wing sheet. The report noted the growth in the number of older prisoners, how they had additional needs to those of younger prisoners and that these requirements were not being addressed (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons, 2004). At that point there were only 1,700 prisoners over 60, only a minority of which were women.

This was followed up in 2008 with a second thematic report from HMIP. In it they remarked on the continuing increase in the number of older prisoners and noted the lack of a response from the National Offender Management Service (NOMS), who were then responsible for the running of prisons in England and Wales, which they observed was 'disappointing' (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons, 2008). HMIP again reiterated how the compliance of the older population could lead to their needs being overlooked.

The next report of note was not for another seven years, when in 2013 the Justice Committee launched its enquiry into older prisoners (House of Commons, 2013a). This enquiry called upon the government to acknowledge the increasing number of older people in prison and to institute a policy for older prisoners, which the government declined to do (Ministry of Justice, 2013b).

In 2017 the Prisons and Probation ombudsman published a thematic review on the natural deaths of 314 prisoners over the age of 50 between 2013 and 2015. This report made recommendations about end-of-life care for older people in prison, but it also raised the issue that the prison population was ageing and highlighted how this older population had different needs to the younger population, and that they required different treatment (Prisons and Probation Ombudsman, 2017).

In 2018 the government released its Model for Operational Delivery (MOD) for older prisoners. This MOD identified older prisoners as a 'specialist cohort' (Ministry of Justice, 2018a, p. 4). Yet, unlike a national policy, that would set out what older people could expect while they were in the prison estate, the MOD was a framework that was intended to show governors the type of services that could be provided for their older population (ibid, p. 5). This document neither offered a policy on older prisoners, nor did it require governors to address the needs of their elderly population; it simply provided them with suggestions of activities and services that they could implement for their older population should they feel the need to do so and as long as they had sufficient funds available (Ministry of Justice, 2018a). This document suggested that there was a recognition of a problem but showed a lack of will to address the issues faced by older people.

Finally, in 2020 the Justice Committee launched another enquiry into older prisoners. In this report they pointed to the huge rise in the number of older people in prison and called for an 'overarching, strategic approach' (House of Commons, 2020a) to be implemented. The purpose of documenting these reports and enquiries, issued by arms-length bodies and committees set up to scrutinise government policy, is to highlight how over a period of 18 years these organisations have repeatedly raised the issues of an ageing prison population to the government. Yet the government has repeatedly refused to consider an older prisoner policy. This has set the tone for how older people are treated within the prison system and has allowed the needs of older people in prison continually to be overlooked.

# The Thesis

This situation, the increasing number of older people and the absence of any policy to address their additional needs, was the starting point for this thesis. My aim was to explore how ageing prisoners coped in a system that was designed for young men, not ageing men and women. Accordingly, this thesis explores the difficulties faced by older people in prison, but it also looks to discern if those difficulties are experienced equally by the older men and women or if, in a system designed for young men, there are gendered differences in the challenges they face. Using Sykes (1958) concept of 'Pains of Imprisonment' this thesis examines the additional ageing and gendered pains of imprisonment that are experienced by older people in prison.

After a thorough examination of the literature and a discussion on the research methods I have used, I present the conclusions from my research in four substantive findings chapters. The literature review is split into three sections. In the first section, chapter two, I discuss the literature examining the health and social needs of older people in prison before going on to explore ethnographic prison works, most notably Gresham Sykes (1958) '*Society of Captives*'. This chapter explores how the concept of 'Pains of Imprisonment' has been used over the intervening 60 years by a number of prison scholars. I then examine the few research projects that have sociologically explored the older prisoner population in England and Wales, Elaine Crawley and Richard Sparks (2005) '*Hidden Injuries*', Natalie Mann's (2012) '*Doing Harder Time?*' and Azrini Wahidin's (2004) '*Older Women in the Criminal Justice System*', the only research that has been undertaken on older women in prison.

The second section of the literature review, chapter three, explores gender and the experience of prison. This chapter looks at the literature on masculinity and how men perform masculinity in prison, before moving on to examine the literature on women's imprisonment and how women face additional expectations during their prison sentence. As Pat Carlen (1983) argues, men are sent to prison for punishment whereas women are subjected to additional expectations on themselves and their behaviour.

The final section of the literature review, chapter four, looks at official responses to the ageing prison population. This chapter examines the calls for an older prisoner policy and the government's response to those calls. It explores the issues that older people can have within a system that does not cater for their needs.

Following on from the literature review the methods chapter, chapter five, details the ethnography I undertook and the difficulties I faced both gaining access and carrying out the research. I reflect on some of the challenges I encountered during the research process.

I then move on to discuss my substantive findings, the three additional pains of imprisonment that older people experience during their incarceration, the 'Pains of Isolation', the 'Pains of Loss' and the 'Pains of Ageing and Deteriorating Health'. These three chapters will highlight the additional difficulties that are faced by older prisoners and how these additional pains are exacerbated by a prison system that does not make any accommodation for this older population.

Chapter six discusses the 'Pains of Isolation'. I illustrate how the pains of isolation were intensified by the difficulties that older people had making social connections with people of their own age. The prison service is reluctant to

house more mature people on wings together, but when older prisoners are a minority within the establishment, having older people dispersed around the prison made it difficult for them to form social groups. Additionally, I discuss how those older people, unfortunate enough to be housed on wings with only younger prisoners, experienced a more difficult time by having to live alongside that more boisterous population.

In chapter seven I explore the 'Pains of Loss' that the older people had to deal with and how this loss is gendered. All of the older people experienced losses, but the older women felt the losses of their ageing parents and their barely adult children more keenly. These women felt guilt over their separation from their families. They perceived that this loss was permanent as the age of their parents made their death a realistic prospect, while the age of their children meant that by the time the women were released their semi-fledged adults would have permanently moved on with their lives.

I also highlight how the older women experienced a loss of who they were, as their gendered roles of daughter, mother, wife were taken away from them by their incarceration. I explore how these losses of their role and identity coalesced and left the women unable to imagine what their future lives would be and how they would move forward when they were eventually released from prison. These older women felt that their sentence was harder to bear, as time at their age was more precious.

Chapter eight explores the 'Pains of Ageing and Deteriorating Health'. Most research on older prisoners has focused on the often extreme health conditions that older people in prison may have to deal with. In my thesis I examine how the common and expected ageing pains of imprisonment can make people's time in prison more difficult. The problems accessing suitable healthcare can

mean that everyday facets of ageing, such as declining eyesight, make time in prison harder. I also explore how the prison regime exacerbates common ageing aches and pains, through the extended hours of enforced immobility which the older prisoners endure in their cells, combined with the substandard furniture available to them.

Again, I demonstrate how some pains of ageing health were gendered as some of the older women, who were going through the menopause, suffered from an additional lack of autonomy as they were prisoners both literally of the system and of their own biological changes. I discuss how they faced difficulties accessing anything to help them cope with their menopausal symptoms, making their ageing pains more acute. Additionally, they were also forced to discuss these symptoms with a range of staff and officers when attempting to get those needs met, resulting in frustration and embarrassment.

Having illuminated the additional ageing pains of imprisonment that the older men and women suffered, I illustrate in chapter nine how the older people were not without autonomy and how they utilised this limited autonomy to mitigate some of their pains of imprisonment. Primarily the older people did this by, finding a benefit to their time in prison, by working, or by coming together with other people of a similar age in social groups. The methods were not mutually exclusive and many of the older people would employ all three methods.

In the last two discussion chapters I intended to use Crawley and Sparks (2005) concept of 'Institutional Thoughtlessness' to analyse why the needs of older people were overlooked in prison and why they suffered from additional ageing pains of imprisonment. However, during the analysis of this research and as the writing of the thesis developed I found myself repeatedly questioning if institutional thoughtlessness offered a sufficient explanation as to why these

older people's needs were so regularly disregarded. This consideration of institutional thoughtlessness, as a concept to understand the additional ageing pains of imprisonment, led me to feel that it does not fully provide an answer that explains why these prisoners' needs were ignored.

Indeed, in chapter 11 I move beyond institutional thoughtlessness to explore the concept of institutional ageism. By looking at other more fully explored discriminations, such as Macphersons' (1999) definition of racism, and how it manifests itself at a structural level, it was possible to elucidate how the ageist policies of the prison service were making the time of older people in prison more difficult and increasing their additional ageing pains of imprisonment. Moreover, when these ageist policies intersected with the institutional sexism that has been identified across the criminal justice system (Fawcett Society, 2009), it was possible to understand why the ageing pains of imprisonment were felt more keenly by the older women, who as a minority within a minority, were invisible within the system and as a consequence of this invisibility were repeatedly overlooked.

# Chapter Two – Old Age and Prison

## What is Old?

The age at which someone is defined as 'old' is contentious. Old age is described as having 'elastic boundaries' with some claiming it is always 15 years above the person's current age (Achenbaum, 2005). In general society there is no fixed age at which someone moves into old age. Even the retirement age is no longer fixed having moved from 60, for women, to 66 and with plans to increase to 67 in the next few years (BBC, 2020). Therefore, defining at what age a prisoner becomes 'older' is also challenging.

Chronological age, the number of years to have passed since birth, is just one of the elements to be considered when thinking about ageing (Humblet, 2021). Another method of defining age is to look at the biological age which incorporates the physical condition of the body alongside the biological markers of ageing (ibid). As people age they often experience a physical deterioration, but that deterioration will vary from person to person. It is widely believed that prisoners age at an advanced rate and have the health needs of people 10 years above their biological age (House of Commons, 2013a, p. 8). However, this presumes a heterogeneity that is not to be found amongst the health of the older prisoner population. Their health will be dependent upon a number of factors, including the length of time they have been incarcerated, their life prior to entering prison and other biological factors (Spaulding, et al., 2011).

Given the difficulties in defining old age, it is understandable why researchers have taken a variety of ages when looking at older prisoners, using 45, 60 or 65 years of age (Trotter & Baidawi, 2015; Yorston & Taylor, 2006). However, despite the complexity of defining what constitutes 'old' for the purpose of this research, and in line with academic and policy work on older prisoners (House of Commons, 2013a), I will be referring to anyone aged 50 and above when discussing older people in prison.

## Why Prison?

Prison is firmly established in its role as the foremost punishment for people convicted of criminal offences in England and Wales, whatever their age. However, in an era of an expanding and ageing prison population, it is worth considering the purpose of prison. What does it do? What does it produce? What theories can help us understand the role that prison holds in our society?

On its website, the prison service proclaims that its aim is to, 'keep those sentenced to prison in custody, helping them lead law-abiding and useful lives, both while they are in prison and after they are released' (HM Prison Service, n.d.). However, there is scant evidence to suggest that prison achieves those aims (Drake, 2012, p. 2). Indeed, as David Garland (1993) wrote almost 30 years ago, imprisonment is a 'continual disappointment, seeming always to fail in its ambitions' (p. 1). Evidence suggests that prison does not stop inmates from committing crime, either whilst incarcerated or after they are released. Drug use in prison is ubiquitous, with 48 per cent of prisoners in one study claiming that it was 'easy' to get drugs (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for England and Wales, 2019), while assaults in prison have increased by 270 per cent, rising from 146 incidents per 1000 prisoners in 2000 to 394 per 1000 prisoners in 2019 (Ministry of Justice, 2021e). Such findings suggest that not only does

prison fail to meet its intended aims, but it actually reproduces harms and social divides. One academic who served a long prison sentence has argued that prison inflicts such harms on inmates that their 'moral tolerance' (Warr, 2012, p. 146) is irrevocably altered, and that those who manage to reform their lives do so, not because of their imprisonment, but in spite of it (ibid, p. 147).

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the gendered impact of imprisonment on older people. In this literature review I firstly explore the increasing numbers of older people that are being held within the prison system. This chapter of the review discusses the issues that older prisoners present to a system that is not designed to cope with a rapidly ageing prison population, before moving on to examine some of the seminal prison studies that have been undertaken. I then explore the limited research that has been conducted on older prisoners more specifically.

## Problems Facing Older Prisoners

Many prison researchers have spent long periods of time attempting to understand the much-hidden world of the prison and its complex role in our society. However, not all sectors of the prisoner society have engendered the same level of interest. In 1941, Otto Pollak highlighted the neglect of research on older people and crime, noting that 'old criminals offer an ugly picture and it seems as if even scientists do not like to look at it for any considerable amount of time' (Pollack, 1941, p. 213).

Until the early 2000s most research on older prisoners had been undertaken in the United States (Aday, 1994; Aday & Webster, 1979; Aday, 2003), primarily because of the country's sizable ageing prison population which numbered 246,600 by 2010 (American Civil Liberties Union, 2012, p. i). However, the

increasing number of older prisoners in England and Wales has engendered an interest in the problems facing this older population. Consequently, there has been a slowly expanding field of research undertaken by academics, third sector organisations and government bodies in England and Wales over the last 20 years. This work has highlighted the key areas in which older prisoners are disadvantaged.

To appreciate fully the problems facing older prisoners and how those problems impact upon the prison service, it is necessary to integrate the study of gerontology, which is a multidisciplinary field that explores the social, cultural, psychological and cognitive aspects of ageing, alongside criminological enquiry (Wahidin, 2004, p. 39). Older prisoners are not homogenous but, they can be placed into one of three categories: 'long-termers' who are serving substantial sentences and have grown old in prison, 'recidivists' who have spent a significant proportion of their lives in and out of prison and 'first-timers' who are sentenced to prison for the first time later in life (Crawley & Sparks, 2006). Each type of prisoner presents different problems and faces a variety of challenges.

## Health and Social Care

An ageing prison population brings with them additional health problems. These additional care requirements are placing increasing pressures on the prison service as it attempts to meet the needs of this growing group of prisoners.

People in contact with the criminal justice system reportedly have a greater prevalence of physical and mental health conditions, encompassing a range of illnesses, than is found in the general public. Infections like tuberculosis are five

times higher in the prison population than in wider society, as are blood borne viruses such as hepatitis C (House of Commons, 2018, p. 10). The health of prisoners as they age can be more problematic. One study highlighted that 90 per cent of older prisoners had a recognised illness (Hayes, et al., 2012). These health problems are often aggravated by delays in receiving their medical records or prescriptions once they arrive in prison, a problem that is exacerbated for older prisoners due to their increasing reliance on medication (House of Commons, 2013a, p. 3).

### *Activities of Daily Living*

As people age, they can experience functional decline relating to the physical or mental deterioration which is often precipitated by an inability to engage in their usual daily routines. Functional impairment is measured by a person's ability to engage in Activities of Daily Living (ADLs): to be able to bathe, eat, go to the toilet, get dressed or get in and out of bed unassisted. Whilst incarcerated, there are some additional Prison Activities of Daily Living (PADLs) that people have to engage with; these include standing for head count, getting to the dining hall for meals, hearing orders from staff, and climbing on and off the top bunk (Williams, et al., 2006). Female prisoners, who required no assistance with their ADLs outside of prison, reported requiring assistance with the PADLs (ibid). Therefore, the physical demands of the prison environment could result in someone who could live independently outside of prison, being seen as functionally impaired whilst in prison.

Functional decline also often occurs more markedly when an older person is unable to take part in their ADLs. A lack of mobility and an inability to live independently such as when hospitalised, can contribute towards this (Graf, 2006). This can result in older people requiring social care to assist them with

their ADLs (AGE UK, 2016). Outside prison, older people may have families to assist them or they may be able to access social care services from their local authorities. However, in prison these additional needs can pose a challenge as the staff are neither trained nor paid to provide social care (Prison Reform Trust, 2008, p. 5).

*Social Care in Prison*

The Care Act 2014 tasks local authorities with the responsibility of providing social care to all prisoners in their area, stating that people in prisons or approved premises are 'entitled to care and support largely in the same way as people in the community' (Department of Health, 2016). However, unsurprisingly, older prisoners can experience difficulties accessing an equivalent level of care (House of Commons, 2013a, pp. 30-31). Prisons are closed institutions, making it difficult for outside agencies to deliver the care required, as access to prisoners is restricted. Some establishments utilise peer support networks and employ prisoners as care orderlies; however, they are unable to provide all the levels of personal care that may be required (ibid).

A joint report by HMIP and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) found that provision of social care was unequal across the prison estate and that not all prisoners had their needs identified on arrival into the prison (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons, 2018). In the first three months after the implementation of the Care Act, a report found only 542 referrals had been made to local authorities for social care, with 14 prisons not generating any referrals at all (Anderson, 2015). At the time the report was produced the policy was new, therefore this low number might have been reflective of the fact that prisons were learning to implement the new policy. However, there were also considerable numbers of prisoners with significant social care needs who were

deemed ineligible to receive help, with the report showing that the conversion rate from referral to eligibility was only 45 per cent (Anderson, 2015, p. 5).

As not all prisoners were deemed eligible to receive social care in prison, but still required some assistance, some local authorities and prisons joined up with third sector organisations, in an attempt to resolve this issue. Devon County Council has been working with the charity RECOOP, Resettlement and Care for Older Ex-offenders and Prisoners, to implement their Buddy Support Worker system across the Devon Prison Cluster (RECOOP, 2017). They train prisoners to achieve a social qualification, to an equivalent standard that care workers in society would be required to reach. The training occurs at the local remand prison and then, as these prisoners are transferred to other prisons in the region they are able to support the older prisoners with their social care needs (Hughes, 2016). It has been noted though, that not all prisons monitor and regulate these support workers to the same degree, placing some of these workers and the prisoners they are supporting at an increased risk (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons, 2018).

### *Access and Mobility*

These increasing health and social care needs present a growing problem to the prison service, as historically prisons were designed for young men (Crawley, 2005). Mobility problems in older prisoners can pose challenges, ranging from difficulties climbing into an upper bunk bed to being isolated on wings or in cells, as they are not mobile enough to circumnavigate the prison. Many prisons are built over multiple floors, making areas of the prison inaccessible to those who are less mobile (House of Commons, 2013a, p. 17). Functional decline can be accelerated by extended periods of inactivity, whether that is being confined to a cell for prolonged periods, or simply being unable to move from the wing.

Therefore, the impact of restricted movement is felt more keenly by older prisoners, as it hastens their functional decline (Hughes, 2016).

The Disability Discrimination Act 2005 states that the prison service has a responsibility to adapt the physical environment so that it is accessible for all. However, the age of some of the prisons makes this problematic, as the physical structures can be difficult to adapt to the needs of an ageing population. About one third of the prison estate was built during the Victorian era (House of Commons, 2019). In these older prisons it is challenging to alter the infrastructure to allow wheelchair access if the walls are a foot thick or the buildings are listed (House of Commons, 2013a, p. 5; Lee, et al., 2016, p. 39). This issue is not restricted to the Victorian sector of the estate as more modern prisons also require adaptations to be made to suit the needs of their ageing population. In some prisons the amount of work that is required is too extensive and would result in such a level of disruption to the prison that it cannot be undertaken (House of Commons, 2020a).

The inability for the prisons to successfully adapt their environment or provide suitable social care for older inmates can also hamper older people's progression through the secure estate, as prisons that are not accessible for all, or do not have 24-hour healthcare facilities, may refuse to take prisoners with increased health and medical needs (HM Prison Service, n.d.).

The increasing awareness of the problems that a 'greying' prison population presents has resulted in a welcome increase of literature that has focused primarily on the physical health of older prisoners and how their increased needs impact the provision of health services. Whilst this is completely necessary, by focusing specifically on health, the other problems faced by older prisoners relating to their ability to participate in the regime and their

preparation for release are often overlooked. These additional problems that the regime presents to an ageing prison population will be discussed in chapter four.

## Researching the Society of Captives

Ostensibly, according to Wacquant (2002), the practice of ethnography, of immersive qualitative research, has all but disappeared. This view is not shared by prison researchers in England and Wales, who refuted this claim (Jewkes, 2013). For many prison researchers, the only way to gain a true level of understanding of the lives of those who inhabit our prisons is to conduct an ethnographic study.

One of the most seminal prison ethnographies from America is '*The Society of Captives'* by Gresham Sykes (1958). Western (2007, p. x) argues this work is the 'cornerstone of prison sociology', a characterisation which is reflected by the relevance of Sykes' findings more than 60 years later. It was fundamentally different from most prison research that had gone before, and what followed, as it looked at prison from the inside, from the perspectives of the prisoners.

### Society of Captives

For Sykes, the paramount concept is the 'P*ains of Imprisonment*'. He contends that all prisoners suffered from these pains through five deprivations; the deprivation of their liberty, their autonomy, security, heterosexual relationships and being deprived of goods and services. He argues that, despite society believing that imprisonment is more humane than the physical punishment inflicted in the past, actually, the deprivations faced by prisoners produced such profound frustrations that they are 'just as painful as the physical maltreatment which they have replaced' (Sykes, 1958, p. 64).

In an attempt to reduce the impact of these pains, some prisoners adopt 'alienative modes' (ibid, p. 107). He argues that these prisoners are divisive and can wreck the social cohesion of the prisoner society. They exploit other prisoners and are individualistically seeking only to reduce their own pain, not the pain of the whole society. If the 'Society of Captives' can form a socially cohesive group, Sykes argues, then the pains will most likely be reduced for all. Those who adopt the 'alienative modes' are despised by the other prisoners as they upset the equilibrium in the prison which can lead to the guards 'tightening up' (ibid, p. 124) the regime, making the pains more severe for all.

For Sykes, the 'pains' are psychological punishments that attack the self-identity of the prisoners. This is an observation that was echoed by Goffman (1968) a few years later. In '*Asylums*' Goffman observes how asylums, like prisons, are 'total institutions' (ibid, p. 11). Total institutions demand that their inhabitants live and work together and are usually segregated from the rest of the world, often with a physical barrier around the institution to keep the outside world out. For Goffman, the residents undergo a 'mortification of the self' (ibid, p. 30) where their sense of self is stripped through a process of 'abasements, degradations, humiliations, and profanations' (ibid, p. 24). Their personal possessions are removed; they may be forced to adopt submissive roles or postures and they lose their ability to be autonomous, to make decisions about the smallest things, when to get up, what to wear, when or what to eat; all are removed.

Sykes' work has been accused of ignoring the influence of the outside society on the prisoner society. Irwin and Cressey (1962) posit that prison is not a closed culture with its own distinct social roles, rather it is a reflection of the society outside of the prison walls. Therefore, the 'inmate code', as described by Sykes,

is more likely to be a criminal code that is carried into the prison by people as they enter. Wacquant (2001) goes further to suggest there is no longer either a culture of the street nor one of the prison. Instead, the two have meshed together as a result of the constant flow of people back and forth between the prison and the ghetto.

Sykes describes a prison society as a single cohesive unit, involving all the prison's population. This ideal is somewhat oversimplified as all prisons are different both in terms of their population, regime and design. The assumption that any prison has a single cohesive prisoner society has been refuted. Prisons in the USA have become riven with conflict along racial and ethnic grounds rendering a collective prisoner society obsolete (Crewe, 2007). Where racial divides are less obvious in prisons in England and Wales, arguably there is still a lack of social cohesion. The Incentives and Earned Privileges (IEP) system has effectively reduced solidarity amongst prisoners. By offering prisoners individual rewards for compliance, the system has placed people's focus on the monitoring of their own behaviour, meaning they are less concerned with the needs of the collective (ibid).

## Additional Pains of Imprisonment

Despite the critiques, both of these works, 'The Society of Captives' and 'Asylums', illustrate how the pains or mortifications of imprisonment impact upon the inmates: how their treatment and the constraints on their choices are damaging to their psyche. Pains of imprisonment is an enduring and useful concept that has been successfully employed to explore the damage inflicted by imprisonment on many groups of prisoners. These studies were undertaken in the 1950s and 1960s but are still cited and used by penal researchers writing decades later to reiterate the point that although physical punishment may no

longer be officially inflicted, it does not mean that hurt and damage do not occur.

### *Pains of Indeterminacy*

The concept of pains of imprisonment is used widely in the discourse of long term or indeterminate sentenced prisoners. Cohen and Taylor (1972) suggest that the life sentenced prisoners they encountered, suffered from additional pains of imprisonment as they struggled to maintain their identities, to survive and to adapt to the extreme situation that they were in. These concepts were extended further to discuss how indeterminate prisoners encounter pains of uncertainty or indeterminacy, pains of psychological assessment and pains of self-governance (Crewe, 2011). Crewe argues that prisoners on indeterminate tariffs suffer additionally as their future is always uncertain. Their release date is unknown and any decision that will be made about them rests with the psychological assessments that they undergo while they are in prison. For these prisoners, everything they say is noted down and the 'psychological power suspends itself perpetually' (ibid, p. 518) as this information can be potentially recalled at some unknown point in the future.

In addition to this, Crewe argues that all prisoners now suffer from the pains of self-governance, as the power in prison, while appearing less obvious or less oppressive, is actually all-pervasive and has been handed to the prisoner to manage their own behaviour under the guise of autonomy. Prison sentences are no longer something to be passively endured; they must be engaged with through sentence plans and behaviour courses. This self-governance is more oppressive for the indeterminate sentenced prisoner as their potential, but unknown, release date depends upon this engagement. So, although there is no compulsion to attend courses and address their offending behaviour, the

refusal to engage with them has serious ramifications on their potential for release (ibid, p. 523).

*Pains of Certitude, Legitimacy and Hope*

Similarly, these concepts have also been applied to foreign national prisoners, who have been recognised as experiencing the pains of certitude, legitimacy and hope (Warr, 2016). Many foreign national prisoners are in the precarious situation of potentially facing deportation after their sentence has finished. Their time incarcerated stretches out before them with an uncertain end date and the possibility that they may be removed to another country, potentially to a place that they left as a child and of which they have no knowledge.

These prisoners have often lost hope as they are unable to imagine or plan for their future and often will be leaving behind families when they are removed. They feel their sentences are not legitimate as the prospect of removal allows them to remain in custody long after the end of their sentence. It is usual, when coming towards the end of a sentence, for prisoners to take ROTL (release on temporary licence), to leave prison for a period of time in order to prepare for their resettlement. This process is denied to foreign national prisoners facing deportation as the usual prison rules often do not apply to these prisoners, as they are superseded by immigration policies (ibid).

*Pains of an Interrupted Life*

More recently the concept of 'pains' has been used to describe the difficulties that children and people serving very long sentences face. Adults facing a long term can be overwhelmed by the length of their sentence. In some cases, their time to serve is as long as the life they have lived and because of that vast time stretching ahead of them, they experience 'temporal vertigo' (Wright, et al.,

2017), a physical response to the enormity of the time that they had both lost but would also have to endure. Similarly, children sentenced to prison can feel that the natural course of their life has been permanently interrupted. A part of their lives has been lost and they may never experience some events that mark a rite of passage for most adolescents. This 'loss of childhood' has altered their lives forever and will leave a permanent and indelible mark on their future (Gooch, 2016).

*Pains of Women's Imprisonment*

Women are often overlooked by prison researchers, given their relatively small numbers in prisons. However, imprisonment for women serving life sentences has also been viewed through the lens of the pains that are inflicted upon those women. Genders and Players (1990) applied Sykes original 'pains' to the women serving life in a unit in Durham prison and found that the women felt devalued as women and unable to think about themselves in a positive light, nor to imagine that they would have a life after prison. Walker and Worrall (2000) also explored the gendered pains of women serving life sentences. They found that these women suffered the pains of indeterminacy, which manifested themselves in the women's loss of their ability to be mothers, through their loss of their control over their fertility and their relationships with their children.

It is well documented that a disproportionate number of women in prison have often been subjected to high levels of abuse in the past and therefore imprisonment can often add to and exacerbate the pains that these women are already living with. Crewe et al (2017) posit that the life stories they were told, by the women in their study on life sentenced prisoners, 'almost without exception, [...] read as catalogues of suffering and abuse' (p. 1363). Their research, comparing the experiences of women and men who were serving life

sentences, found that the women experienced the pains of long-term imprisonment more severely than the men (ibid, p. 1365). This work highlights how damaging the loss of motherhood is to these women and how their deprivation of autonomy in prison often echoed the loss of control that they experienced in their lives before coming to prison.

### *The Proliferation of Pains of Imprisonment?*

The concept of pains of imprisonment has been applied to help in understanding the problems experienced by many different groups of prisoners. Its extensive use has led to criticisms that the concept has been overused to such an extent that it dilutes any attempt to effect any meaningful reform; as the repeated use of the concept of pains of imprisonment becomes a 'dull chorus', that becomes easy for policy makers to ignore (Haggerty & Bucerius, 2020).

While it is true there has been a proliferation of the different pains of imprisonment that have been identified as being experienced by diverse prisoner groups, rather than diluting this concept, arguably it emphasises the difficulties that the incarcerated population face and highlights how different aspects of prison can be more challenging for some groups of prisoners. This concept has not yet been used to frame the problems experienced by older prisoners.

Haggerty and Bucerius argue that the proliferation of different types of pains results in a mass of 'unranked' (p. 10) pains, with no way of knowing which pain is worse than the others. Their view is that a ranking is required so that the 'worst pains' can be separated from other less serous 'hurts' and 'problems'. This argument, however, assumes a hierarchy of pain, where one person's pain can be classified above someone else's, that some peoples suffering is not as

great as others. I would argue that the beauty of the concept of pains of imprisonment is that it allows researchers to look at the specific difficulties of individual groups of prisoners and to explore in depth the challenges these groups experience.

In the coming chapters I explore how the pains of imprisonment can be used as a framework to understand the problems of imprisonment as suffered by the older prisoner population and will offer some pains of imprisonment that the older people have suffered. There is nuance within these pains and some, like the Pains of Isolation could be viewed as a further extension of Sykes original pain of a loss of security, rather than a specifically new pain. Whereas the Pains of Loss and the Pains of Ageing and Deteriorating Health further expand the work on pains of imprisonment and add further depth to the challenges faced by the older prisoner population.

## Institutional Thoughtlessness

These prison researchers, like Sykes before them, have explored the prisoner society from the inside and highlighted the many different pains of imprisonment. To ground this research in the literature it is important to consider some of the key studies that have been undertaken on the ageing prisoner population. This literature helps to provide a theoretical framework, which alongside the pains of imprisonment, guides the analysis. Academic research holistically examining the experiences of older prisoners has been infrequent but, the studies undertaken have highlighted clearly the range of problems that older inmates face and have emphasised how, when experiencing prison at an older age, they suffer from additional pains of imprisonment. Most research has been conducted in the male estate, given the significantly larger number of male prisoners.

Crawley and Sparks (2005; 2006) examined both the problems facing older men whilst they were incarcerated and their fears and concerns over their prospective release. In *Hidden Injuries* they discussed the structural difficulties that older prisoners faced, from both the physical structures of the prisons that the older prisoners struggled to negotiate, and the structure of the regime that often overlooked the older inmates. Their paper drew on Sennett and Cobb's (1973) theory of the hidden injuries of class. This argued that if people, who were powerless in an institutional hierarchy, were treated badly or overlooked, they could internalise those negative feelings. These negative emotions engendered feelings of powerlessness and left them with an inability to make themselves and their needs visible; and so, they suffered from hidden injuries. Many of the older prisoners in Crawley and Sparks study were held in high security establishments, irrespective of their physical frailty (2005, p. 349). They found that there was a dissonance between what was expected of the older men as prisoners and what they were able to achieve as old men (ibid, p. 352). For Crawley and Sparks, older prisoners were overlooked and suffered hidden injuries, as their age made them less likely to demand their rights or special treatment.

In this work they introduce the important concept of 'Institutional Thoughtlessness' (2005, p. 352). Crawley and Sparks suggest that institutional thoughtlessness occurs when the needs of the older prisoners are not considered either in relation to the physical environment in which they are required to live, nor by the prison policies and practices to which they are subjected. This concept crucially highlights how the absence of an older prisoner policy has enabled a lack of consideration to the differentiated or additional needs that older people in prison might have. For Crawley and Sparks, the staff did not deliberately discriminate against older prisoners but,

through their policy of treating all prisoners in the same manner, they thoughtlessly expected them to behave in the same way as their younger counterparts and did not contemplate that they may be unable to perform as well or as quickly. The prison did not actively seek to curtail the activities of the older residents, but the principle of sameness did not allow for any consideration of their differentiated needs.

Crawley and Sparks highlight a number of problems facing older prisoners and how issues can influence 'first-timers' and 'long-termers' differently. They posit that the first-timers can experience a 'catastrophic event' when being sent to prison for the first time in old age, especially those whose crimes were committed many decades earlier. Many of these older prisoners had to leave their families behind which caused them increasing distress. Whereas the long-termers' concerns focused upon their release and how they would cope in a society that had passed them by (2006, p. 71). Many of the older prisoners shared a fear of dying in prison. This is a legitimate fear for many older prisoners, especially those first timers whose crimes were committed historically but had only just been sentenced. In 2020, 184 prisoners over the age of 50 died in custody due to natural causes, accounting for 89 per cent of all deaths attributed to natural causes and 58 per cent of all deaths in custody (Ministry of Justice, 2021e). The length of sentences being given to older prisoners can mean that their sentence, whilst not stipulated to be a life sentence, can effectively be viewed as one. Indeed, Crawley and Sparks noted that during their research a number of their participants had died (2006, p. 68).

Considering the concept of 'institutional thoughtlessness', Humblet (2021) suggested, in her study in two Belgian prisons, that older prisoners experienced problems both from ageing and from being a prisoner. Growing old brings with

it an increasing vulnerability whilst also an expanding wealth of knowledge. She argued that institutional thoughtlessness impacted them doubly, as their vulnerability was compounded by the prison experience but also their increased knowledge and life experience was disregarded by the prison regime. Therefore, many of the problems that the older prisoners faced could have been overcome if the staff had just considered them and been more thoughtful about the problems that older people were encountering (Humblet, 2021, pp. 274-279).

## Harder Time

Another study, by Natalie Mann (2012), observed how the health and mobility needs of older male prisoners resulted in them doing 'harder time'. She describes their relative helplessness in a system that was not designed for older people and how their age made them more likely to be compliant and passive agents, allowing their needs to be disregarded (ibid, p. 42). Yet conversely, she also argued that many older prisoners were raised in an era when men undertook national service. Therefore, they were able to draw upon the 'habitus' and 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 1977) from their previous lives to cope with their imprisonment. This highlighted the problems of presenting older prisoners as a homogenous group as they are a heterogeneous mix. Mann felt that as time passed fewer ageing prisoners would be as well equipped to deal with their imprisonment. Therefore, given the growing numbers of older people in the system, the prison service will face increasing problems with their ageing population (Mann, 2012).

## Older Women in Prison

Women in prison in England and Wales account for only five per cent of the total prison population, making them a minority in the secure estate. This small proportion of women in prison has given female imprisonment something of a Cinderella status. Women are incarcerated in a system designed for men by men; they are held in establishments that were not built to house women prisoners and they are often subjected to prison courses designed to address men's offending behaviour (Carlen & Worrall, 2004, pp. 68-69). The gendered nature of imprisonment is discussed in more detail in the following chapter. However, it is pertinent to note that historically prison researchers have tended to ignore women as, with a few notable exceptions; see for example Carlen, (2002) Carlen & Worrall, (2004) Crewe, et al., (2017) and Genders & Player, (1987), most prison research has focused on male prisoners, to the exclusion of women. Moreover, research on female prisoners, when it has been conducted, has tended to focus on aspects of domestic life or sexual relations (Liebling, 2009). Although the amount of research into women's incarceration has increased in recent years, given the predominance of male prisons, most prison research still tends to focus on men.

Older women are a minority within this minority, numbering just 474 (Ministry of Justice, 2021a). In the United Kingdom, only one study has examined the needs of older female prisoners. Azrini Wahidin's (2004) lone exploration of the invisibility of older women in British prisons attempted to 'un-silence' (p. 10) this neglected and unseen population. She highlighted the way they were disregarded, both in terms of the lack of research undertaken into their experiences and by the prison service that ignored their needs. Wahidin argued that the prison service's policies disregarded the older women's needs and

requirements because, as a minority they have been marginalised (p. 10). Ageing women have different health care requirements to men, for example they need systematic cervical and breast cancer screening, yet these screenings were not regularly provided (Wahidin, 2011, p. 115).

Through qualitative interviews she explored the challenges that these ageing women faced in a system that disadvantaged women and exposed how they struggled to cope within a regime that has stripped them of their social roles of wife, mother, and grandmother (Wahidin, 2004). This was echoed in recent research on the experiences of long-term female prisoners which described their anguish at being imprisoned and being forced to abandon their maternal roles (Crewe, et al., 2017). Wahidin also contended that the older women often felt discouraged from engaging with the work and employment opportunities within the prisons, as these were retained for the younger women with a future (Wahidin, 2004, p. 182). Feeling excluded, the older women utilised the limited agency that they had to negotiate their way through the penal system. However, in many cases this response would involve withdrawing from the prison environment, leaving them open to misinterpretations and accusations of aloofness from both staff and inmates alike (Wahidin, 2004, p. 189). Moreover, their withdrawal increased their invisibility, allowing their needs to be further overlooked.

## A Conceptual Framework

These studies have used qualitative methods in an attempt to gain an understanding of the experiences of older prisoners. These ground-breaking projects have much to recommend them and have all highlighted the numerous problems that older people can face whilst incarcerated.

My research uses the concept of pains of imprisonment as a way of exploring the gendered difficulties that older people in prison face. This concept helps to illuminate the challenges faced by older men and women in prison and the difficulties that the prisons have in managing this ageing population. Alongside this, I attempted to employ the concept of institutional thoughtlessness to understand how and why the needs of older people are overlooked. This framework should have allowed the exploration of how institutional thoughtlessness intersects with, and increases, the pains of imprisonment. However, as the analysis of the thesis progressed it became apparent that institutional thoughtlessness was not fully able to explain why prisoners' needs were overlooked. In the penultimate chapter of the thesis, I turn to the concept of institutional ageism to explore if this provides a better explanation for why older prisoners additional needs are overlooked.

In the following chapters I evaluate the literature on the varying experiences faced by men and women in prison and examine what impact gender has on them. I then explore the existence of institutional thoughtlessness at the level of prison policy and at the local institutional level.

# Chapter Three - Gender and the Experience of Prison

This chapter examines the literature on gender and how that impacts on the experience of imprisonment for men and women. Gender is not just based on a natural state defined by biological difference but is also socially constructed. Gender relations order society profoundly and it is important to note that masculinity and femininity are not constructed equally, rather masculinity is privileged over femininity (Connell, 1987). All institutions are formed by the gender relations that make up the gender regime of that particular institution (ibid). Therefore, it is not just the people within the institution that construct this gendered identity, but the institution as well. It constructs the definitions of masculinity and femininity: what does it mean to be a man and what does it mean to be a woman. Connell (1987) describes 'hegemonic masculinity' as the idealised version of masculinity within that gendered regime. Hegemonic masculinity can alter depending on the time and place but generally is men's economic, social, and political position, above women.

The academic study of crime, criminology, reflects this hegemonic masculine view, as its focus tends to fix the male experience in its gaze, while the study of women is supplementary to it (Daly & Chesney-Lind, 2009, p. 343). Not only has criminology studied men, to the near exclusion of women, but it has studied men without apparent interest in their gender at all. Given the seemingly 'natural' relationship between men and crime, conceivably gender should be the primary area of study, to attempt to understand not only what makes men

more likely to offend, but what makes women less so (Naffine, 1997, pp. 6-7). When discussed in academic texts women are often in a discrete chapter of the book. These chapters ostensibly refer to gender but often contain little or no information pertaining to men. Furthermore, there is never a discrete chapter within these texts just to discuss men. This allows the idea of gender to coalesce with the idea of being a woman and accordingly women are seen as a specialism, an addition to the main body of knowledge whereas men are the taken for granted 'norm' (Naffine, 1997, pp. 2-4).

Likewise, the criminal justice system also follows this androcentric view. When thinking about prisoners the default position is man. Prisoners are men, prisons were built for men, and women have to adapt and make do. This thesis attempts to redress this imbalance by studying older men and women together, to analyse how gender impacts upon their prison experience, to look at those gendered differences and explore how age and gender intersect and contribute to the additional pains of imprisonment that these older people are experiencing.

## Taking a Stand

One way of understanding how imprisonment impacts upon women is by using a feminist standpoint method. This is about creating research for and about women and giving them a voice. This allows for the exploration of the lives of women, and their experiences, and to understand how they are different from those of men. It is about understanding the experiences of the women, not making assumptions about them (Ramazanoglu, 2002). Following the argument that both the criminal justice system and the academic study of that system are 'androcentric', research taking a feminist standpoint can attempt to 'un-silence the voices of women behind bars' (Comack, 2011). Exploring the

experiences of women, as well as men, can provide a more rounded view than just exploring the male experience.

Harding (1991) argues that there is no single woman's viewpoint, as women's lives are all different and each woman's knowledge will be unique to her. By giving older women in prison the ability to voice their experiences it is possible to produce knowledge that provides these women with an opportunity to be heard. The knowledge has a political purpose and will challenge the dominant understanding of how imprisonment is experienced in old age. Standpoint theory can highlight how the older women in prison can exercise the limited power they have, in order to cope and survive in prison. Comack (2011) argues that the research needs to be grounded in the women's standpoint, through their knowledge and the context of their lives. Then the researcher applies a theoretical lens to interpret their experiences. By understanding their position, and the social structures that constrain their lives, it is possible to understand the agency that they are able to employ as well as the barriers that limit those choices (Comack, 2011).

## Characteristics of Men and Women in Prison

Both men and women's imprisonment more than doubled between 1993 and 2012 when the numbers peaked. Since then, the number of women in prison has declined more quickly, at a rate of 2.9 per cent per year, than for men at 0.9 per cent, but it is still double where it was almost three decades ago (Ministry of Justice, 2020). The majority of women, 61 per cent, have been imprisoned for non-violent offences, whereas almost half of the male prisoner population, 49 per cent, are serving sentences for violent or sexual offences (Ministry of Justice, 2021a).

The majority of people in prison are likely to come from backgrounds of socio-economic deprivation, but women in prison are more often drawn into crime through their economic circumstances (Moore, et al., 2017). This can be seen in the types of crimes that they commit and the length of sentences that they receive. In 2020, 37 per cent of women were sentenced to prison for acquisitive crimes and 68 per cent of women received short sentences of 6 months or less, despite it being accepted that short sentences are ineffective, do not address offending behaviour, and aggravate the mental health and socio-economic problems that these women and their families already face (Corston, 2007, p.i). Criminalising these women for acquisitive crimes, layers yet further structural disadvantages on them constraining ever more their life chances and their ability to look after themselves and their families.

Certain problems are more prevalent amongst the prisoner population as a whole. Figures shown in the chart below (figure 1) highlight that adult prisoners are more likely than the wider population; to have been taken into care as a child, observed or been a victim of violence, suffered from mental health issues, or attempted suicide. Yet, in all of these categories, women prisoners will have had a greater likelihood of experiencing these incidents than male prisoners.

These figures highlight the traumas and struggles that both men and women in prison are faced with in comparison to the population outside of prison, but the gendered differences in the mental health of men and women in prison are clearly discernible. That women struggle more with their imprisonment is emphasised by women accounting for 22 per cent of self-harm incidents despite only representing five per cent of the prison population, with 39 per cent of female prisoners resorting to self-harm as opposed to 14 per cent of the male

prisoner population (Ministry of Justice, 2021d). What then can we say about the gendered experience of prison that might explain the differential outcomes of older men and women?

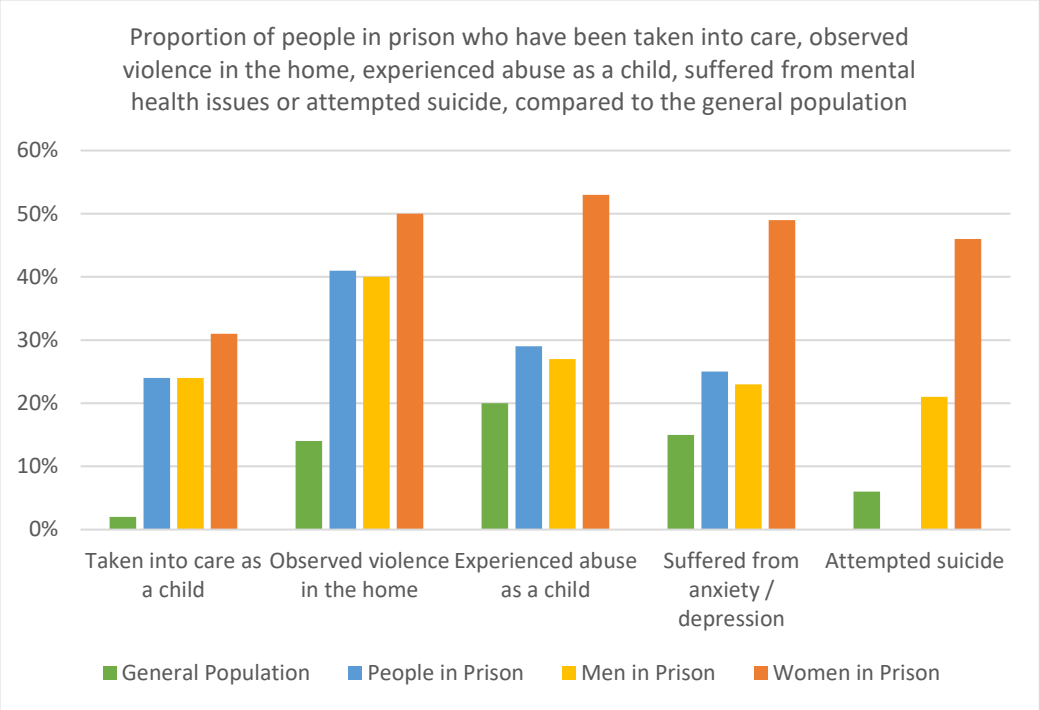


*Figure 1 (Prison Reform Trust, 2021a)*

## Performing Masculinity in the Society of Captives

At the risk of stating the obvious, male prisons are overwhelmingly masculine settings, despite the introduction of female staff within prisons. Men's prisons are often described as having a hyper-masculine environment, where outward displays of aggression are considered the norm (Maycock, 2018). Yet conversely, being in prison places you in an environment where you are expected to behave in a compliant manner. You need to observe the rules and an element of deference towards those in positions of authority is expected. This contradiction gives rise to the question: how is it possible to perform

masculinity when locked into an environment that demands submissiveness from its captives (Sloan, 2016)?

Hegemonic masculinity, although variable, is generally characterised by men showing their independence, their emotional and physical strength, their ambition, and their leadership. Additionally, it often prioritises heterosexual relationships above others (Connell, 1987). The idealised version of masculinity in most male prisons is based on physical dominance. Violence is commonplace in prisons and this violence reinforces a hierarchy that prioritises aggression and strength (Scraton, et al., 1991). In order to survive in the male estate, men must be able to find their place within this excessively masculine hierarchy (Jewkes, 2005). The pains of imprisonment severely restrict the men's ability to display traditional masculine traits, as their ability to provide for their family or indulge in heterosexual relationships are denied to them (Sloan, 2016). In order to perform their masculinity, the male prisoners must seek other means of signalling their manliness to their fellow captives.

## Bodies of Emotion

Being a man in prison means you need to look the part as well as act the part. Both of these facets are intrinsically linked to how masculinity is performed within the penal environment. As the prison hierarchy holds the strongest at its apex and the weakest at its base it is incumbent on the men to carve out their position in the society (Jewkes, 2005). To do this they must present their masculinity to their fellow captives.

In prison, all the usual signifiers of wealth and power are removed. Often prisoners are issued standard clothing which they must all wear. Therefore, in an attempt to differentiate themselves, some men will endeavour to perform their masculinity through their bodies. Usually in society men's bodies are not

held subject to the same scrutiny as women's. However, once women are removed from the equation men's gaze will turn on each other (ibid). Prison gyms are often full of men working tirelessly at lifting heavy weights, striving to inflate both their muscle size and indeed their position within the prison. To build up their body mass not only signifies visually their power, but it also shows to the other prisoners their ability to impose strict control on themselves, whilst simultaneously exerting their own agency, within an environment that greatly restricts people's ability to do so (Jewkes, 2005).

## Just Frontin'

Goffman (1959) argues that people manage the way they are viewed by others, and they do this through 'dramaturgical' means, by putting on a 'front'. This front is crucial so that we can 'convey an impression to others which it is in [our] interests to convey' (p. 16). In other words, as humans, we manage how we present ourselves to others, in order to ensure others are perceiving us in the way we would like them to. This happens in all areas of life but is felt to be particularly crucial in the hyper-masculine prison environment. Jewkes (2005), argues that 'wearing a mask' is a commonplace strategy amongst prisoners to help them cope with their sentence. This mask presents the image they want to display. To find their place in the prisoner hierarchy they need to be seen to be prepared to fight. Displaying fear or showing signs of weakness can be exploited within this environment. However, presenting a fearless façade alone will not help; this mask will only protect them from victimisation if they are prepared to stand their ground in the face of aggression (Evans & Wallace, 2008).

A mask is not just about projecting a fearless image to those around you, it is also about suppressing emotions. Masculinity in prison is associated with 'emotional fortitude', (Crewe, 2009, p. 282). To be stoic, to keep your emotions

under control is the ultimate mark of masculinity. Someone who can do their sentence without displaying emotions is seen to be endowed with real masculine qualities, as they are able to maintain their self-control throughout their sentence. As Sykes (1958) put it, 'the real man regains his autonomy, in a sense, by denying the custodians' power to strip him of his ability to control himself.' (p. 102).

This bid to perform masculinity can be harmful to men. Men who suppress their emotions are more likely to experience mental health issues such as anxiety and depression (Montero, 2018). Many prisoners are aware of this danger and have found ways to channel out these emotions. The lucky ones vent their pent-up emotions in the gym or by letting their emotions out, regularly but in private (Crewe, 2009), whereas, others who cannot find a way to regulate their emotions submit to the despair they are feeling and, as the figures earlier told us, in some cases can turn to self-harm and even suicide when it becomes too difficult to cope.

Kimmel (1994) argues that the overwhelming emotion intertwined with masculinity is fear, a fear that they might somehow expose themselves as being less than a real man. That they could be perceived as being feminine or homosexual is the fear that keeps the mask firmly in place. However, men who are felt to be carrying a 'front' can often be seen as disingenuous and having something to hide. More masculine value is seen to be placed upon people who are true to themselves. Unfortunately, this strategy may not work for all prisoners. Hegemonic masculinity favours heterosexual relations, and this is amplified in the hyper-masculine world of the prison. To be openly gay could be seen as opening oneself up to ridicule and victimisation. Therefore, for some prisoners the need to fix the mask in place is vital (Crewe, 2009), as the mask

allows them to keep their 'true' self away from other prisoners, retaining privacy over certain aspects of their outside life.

## Changing Views of Hegemonic Masculinity

Prisons are not homogenous and therefore hegemonic masculinity will vary according to the institution, as different regimes will promote different versions of masculinity. Unsurprisingly, young offender institutions are more volatile and will likely experience a high number of violent outbursts on a daily basis (Gooch, 2016), whereas open prisons have a more controlled environment and are calmer (Sim, 1994). Similarly, within a large prison, different areas of the prison might have different ideals of masculinity. Not all men wish to display themselves as violent hardmen, indeed often men will describe the fear they experience in prison.

As people age, their views and ideas of masculinity are likely to alter, and they are less inclined or less able to engage in outwardly violent behaviour (Evans & Wallace, 2008). Some men will choose to display their masculinity through other methods such as work and education (Sim, 1994) or by keeping themselves and their surroundings clean (Sloan, 2016). As the older population, who are less physically able to perform hyper-masculinity increases, it will be a challenge with which the prison regime will have to contend. If these older prisoners are in danger of being more vulnerable to the prisoner society, will the prison service act to ensure that the environments that they are held in are more suitable to their needs?

# It's a Man's World

For women, the gendered challenges of prison are different. The lives of a vast number of women in prison have been affected by poverty, homelessness, family breakups, mental health problems and abuse and violence. Rather than intervene in the lives of women in a positive way, the state's response is to criminalise these women rather than help them (Clarke & Chadwick, 2017). The conflation of the term prisoner with being male allows women to be disadvantaged before they even enter the prison. Men who commit crime are seen as normal, women on the other hand, are not (Carlen & Worrall, 2004). The prison estate was not designed for women, nor were they given any consideration for how they are held. Of the 12 women's prisons in England and Wales, only one was designed specifically for women. The rest have all been re-rolled from men's prisons or adapted from buildings designed for other purposes. Because of this, most female prisoners are held in high security establishments designed to prevent men from escaping, despite women having virtually no recorded cases of escape (Carlen & Worrall, 2004, p. 53).

## Gendered Social Control

Despite their different offending behaviour and different needs, women are treated in the same way as male prisoners and are subjected to the same rules and procedures as men but, in addition to that, the female prison regime is shaped by 'the most repressive, discriminatory and usually outdated ideologies of womanhood and femininity' (ibid, p. 2). Subsequently, women prisoners are seen as abnormal and their offending behaviour is often pathologized, leading to them being regarded as 'masculine, mad, menopausal or maladjusted' (ibid, p. 2) and subjected to gendered social control mechanisms. Women have

different physical needs, medical requirements, and family responsibilities and are expected to meet very different cultural and social expectations than men. But these differences are often overlooked in prison. This has led Carlen (1983) to argue that the prison's aim for men is simply to 'discipline and punish', while with women the aim is to 'discipline, medicalise, domesticise, psychiatrise and infantilise' (Carlen & Worrall, 2004, p. 83).

The offending behaviour courses that women must undertake while they are in prison have mostly been designed for men. These courses assume the causes of women's offending behaviour is the same as men's and accordingly ignore the differentiated life experiences of the women (Carlen & Worrall, 2004, pp. 68-69). Cognitive Behavioural Therapy Programmes (CBT) assume that these women have agency and are responsible for their offending behaviour and can generate a positive change through CBT. But by placing the blame and responsibility with the individual women, this neo-liberal ideology skilfully ignores the social and structural inequalities that constrain their life choices (Kendall, 2002).

## Bodily Pressure

Women and men are both physically confined in prison and their behaviour is attempted to be regulated. But for women, there is an additional facet in that their bodies are also subjected to a scrutiny within the prison that, in the name of security, invades the women's privacy and dignity (Carlen, 1998). Strip searches and mandatory drug testing (MDT) force women to reveal intimate parts of themselves or to perform intimate procedures under the watchful eye of their captors. Following the Corston report, strip searches were only to be used in the case of 'intelligence or reasonable suspicion' (Ministry of Justice, 2016b) but there are still examples of this behaviour continuing

inappropriately. In 2019 the High Court found that the Ministry of Justice had failed to prevent the breach of women's human rights when they were unlawfully strip searched in HMP Peterborough (BBC, 2019).

In prison there is little private space or privacy for anyone, but again women are more open to scrutiny. Although there is no overt objection to having male officers working in the prison, it can cause women to feel anxious as the lack of privacy means that the officers could enter their cells at any time, catching them in a state of undress or going to the bathroom (Carlen, 1998). Also, the knowledge that male officers would be looking through the door flap when they were doing the evening rounds can make women feel acutely conscious of their loss of privacy in the face of authority. This makes women vulnerable and powerless to resist the 'legitimated punitive stare' (p. 142) they must endure.

All of women's biological activities are open to inspection by the prison staff. In order to gain access to items they might need, menstruation, menopause, even pregnancy all have to be discussed with the officers, many of whom are male (Bosworth, 1999). These matters, that are often deeply private to women, and are not routinely discussed in public, would have to be presented to the officers so that any necessary items could be approved, a practice that is deeply humiliating to women. Older women are also obliged to share personal information about the intimate aspects of their ageing bodies. For a generation who had only referred to gynaecological issues as 'women's troubles' being forced to verbalise to the officers, often much younger men and women, the need for incontinence pads creates a deep sense of shame.

## My Fair Lady

The gendered nature of the prison regime is evident in the array of educational courses and work that is available for the women to undertake. In men's prisons there are often courses for bricklaying, plastering, HGV driving, construction, or printing. This display of stereotypical masculine employment is not often available in the women's prisons. Rather they are offered courses that are tailored around shaping their feminine identity and their presentation of themselves. Courses in sewing, cooking, and hair and beauty are available for women to undertake and are all designed to enhance their feminine virtues (Bosworth, 1999). This gendered attitude towards education and training fails to understand the real-world experiences of women and the limited selection offered appears to be attempting to reinforce a form of idealised femininity, that is not necessarily reflective of the lives of women in prison.

## Resisting the Man

In 2020 women accounted for five per cent of all proven adjudications in prison (Ministry of Justice, 2021a). Women are most likely to be given an adjudication for the charge of disobedience and disrespect. In 2017, 43 per cent of women's adjudications were for this reason, as opposed to only 33 per cent of men's (Ministry of Justice, 2018c). A number of conclusions can be drawn from these figures. Possibly, due to their mental health issues, the female population are more difficult to manage, or perhaps women are disinclined to conform to overbearing and unreasonable levels of discipline. Another possibility is simply that women are treated more strictly and expected to conform to different standards of conduct than male prisoners. Women's prisons are less violent than the male establishments so possibly the officers are conditioned to mark out their authority over the prisoners; therefore, the women are punished for

less serious offences than the men would be (Carlen, 1998). This conduct is held to gendered expectations of how women should behave, not to swear, answer back or question the rules and regulations (Carlen & Worrall, 2004). Many women in prison railed against the petty and paternalistic rules of the prison and the attitudes of the officers which they felt infantilised them, and they would attempt to assert their resistance in the face of this (Rockell, 2012; Bosworth, 1999; Carlen, 1998).

Although the Ministry of Justice does not collect exact numbers, approximately 66 per cent of female prisoners are thought to have children under 18 (Beresford, 2018). Separation from their children produces a 'physical, deep pain', and a strong sense of guilt, with women feeling they have failed as mothers and as women (Baldwin, 2015, p. 161). These women have been autonomous prior to entering the prison; adults who were responsible for running their own homes and looking after their own children. Yet in prison they are not deemed responsible to make the most basic decisions. They are told what to do and when to do it. They are treated with suspicion and mistrust; if ill they are disbelieved by the medical staff who assume they are attempting to gain medication for some nefarious reason (Rockell, 2012). The older women are denied proper access to routine medical examinations and are labelled hypochondriacs when they do attempt to gain medical help (Wahidin, 2004). Additionally, they are expected to refer to the younger officers as 'sir' or 'miss', which could be difficult to accept (Carlen, 1998).

To attempt to resist this paternalistic attitude women often refuse to comply. They are deemed by staff to be more argumentative and less likely to take no for an answer, whereas men are perceived as being generally more compliant to orders (Carlen, 1998). There is a certain irony in this observation as women

are often given CBT courses to improve their assertiveness, yet when the assertiveness appears it is unwelcome and perceived as disobedience or disrespect (ibid p. 89).

## Gendered Approaches to Imprisonment

There are divides within feminist criminological studies that revolve around the issue of women's treatment by the criminal justice system; should women be treated the same as men, the 'sameness approach', or are women appreciably different and require special or differentiated treatment, the 'difference approach' (Burgess-Proctor, 2006, p. 32)?

The sameness approach advocates equal treatment under the law and access to the same programs within the prison estate. Advocates of this approach contend that treating women differently amounts to discrimination and can result in paternalistic laws that enforce further social control over women under the guise of protection (ibid) whereas, proponents of the difference approach contend that the structure of society is unequal, and the law is not gender neutral. Therefore, treating women 'equally' is judging them against male norms and disadvantaging them (ibid). It also does not consider the impacts of prison on women, and how that can have further unintended consequences in society (Carlen, 2002, p. 5). This 'search for equivalence' (Carlen & Worrall, 2004, p. 30), the desire to treat and punish women as men, has been responsible for increases in the numbers of women in prison.

## Corston Report

In 2006 Baroness Jean Corston was commissioned by the government to conduct a review of the women's estate following six self-inflicted deaths in

HMP Styal over the course of one year. Corston (2007) made a strong case for differential punishments for women's offending behaviour. She argued that equality meant equality of outcome, not treatment. As men and women had different needs and there was a fundamental difference in their offending behaviour, they should be treated differently. The report suggested that a 'distinct, radically different, visibly-led, strategic, proportionate, holistic, woman-centred, integrated approach' (Corston, 2007) should be adopted to address women's offending.

In the report Baroness Corston made 43 recommendations. The overarching theme of her report was that prison is unsuitable for the majority of women. She recognised the harms inflicted on women who were imprisoned in a system designed for men. She highlighted how these harms were inflicted not just on the women, but on their families too, and told of the resulting damage and disruption, through often short sentences, impacting these families. Her report proposed actions that would move towards reducing the numbers of women in prison by using community alternatives to custody. At the time the government's response accepted 'almost all' of the proposals in the report, 41 of the 43 (Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice, 2007).

Unfortunately, despite this initial acceptance, some 15 years later many of the recommendations have yet to be instituted, most notably the proposal to replace the existing women's prisons with smaller multi-function custodial centres, spread geographically throughout the country. In 2013 the Justice Committee remarked on the lost opportunity of taking forward the Corston recommendations and called upon the, then, coalition government to prioritise the needs of female offenders and recognise their differential needs (House of Commons, 2013b).

## A Distinctly Different Approach?

In March 2013 the coalition government announced its 'Strategic Objectives for Female Offenders', which stated that it would look at enhanced community sentences for women, review the women's estate and recognise the needs of female offenders through the Transforming Rehabilitation program. The setting up of an advisory board for female offenders was also announced (Ministry of Justice, 2013d). In 2018 another proposal for female offenders was released, the Female Offender Strategy. This strategy's three priorities were; early intervention, a focus on community-based solutions and making prison as effective as possible for the women sent there (Ministry of Justice, 2018b). Many penal reform charities were opposed to the early intervention strategy, as it would most likely draw more women into the criminal justice arena (Ryder, 2018) and have criticised the five million pounds allocated for the women's centres as 'falling short' of what is required to effect lasting change (Drinkwater, 2018).

Sadly, this female offender strategy makes no mention of older women at all, continuing to compound the invisibility of older women in the system. Three years after the latest women's strategy was released the government has again been criticised for a lack of progress in its aims, failing to meet over half of the commitments that it made when issuing the strategy. Notably, of the five women's residential centres that were promised, none have been opened. The first site was intended to be in Wales and was purportedly due to be opened by the end of 2021. However, currently no site has yet been identified (Smallshaw, 2021). In addition, the key aim of the strategy, to reduce the number of women in custody, is effectively being reversed by the announcement of an additional 500 places in the women's estate (Prison Reform Trust, 2021b).

Despite a general acceptance that their increased needs means that prison has a more detrimental impact on women than on men, and an acknowledgement that men and women require different approaches to their punishment, change has been slow to materialise. Following a time of political change, the vote to leave the European Union, three general elections between 2015 and 2019 and an unprecedented five different Justice Ministers in five years, the focus on women has become a little lost. Whether this lack of action is due to; the invisibility of women within the prison system, because it is politically unpopular to be seen to be addressing the needs of prisoners, or simply because on the grounds of 'less eligibility' people in prison should not be given better treatment than the poorest person in general society (Carlen, 2002, p. 15), remains as conjecture.

## Conclusion

This chapter has explored the literature showing the clear gendered differences to the experience of prison for men and women. It highlights the problems men face when attempting to find their place in the hyper-masculine environment of the male prison. This proves more difficult for those older prisoners who do not conform to this hegemonic masculine ideal. These older men, who are less willing and able to present this masculine front, have to find an alternative way to perform their masculinity and to secure their place in the prison hierarchy.

All prisoners suffer from pains of imprisonment; however, arguably imprisonment is more detrimental to women, and they experience greater pains (Carlen & Worrall, 2004, p. 63). Women have different pathways into crime and the experience of imprisonment is greatly damaging to them and their families. Women are punished in the same way men are but are additionally held up to gendered social control that attempts to make women

conform with stereotypical views of 'idealised femininity'. The women are also subjected to scrutiny and inspection of their bodies in a way that men are not. Practices such as MDT and strip searching are highly invasive, degrading and humiliating, but for women who have suffered sexual abuse this could be viewed as re-victimisation (Corston, 2007, p.5). Older women in prison are forced to disclose intimate details of their ageing bodies with younger, often male officers and are infantilised and subjected to petty and overbearing rules and procedures.

Despite the call in the Cortson Report (2007) 15 years ago for a radical change to women's imprisonment, very little has changed. The majority of women entering prison are still serving short sentences which are damaging to both the women and their families. Many female offender strategies have been submitted yet still no radical change has occurred.

## Institutional Thoughtlessness

Institutional thoughtlessness allows the treatment of older people to be overlooked, not via direct discrimination but by the principle of sameness that overlooks the differentiated needs which older people have. The next chapter, the final chapter of this literature review, examines institutional thoughtlessness and how prison policy is overlooking the needs of these ageing men and women, and explores how this policy translates at the individual institutional level.

# Chapter Four - The Response to Greying Prisons

Sykes (1958) suggests that all inmates suffer from pains of imprisonment as a result of the deprivations which they endure whilst incarcerated. However, it has been posited that, due to their deteriorating health and physical abilities, older offenders experience a greater number of pains (Crawley & Sparks,2005; 2006; Mann,2012; Wahidin,2006). Age is a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010 which provides that no-one should be disadvantaged or discriminated against, either directly or indirectly because of their age (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2020). In 2009, the United Nations recognised that older prisoners were a group with special needs that had specific vulnerabilities within the prison estate (2009, p. 1). Yet, despite old age being recognised both in law and by intergovernmental organisations, government policy appears to be unwilling or unable to address the needs of ageing prisoners through a policy lens.

Repeated calls have been made for the government to issue a national strategy and guidelines for the care and treatment of older prisoners (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons, 2004, p. x; 2008, p. 10; Prison Reform Trust, 2008, p. 2; House of Commons, 2013a, p. 56). Yet despite these numerous requests, the Ministry of Justice has declined to do this, stating:

> [A] blanket categorisation of prisoners by age is unhelpful. For this reason our approach for managing older prisoners will focus on addressing their individual needs. A generic 'older prisoner strategy' is not in our view an appropriate way forward. (Ministry of Justice, 2013b, p. 17)

By refusing to acknowledge older offenders as a distinct group, prison policy assumes that these offenders have the same capabilities as their younger counterparts, irrespective of their physical ability. This gives rise to a 'paradox of care' (Hughes, 2015b) where the government's refusal to institute a specific older prisoner policy, on the grounds that they are not homogenous is in reality, expecting them to behave in a generic manner with all other prisoners. Given the physical health and mobility issues of many older prisoners, this can be problematic as they are physically unable to meet the requirements that the regime places on them.

Through this standardised approach, this institutional thoughtlessness disadvantages and excludes older prisoners with additional physical and social needs (Crawley & Sparks, 2005, p.352). This lack of government policy lays the foundations at a macro level for institutional thoughtlessness to become endemic within the structures and cultures of the individual prisons themselves. Therefore, as prisoners age, their time in prison becomes increasingly challenging, and they face a 'harder time' (Mann, 2012). This chapter of the literature review explores the government's, so far, intractable position on this matter.

## Prison Policy

The prison service has numerous Prison Service Instructions (PSIs), Prison Service Orders (PSOs) and policy frameworks that cover the rules and regulations of how prisoners are managed within the prison estate, and they cover most topics. However, a policy on older prisoners has, so far, not been forthcoming. In the most recent Justice Committee enquiry into older prisoners, the committee again called for the strategy to be implemented. In response to

these calls from the Justice Committee, Lucy Frazer MP, who was then a Minister of State at the Ministry of Justice, announced in November 2020 that the government felt that the time was right to develop a policy for older people in prison (House of Commons, 2020b). However, at the time of writing such a policy has yet to be produced. An older prisoner policy has been mooted before. Peter Clarke, who at the time of giving evidence to the enquiry, was the Chief Inspector of Prisons, remarked how in 2017 he had been invited to a working group that was looking to produce a policy on older prisoners. He went on to say how he attended one meeting but the group never met again, and no policy was produced (House of Commons, 2020a, p. 41). So, while this news is welcome, until the policy is produced it is not possible to evaluate its contents.

## Prison Regime

It is worth exploring why an older prisoner policy is necessary to help older people as they negotiate the prison regime. In addition to the health and social care needs that those older prisoners might present with, as discussed in chapter two, older people have different requirements from the majority of prisoners. The prison regime encompasses the activities that prisoners engage with during their time in custody, such as education, behavioural courses and work. The purpose of these courses is to address offending behaviour and to prepare people for life outside prison. Accordingly, the primary focus of most prisons is to provide people with meaningful employment or education to prepare them for work upon release. This goal may not be compatible with the intentions of older prisoners, who may not be expecting to work after their release, due to retirement, disability, or ill-health (Codd & Bramhall, 2002, p. 32).

Often, little thought is given to alternate activities that might be better suited for the older population. Prisoners over 65 are not expected to work, as they are eligible to retire; however, if no suitable activities are provided for these older people, they may remain in their cells for extended periods of time, with no purposive activity (House of Commons, 2020a). This can be detrimental to both their physical and mental health. Many older people may wish to continue working in prison, but often, these roles can be unsuitable for people as they age.

Older people in prison would benefit from a distinct regime offering activities designed specifically for them. PSO 2300 stipulates that all prisoner's specific resettlement needs must be considered (HM Prison Service, 2009), but the prisons primary objectives take precedence and the requirements for this group are often overlooked (Crawley & Sparks, 2006). By not addressing their specific resettlement needs while they are in prison, the released older prisoners can encounter difficulties when attempting to resettle.

## Preparation for Release

Release can prove problematic for older prisoners. Those prisoners, who have been incarcerated for prolonged periods of time, and have grown old in prison, risk being institutionalised and can find it difficult to adapt to the pace and trappings of modern-day life. This can make reintegration back into society a challenge (House of Commons, 2020a). These issues can apply to all released prisoners, but the older population can be overwhelmed by these issues and find resettlement difficult (Crawley & Sparks, 2006). These issues coalesce, causing this group problems securing employment and accommodation (Kennedy & Kitt, 2013, pp. 16-17). Reports have shown that as released prisoners age, their rates of unemployment drop however, there is no

corresponding increase in employment figures, suggesting that work may not be an option for them (Codd & Bramhall, 2002, p. 32).

### *Accommodation*

Accommodation is often another issue that proves problematic for released prisoners, but it can prove more challenging for older people, especially those who no longer have a home to return to. Prisoners released without accommodation can become homeless (House of Commons, 2013a, pp. 44-45) or, owing to the cost of renting in the private housing sector, end up living in hostel or bed-sit accommodation (Codd & Bramhall, 2002, p. 32). Their choices are restricted further if they have health or mobility issues. Some released prisoners have to reside in 'approved premises' after their release; however, many of these premises are not suitable for people with impaired mobility (Kennedy & Kitt, 2013, pp. 23,25), consequently some older prisoners may have to remain in custody until suitable accommodation is found for them. These problems exacerbate the difficulties faced by older released prisoners.

### *Family Ties*

Older prisoners are often lacking family support as, either deliberately or accidentally, those relationships have lapsed during their time in prison. This lack of familial support can leave older prisoners socially isolated in the community which can generate problems in their attempts to live independently (House of Commons, 2020a). Although this is also an issue for younger prisoners, this absence of help and support for older people after release makes resettlement intrinsically more difficult, leaving many older prisoners feeling that they have insufficient time or energy to 'start over' and re-build their lives (Crawley & Sparks, 2006, p. 75).

### *Probation*

In addition to a lack of policy relating to older people in prison, the probation services have made no systematic plan for the monitoring and care of older people once they are released (Cadet, 2020). The National Probation Service should monitor all released prisoners in the community for 12 months after their release. However, at the time of writing, a substantial proportion of their work was outsourced to second and third tier providers, who were paid by 'payment by results', showing that they had effectively reduced reoffending (Corcoran, 2009).

The reoffending rates for older prisoners are low, compared to other groups of offenders, with a two-year reoffending rate of 15.5 per cent (Ministry of Justice, 2021c). This relative compliance allows probation services to overlook the needs of the older population and focus their resources on groups where the reduction in reoffending would be more noticeable (Maguire, 2012, p. 489). Indeed, as older prisoners are not a specified group, defined by the government as requiring specialist assistance, it can be very difficult for any third sector organisations to acquire funding to work with older prisoners (Hughes, 2016).

## A Differentiated Regime

Many older prisoners can find the experience of prison both disturbing and isolating. In the United States, it is commonplace for older prisoners to be housed together in secure care facilities (Human Rights Watch, 2012). The segregation of older prisoners does not happen routinely in England and Wales, although a small number of prisons, like HMP Norwich, have an older prisoner wing (HM Prison Service, n.d.). Many aspects of prison life can prove difficult for the older population. Older prisoners can be vulnerable to bullying from

other inmates (Prison Reform Trust, 2008, pp. 8-9). The environment is worsened by the unrelenting level of noise in prison. Older people find it challenging to cope with the levels of noise (Crawley & Sparks, 2005; 2006; Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons, 2004; 2008). It can be persistent and intimidating and can increase their feelings of vulnerability (Chu, 2016, p. 34; Mann, 2012, p. 42; Wahidin, 2004, p. 99).

Segregated units would be quieter and could allow the older prisoners to form social networks with people of a similar age (Aday, 2006, p. 215), reducing the risk of victimisation for older more vulnerable prisoners. Holding them in separate accommodation would enable the prison service to provide the older population with the medical and social care that they require. This would produce economies of scale, as the supply of care could be focused in specific locations and not be dispersed throughout the prison estate (House of Commons, 2013a, p. 21).

More countries are considering separate accommodation for older prisoners. In Scotland, a former Justice Minister called for old care homes to be turned into secure care facilities for Scotland's older prisoner population (Naysmith, 2016), whilst in Ireland reportedly Mountjoy prison in Dublin is building an accommodation block specifically for older prisoners (O'Connell, 2017).

*Segregation or Integration?*

In England there is no plan to segregate older prisoners. Almost 20 years ago, Juliet Lyon, the then Director of the Prison Reform Trust, suggested to Alan Milburn, the then Secretary of State for Health, that England should consider an American style of semi-secure care homes for elderly prisoners. Milburn dismissed the idea completely, concerned how the idea would be criticised by

the tabloid newspapers (Lyon, 2014). Despite this, the age and health of many older prisoners prompts questions about their imprisonment.

Prisoners over the age of 60 are less likely to reoffend. Given the physical and mental capacity of some older prisoners, a secure care facility could provide a more civilised approach to their incarceration and offer the care they might require. These facilities could be restricted to prisoners who would require social care provisions outside of prison and it could be left for the prisoners to decide if or when they needed this level of care. However, this decision would not be popular with the media and could prove problematic for any government that suggested these plans, as the former minister recognised. Prisons that are felt to be treating prisoners too favourably risk negative media coverage, with headlines such as 'Soft Cell: Fury as prison boss calls for caring jails' (Hughes & Bowness, 2003). This 'zero-sum game' makes discussions about care for older prisoners challenging, as the victim is routinely held up in order to incite public outrage (Garland, 2000, p. 351).

Undoubtedly, the care of older prisoners is an emotive issue; the criminal justice system must balance the offender's position as a prisoner against their care requirements (Jaques, 2006, p. 198). In the recent Justice Committee enquiry into older prisoners the former Chief Inspector of Prisons called for the very elderly and infirm to be housed in secure care homes rather than prison (House of Commons, 2020a, p. 20). However, this is unlikely to happen as the prison service is firm in its intentions not to house older prisoners separately.

The government has stated clearly that there are no plans to offer specific accommodation for older prisoners (Ministry of Justice, 2018a). The prison service is opposed to the segregation of older prisoners because they are thought to have a calming influence on the prison population, which is

beneficial to the regime (House of Commons, 2013a, p. 22). In society, it is common for people of all ages to live together, and many able-bodied older people would be opposed to segregation on the basis of age and could feel stigmatised by this (Prison Reform Trust, 2008, p. 7). Furthermore, the small number of older prisoners could mean that segregating them may result in them being held some distance from their families and intended resettlement location, engendering further problems upon release (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons, 2004, p. x).

Given the heterogeneity of the older prisoner population it would be wrong to exclude older people from the rest of the prison population. A better solution would be to adapt both the physical environment and regime to accommodate people of all ages (Humblet, 2021). However, that can often be problematic as the costs of making those adaptations or the upheaval that the work would cause means that it is often not possible (House of Commons, 2020a).

Many of the expert witnesses, who gave evidence to the 2013 Justice Committee enquiry into older prisoners, were opposed to the segregation of older prisoners. Consequently, the committee concluded that segregation was unnecessary (House of Commons, 2013a, pp. 52-56). However, since then some of those expert witnesses' opinions on segregated facilities altered (Hughes, 2016, p. 58; House of Commons, 2020a). The historic cuts, experienced by the prison service, eroded the facilities offered to older prisoners. Services for the older population, that were previously funded by the government, have been reduced or in some cases withdrawn completely. This depletion of services decreased the visibility of older prisoners and led to their needs being disregarded. By the time of the 2020 Justice Committee enquiry these experts had altered their opinion and now felt that older prisoners deserved the ability

to choose to reside in a wing for older prisoners, should they wish to do so (ibid).

## Model for Operational Delivery – Older Prisoners

This current absence of policy means that there is no standardised provision of care for older prisoners across the secure estate. In 2018, in lieu of a national policy, the government produced a Model for Operational Delivery (MOD) for older prisoners. While this document offered helpful advice and options for prison governors regarding the types of services and activities that they could be providing for their older population, it made no demands on them to do this. Indeed, the document continually states that these are the options a governor might 'consider' and that the 'overarching aim of the MOD is to encourage a regime where older prisoners have constructive time out of their cell' (Ministry of Justice, 2018a, p. 12).

Whilst the aim of the document was welcome, the emphasis on consideration and encouragement of these options meant that, once more, each prison was left to implement its own policies to accommodate the needs of their older populations. This leads to differing services being available across the prison estate. It is difficult to fully ascertain the level of facilities that are available to prisoners as they age, as this information is patchy and often not publicised outside the prison. A recent freedom of information request for details of the services offered for older prisoners was denied, as the information is not held centrally, and it would have taken too much time to write to each prison asking for the information.

Some prisons, often those with large ageing populations, usually had better regimes instituted. A submission to the Justice Committee from Her Majesty's

Inspectorate of Prisons found that prisons which had an over 50s population of more than 20 per cent of their prisoners, were more likely to have made specific accommodation for their older population (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons, 2019). Some establishments, by engaging with charities such as RECOOP and AGE UK, provided specialised services and activities for older residents and have been praised for their exemplary policies (House of Commons, 2013a, p. 20).

At HMP Leyhill, where approximately 45 per cent of the population is over the age of 50, the prison service funds RECOOP to run a day centre for the older prisoners to provide activities and social interaction. A further freedom of information request for details of services provided by individual prisons, highlighted that HMP Bure and HMP Haverigg organised older people's events, clubs and coffee mornings and HMP Whatten and HMP Littlehey had wings for older people with healthcare assistants attached to them. These five prisons all had older prisoner populations of between 41 and 57 per cent; therefore, they had been compelled to provide these services because of the large numbers of older men which they housed. But these services were not replicated throughout the entire system.

Financial implications are at the heart of the MOD and the decisions that governors must make when deciding what accommodations they could make for their older population. The MOD specifically refers to governors considering 'the extent of the prison's financial and other resources' (Ministry of Justice, 2018a, p. 26) when deciding what adjustments to make. The reduction in prison budgets has already resulted in many services for older prisoners being either under threat or discontinued (Hughes, 2016, pp. 46-47). The lack of a national policy engenders an inequality of provision throughout the secure estate. This

unequal delivery of care can disadvantage older prisoners as they progress through the prison estate, as there is no guarantee of the regime they will be subjected to.

## Tainted Population

It is difficult to discuss older prisoners without addressing the subject of sexual offences. All of the five prisons discussed above predominantly held men convicted of sexual offences. One of the main contributing causes of the ageing prisoner population has been the increase in the number of older men imprisoned for historical sex crimes. This, along with the increasing length of sentences being handed down, has caused the numbers of prisoners aged 60 and over to increase by 243 per cent since 2002 (House of Commons, 2020a). Both Crawley and Sparks (2005, 2006) and Mann (2012) noted the prevalence of men convicted of sexual offences within the older male prisoner population. In the first eight years following the implementation of the 2003 Sexual Offences Act, the numbers of sex offenders in prison increased by 31 per cent (Ministry of Justice, 2013c, p. 22) and sex offenders now account for 18 per cent of sentenced prisoners (Ministry of Justice, 2021a). However, this figure is not uniform across the prison population; it is skewed towards older prisoners. The incidence of sexual offending amongst prisoners over 50 is higher, at 46 per cent (Ministry of Justice, 2018a).

## Older Prisoners and Men Convicted of a Sexual Offence

Given the prevalence of sex offenders within the older prisoner population, there is a danger that these two groups of prisoners are becoming confused. The needs of older people are becoming conflated with the needs of men convicted of a sexual offence. Throughout the MOD, there are references to the large overlap between older prisoners and sex offenders. The MOD references a

number of examples of good practice for governors to note, but all of these examples refer to prisons that have a large population of sex offenders and therefore a large population of older prisoners.

Sykes (1958) argues that all prisoners are excluded from society. Following that argument, Ievins & Crewe (2015) posit that sex offenders face a double exclusion; not only are they excluded from general society but they are further excluded from the 'society of captives' (p. 483), as they are often housed in specific sex offender prisons or on vulnerable person wings that operate separately from the rest of the prison. However, this exclusion can also often assist these older prisoners.

As I have highlighted, sex offender prisons or vulnerable person wings often have higher numbers of older men and due to this, those prisons are more likely to have made suitable arrangements for their older population. Therefore, by accident rather than by design, prisons holding large numbers of sex offenders are accommodating the needs of their older population, simply because the numbers of older prisoners make it impossible for the additional needs of these older men to be ignored. However, for those older men not convicted of a sexual offence and for older women, their small numbers in the prisons allow them to be disadvantaged as their additional needs continue to be overlooked.

## Institutional Thoughtlessness and Penal Policy

While the definition of older prisoners as a 'specialist cohort' within the MOD is a positive move, we are still waiting to see if an older prisoner policy will come to fruition. The MOD is useful in terms of signposting governors to the types of services that they might potentially offer their older populations, although its purpose is a little vague. More than that, the conflation of older prisoners with

sex offenders allows the needs of the 54 per cent of older prisoners not convicted of sexual offences, to be overlooked.

The focus of the MOD is also heavily fixed on men which overlooks the needs of older women in the prison estate. Older men account for 16 per cent of the total prison population, whereas older women account for less than one per cent, 0.6 per cent (Ministry of Justice, 2021a). The focus of the MOD is also on the much older population, those who are retired or elderly and infirm. This neglects the older people who may be physically able but are not getting suitable work or resettlement advice. These older prisoners may struggle while being surrounded by much younger people and they may not get the opportunity to spend time with people closer to their own age. This can deny them the ability to form social groups with people of similar ages and interests.

## Overarching Aspects of Ageing

De Medeiros (2017) argues that there are three overarching aspects that impact upon ageing: structure, experience, and care. The structure refers to the systems and social policies that are in place to help older people, while the experience regards how individuals react to the structures that are in place, and care relates to how care is provided to older people but also how care or concern is shown to the ageing population. These three aspects of ageing coalesce with each other. So, the structure that exists, the policies and systems designed to help people as they age, will affect the experience of the individual. These systems will either help people as they age, or they may work against older people by impeding them. The structures can also impact on the care that older people are shown and receive. The structures can dictate whether care is provided by the state or family, but if no structure is put in place to assist older

people, they can be deemed as being less deserving of care by society more generally (De Medeiros, 2017).

This can help us to understand how the lack of prison policy can lead to institutional thoughtlessness within the prison estate. This institutional thoughtlessness is happening at a macro, meso and micro level. At a macro level there is the lack of a national policy; this disregarding of the needs of the ageing prison population sets the structure for all prisons. Despite, in some cases, there being an awareness of the needs of the ageing prisoner population, the policies and structures to help older people in prison have not been put in place, and so their specific requirements are overlooked.

This feeds down to the meso level, where the individual prisons have to manage this ageing population. The MOD helpfully offers suggestions of what individual governors might consider doing but does not dictate that these services must be put in place. Moreover, it reminds governors to consider their budgets and what they can afford to do. The lack of a definitive policy allows some prisons to overlook these older people's needs, especially in establishments which do not house large numbers of older people. The older prisoners who are not convicted of sexual offences, are overlooked as their relatively low numbers make it financially unviable to offer specific services for them.

Then, at a micro level, the experiences of the individual older prisoners are more difficult as they are being held in a system that does not cater for them specifically. These older men and women are much less likely to complain and get their needs addressed. Older prisoners are generally quieter and more likely to comply with the rules. This tendency to acquiesce compounds the impact of the absence of a national policy, allowing their needs to be thoughtlessly disregarded. The lack of policy impacts directly on the care shown to the older

prisoners. They are allowed to be thoughtlessly overlooked, not because the staff are discriminatory towards them, but simply because the structure does not mandate that they might have specific or different requirements than the rest of the prison population.

In the following chapters I discuss how institutional thoughtlessness plays out for the individuals in prison, how, because their needs are often overlooked, these older prisoners suffer from additional ageing pains of imprisonment. Previous research on older prisoners has identified the difficulties faced by either older men or women, but no research has directly compared them both; this study aims to redress that deficit. Consequently, I have undertaken a specific examination of the issues faced by older female prisoners in England, a group that has not been researched for almost 20 years. It examines how their gender impacts on their needs and enables a direct comparison with the experience of their male peers.

Previous academic studies were conducted more than 10 years ago, when older prisoners were a smaller minority within the prison population. It was also all undertaken prior to the budget cuts that were imposed on the prison service. Consequently, their findings may now be out of date. This important topic is now ripe for re-examination, given the continuing increase in the numbers of older men and women held within the prison estate and the government's apparent inability to introduce a policy for them.

# Chapter Five - Methods

To explore the experiences of older men and women in prison, I chose to conduct my research in two prisons in the south of England, one female and one male. This research has examined the older prisoner population in these establishments in-depth and explored holistically their interactions within the prison environment. This research has focused on how they experience imprisonment and ageing, and how this ageing population was impacting on the prison services and the staff who were charged with looking after them. By looking at the experiences of imprisonment for women and men, it was possible not only to examine the challenges facing the older population, but also to compare their needs. Through this comparative study it was possible to identify both similarities in their experiences and differences in their requirements.

## Research Question

In order to examine the challenges of an ageing prison population, the overarching research question was:

- *How do older men and women experience prison?*

In order to be able to answer this question fully the following sub questions were also addressed:

- *What are the ageing pains of imprisonment?*
- *In what way is the experience of older prisoners gendered?*
- *How do older prisoners negotiate their position within the hierarchy of their establishment?*

My research focussed on examining imprisonment and old age. I have looked at the experiences of both older men and women to explore if their experience of prison as they age is gendered. To undertake this research, I utilised qualitative ethnographic research methods. This consisted of an extended period of non-participant observation, followed by in-depth semi-structured interviews with both older prisoners and staff. Ethnographic methods are favoured by prison researchers, especially in the United Kingdom where there is a burgeoning body of prison research utilising ethnographic methods; see for example, Bosworth, (1999); Cohen & Taylor, (1972) Crawley & Sparks, (2005); Crewe, (2009); Drake, (2012); Gooch (2016); Liebling, (2004); and Stevens, (2012).

## Research Sites

It is difficult to gain a direct comparison between male and female prisons, due to the difference in the way the two estates are categorised. The male prison estate is categorised from A to D, with A being those requiring the highest security, to D for those who are deemed suitable for open conditions. The women's estate, however, only has open or closed prisons. As I wanted to explore the gendered aspects of ageing in prison, the first site I chose for my research was a women's prison, 'HMP/YOI Womans-ville'. I specifically wanted to examine the issues around older women's imprisonment, as they are a minority within the prison estate, accounting for, as mentioned in chapter four, 0.6 per cent of the entire prison population (Ministry of Justice, 2021a). There is a degree of intersectionality with this group, as their invisibility is compounded by both their age and their gender. The establishment that I selected had only recently reopened. It was a mid-sized closed prison with a capacity of 330, holding only sentenced prisoners. The women were serving a range of tariffs from life imprisonment down to sentences of just a few weeks.

I selected a male establishment, 'HMP/YOI Mans-field' with a comparable population mix to examine. This establishment was a category 'C' training prison. Like the women's prison it was also mid-sized with a capacity of 744, and it held a similar make up of prisoners, who were all sentenced and were serving a range of sentences from a few weeks to life imprisonment. Both establishments were working prisons, where everyone was expected to be in work or education throughout the day. So, although the male and female prison estate is not directly comparable, both prisons held a similar range of prisoners with a relatively stable population. I knew that both of these establishments had proportions of over 50s that were lower than the national average. This was an important facet in the selection process as I wanted to explore whether or not the low numbers of older prisoners impacted on the services that were offered to them.

## Practicalities of Gaining Access

One of the most challenging aspects of prison research is gaining access to the establishments (Waldram, 2009). It is usual in criminological research to engage in a process of negotiation with 'gatekeepers'. These are the people or organisations who can facilitate access to the places or participants that are required for the research to be undertaken (Burgess, 1984 cited in Noaks & Wincup, 2004, p. 56). Research experience in prison, where or how the research can be undertaken and the access sanctioned, is often set by gatekeepers (Gooch, 2021). Gaining this access can be a difficult and time-consuming process and with regard to prison research there are multiple layers of gatekeepers to be negotiated (Sloan & Wright, 2015). Gaining permission from the gatekeepers requires being both unrelenting and persistent (King & Liebling, 2008, p. 432). In England and Wales, access needs to be negotiated in

the first instance by applying to the National Research Committee (NRC) for permission to conduct the research. No prison governor, no matter how supportive they might be of your work, would grant permission for research to commence in their establishment without it. It can often prove difficult to negotiate with government agencies who may well not approve of the methods you intend to employ, nor the findings you may later report (Jewkes, 2015).

If you want to conduct research in a secure environment, access to your research participants will be very closely guarded. When it comes to gaining access to prisons, being 'known' can be very helpful when negotiating with gatekeepers (Sloan & Wright, 2015). As well as being 'known' what you have 'done' can also be important. For several years I volunteered as an Independent Monitoring Board (IMB) member and worked in two prisons locally. This role meant that not only was I known to a number of prison governors, but I was also a trusted entity. In order to strengthen my application to the NRC I decided to approach two prison governors whom I knew directly, in an attempt to secure some support from them to conduct my research. This was done with the hope that securing research sites, and support from serving governors, would lend some legitimacy to my research and assist in gaining permission from the NRC.

## National Research Committee Application

After I had gained the support for my research from the governors at the two research sites, I began the process of applying to the NRC. The nine-page application form (appendix i) required information detailing the aims of the research, the practical and academic contributions, the methods to be used and the ethical considerations of the research. In addition, the research had to be approved by the university's ethics board. As I noted earlier, government

departments can view some research methods unfavourably and the NRC had some reservations about my research. Specifically, they initially raised concerns around my ethnographic research methods, the value of conducting observations, the length of time I intended to conduct the ethnography for, and the sample sizes I proposed for the interviews.

After these concerns had been answered, the NRC requested further clarifications on my observation methods, specifically how I would ensure that everyone in the prison would be aware that I would be observing them and would be able to exclude themselves should they wish to. After assuring them I would put up posters (appendix ii) around the prison detailing my purpose there and that the governors would also advertise my presence, I finally received my permission to conduct the research.

## Ethnography

After the permissions were secured, I began my fieldwork. My research was examining the gendered aspects of imprisonment and old age, through ethnographic methods. I was examining this both from the perspective of the older people in prison, exploring how they experienced imprisonment, and also from the perspective of the prison staff, exploring whether the ageing prison population was altering their role in the management of the prison.

Ethnography can be used to gain what Clifford Geertz (1973) describes as 'thick description'. In order to gain an in-depth understanding of the world inhabited by the older prisoner and to interpret what is being observed, it is important to develop an understanding of the prison milieu. An extended period of ethnographic observation can provide an inherent understanding of the world being observed. Geertz argues that having knowledge of the context of an

environment allows us to explain the difference between 'the twitch of an eye and a wink' (1973). So, by gaining a knowledge of the penal environment, its rules and its routines, it is possible to interpret the behaviour of the older prisoners.

Crawley and Sparks argue that 'observation is a key operation in prison research' (2005, p. 349). Whilst Liebling (1999) asserts that inmates are the most vital source of information that can be gained, and that their feelings are essential to developing an understanding of the penal landscape. So, although prison ethnography is a challenging research method, and negotiating access can be difficult, it continues to be favoured by many prison researchers.

For those researchers, the only way to gain an understanding of the lives of those who inhabit our prisons, is to conduct an ethnographic study, to immerse yourself, as far as possible, into the penal environment (King & Liebling, 2008). Prison can be an intimidating place. To stand on the wings requires 'courage and nerve' and an ability to find a balance that allows you to be safe but to be able to observe fully what is going on around you (Gooch, 2021, p. 185). If that balance can be found, ethnography allows the researcher to see for themselves what is happening in the prison environment. So, by being there and bearing witness to the lives of those incarcerated, it is possible to understand the challenges facing people in prison.

This method of research can be however, a little contentious as researchers' claims to 'epistemological privilege' are challenged (Hammersley, 2015, p. 25) by those who suggest that a researcher's knowledge is neither wholly authentic nor complete. Hammersley cautions that simply because something is observed, it does not give the researcher superior knowledge. Ethnography can allow you to get close and provide knowledge that you might not be able to gain

anywhere else, but what you have observed should never be taken at face value as appearances can be deceptive. What is seen is a 'positioned observers' sense of things' (Back, 2013); therefore, it is not correct nor absolute, but just what was observed. Other sources of knowledge also exist, and it is incumbent upon researchers to bring with them these other sources of knowledge and theory. It is by interactively combining the knowledge gained as an insider, with knowledge from the outside that deeper understanding can be developed (Hammersley, 2015).

## Quasi-Ethnography

Ostensibly, prison ethnography is a contradiction in terms, as it is not possible to conduct a fully immersive ethnography in a secure establishment (Drake, et al., 2015). The researcher's ability to leave the prison at the end of the day and the 'visible symbols of distrust' (Waldram, 2009) that they wear, the keys and the chain, identify them as 'outsiders'. As an outsider they will never be able to share completely the experiences of the people in prison. So, unless they enter the prison, as serving prisoners, they will never be able to truly immerse themselves in prison life (Drake, et al., 2015). The 'rhythm' of the prison is such that any ethnography will always be partial, as there will always be certain times of day when invariably the researcher will not be there to observe what is going on.

In an acknowledgement then, of the limits of prison ethnography, this research incorporated what Barbara Owen (1998) refers to as 'quasi-ethnography'. This recognises that whilst I did bear witness to the lives of older people in prison, I was not able to observe or experience all of the challenges they face during their incarceration. The quasi-ethnographic portion of the research took place over nine months between June 2017 and February 2018. During the research I was

able to familiarise myself with the prisons and their routines. It also allowed me to observe the older prisoners; how they were able to negotiate their way around the prison, how they interacted with other prisoners, both younger and older, but also their interactions with the staff. This engendered a vital knowledge of the workings of the regime and the older people within it.

In each prison, when I began the fieldwork, I was given a security talk and placed on the TRAKA system. This electronic system allowed me to draw keys in the prisons and gave me an element of independence to conduct my research. The decision to carry keys was a contentious one. Some prison researchers argue that you should try and replicate the prisoner's experience as closely as possible and that holding keys further enhances the power imbalance and differentiates you clearly as an outsider. Additionally, by holding keys, you are 'facilitating the operation of the penal machine' (Scott, 2015, p. 54). Whilst these concerns are valid, the practicalities of conducting the research in a prison estate that was struggling to run a full regime with very low staff numbers, meant that I would not have been able to undertake the research if I had to be escorted at all times by an officer. Moreover, my role as an IMB member meant I had already been key trained and was routinely used to carrying them.

## Negotiating with Gatekeepers

I was required, by the NRC, to publicise my presence in the prisons and explain what I was doing. This would allow anyone who preferred not to be observed the opportunity to remove themselves from my presence. To achieve this, notices were sent out to all staff and prisoners, and I displayed posters around the prisons explaining who I was, what I was doing and how to get in touch with me should they have any questions.

Although I had negotiated my access with the NRC and the individual governors, they were not the only gatekeepers with whom access had to be gained. There were multiple layers of 'micro-regulations' (Drake & Harvey, 2014) that had to be negotiated on a daily basis. In the prison environment it is common for staff to transfer and move around, whether they be the governor of the prison or the staff on the wings. This, combined with staff shift patterns, meant that repeatedly I had to renegotiate my access to my research field. Also, just being given permission by the NRC and the prison governor does not guarantee that the individuals in the prison, both the prisoners and the staff, will be happy and willing to talk to you.

Therefore, throughout the process access has to be constantly negotiated, both formally and informally (Rowe, 2014). From obtaining lists of the prisoners over the age of 50, to getting the staff to allow me to 'hang around' and observe in the workshops or on the wings, all of my movements, although sanctioned by the governor, required consent from everyone I encountered along the way. Perhaps, more importantly than the staff, I had to negotiate my access with the older men and women directly.

## Practicalities of a 'Quasi-ethnography'

The practicalities of ethnography were confusing both for me, and for the people who observed me doing it. What was I supposed to do, stand and watch, or stop and talk? Some books will tell you about the practicalities of gaining access but the how and why are often obscure. When I stood and watched, it made the wing staff uncomfortable and they would try to foist people onto me, saying 'you want to speak to this guy' (fieldnotes). But this would often result in an awkward stilted conversation. Among the younger prisoners to begin with, there was a great deal of interest in my presence. Often in the first site the

younger men would enquire about what I was doing. Many times, the wing jokers would send one of their friends, who was clearly not over 50, to talk to me. They would arrive saying, 'Miss my mate said you needed to talk to me' (fieldnotes), much to the hilarity of the rest of the men. Eventually though this settled down and I became a familiar presence on the wing. Many of the older prisoners, whom I had encountered around the prison would come and seek me out, and talk about how they had been, how their time was going and often when they might be getting out.

Another practical issue I faced was how much time to spend in the prison and where to spend it when I was there. I was advised early on that to spend any more than three days a week in prison doing my research would be excessive, so I decided to limit my time to this. Crewe (2009) argues that 'being there' is vital in prison research, but 'being there' too much can be counterproductive (p. 467). This time commitment worked well when I was only researching a single establishment but once I began fieldwork in the second site this limit proved more problematic.

Once I began conducting the fieldwork simultaneously in two prisons I found it difficult to limit the time I was spending on the research to just three days. I often attempted to spend two days in each establishment, in an effort to maintain my presence within the prisons. However, with my additional commitments in a third prison where I volunteered, I found on more than one occasion that I had spent six days a week in prison.

There were multiple problems with this. Firstly, conducting research in prison is emotional and exhausting (Jewkes, 2011). At times, it can also be frightening and intimidating. The environment demands vigilance, so as not to miss something vital that might be happening in front of you, but also just being

aware of where you are and who is around you. Therefore, the physical and psychological effects of the research were draining. This lack of time and energy then impacted upon my ability to write up my research notes, moreover it did not allow me any time to reflect upon my experience and examine my thoughts and feelings. Nor was I able to devote time to reading and writing, a process that was vital for the development of my thesis.

Furthermore, on a purely practical level, as well as being a prison researcher I was also a mother to a teenager. This output of time, especially over the summer holidays, meant that I was unable to undertake that role fully either. I felt it was imperative to be more regimented about the time I spent in the field. Therefore, I attempted to readopt a policy of three days per week in prison. This would mean each week I would spend two days in one site and one in the other, alternating each week, allowing me time in each establishment to maintain my presence, but also giving me the time that I needed to work and reflect upon my experiences.

## HMP/YOI Mans-field

I first began my research in the male establishment. At this point the prison was scheduled to close before the end of the year for redevelopment, although subsequently this closure was postponed. The prison then held 744 men, and at the beginning of my research there were 53 men over the age of 50, seven per cent of the prison population, well below the national average. Although this number would fluctuate between 49 and 55 as men came and went, at no point did the proportion of older men increase above seven per cent.

The site was large and had many buildings spread out across it and was split into two parts. There were nine wings; five in the top site and four in the bottom,

two gyms, two education buildings, two healthcare buildings, two sports pitches and numerous workshops. Practically it was difficult to know how and where to spend my time. One of the aims of the ethnography is to get a sense of the prison, how it feels and smells. It is vital to become familiar enough with the atmosphere of the prison to notice any changes. I decided to limit myself to a small number of places, so that I might get a real sense of how life was for the older men in these areas of the prison. I positioned myself in three areas: on a wing that had the largest proportion of the older population, housing 20 of the 53 prisoners who were over the age of 50, in the new gym on Friday afternoons during the over 40s gym sessions and in the bike workshop.

These three places ostensibly provided me with opportunities to observe and talk to a number of the prisoners who were over 50. However, on the wings, the older men were often absent, choosing to avoid the raucous association around the pool tables, for the safer haven of their rooms. Moreover, I was conscious that, by restricting myself to these three areas, that there were older prisoners whom I was unable to observe due to their residing or working in different areas of the prison. In an attempt to overcome this, I approached the prison about running an over 50s group. The intention was to provide a facility that would allow the older men to come off the wings during the week. I had hoped that this would increase my interactions with the older men, whilst also providing the prison with a much-needed facility for the over 50s. Unfortunately, due to staffing issues and the practicalities of where and when to run this group I was unable to provide this service.

## HMP/YOI Womans-ville

The second site, a women's prison, was smaller with only four wings but one of the wings had effectively eight sections to it, so the women were more

dispersed. At the beginning of the research the prison held 39 women over 50, 12 percent of their population, with only 4 being over 60. This figure vacillated between 37 and 42 older women during my research period.

Initially it felt as though the research would be easier to conduct, as the atmosphere was much lighter in this prison, as it lacked the ever-present threat of violence that permeated HMP Mans-field. I was able to get lists of where the women were living and working; however, the older women were less concentrated than in the men's prison. The majority of the older women were spread over three wings and there was no single work role that had greater numbers of older women working there.

The ethnography proved to be a more challenging task, as there were very limited opportunities to find places where the women would be present and could be observed. On one of the wings there was no association area for the women to use and so they spent most of their association time in their rooms. On another wing, while there was a large association room, it was hardly ever used by any of the women, with the women once again retreating to their own space in their rooms.

## Over 50s Group

I offered, as I had done in HMP Mans-field, to set up an over 50s group. The governor at HMP Womans-ville was supportive of my attempts to run the group and I was able to provide this service. The group ran every other Saturday morning from 29th July 2017 until 22nd December 2017, hosting between 14 and 18 women each session. I held the group in a room at the back of the gym and it was run without any prison staff's involvement, although occasionally a staff member would look in to observe what we were doing.

The purpose of the group was to allow the older women some time out of their cells on a Saturday morning. Alison Liebling (2015) and colleagues ran a prison dialogue group at HMP Whitemoor, where she described its aim as being to humanise their time in prison. It offered no educational or therapeutic purpose rather it was about 'respect and reciprocity' (p. 73). My group ran along similar lines; its intent was not to educate nor alter anyone's behaviour, it was simply an opportunity for the older women to come together and spend some time with people of a similar age.

The activities were co-ordinated by one of the older women at the prison and encompassed a range of pursuits from arts and crafts to a quiz. Coffee and cake were also provided. The group proved to be an excellent way of gaining access to the older women. It allowed me to observe the older women, albeit in a manufactured environment, but it also meant that I then knew who was over 50. Once the women were familiar to me, and vice versa, it enabled the ethnographic portion of the research to proceed more easily, as I knew whom I was looking for. However, I was aware that my actions, in running the group, were actively altering the research field. This impact was especially noticeable when I later interviewed the staff. In response to questions about what provisions were available for the older women, I was frequently told that 'the prison runs a group for the over 50s' (fieldnotes), as the staff were unaware of my involvement in its inception.

Additionally, as Liebling also found with her group, it proved to be a 'vital process for building trust' (p. 73). Most of the interviews that I undertook, 84 per cent of them, were with women who had attended the group. Accordingly, there are potential concerns that this method could have impacted on my research findings. Firstly, it was a self-selecting group, which limited my ability

to ensure I had a representative sample of the over 50s population. Secondly, the women were incredibly grateful for the group and the opportunity to be out of their cells and to be able to spend some time in the company of women of a similar age. This potentially caused a conflict of interest in the research. The women may have perceived that I was running the group for them for altruistic purposes, when I was predominantly running the group to assist me with the ethnography. This perception could have engendered a situation where the women felt obliged to talk to me when I asked them for interviews.

To counter any feelings of indebtedness, I took great pains to explain to the women that they were under no obligation to talk to me, and they were still able to attend the group. Indeed, not all women who attended the group were interviewed. However, the interviews that I did with the 16 women from the group resulted in interviews that were perhaps more personal and in-depth than they might have been without that connection. The group had enabled me to build up both trust and a rapport with the older women. Many of the women opened up to me, affording me great insight into their lives and the pains of imprisonment that they were suffering as a result of their age.

Running the group also placed me, as the researcher, in the centre of my research. No longer was I merely an observer, I was now participating. These kinds of interactions force researchers to step outside of their role and to give something of themselves to their participants (Liebling, et al., 2015). In this situation, with the women in the group, it was impossible not to 'reveal something of who you really are' (Gooch, 2021, p. 177). Ethnographic research is not one-sided; it builds trust between the researcher and those whom they are researching, and to build trust, the interactions need to be reciprocal. However, there are dangers in getting too close to your participants. In being

close to your participants you can reap rich rewards, gaining knowledge that you might not otherwise have gained, but there is the risk that you might also lose, or be seen to lose, your objectivity (Hammersley, 2015).

## Participation and Emotion

The more challenging aspect of my active participation was the emotional attachments that began to form with some of my participants. How to deal with the emotions of prison research is not covered in most research accounts, or if it is, it is cast to the back in an appendix, as though it were superfluous to the research (Jewkes, 2011). And yet I became embroiled in the 'tyranny of intimacy' during my research (Bosworth, 1999, p. 73). My extended contact with the women formed relationships between us. Some women saw me as an equal, a friend to confide in, others as an analyst, someone to whom they could tell their often traumatic narrative accounts. But it was reciprocal, I could identify with some of the women, when the emotions and losses in my personal life mirrored and echoed some of theirs.

With our approximately similar ages, with our children at similar stages of adolescence, I could empathise with them. I was acutely aware how difficult their separation from their children must be. I began to feel a responsibility towards one of the oldest women and I would ensure I always went to see her whenever I went into the prison. She was receiving no visits while she was in prison and she was estranged from her daughter, who was my age. The relatively recent loss of my own mother was clearly evoking an emotional connection with her. As Jewkes (2011) argues 'there may be unrecognized processes of transference and countertransference at work' (p. 71).

My identity became entangled with the women's in a way that did not happen with the older men. The women began to invade my consciousness when I was away from the prison, their presence 'haunting' me through the gates and into my everyday life (Sloan & Wright, 2015). This engendered a sense of obligation towards the women, to drive to the prison every other Saturday, to run the group for them.

Furthermore, it left me with a commitment to them, to ensure that I represent their stories that they have entrusted to me, honestly and faithfully. The impact of this 'haunting' can be a double-edged sword. Avery Gordon (2008) argues that when you are 'haunted' by your participants you 'take on the condition of what you study' (p. 22). This can engender great 'insights' into the lives of your participants, but equally can render you blind, presenting you with a perhaps distorted view of them (ibid). As Crewe and Ievins (2015) suggest, these good intentions, to represent the women honestly, might in the end be 'diverted by many otherwise admirable objectives' (p. 129).

## Penal Voyeurism

There is a fine line between ethnographic prison research and penal voyeurism. In the initial stages of the ethnography, the researcher is obviously out of place, neither a prisoner nor a staff member. I found, along with other prison researchers, that this period of observation can arouse suspicion amongst both prisoners and staff (Crewe, 2009; Stevens, 2012). Comments such as 'are you here spying on us again?' (fieldnotes) were not uncommon. It can be difficult to explain your role satisfactorily to people. Researchers spend a substantial amount of time 'hanging around' watching people, leaving them open to the charge of voyeurism and vulnerable to accusations of spying (Hammersley, 2015; Waldram, 2009) and there is some truth in these accusations. I often felt,

during my research, that I was infringing on people's privacy and exploiting the pain and suffering of some of the older people I encountered. My feelings of unease are echoed by other prison ethnographers.

Wacquant (2002) writes of the 'nauseating feeling of being a voyeur' (p. 378), and how he felt the need to apologise for his presence in the prison.

Undertaking the observations could be hugely discomforting. It was uncomfortable to witness people in this situation, to stand and watch them, to intrude on their privacy and their space. As Wacquant aptly notes:

> A sentiment of embarrassment, of 'dirtiness', to have infringed on the dignity of human beings by the mere fact of having been there and seen that place, and thus to have treated its denizens as one might the occupants of a zoo (2002, p. 381)

My feelings of discomfort were amplified when, in the case of many of my participants, the emotions became too much, and they broke down. It is difficult to witness the pain of other human beings. What you have seen and heard can stay with you long after the event and can lead to the feeling that you are exploiting people's pain (Phillips & Earle, 2010). I was left with the disturbing feeling that I was taking something for my own benefit, from those who had little to give. I felt as though I was exploiting my participants, but it was difficult to assuage my own guilt, as it is not possible to give anything to serving prisoners in exchange for their participation. I hoped that the running of the over 50s group, at least for the women, restored some reciprocity.

## Interviews

My period of 'quasi-ethnography' enabled me to be visible on the wings and allowed both the residents and the staff to become used to my presence. Eventually the initial 'spying' comments slowly gave way to more relaxed

conversations. Allowing everyone the opportunity to scrutinise me, and become familiar with my presence, assisted me when I was looking for interview participants. If your potential participants perceive that you are 'an alright' person (fieldnotes) they are more likely, when the interview phase of the research begins, to agree to be interviewed (Stevens, 2012).

As part of my ethnographic approach I conducted 57 semi-structured interviews with both prisoners and staff (see appendix iii and iv for interview guides). Semi-structured interviews are often used in feminist research methods as, from a feminist standpoint perspective, people are seen as being the authority on their own experience (Hammersley, 2015). Conducting semi-structured interviews can also alleviate any hierarchy between the researcher and the participants (Davies, 2011, p. 163). The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed me to raise any specific points that I had, and it also presented me with the opportunity to probe my participants more deeply on areas that I felt required exploring further. More importantly, it ceded an element of control to my participants, by allowing them to discuss the issues that were pertinent and important to them, rather than adhere to a schedule of what I felt was important (Semmens, 2011, p. 64).

Conducting interviews in this way makes it a more reciprocal event and is a powerful way of giving my participants, who are often left voiceless by the prison system, the opportunity to express their feelings and opinions. This resulted in a 'guided conversation' where I could probe further to gain 'thick' description during the interviews, but where my interviewees could also participate on an equal footing, telling me their stories (Davies, 2011). The benefit of this is that it results in a co-production of narratives, a retelling of their stories from their own standpoint (Jewkes, 2015).

At HMP Mans-field I undertook 19 interviews with older men at the prison, whose ages ranged from 50 to 71. I also conducted 9 interviews with a variety of staff members from the governing governor to the wing staff. Three of the staff members were female and six were male. At HMP Womans-ville I also conducted 19 interviews with older women in the prison, whose ages ranged from 50 to 72. Additionally, I interviewed 10 staff members, four of whom were female and six of whom were male. They also performed a range of roles from being the governing governor to the wing staff.

All the interviews were undertaken in the prison and were conducted face-to-face and lasted between 35 and 100 minutes. Most of my participants were happy for me to record the interview, and so all bar three were recorded; of the three, one participant did not wish to be recorded, so I made notes by hand during the interview, and in the cases of the other two, because the recorder turned off during the interview, so I made notes after the event. Recording the interviews allowed me to ensure that an accurate transcript was produced, but more importantly it allowed me to be present and focused on my participants and what they had to say to me.

The interview selection was done by a purposive sampling method. This method was appropriate as I was deliberately seeking to talk to a specific sector of the prison population, those over 50 (Semmens, 2011, p. 72). Initially I invited all the prisoners who were over 50 in each site to be interviewed. This method had varying degrees of success across the sites. In the first site I had a number of responses from men whom I had not encountered in the wing or in the workshop. This allowed me to gain insight into the experiences of men who had little interaction with other men of a similar age. In the second site, I similarly invited all the women over 50 in the prison to be interviewed. Initially

I had a very limited response from the women. I then approached the women who attended the over 50s group and asked if anyone would be prepared to be interviewed which generated a better response.

I adopted a snowball approach with the staff and asked those who agreed to talk to me to suggest others whom they felt would be willing to be interviewed. I also interviewed the main governor in post in each prison. Undertaking this large number of interviews, in addition to the nine months of quasi-ethnography, meant that I was able to achieve data saturation across both of the sites.

## Epistemological Position

Becker (1967) argued that all research contains bias, that it is subjective and highlights the researcher's ideological position. For Becker the important facet was for the bias to be acknowledged and reflected upon. My concern in this research was the increasing numbers of older people in the prison system, how they were able to cope with their imprisonment, and how the system was managing with this ageing population. Equally I was interested in exploring how the ageing population was, in turn, impacting upon the staff working with them. As this research sought the experiences of both older prisoners and staff, I had to perform a 'tightrope walk' (Stevens, 2012, p. 43) between both camps, always being careful not to alienate either 'side' as both were equally important to the research process.

Qualitative research is often accused of being unrepresentative, owing to its small sample size. However, qualitative researchers are deliberately sacrificing large scale studies, that can be deemed representative, in favour of smaller case studies that explore people's experiences and are rich in detail (Yin, 2014). This

research, in line with much ethnographic work, adopted an interpretivist approach and by utilising Weber's concept of 'verstehen' attempted to understand the experiences of the older prisoners, from their perspective (Epstein, 2012, p. 24). In accordance with the principles of Adaptive Theory (Layder, 1998), I entered the field with an orientating theoretical concept, but I was also open to other concepts that emerged from the research. Fixed theoretical ideas can lead to a 'blinkered outlook', where only data that fits the theory is considered. Therefore, rather than expand the research field, the data collected merely reinforced the existing perspectives (Layder, 1993, p. 52). In line with 'adaptive theory' I considered the data, not just in isolation, but in relation to how the social structures affected and altered the prisoners' interactions, the influence of macro-structures on micro-behaviour (ibid, p. 69).

An ethnographic approach is 'iterative-inductive' (O'Reilly, 2012, p. 30) where the analysis and the data collection occur simultaneously, not one after the other. The analysis of the data began from the moment I began the fieldwork. I transcribed the fieldnotes and interviews myself from the moment the fieldwork commenced. Although this process is rightfully acknowledged as a time consuming and painful process, it enabled the research to become embedded in my mind and allowed for total emersion in the data. Through the iterative process of data immersion, of reading other literature on both penal research and other wider sociological themes and by considering the interplay of structure on behaviour, themes were able to emerge from the data I collected.

## Ethical Considerations

I endeavoured to conduct this research in line with the British Society of Criminology's ethical guidelines. This research was granted permission by the university's ethics board in addition to being cleared by the NRC. However, the

ethics of the prison can often conflict with the ethics of university boards. The university requires that participants remain anonymous, while the prison demands that disclosures are made if any prisoners display or discuss any illicit behaviour (Jewkes, 2015). Therefore, conducting this research presented some ethical dilemmas. Who should my ethical consideration prioritise? The prisoners, who are a vulnerable group? Or the prison authorities that hold the keys, (literally) to my access to these groups? Prisoners do not have autonomy and power over their lives in the way that people outside of prison do (Sloan & Wright, 2015). Therefore, I had, and still have, an ethical obligation to ensure that they suffer no harm as a result of my research.

Seemingly simple ethical considerations took on great significance. With regard to informed consent; all the participants had to be aware of the purpose of my research, the limits of the confidentiality I could offer them and that they had the right to withdraw their consent if they wished to. I explained all this to my participants, and I hoped that they would then be in a position to make an informed, unforced decision to participate (Wahidin & Moore, 2011, p. 301).

However, a pertinent question to ask is, do both staff and prisoners have the ability to give informed consent? The prisoners might have felt that they were obliged to agree to be interviewed (Jewkes & Wright, 2016), that their progress through the estate was dependent upon their co-operation or borne out of some sense of obligation due to my running the women's group. Equally the staff may have perceived that there was pressure from their senior officers to participate. I was aware of the limitations of informed consent during the research and to combat this I verbally assured people, before the interview began, that they were under no obligation to participate and again at the end of the interview, I reminded them that they had the right to withdraw at any point (Silverman,

2011). However, there remains the possibility that some people might have consented out of a sense of obligation.

## Dangers of Writing-up

The protection from harm was constantly in my thoughts during the process, especially during the writing of this thesis. The aim of this process was not to exploit people, rather to illuminate the pains of imprisonment they were suffering, in order to assist older people in prison. However, there are dangers in this process where participants might not agree or understand how they are presented in this work.

All the participants and the establishments have been anonymised. However, there are limits to the confidentiality that can be offered and some participants may be identifiable through other information contained within my thesis, their age, their gender or their role within the establishment. If people can identify themselves, would they agree with my characterisation of our meetings? During the interview process people can often feel swept up in the 'comforting embrace of the interview' (Crewe & Ievins, 2015, p. 127) and in doing so reveal more than they had intended. It is possible then that some people might feel betrayed by what is written about them. Similarly, when translating my participants' stories into sociological terms something may be lost or added in that process, or they end up being reduced to a variable of a typology that they do not recognise when their complex life experiences are stripped down to their component parts (ibid).

Equally, with the prison governors, they had welcomed me into their establishment to undertake the research but may perceive any findings as a criticism. Many of the staff gave their time to me generously and spoke to me

candidly about the prison and how they perceived the needs of the older people. If they read this thesis will they feel betrayed by what has been written? Will they take my criticisms of the system as a personal affront? So, although my intent was not to cause harm there is a discomfort, while writing this, that some unintended harm might occur.

Having explored the research methods I employed and reflected on some of the challenges I faced, I discuss the findings from my research in the following chapters. Taking Sykes' (1958) concept of pains of imprisonment as a guide, I have observed that the older population, as a result of their incarceration at an older age, experience a number of specific ageing pains of imprisonment. These additional pains can be broken down into the 'Pains of Loss', the 'Pains of Isolation' and the 'Pains of Ageing and Deteriorating Health'.

As I mentioned in chapter two, some pains could be viewed as an extension of Sykes original pains, whereas others are distinct. The Pains of Isolation could be perceived as an extension of Sykes original pain of a loss of security, whereas the Pains of Loss and the Pains of Ageing and Deteriorating Health further expand the work on pains of imprisonment. These new pains further elucidate the challenges faced by the older prisoner population. The following chapters discuss how these pains are experienced by the older men and women and how many of the pains have a gendered element, where age and gender intersect, exacerbating those pains.

# Chapter Six - Pains of Isolation

A significant amount of research has been done into the social lives of older people. Much of this research has focused on their social interactions and isolation in old age. Isolation and loneliness are arguably the two key concepts used when researching older people. Indeed, gerontological research has shown that the key to a good quality of life in older age is the ability to participate fully in the social world around you and to be engaged in that world (Victor, et al., 2009). Being socially isolated also has impacts on a person's health. Studies have shown a link between social isolation and increased morbidity in older people (Leigh-Hunt, et al., 2017). However, little research has been done on social isolation and older prisoners.

Following on from Sykes' (1958) concept of pains of imprisonment, the upcoming chapters explore how older people in prison were suffering from additional pains of imprisonment as a result of their age. This chapter discusses the 'Pains of Isolation'. These pains can be self-imposed, as older prisoners often isolate themselves from the rest of the prison population in an attempt to keep themselves safely away from the more boisterous elements of the prisoner society. However, this self-management strategy amplifies their pains of isolation by reducing their ability to form cohesive social groups, an option that is already restricted due to the nature of the prison environment.

In carrying out my research, I spent many months across the two sites attempting to observe older prisoners and how they were able to negotiate their way around the prison, and how they managed the prison regime. This

task at first proved more difficult than I had imagined as the older people were difficult to identify. Having positioned myself on the wings during association or in the gym, I would look to see the older men and women, but I often struggled to find them. They were nowhere to be seen on the wings. Large groups of men would be gathered around the pool table, vying to play one another. The noise of 60 or more men would reverberate around the wing, laughing, shouting and swearing, but the older people were rarely in view, choosing to keep themselves away from the rest of the population. I noted early on in my observations:

> On the wings the older men seem almost invisible. They tend to be apart from the younger men. I saw a couple of older men having a conversation but only in passing. They seem very apart from the general melee.' (fieldnotes)

This self-imposed isolation occurred for a number of reasons, which I explored in interviews.

## Self-Isolation

*'I just sit behind the door and just get on with my bird.'* Albert

Many of the older prisoners felt uncomfortable in the prison environment. For those prisoners who were incarcerated for the first time later in life there was an element of fear and uncertainty derived from being forced into this alien environment.

> *Well, I--, I've heard all these rumours of people getting shagged in the showers, erm, stabbed and all this, robbed and then I was frightened, and I didn't think I would make the gate, till release. I thought I'd either be dead or I would kill myself, you know, suicide. And then when I came in and then I was put in a room and I was put in a cell, I had no blankets, there was no pillow, no telly, and everyone else had all these things. And then when I pressed the button the cell was filthy, the floor was in bits, toilet was disgusting and--, and then like looking at the four walls, all litter in the window, I thought I can't do it.*
>
> Alfie

Understandably, when given a custodial sentence for the first time, it can be difficult to know what to expect and many of the older people discussed openly their fear upon arriving into custody, especially when their only knowledge of prison might be drawn from dramatised experiences in television shows.

> *I wouldn't leave my room; I was scared to come out my room, in case I got attacked. I'd been told there was some dangerous girls out there.*
>
> Ange

The older prisoners, who were confronted by situations that were being experienced for the first time, were often fearful of the environment and the others around them. This fear of the unknown left them with a feeling of 'ontological insecurity' (Giddens, 1991), where they were lacking the protective cocoon that guards against everyday life. The first-time older prisoners could, as a coping mechanism, be distrustful of those around them.

> *And I don't want to get to know them. Even some of the officers have said, don't tell them when you get ROTL's because they'll sabotage it! […] And I just don't want to be around people like that. I'd rather, if that's how it is, I'd rather shut myself off and be on my own.*
>
> Agnes

For many of the older people, especially the women whom I encountered, this ontological insecurity set the tone for how they would react in prison. They frequently perceived that it was easier and safer to remain in their cells for extended periods as the isolation and the locked door often provided a feeling of security.

Many of the women had transferred from local prisons where they were more likely to experience longer periods confined to their cells. This was due to a combination of less staff in the prisons to allow for unlocking and because these local prisons were less likely to give the women jobs or education, as often they were waiting to be transferred to another prison. Ironically the more open a

regime was and the more freedom the prisoners had to move around, the more unsettling some of the older women found the experience.

> *And you were locked up a lot more at [the other prison] but I didn't mind cos I was on me own so just leave me alone. That's fine.*
>
> Connie

For some people, the locked door of their cell provided them with their 'protective cocoon' and allowed them to feel more secure within this unsettling environment. This self-isolation was an effective technique for providing them with a sense of security but primarily only if they were in a single cell. For those older prisoners who had to share cells with other inmates, the experience could often increase their feelings of ontological insecurity as they had no way of gaining any space where they felt safe.

> *I didn't want to turn the TV on or anything to wake him too much, but he did wake up, started shouting and screaming, and lashed out, punching the window very violently. I immediately had to press the bell and get myself out of there.*
>
> Johnny

Although those new arrivals entered the prison expecting the worst, fortunately, for most of the older prisoners, their feared experiences did not materialise. Yet despite this, the nervousness that they felt upon arrival still prevailed. The noise and volatile nature of the prisons meant that many of the older people preferred to isolate themselves away from the younger elements of the prison, rather than engage fully in the prison social world.

## The Privilege of Youth

*'They're rushing past you or pushing you out the way.'* Dot

Although, as I have discussed, the prison population is ageing, older prisoners are still a minority within the secure estate. On 31st December 2020, prisoners over the age of 50 accounted for 17 per cent of the prison population, while

prisoners under the age of 30 made up 33 per cent (Ministry of Justice, 2021a). This meant that younger prisoners outnumbered older prisoners by almost two to one. Moreover, the spread of older prisoners is not uniform across the prison estate. As I discussed in chapter four, more older men are in prison for sexual offences which means that prisons that have dedicated facilities for sex offenders are more likely to have a higher concentration of older prisoners than a standard working prison. In HMP Mans-field, the older men only accounted for seven per cent of the prisoners and in HMP Womans-ville the older women made up 12 per cent of the population, which is less than the national average.

This high proportion of younger prisoners often presented problems for the older residents as their behaviour and the noise that they made, increased the isolation felt by many of them. It heightened their sensation of ontological insecurity and intensified feelings of vulnerability. On the wings and around the prison the younger prisoners were loud and intimidating. When walking onto a wing in the men's prison one morning I noted:

> The shouting and the noise feels especially threatening this morning. As I was walking around the wing about four young lads bounded past me, knocking me slightly into the wall. There were shouts of 'sorry miss,' but it was very unsettling and made me keen to find a spot where I was slightly more out of the way. (fieldnotes)

This feeling was often shared by the older residents who found the boisterous nature of the younger people difficult to bear.

> *Because the youngsters, some youngsters, the way, they've not had proper upbringing. They don't know no different. Their parents have been in and out of prison or whatever. So, they've not got no respect. Some of them, I don't think they realise what they're doing or what they're saying. A lot of 'em do and a lot of them if they barge into you will say sorry, but a lot of them won't. They just walk about and cos they're in prison they think they're the top or whatever.*
>
> Sharon

The younger residents were often perceived by the older prisoners as lacking in personal respect for anyone else. Their behaviour could seem intimidating to the older residents and consequently they would try and avoid being in places where large numbers of younger prisoners congregated.

> *We keep away from the youngsters, you know the ones that are running about and causing agro, all the time and ... we just keep away from them.*
>
> Donna

A few of the older prisoners enjoyed the company of the younger inmates and felt that their presence bought some life and vibrancy to the prison as they did not want to be just surrounded by 'old farts' (fieldnotes). Some of the older people felt that they were held in an esteemed position, due to their age and were able to act in a parental role towards their younger counterparts.

> *Well, some of the youngsters that are around you on the wings, knowing that you're older, they know what respect is for you, it means something to a lot of them, you know what I mean? I have never been bothered or wanted for anything like that.*
>
> Artie

However, these people were very much in the minority. Many of the older residents, both men and women, had little interest in associating with the younger prisoners. The older people often expressed a desire to be able to get on with their sentence quietly, but the rowdy behaviour of their wing mates could make that challenging.

> *There was one young lady on my landing who kicked off at the tiniest thing, throwing chairs, she shut herself in her room, throwing chairs and breaking things. Three times it happened on that landing! They just let her get on with it and told her to stop it and calm down. But she should have been put in segregation. Like any other prisoner that does that. But because she's young, oh well, it's alright. No, it's not bloody alright! Her kicking off got all of us locked in. We all got locked in because she kicked off.*
>
> Connie

This type of behaviour would impact on the whole wing. The older people often

felt that the selfish behaviour of the younger residents had a detrimental impact upon them all and made their prison time more difficult. This was due to additional lockdowns and other sanctions that were imposed upon the whole wing, not just the younger people who were often the cause of the problem.

"Scissor-gate" was a case in point. The women had been allowed to borrow scissors from the office. Many of the older women did arts and crafts in their rooms during lock up and scissors were vital to them. Some of the younger women had been using the scissors inappropriately, as Donna told me, *'apparently one of the younger girls was cutting their pubic hair with them'* and the use of the scissors was removed for all of the women. Many of the women I spoke to were upset by this, as the inability to spend their time crafting was making their duration locked in their cells more difficult to endure. They did not feel that this punishment would impact the younger women, as they felt that they were more likely to watch television when they were locked in their rooms.

The older people were more inclined to be compliant with the rules of the system, whereas the younger people were more likely to rage against it. This dichotomy made life together challenging for the older residents who, for the most part, only wanted to serve their sentence as quietly as possible and with as little aggravation as possible. As Connie put it: *'there's the rules, you follow them, you crack on, you keep your head down'.* Consequently, many of the older prisoners expressed a strong desire to be apart from the much younger element that they were forced to live alongside.

> *For me personally I find it particularly hard to do any sort of time in prison, if I'm surrounded by ... late teens, early 20s people. They're just a giant pain in the arse. A giant pain in the arse. And er you know, you can find yourself losing your cool very quick with some of them. So that's why I just tend to steer clear of all of them.*
>
> Calvin

The older prisoners deliberately attempted to isolate themselves away from the much younger elements in the prison and, given the large number of younger people in prison, this often presented difficulties for the older residents, resulting in them spending more time alone and not engaging with the world around them.

## The Problem of Youth

'*The young fellas, they would stab you for an half-ounce packet.'* Si

The behaviour of some of the younger people was sometimes not just an irritation but could also be perceived as being deliberately threatening.

> *I've been bullied. I've been victimised, I've been threatened, I've been assaulted four, five times.*
>
> Si

The threat of violence, real or otherwise, was prevalent amongst the older population making many of the older people concerned for their wellbeing. Some of the older people were worried that their physical vulnerability could make them targets for the younger prisoners. This was especially of concern to those prisoners serving longer sentences who had always felt able to defend themselves physically but were conscious how their advancing years would make them more vulnerable.

> *I'm known as being very fit. I'm probably fitter than a lot of the youngsters here and stuff and I'm very strong minded, and I've got a reputation. But that's not always gonna be the way. I mean sorry to say the other week, two of the YOs, who were put on my landing, decided they were gonna rip the arse out of me and the abuse they gave me! Well I'm sorry. I attacked one of them and punched the living daylights out of her, because that's the way she had to be dealt with. Cos I spoke to her in an articulate, friendly, nice manner. And she ripped the arse out of me, and I punched the life out of her. But I'm not always gonna be physically able to do that.*
>
> Manda

The fear of physical assault for some older prisoners resulted in their self-isolation as they remained in their cells or away from the wings to avoid

confrontation. For others, who had always been able to 'handle themselves', their concern was how they would cope given that their age made them more vulnerable. This resulted in some prisoners, both men and women, adopting a 'front' (Crewe, 2009) so as not to appear vulnerable.

> *I wouldn't let them know that I was frightened because you do that, then straight away he will know he could take advantage.*
>
> Si

This attitude was gendered as it was, in most cases, the older male prisoners, usually those men who had spent considerable amounts of time in prison, who adopted a Goffmanesque approach. They did not wish to appear vulnerable in the system and felt that to preserve their safety, they had to present this fearless façade, as showing themselves to be weak might result in someone taking advantage of them. Adopting a front can be dangerous because you may be called upon to act in a way that supports the image that you are portraying and if your front slips that could make you more vulnerable.

## The Ear-Piercing Sound of Youth

*'Effing and blinding, screaming, shouting, loud music and banging doors.'* Selina

The behaviour of the younger residents could be intimidating for the older prisoners but often it was not just what they were doing but the level of noise that was made by the younger prisoners. The older residents often struggled to cope with it. People exposed to noise pollution have been shown to experience detrimental impacts in their physical and mental well-being (van Kamp & Davies, 2013). Difficulties in coping with the noise level was remarked upon by many of my participants. The invasive and pervasive levels of noise were a challenge for the older people. Instead, they preferred to withdraw to the relative quiet of their own cells when the noise became too much.

*Sometimes I have been known to ask to be locked up early. Not so much weekends, but when it gets really noisy, and I can't hear my television. I think, well you might as well get locked up. So, I say to the officer, 'can you lock me up please?' And then I just get on with what I've got to do. And I know then, that's it.*

Doris

Whilst both the men and women struggled with the younger population, the older women in particular, suffered greatly from the relentless playing of loud music. They found it particularly hard to endure; as Dot told me, *'It's the thumping, it stops you being able to think properly'*. The noise from the music would continue all day, from first thing in the morning until long after the evening lockup. Not only was it overly loud but it was, for many of the older people, not recognisable as music. It was rather just a persistent noise from which they felt there was no escape, other than retreating to their cells.

*Sometimes there is nowhere you can go to get away from it. So, I have to just put ear plugs in to muffle it. And it offends me, it angers me! I wanna get away from it. I don't want to listen to her next door or her opposite. Some days the door is open and I can't hear my own TV. Why should I have to shut my door all the time?*

Manda

The incessant noise from the music caused them anxiety and frustration. The officers did not appear to consider how the noise was impacting the older population, in part because they did not often complain about the noise levels. The older people were aware that if they did complain the younger residents would know it was them and they would have to suffer the consequences of their actions.

*I'm 62 in May, I'm put with a wife beater one side of me with a 70-amp stereo blasting out bungalow music I call it, they call it garage, I call it bungalow. And in the next--, next side of me I've got a 30-year-old geezer blasting out country and western. And they've got no respect for nobody, and they'll play it till eleven twelve o'clock at night. Staff here haven't even got the power to switch someone's electric off!*

Albert

Many of the older people felt that their concerns about the noise levels were disregarded by the officers. Either they did not care about the noise level, as Manda remarked, '*they don't give a shit, they go home',* or they had no authority or ability to make the other prisoners comply. In the prison environment those people who create the most noise and aggravation are more likely to have their needs met. The compliance of the majority of the older population allowed their needs to be overlooked as, rather than demanding that some action was taken, they simply retreated back to their cells.

## Stick to Your Own Kind

*'I've got nothing in common with a 21-year-old.'* Brian

Not only was the noise an issue that caused the older generation to isolate but they also felt that they had nothing in common with the very young residents. For older prisoners who were not located with other people of a similar age, this could present problems. It could be difficult for the older prisoners in this situation to forge social bonds due to the lack of people of their own age in the environment. Dot was fortunate insofar as her wing had an association room; the majority of the other wings in the women's prison did not have any association space. However, the availability of the space to associate did not make it any more likely that she would engage with the other women on the wing, as they were all younger than her.

> *But I don't go in there cos there's nothing ... it's just all the young girls and its they wanna watch what they wanna watch. You don't have a choice with what you want to watch. They do their own thing, so you've just got to go with it. So, I don't bother.*
>
> Dot

So, although Dot did not experience any specific problems with the younger women on her wing, she still felt isolated from them by virtue of the lack of shared interests or experiences that she had with women who were 40 to 50

years younger than her. Instead, she preferred to remain in her room as she felt there was no place for her in the group of younger women.

One of the wings in HMP Mans-field held about 20 of the men who were over 50. This allowed these men to form small social groups and although they still removed themselves from the general rowdiness of the wing, they were able to engage in positive social interactions.

> *I'm usually doing something probably. Reading a book or a magazine or doing something or watching the television or something. But we tend to chat with ourselves. A couple of the guys in here are quite close to me in proximity [...] And there's four of us in a row, so we sort of chat in our cells.*
>
> Cyril

In HMP Mans-field, where there were a sufficient number of older prisoners on the wing, the more mature people instinctively tended to find one another and were able to form cohesive social groups. This allowed them to have a support network whilst still remaining apart from the rest of the prisoner population. However, with the exception of this one wing, the remainder of the over 50s were dispersed across the other eight wings, with four wings only having one or two prisoners over 50 residing there. For these older people their withdrawal to their cell was not a conscious decision made to make their life easier, but one taken as they felt alone and isolated amongst the rest of the population.

> *We didn't even go out of our cells all weekend ... [MS: Is that because you feel unwelcome, or you feel unsafe?] It's that I'm just not welcomed, and nobody greets me or even acknowledges me, so why bother trying to socialise.*
>
> Johnny

## Johnny: A Case Study of Isolation

*'I certainly don't fit into their cliques.'*

Johnny was especially isolated within the prison. He was a professional man who had emigrated to England many years before, leaving his immediate family many thousands of miles away. He had been recently bereaved, losing his partner of many years and was now completely alone with no family anywhere close by.

> *The experience is very isolating and it's very lonely. I've been going through quite a lot personally, in my personal life, so, not an easy time for me.*

He had been living on the south coast and given the prison's distance from the area, he had only received one visit from friends in the 10 months that he had been in prison. The coalescing of his recent loss, his family being overseas and being held far from his home was taking a toll on Johnny and he was suffering from extreme isolation. The issues of cost and time difference made any contact with the outside world very difficult; indeed, he mentioned a number of times how the cost of an international phone call was prohibitive. Many people now only have a mobile telephone and the cost of calling a UK mobile from prison is reportedly 13 pence per minute (Prison Guide, n.d.).

> *It's not like you can pick up the phone and talk to a friend, from my perspective, as I mentioned the phone costs. You can have a quick, hi, how are you? Two minutes max conversation and then you've used up all your credit. It's done.*

Johnny had been placed on a wing that had no other men over the age of 50. The wing was predominantly occupied by prisoners who were from the traveller community with whom he had little in common. The experience, both in prison and specifically on his wing, left him feeling very separate and as if he had 'been dropped into this alien environment'.

> *[On the wing] there are probably only a handful of anybody over 40, let alone 50. Everyone else is mostly from the travelling community and quite set in their ways. So, it's a very cliquey wing, in that sense, and I certainly don't fit into their cliques.*

To compound his isolation Johnny was gay and felt that the culmination of his age, sexuality and professional status, added to his feelings of isolation, specifically on the wing where he had been placed. The intersectionality of his age, class and sexuality made Johnny feel more isolated as he struggled to understand if the hostility that he was facing was due to his age or his sexuality or both. These intersecting layers added to his invisibility within the prison and resulted in him feeling completely alone.

> *Where I am placed on my wing, erm, I've found I'm quite isolated. I'm not part of the young travellers' cliques. In fact, I'm ignored by them. It's almost like a wall of homophobia, and also being older makes them less inclined to even say hello.*

His first cellmate, a young traveller, had become quite intimidating and prone to outbursts of violence. So, whereas other older prisoners could often retreat to the security of their cells, this option was not available to him. Johnny also felt disadvantaged because it was his first time in prison, and he struggled to obtain the information from the prison that he needed to make his sentence more bearable. Other prisoners had groups of peers around them who could support them and assist them with their navigation through the prison; however, because he was isolated he felt that support was lacking for him.

> *So, you learn things as you go on, and you learn by mistake or, if you're lucky, you have a big network of people who can help you in the prison, which most prisoners do. I unfortunately don't.*

The information in the prison does not cascade in a logical manner from the staff to the prisoners. Notifications were usually put up on very overcrowded notice boards and were soon covered up by subsequent notices. Staff, if asked,

were often unable to help as they seemed either not to know the information sought or were unwilling to share it with them. Many prisoners were simply told to submit an 'app', a written application for information. It was reported to me, by both the older men and women, that the help required to navigate their way around prison usually came from fellow prisoners who 'knew what's what' (fieldnotes). So, most prisoners relied on their social networks to guide them through this maze of often (mis)information. For those older people like Johnny, who did not have social connections within the prison, this information was difficult to come by and increased their feelings of isolation.

Johnny's case highlighted the difficulties faced by many older prisoners, men and women, on the pains that they suffered through being isolated within the prison. The lack of social groups made the older person's time more difficult. Yet, as has been noted earlier, the older prisoners were far less likely to bring these difficulties to the notice of the prison and were far more likely to attempt to cope on their own. The lack of consideration paid to Johnny by the prison was a clear example of institutional thoughtlessness. The prison did not consider how isolating he was finding his time on the wing. They failed to consider that a 51-year-old professional man, who was also gay, would find it difficult, if not impossible, to forge any social connections in the environment in which he was confined.

## Lack of Trust

*'You're not here to make friends.'* Selina

This self-imposed segregation away from the younger residents and the lack of contemporaries for the older people to associate with presented problems on the wings, as some older people struggled to develop any type of relationship without shared common interests. Being unable to form social bonds also made

some of the older prisoners more distrustful of the other prisoners around them.

> *The only advice that I would give to a woman going into custody, is ... the only person you trust is the reflection in the mirror. That's the only person you trust. Talk to yourself.*
>
> Selina

While this belief is common amongst most prisoners, it was prevalent amongst the older people. Many of the older prisoners, especially the older women who I spoke to, were very distrustful of other women in the prison and they purposely self-isolated as a way of protecting themselves from difficulties with other prisoners. Many women felt that it was wise to keep their personal details to themselves, as if other people became aware of your personal issues it could create problems.

> *It's difficult, but you get, it's isolating, but you don't have those problems thrown back at you. And that ... barrage of insults thrown at you, when you've said something to somebody and then they've repeated it to somebody else, and it's been blown out of proportion, and it comes back to you. You have to experience that, to make you realise, you zip it, you zip it, because it gets you into more trouble and its unnecessary aggravation that nobody needs to deal with.*
>
> Selina

Although there was a lack of trust between many people in prison and a belief that you must 'pull your own time' this could be a difficult approach to take. I witnessed some of the issues Selina was referring to; however, she was a sociable woman and the length of the sentence that she was serving made the practicalities of maintaining this closed off approach quite problematic. Despite being repeatedly told by numerous participants that they, 'just keep themselves to themselves' (fieldnotes), many of the older people acknowledged how important it was to have some social interactions to make the prison journey a little easier. Having someone with shared experiences is an important part of that process.

> *You still need to sort of talk to people, and it's hard to find people of your own age, that you can communicate with. So, what you're doing is you're communicating with people what are younger than you, and they're not on the same wavelength as you, and you're not holding a conversation that you would really want to be holding but it's just that you have to make conversation. Cause you need, not friends, but you need people to be able to just talk to.*
>
> Sharon

Although the common mantra of the older people was, 'keep your head down and do your time', there was also an acknowledgement, especially by the women, that some degree of companionship was going to be necessary to survive their sentence.

## Making Connections – Coping with the Pains of Isolation

As has been shown in Johnny's case, the inability to associate with or have access to people of a similar age or background presented problems for the older population. This left them feeling very isolated, despite being surrounded by hundreds of other people. Both the women and the men were cognisant that they needed to overcome their isolation and look for people whom they felt were in similar situations to themselves. Where the older prisoners were able to find people of a similar age, they formed social groups, and this helped them to overcome the isolation that could be experienced by others.

In HMP Mans-field, in addition to the one wing that housed a large number of older people, there were two work areas where a high proportion of the men were over 50: the bike workshop and horticulture. Although not intentionally nor exclusively for the over 50s, these two areas in the prison had become popular with the older men. Of the 19 men I interviewed, seven of them, over a third, were employed in one of these areas. This allowed the older men not only the ability to work but also to form social connections with people their own

age. Johnny, despite the situation he faced on the wing, felt fortunate as he had been able to get a job in horticulture. He revelled in the ability to spend time, not only outdoors, but also with other older men with whom he was able to gain some semblance of social support, if only for the time that he was able to go to work.

Although the women did not have the opportunity for similar older person's working environments nor wings with large numbers of older women on them, many of them managed to carve out small social groups with people of similar ages and interests. The benefits for those older prisoners who forged social networks was clear. They appeared more confident and able to negotiate their way around the prison. Those older women and men managed to find their social support and although they predominantly remained apart from the younger prisoners, they were able to have meaningful interactions within those groups.

> *There's a load of us and we sit down the end of the wing, we're the wrinklies they call us [laughs], like the younger lads, we're the wrinklies, but we're happy, you know. There's four of us up there, first timers, and there's another four who have done four more sentences, so we listen to what they say.*
>
> *Alfie*

There was clearly an exchange of information within those groups, and this assisted the older people and provided the first-time entrants into the system with some useful inside knowledge, that aided them when trying to navigate the prison system.

The lack of people of a similar age and with similar interests, could lead to older people self-segregating as making connections with much younger people could often prove difficult. One way of mitigating this issue could be through

the introduction of older prisoner wings. Overwhelmingly most of the older people that I spoke to felt that these units would be beneficial to the older population, as they would relish the opportunity to be away from the more disruptive elements of the prison. That is not to say that they wanted to be on a wing that felt like a retirement home, merely that they would prefer to be housed with other residents who were aged above 40, with residents who had a similar attitude towards serving their sentences.

> *I think they should have a certain wing for certain age groups and all of that. You know. It doesn't work, mixing with youngsters, it really doesn't.*
>
> Eric

Both male and female older residents were keen for some type of separate accommodation for the more mature residents. However, this was not reflected in the conversations with the prison staff. Almost all of the staff that I spoke to were resistant to this idea and advocated for the mixing of the older and younger residents together.

> *I wouldn't want to see them segregated. I certainly think for the older, older population, there is a call to have an assisted kind of ring-fenced area. And I--, I don't know what the women themselves would say. I mean some of the women love mixing with younger women. And again, I think it's an individual thing you know. Some of them would say, I don't want to bloody be around all old people all the time. I'm, you know, I'm young.*
>
> Governor Tania

The staff were against segregated accommodation for the older residents. Some felt that it was not reflective of real life for the more mature residents to be separated out from the other ages. They would contend that in society people of all ages lived alongside one another and therefore this should be replicated in prison. This argument was slightly flawed as in society if older people were living with someone younger it would more likely be their family, where

presumably there would be a degree of consideration for the older person's needs. This was certainly not the case in prison.

Other staff felt that placing all the older people together would have a detrimental effect on the older prisoners, as living with only older people would be akin to being in an old people's home and would make them old before their time. However, the most often repeated mantra from the staff was the belief that the older prisoners had a calming effect on the younger more disruptive inmates. This 'fact' was repeated to me often by staff from all levels and from both the male and female establishments. Yet despite this, there is no evidence that shows that older people can exert a calming influence on a wing.

> *I think it would probably benefit the older men more than it would the prison. ... Because then they could get probably a lot more of the specialist care they needed. If they were all in the same place, and they were with staff that knew how to manage their needs, then they'd probably be managed better than what they are now split across the prison population. But, then we wouldn't see the benefits of what I said earlier, of the calming influence on the younger men.*
>
> Officer Robert

Older prisoners do tend to be calmer and are less likely to be confrontational than younger prisoners. Therefore, a wing that is populated by large numbers of older men is calmer. However, one or two older people on a wing will have no impact on the overall atmosphere of the wing, as they would be so outnumbered that the older people would retreat to their cells. Therefore, despite understanding that there would be benefits, certainly for the older people, of segregated accommodation, this prospect was routinely dismissed as an option.

# Thoughtlessness

Isolation is something with which, on occasion, all prisoners will have to contend. However, the need to maintain social networks is vital for people as they age. Being socially isolated impacts on the mental and physical wellbeing of older people. The staff were generally aware that older prisoners might be more inclined to self-isolate and were aware that there was a reluctance by most of the older population, to mix with the younger residents. Yet despite the staff articulating this, the prison regime was reluctant to provide the older people with more age-appropriate accommodation.

In the men's prison, I was often told by staff that the older men preferred to be located on one particular wing; this was why there was a large number of older men on that wing. The cells were all single occupancy accommodation, and they all had their own showers. When I questioned why all of the older men could not be located there, I was again given the response that the prison needed to have the older men dispersed throughout the prison as it served to calm the environment. While undoubtedly the atmosphere on this wing was much calmer than any other area of the prison, this was not necessarily due to the older prisoners residing there.

Initially the wing had been assigned as an enhanced wing, so there was more generally a level of compliance amongst the men on this wing. Moving around the other wings, referred to by the men as 'Beirut', the atmosphere was decidedly much rowdier and menacing. These wings often only held one or two older men and those who found themselves isolated on these wings, sharing cells with randomly assigned cell mates, were having a vastly different experience to those in the relative calm of the formerly enhanced wing. Their

presence was clearly having no impact on calming the environment; rather, they had to hope for a decent cell mate, or a move off the wing. On these wings the mantra was often, 'keep your eyes down, keep your head down'(fieldnotes).

By considering the needs of older prisoners, the establishments could have, relatively easily, lessened the pains of isolation experienced by the older people. Providing wings that were enhanced or for people over the age of 40, would simultaneously provide accommodation that was calmer as well as offering more opportunities to form social networks, which are vital to assisting people cope with their sentence. An older prisoner policy could mean that on arrival into a prison, consideration is given to someone's age and circumstances. If single cell accommodation was not available, older people could be placed with someone who might be a more suitable cell mate.

## Conclusion

Older people in prison are more likely to self-isolate, especially those entering prison for the first-time, in an attempt to create some ontological security for themselves. The prison environment can be frightening and an assault on the senses, especially the ears. Older people have different needs and requirements to the younger population and should be provided the opportunity to reside in accommodation that allows them to form social networks.

Both the men and women in my study were aware how necessary it was for them to find some form of companionship, even if they were not fully trusting of the people they encountered. Many of the older people, despite vocalising this mistrust of others, were attempting to utilise their agency to create these social groups. Those that were able to do this, appeared more comfortable in

negotiating their way around the prison and were able to use these networks to support them through difficult times.

The prisons were unable to meet the needs of their ageing population as they thoughtlessly treated all prisoners as a homogenous group, rather than attempting to draw out the heterogeneity of prisoners and address those individual needs. This one size fits all policy continues to thoughtlessly overlook the additional pains of imprisonment that are endured by the older population.

# Chapter Seven - Pains of Loss

This chapter discusses the 'Pains of Loss', as experienced by older prisoners. Prison is defined by loss for all prisoners, the most obvious loss being the prisoners' loss of liberty. However, other losses have been observed in the prison population particularly by prisoners serving long sentences. Drake (2012) observed how long-term prisoners felt that, as the outside world was changing and progressing, they were losing their connection to the that external realm. Jewkes (2006) noted that in a similar way to people facing a terminal diagnosis, prisoners serving life tariffs found their sentence 'seismically disrupts the[ir] life course and forcibly suspends future expectations' (2006, p. 366).

In this chapter I explore how older prisoners experienced loss in a different way from the rest of the prisoner society. As they aged, the challenges they faced made those losses more profound and difficult to endure. These losses were not experienced uniformly by all older prisoners, but rather there was a gendered aspect to the losses they experienced. In this chapter I will explore here how those different losses were experienced by the older men and women.

## Ageing Families

'*My father has got a weak heart and my mum has had cancer this year and had to have a mastectomy.'* Anastasia

The older prisoners that I encountered had experienced many losses during their incarceration, but perhaps the most noticeable was their loss of family. For several reasons many of the older prisoners had limited contact with their families. Owing to the age of my participants, their parents, if they were still

alive, would be in their late 70s or 80s. Many of these older parents had serious health issues that caused concern for their children in prison.

> *My mum was 75 on Friday. [MS: And is she fit and able and can she come and see you?] Erm not ... She's got a lot; a lot of health issues and she keeps falling over at home and she's had quite a few falls since I've been in prison. And she's had a mini stroke, yeah she's not that healthy.*
>
> Manda

These ageing parents were a source of constant worry and generated fear. The older prisoners worried about their parents' health and wellbeing; often that fear was justified. Although both the older men and women faced the same issues with their ageing parents, this loss of ageing families was not vocalised by all my participants and had a gendered aspect to it. The older women I encountered routinely raised concerns and issues about their parents, whereas those relationships were rarely mentioned by the older male prisoners. Out of the 19 older men that I spoke to, only three of them made any reference to their parents when asked about family, and none of those expressed any concern over their wellbeing, despite two of the parents being described as 'ill'.

There was a notable difference when the women were asked about family. Most of the women included their parents in their discussions of family, as well as their partners and children. The health problems of their ageing parents meant that many of the women expressed a genuine concern that their parents would not survive until the end of their sentence. This fear was not unrealistic; some of the women had lost one of their parents whilst they were in prison. Indeed, Gwen lost her mother shortly after our interview.

Caring is a gendered role, with almost two thirds of informal care giving in the United Kingdom being undertaken by women (Office for National Statistics, 2017). This was reflected in the women in my sample as several of them had

been the primary carers for their ageing parents prior to being incarcerated.

> *Do you know my mum's 83 and she's bed-bound; I was her carer for her before I come in. [crying]*
>
> Gwen

The guilt and frustration felt by many of the women over leaving their parents was palpable. They carried with them not only the shame of their prison sentence, but the worry that they had let their parents down by being unable to continue to look after them. They experienced a further loss of control over not being able to care for their parents as they felt they should. There were many tasks that the women felt that they should be performing for their ageing parents, but from prison they were powerless to assist them.

> *But my mum and dad are like very, very ... they wouldn't want help coming in unless it was really necessary. […] They expected me to help look after them, which […] I would have, that's why they were going to move to [my town]. I love them to bits; all my friends love them. That's why I was going to help them. So, it's kind of wrecked their life as well as mine.*
>
> Anastasia

As well as their guilt and sadness over not being able to care for their ageing parents, the women also expressed frustration at their inability to make any provisions that their parents required. The thought of their parents dying and not being able to make the arrangements or to attend their funerals was difficult for many of the women to comprehend. They struggled with the lack of autonomy, to be unable to make these decisions and carry out such tasks.

> *So, I think, my mums will, the house will have to be sold and divided. But then obviously you'll have inheritance tax and all that. Then what? How do you control anything from in here? How will I even know that my mum is dead?*
>
> Manda

Even if their ageing parents were in reasonably good health there was still a concern over having elderly parents and spouses or siblings having to make the journey for visits. The small number of women's prisons in the United Kingdom

means that women are often held much further away from their homes and families than men. On average, women are held 63 miles away from their homes, with approximately 17 per cent of women being held more than 100 miles away from their home (Gov.uk, 2018). The closure of Holloway women's prison in London has resulted in women from the capital being held much further away from their families (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for England and Wales, 2017). In prisons such as HMP Askham Grange in North Yorkshire, residents were an average of 97 miles from their homes and at HMP Drake Hall in Staffordshire, women were on average 93 miles from home.

> *None of 'em can visit cause it's too far. 5 hours here, 5 hours back, it's 10 hours. They can't do it.*
>
> Gwen

Many of the older women I spoke to were in a similar situation being held some distance from their families. Consequently, it was often a long journey for these ageing relatives to make. As they were conscious of this distance my participants would try and dissuade their families from visiting as they were concerned over the length of the journey that their relatives would have to undertake, given their failing health and advanced years.

## Fledgling Adults

'*But then I think I'm a mum, and my son, there are still times when he really needs me.'* Sasha

In addition to their concerns over their ageing parents, many of the older residents also had children, a number of whom were still in their teens. Although some of the men acknowledged that they were missing out on part of their children's lives, for the female residents particularly, this was a difficult experience as they had to leave their children, who although technically adults, were still seen by their mothers as children.

> *I've got a boy at home, he's 19 next week. He still needs mum. [...] I've never left him like. I'm finding that hard. ... I've just got to wait ... [crying]*
>
> Gwen

As other researchers have observed these maternal pains of loss are particularly gendered (Crewe, et al., 2017). When men are sent to prison, by and large their children are looked after by their mothers, whereas only nine per cent of the children of women in prison are looked after by their fathers (Women in Prison, 2013). One of the most difficult things, for the women who are mothers, is to come to terms with the loss of their children and being deprived of their maternal role (Hairston, 1999).

For the older women, whose children were on the cusp of adulthood, their removal from the home to the prison often resulted in their children being left to fend for themselves. Once children are 18, they are too old to be taken into care. Repeatedly, I was told of how children as young as 16 were looking after themselves whilst their mother was in custody. This loss of being a mother to their child was often difficult for the women to endure. They often felt they had not yet adequately prepared their children for their life as an independent adult and the restrictions of the prison regime made it difficult for them to manage those last vestiges of mothering, that the women felt they still needed to do.

> *But then I think I'm a mum, and my son, there are still times when he really needs me. I mean it's silly, he's 21 and the other day we were speaking on the phone, and he said, 'Mum, can I ask you something, do you put the Comfort in after, in the washing machine?' And its little things like that because before we could text each other when he was training at the barracks. We could text if he needed to know something, and I could text him. And then, cos he was in with all the boys, they wouldn't know he was asking his mum! Stuff like that, what washing powder do you get? Little things like that. We could text all the time. And when you don't have that, and you have very little communication, and you don't see one another. That makes it even worse.*
>
> Sasha

They felt the loss of their mothering role keenly as they were unable to give their children the guidance they needed as they made their way into adulthood. One impact of these children having to live without their mother was that they learned to adapt in their motherless worlds at speed. These young adults were moving on in the world on their own, leaving their mothers only able to observe from a distance.

This caused frustration for some of the women as their importance in their children's world decreased. Ange arranged a transfer to be in a prison closer to her son. She had been imprisoned overseas when he was 15 and had not seen him for four years. She was upset when she discovered he was working at the weekends, as she had expected him to visit her. She found it difficult to come to terms with the realities of his life, as she was expecting him to spend his time doing things for her, when he was now focused on his own life.

> *He's at university, in his second year, he's doing very well. Now he's got a weekend job to give him a bit of pin money. But if I ask him to do anything - he's like 'yeah mum I'll do it' - but then it doesn't happen. [...] it's very frustrating.*
>
> Ange

The women were losing control and influence on their children as they transitioned into adulthood. They had to sit passively and observe their children moving on with their lives, whilst their own lives remained static.

The pain of being separated from their children was evident. When chatting with the women informally around the prison their children often came up in conversation. This excerpt from my fieldnotes highlights the difficulties these exchanges raised.

> In a conversation with Selina, I mentioned her son, she likes talking about him and becomes animated, her face visibly lights up and she is

> immensely proud of him. Then, in the way with those who are bereaved, that initial delight in thinking and talking about a loved one is swiftly followed by the sense of loss of being deprived of their presence. I feel responsible for her emotional upset as I raised him in the conversation, but it is hard to ignore him when sat in a room surrounded by his photos and cushions and pillows with his picture on. (fieldnotes)

Selina, like many of the women was conflicted between her desire to see her son and her attempts to protect herself emotionally. She missed her son a great deal, having only seen him six times in the two years that she had been in prison, yet she also expressed a strong desire to cease to have contact with him as she felt it would be easier not to see him at all, rather than bear the repeated pain she experienced when he left.

> *But I don't like visits. I hate visits, I hate saying goodbye, I have a four day, really low depression after seeing him. Because its fine when you're on the visit [...] I'm sorry. It's sometimes a lot easier to speak on the phone. Because when you have that contact, that physical contact, its ... it ... really hurts. It hurts, and I just suffer terribly. To the point where I wanted to start taking medication again, anxiety medication. But I can't, I don't want to. But it makes you feel like that. Yet again it just hits you slap in the face. The reality of where you are, and the frustration. And so, every time you have a visit, you beat yourself up. And there's nothing you can do about it. So, I think everybody goes through it, it's not just me, everybody. Everybody has those feelings. And nothing takes that pain away. Nothing.*
>
> Selina

Regardless of these sentiments, many of these women would continue to maintain their contact with their children, despite the immense personal pain it caused to themselves. While Crewe et al (2017) have also highlighted this issue, they focused on the impact of loss on long term prisoners. My research highlights how the older women's stage of life, meant they experienced the pain of loss of their family contact as keenly as those long-term prisoners, because they felt they had less time left to rebuild their lives and less time to re-establish those ties with both parents and children. There was a genuine risk that their parents may not live until the older women were released, and their children

were moving on with their own lives, leaving their mothers behind. Therefore, despite not serving a life sentence, the older women experienced this loss just as greatly as those women serving long sentences.

## Difficulty and Drift

*'I haven't had a visit since I've been in prison.'* Ronnie

Maintaining contact with their families could often be difficult. There were many examples where the older prisoners deliberately kept their family contact to a minimum, but there were also other difficulties in sustaining contact. For the older women there was an issue over using the telephones.

> *One thing I do miss from [the other prison] is the POD, and the phone in your room. Particularly because I don't get visits. I could speak more privately, and if I did get upset … well. It is noisy where I am, and sometimes, I have to say to my husband, 'look I'm gonna have to put the phone down, because I can't hear you, you can't hear me'. [MS: What's the noise like on your wing?] Pretty bad, pretty bad. And you know, it is. I try to phone, during the day when they're at work, because then it's quieter then, even though that's more expensive, its quieter. If I don't, like when I was at education, then then obviously I have to phone then and sometimes it is a nightmare. Because they, ... I always respect people when they're on the phone, but not everybody does and they're younger and ... you know ... shrieking.*
>
> Doris

In the women's prison there were only communal telephones. As these could only be used at certain times when the women were unlocked there was often a queue to use the phone. When the women were queuing, there was a prison etiquette around how long the women can then be on the phone. This made their conversations difficult to have and any personal meaningful dialogue was almost impossible, as the women were acutely aware of the number of women around listening to them. Moreover, the noise level on the wing during periods of unlock could be tremendous. Rarely were the wings quiet as the noise of between 40 and 50 women reverberated along the corridors making any

conversation difficult. On entering the prison one day I noted:

> 'I walked onto the wing and the wall of noise rolled towards me. The cacophony of sound was overwhelming. Shouting and swearing joined in with shrieks and declarations of love. It was difficult to think, the sound was almost assaulting' (fieldnotes).

Doris was in her 70s and did not receive any visits. Her husband lived about 100 miles away from HMP Womans-ville and was too old and unwell to be able to make the journey to visit her. Her phone calls were her only connection with her husband, other than the letters they sent each other. She often worried about her husband, given his health issues, and used the phone calls to reassure herself that he was well. There had been occasions where Doris had been unable to make contact with her husband and this caused her an immense worry, as they had no children, and her husband did not have any help in the community to assist him.

These worries were not without cause; previously her husband had fallen over and had spent three days lying on the floor before someone had found him. As the time she could use the communal telephone was restricted, this could make contacting him difficult. Doris, along with other women, had begun her sentence in a private prison that had in-cell telephones, and therefore the move to HMP Womans-ville had made communication with her husband more of a challenge. The men in HMP Mans-field were more fortunate as they all had in-cell telephones, which made contact with their families more accessible for them if they chose to keep in contact.

## Deliberate Loss

*'I've got family, but I don't have nothing to do with them.'* Benny

There was a gendered reaction to visits and contact with their families amongst the older population. The women would continue to attempt to maintain

contact with their families, despite the emotional cost they endured, whereas the men's reaction to family contact was less invested with emotion. Although several of the male participants expressed a lack of interest in visits, it was not usually done with the intent of sparing themselves or their family mental anguish. For some of the men it was because they could see no benefit in receiving a visit.

> *Yeah, I get a visit, yeah. Do you know what, I don't even like visits. I hate visits. [MS: Why's that?] I don't know. It seems like it's breaking the routine up, if you know what I mean. I've got a routine every day, I can do it by the minute. [...] Sometimes a visit's stressful, sometimes it ain't, do you know what I mean? I just--, I'd rather not have a visit where she nags and goes on, she books a visit, she says that when she needs another visit. Sometimes I don't even turn up. But I can't just--, visits ain't me, do you know what I mean? I would rather do a sentence with no visits at all.*
>
> Micky

Whether this display of machismo was a real reflection of their feelings, or a coping mechanism was difficult to say. None of the men who I spoke to expressed any emotional discontent at being separated from their families; indeed, many of them vocalised a reluctance at having their family visit them in prison. Some of the men expressed this sentiment as they did not want their family exposed to the prison environment. Calvin often remarked '*I don't really want my family around the environment to be honest'*, whereas for others, it was common for the men to disparage and disregard the idea of having a visit from a loved one. Remarks such as '*So, after 20 minutes I was almost looking at the wife, asking her to go home'* were not unusual.

Prison is a lonely environment that conversely provides 'company in abundance [but] little emotional sustenance' (Crewe, 2009, p. 313). In 'Total Institutions' family ties are severed upon entry (Goffman, 1968) and some prisoners do feel that they need to withdraw emotionally in order to endure

their incarceration. Therefore, in the same way that the older women avoided having visits from their family because of the pain that their departure caused, perhaps this display of machismo is a 'front', (Crewe, 2009) part of a male defence mechanism that helps people survive in prison. By eschewing the need for the company of their loved ones, these men were able to demonstrate that they were capable of managing their time on their own, that they had no need for emotional support from either the outside or from others in the prison.

> *I can actually do my sentence without any visits, I've got a phone, I put £10 a week on, I phone one of my kids, I phone the next one, if I don't get them I leave a message with that one to tell them that message, so I'm alright, you know?*
>
> Alfie

Whilst this need to display disdain for visits was a trait predominantly seen in the male participants, both men and women discussed how they did not wish to have their family 'tainted' by the prison environment.

> *[MS: Do you have family based nearby? Are you able to get visits?]. Not particularly, I mean I do get visits yeah, but they're not particularly close. And I don't particularly want them to have to come to prison anyway.*
>
> Angelique

These older prisoners perceived that their families would be stigmatised by their association with the prison, and they therefore preferred to maintain a barrier between their personal lives and their incarcerated existence. This feeling of stigmatisation from the association with prison was felt more keenly by the older population; as it has been noted, for younger prisoners their incarceration does not produce the same taint on their lives (Hughes, 2015a). Therefore, by keeping their family apart from the prison, older prisoners felt able to protect them from any contamination caused by being in the prison environment.

## Loss of Relationships

*'But whether or not it is going to last, my marriage, that's another question.'*
Sasha

Maintaining contact is difficult when in prison. The regime dictates who you can see or speak to and at what time. The availability of the telephone makes it impossible for prisoners to ring home at a set time, so the family at home may often be out. Although most people now have mobile phones as I mentioned in chapter six, the cost of prison phone calls is expensive and to phone a mobile telephone is even more so. If the prisoner is reliant on the money that they earn in the prison, it can be difficult for them to afford the pin credit that they might need.

> *I'm cut off as it is from my family, from friends, telephone is just so expensive to use. It's impossible.*
>
> Johnny

Owing to these difficulties it is easy for relationships to drift apart. Many of the men, and a few of the women, had adult children with whom they were no longer in contact.

> *I don't get on with my family.*
>
> Cyril

Without an ability to easily get in touch with their families or a willingness to do so, many of the older people become isolated. This lack of 'bonding' and 'bridging' social capital, that binds them into society and builds their social relationships (Putnam, 2000) can present problems for the older people when they leave prison and attempt to resettle (Hughes, 2015a).

Many of the older women were concerned over the state of their relationships. This issue was exacerbated for several of the women as their partners were also in prison, making contact between them even more problematic. Inter-prison

phone calls are limited and can be difficult to arrange. It relies on both prisons being able to arrange a suitable time for a phone call that is agreeable to both regimes. To get an inter-prison phone call requires tenacity from both parties as it is often difficult for the staff to get in touch with a contact at the other prison due to the prevalence of shift work. Many requests and reminders may need to be made in order to facilitate this. This inability to have any kind of regular contact with their loved ones raises many concerns for the older women, not least that they worry if their marriage will be able to survive their imprisonment.

> *And you wonder if you're still going to have a marriage, to be truthful. It keeps going through my mind, I think to myself, I've changed. Anyone who's been in prison obviously changes, but I've changed, and he's got to do 5 years and he's definitely gonna have changed. So, there's no way we're gonna come together and be the couple that we were, the married couple that we were. Its gonna definitely be different but whether its gonna work or not, … I don't know.*
>
> Sharon

These couples were usually sentenced for the same crime and the differing sentences could also cause anger and resentment amongst the couples due to the perceived inequality of their outcomes.

> *And I'm angry because I got a bigger sentence than him. And that's wrong. And because he got a lesser sentence he's gonna get TAG and he's out in June. He's not really done that long, and it's like ... And then I feel bad because I think, why are you thinking this? You should be happy for him. That he's getting out.*
>
> Sasha

The inability to communicate easily with their husbands and the growing resentments that they often felt, caused tensions in their relationships and, despite being married for many years, these women were concerned about the future of their marriages and how they would fare once they were released from prison. They were aware their role of mother was over as their children

had grown up; however, they also faced uncertainty over their role as wife and how that was going to be impacted by not only their incarceration, but their husband's as well.

## Losing Sight of Ones-self

In addition to losing touch with their families and loved ones whilst in prison, many older prisoners also lost their sense of themselves. This loss was felt more keenly by the women than the men in this study. The men had a clear sense of who they were and how their life after prison would continue. The women on the other hand seemed unable to look forward to that future self. Their identity, who they were, their social roles, had been shattered by their prison time, and while in prison this loss seemed too great for them to endure. Their inability to see a future was compounded by both the loss of their social roles and the amount of time they perceived they had left.

### Loss of Time

*'But it's like you're nearer the end of your life. So, to me it's more of a punishment.'* Anastasia

Azrini Wahidin (2004) found in her research with older women prisoners that they too felt that time was running away from them. Comparatively studying both older male and female prisoners, it was possible to discern a gendered difference in their attitudes towards life after prison and their pains of loss. All prisoners faced a loss of time whilst incarcerated. For the older residents, particularly the older women, there was a feeling that time was running out for them. With the older men I spoke to, although some of them acknowledged that they were losing time whilst in prison, they all had firm plans about what their future life was going to entail, what job they were going to do and where they were going to live.

*I applied for a job cos I know I'm going home in two weeks, so there's a company [...] and I wrote to them from here, with the prison logo on it, and I gave my name, I'd pulled their trailers for them when their lorry broke down, and I explained to them my offence, what I'd done, where I am and could they give me some help or a job, and I left my brother's phone number and could they phone yes or no? Well, he phoned my brother and offered me a job.*

Alfie

This confidence in their future lives was not replicated amongst the older women whom I encountered. Many of them were often struggling to imagine their future selves and how their lives would be after their release.

*And then I worry about things like, when I go for my first parole, I'm gonna be 70. It's like I've got no identification. [...] Cos then I think to me-self what happens if I'm 70 years of age and I've got no identification. How do you rebuild your life at such an age? Or am I going to be mentally or physically able to? Where am I going from here? An old people's home? I don't know. But what happens to all your stuff? ... You know I don't have a lot of contact with the outside now, and this is like 7 years in. So, what am I going to be like in 24 years' time?*

Manda

Manda was serving a life sentence and she could already see how the outside world was receding from her. Her connections with others outside of prison were already reduced to a single person, her mother, who was in her 70s. For Manda, the worries about the future were real. She will be a similar age to her mother before she is considered for release and the likelihood of her having anyone outside in society to support her seemed remote. She felt that there would be nothing left for her in the world outside of prison, and that time would have passed her by. She anticipated that the future would hold little for her once she was eventually released and that there would be no time for her to begin again, and no-one to assist her while she attempted to do this.

Manda was firmly in a 'permanent liminal space', (Jewkes, 2006) unable to imagine her future self. However, an inability to imagine a future was not just confined to life sentenced prisoners. Most of the older women I spoke to could not seem to construct a future for themselves and imagine what their life would be after prison because they felt there was not enough time left for reinvention.

> *[B]ecause I have got less time to rebuild, haven't I? Less time to reinvent myself or whatever. If I was 25, I'd probably think never mind it will be all over by the time I'm 30 - do you know what I mean? I'd have lots of time to reinvent myself, but I don't have that time [voice breaks a little]. That for me is the biggest concern about my age.*
>
> Angelique

The older women felt as though their prison sentences, at their time of life, were more severe as the time that they had left was more limited. Therefore, their ability to begin a new life once their time in prison was over, was curtailed.

## Loss of Identity

*'Your everything … everything has been removed.'* Selina

For the women, imprisonment dealt a huge blow to their lives; the normality of their world, the routine, all had been lost. Being imprisoned stripped the women of their gendered roles, that of wives, daughters, mothers and grandmothers.

> *The older women that are here are really suffering, really suffering. Because of ... I think how older women suffer; is we've been so used to things for so many years. And all of a sudden, we haven't got that, you were depended on! Relied upon.*
>
> Selina

Many of the women felt that as they had been forced to leave their ageing parents or children, that role was no longer available to them. That incarnation of the self was gone, yet because of their age they did not feel that there was enough time left for them to rebuild a new life and a new role once they had left prison.

Their previous identity had been lost and it had been replaced with the 'prisoner' identity. The forced adoption of the prisoner identity and the withdrawal of most of their autonomy seemed more difficult for the women to accept. Perhaps because the men's identities are less bound up in those social roles they did not exhibit this loss of identity or possibly, there were issues to do with the presentation of masculinity at play here, where the men felt compelled to present themselves of being certain of their future. For whatever reason, the men were more certain of their path out of the prison than the women and did not vocalise this loss of their identity in the way the older women did.

> *I do find things like that, actually really make me quite angry. Because you have lost your identity, you're just another prisoner.*
>
> Angelique

Not only had they lost their social roles, but they also had to adopt the persona and demeanour of a prisoner and all that entails. In addition to their loss of liberty, the women were losing their autonomy to make decisions and their ability to behave as adult women.

## Pains of Infantilisation

*'But I'm 55 years old for god's sake!'* Donna

This loss of identity was compounded by the way the women were treated in prison. It has long been recognised that women in prison are infantilised in a way which the men are not (Carlen, 1998). The women were sometimes described to me as being '*naughty*' and '*silly*', words that had a childish connotation to them. This treatment increased the frustration felt by the older women. Treating them like naughty children, rather than adult women, added an additional gendered pain that they had to endure.

Many of the staff in prison were much younger than the older prisoners, and the women felt that their interactions with the younger less experienced staff could sometimes be difficult. For the women this added an additional layer of frustration to their situation.

> *It makes you feel stupid, when you are calling officers 'sir' and 'miss'. And they're 20, 22, 24. And you go, 'excuse me, miss miss', and its like 'oh god!', I'm old enough to be her bloody mum! Oh god, it makes you feel ... And some of them, if they talk down. And it's like, 'oh my god!' And its that frustration again where you just have to grit your teeth. . [...] They make you feel so stupid!*
>
> Selina

They found having to address people young enough to be their children, as 'miss' or 'sir' demeaning, which was difficult to endure. They often felt disrespected by the way these younger staff spoke to them, and they discerned that there was a lack of respect for their age and what they had done in their lives prior to arriving in prison.

> *We're not babies, we're not children, we're not, you know, we've had lives, we've run families, we've bought up, we've raised children. So, in that sense yes. But there's lots of women like me here. We're quite capable. And there's a lot we could probably offer, in terms of helping around the prison which would also, I guess, help with our resettlement. But you know, it doesn't happen.*
>
> Angelique

The older women particularly struggled with what they felt was the disregarding of their life skills and the way their previous life experience was overlooked. Once imprisoned they had become infantilised by the state and forced to adopt submissive roles. Whilst presumably this is also true for the men, it was never raised as being an issue for them. Many of the older women had lived their own lives, raised their families, run their own home. They felt their skills and experience were removed from them and they were given the label of prisoner. A number of the older women were in prison for the first time later in life, many for theft and fraud offences, and they found it difficult when

they were assumed to have the generic prisoner characteristics. The imposition of mandatory drug tests and the assumption they should take basic level English and maths was an affront to who they were. They resisted this prisoner label and the attitudes of the staff that demeaned them.

The women were conscious that this 'prisoner identity' would follow them out into the world, limiting their ability to imagine their new identity. In order to desist from crime, people need to be able to 'make sense of their lives' (Maruna, 2001, p. 7) which is done by constructing a narrative that integrates people's past, present and imagined future lives. This inability for the older women, to imagine their future once they were released from prison, does not necessarily impact on their desistance from crime, as women's reoffending rates at 19.6 per cent are lower than men's at 25.7 per cent (Ministry of Justice, 2021c). However, it did impact on their sense of self.

The older women suffered from a crisis of confidence around finding their place in the world more generally; who they were and what their future role would be was unclear to them. This inability to visualise their future deepened the women's loss of self and added to the 'liminal state' (Jewkes, 2006, p. 367) that not just life sentenced prisoners found themselves in, but the older women experienced too.

## Loss of Physical possessions

*'So, my mum has got all my stuff. What happens when my mum passes away? Everything. I'm gonna lose everything. Everything will go!'* Manda

As people age they build an array of possessions that represent who they are, what they have and where they have been. These items are not necessarily materially expensive but can be richly invested with memories and meaning. All prisoners risk losing their home once they are in custody; indeed, some of the men I encountered had experienced this, but women are at greater risk of

losing their homes and all their possessions than men (Prison Reform Trust, 2018). Although younger women also have the potential to lose their homes, the build-up of personal effects that a woman in her 50s has is far greater than that of a younger woman, as they have a lifetime of accumulated belongings. These possessions appeared to contain greater sentimental attachment for the women, than those possessed by the men. This loss of self that the older women felt was compounded by the loss of their physical items.

> *And it's like God, I've just lost my home, I've lost my business. I've lost my dog, my cat, you know, ... so it was, it was hard.*
>
> Donna

This loss of the tangible things that make up people's lives, the documentation, the photographs, all the belongings that are infused with a lifetime of memories, this adds to the loss of self. For older people in society it is always preferable for them to stay in their homes as they age, as their sentimental attachment to their home and having their possessions around them is beneficial and comforting and gives older people a sense of security (Wiles, et al., 2012).

So, for these older women, who had lost their homes and all their possessions, there was a deep-seated feeling of insecurity. They had not just lost their personal effects but had lost their belongings that held their lifetime of memories. For those women, it was not just that so much time had been lost that they did not know how to restart their lives again, nor just that the amount of time they had left felt too limited to begin this huge task, but by losing the things that were personal to them, the things that made them who they were, they had lost sight of their sense of self. The culmination of these losses made it harder for the women to imagine their future selves. Moreover, as the people whom they loved disappeared as well as their homes and possessions, the older

women were isolated in the world and were unsure how to move forward with their lives after prison.

## Dot: A Case Study of Loss

*'My family have disowned me.'*

Dot was in her late 60s. She had been in prison for about six years and had almost no contact with the outside world. She was arrested overseas and served the first three years of her sentence in a foreign prison. Prior to her incarceration she was living abroad. When she was arrested she lost everything; her home and all her possessions including her dog were gone. Dot maintained that she was not guilty of the crime for which she had been sentenced, but the impact of her prison term caused a rift between her and her family. Although she had two children, she was completely estranged from them and she had no contact with them for the whole of her sentence, both in England and abroad.

> *[MS: And do you have family and people who come and visit you here?] No visitors at all. [MS: Why do you not have any visits then?] Because my family have disowned me. My daughter is ashamed of me, […] I've tried to get in touch with them and that, but she's not ... she won't listen […] But she says she doesn't want to know. [MS: that must be really difficult for you] It is, it's hard. And it's even harder when people are going out on their visits and they're coming back and talking about their daughter or their son. That they've visited them and that. Yeah it is hard.*

Dot felt the pain of her separation from her children very deeply. Losing both relationships with her children and all of her material possessions compounded her isolation, she felt entirely alone both in and out of the prison. Dot had a large number of siblings but only one family member kept in contact with her, an older sister who was unwell. They only communicated by letter and very occasional phone calls. The only things Dot had, the possessions she owned and

the people she knew, were what she had in prison. She was incredibly apprehensive about leaving the prison, which she considered to be her home.

She worked in the prison, and her role meant that she predominantly worked with prison staff. She felt strongly that those staff members were her support, and she substituted the emotional scaffolding and support that she lost from her family on the outside by manufacturing it inside prison with the prison staff, not the other prisoners.

> *I'm a bit scared though, going out, cos all my friends are here. And I don't mean prisoner friends, I mean friends as, i.e. officers. Cos they've all been good, and I've never had an issue and I know I'm going to miss quite a lot of them, and I'm going to miss quite a lot of them, who I've got to know really well. Yeah, I'm going to miss the officers.*

Dot began taking ROTLs to the local town. In the first instance she enjoyed these visits as she was accompanied by some staff members so she could become familiar with the area, and for her this was akin to an outing with a friend. After two or three accompanied visits she was expected to go on her own. She did not enjoy going out on her own and would rarely take much advantage of those opportunities, often returning to the prison hours earlier than she was expected to, as she felt lonely and isolated. Perhaps because of her lack of support in the outside world, Dot seemed to find it difficult to imagine a world outside of the prison estate and often mentioned how she would prefer to stay.

> *To me this is just like I'm renting a room. Just going to work, coming home and that's it. Getting me food. It just don't feel like a prison. It's just an easy life. It's so easy here. You could do it with your eyes closed.*

Dot was in no hurry to leave the prison. It was her home, and she felt secure there. She considered the staff to be her friends. She frequently told me about her wish to return to the prison after her release in order to carry on working at the job she had there.

> *They know I don't want to go, cos I'm going to miss the company. Not the company here [on the wing] but going to work and mixing with the officers. Cos like from next year, I've only got one year left, and I'm glad about that, but then I'll miss my job and the officers. I want to be able to live nearby and keep doing my job! I'd love that, I'd be in my element.*

Dot, like several of the women I spoke to, had suffered from multiple pains of loss. She had lost contact with her family and friends, she had lost her home and all of her personal possessions, and she also felt keenly the loss of time. These losses coalesced and contributed to her losing her sense of who she was and how she would move forward. Her old life and all that went with it was gone. She felt isolated and alone and was insecure about what the future might hold, where or how she would live, and what she would do.

## Thoughtlessness

All prisoners experience pains of imprisonment, however some prisoners are suffering further pains specific to their situation. Sykes (1958) did not include the pains of loss in his work, but the gendered pains of loss have been discussed by Crewe et al (2017) in relation to the losses felt by life sentenced prisoners. I am arguing that older people, specifically older women, experience specific intense gendered pains of loss. Through the combination of the loss of their parents, children and relationships, through the loss of their social roles, and through their loss of time, the older women prisoners I interviewed were unable to imagine their future. The importance of developing a life narrative for released prisoners has been discussed (Maruna, 2001); however, it is equally important for people still serving a sentence to be able to imagine their future, to give them a sense of purpose and a path out of prison.

Institutional thoughtlessness meant that the specific needs of older prisoners were overlooked, in an effort to treat all prisoners equally. It has been argued here and elsewhere (Crawley, 2005; Crawley & Sparks, 2005) that older people

in prison are often disadvantaged by the prison establishment, as their more compliant behaviour is more likely to lead to their needs being neglected. However, amongst the ageing prisoner population my research found there were gendered differences to the pains of loss experienced by the older prisoners, and institutional thoughtlessness increased the pains of imprisonment that the older population were facing.

The older men whom I encountered in my research were more likely to be held close to their home and eventual resettlement area, than the women were. In 2007 Baroness Corston, in her report on women's imprisonment, recommended that the government should 'replace existing women's prisons with suitable, geographically dispersed, small, multi-functional custodial centres within 10 years' (Corston, 2007, p. 5); allowing them to be held closer to home. This recommendation, however, was never accepted by the government and in the 15 years since the Corston report was published, there has been no move towards replacing the existing women's prisons with smaller geographically dispersed centres.

The recent Female Offender Strategy, published in 2018, committed to managing more women in the community in residential centres. Yet when questioned about the progress of these centres, Minister Lucy Frazer responded that the government was 'considering how best to take the project forward' (UK Parliament, 2020). This gendered institutional thoughtlessness, allowed women to continue to be held greater distances away from their homes and families, than men, and disadvantages them because of it. However, the issues of age and gender coalesced. Continuing to hold women further from home disadvantaged all women, but especially the older population, as this often

meant that they were not able to receive visitors, due to the age and health of their family members.

In addition to their geographical dispersal, the older women were also disadvantaged by the lack of in-cell telephones. As all the women on a wing were only able to make calls at specific times, it made it particularly difficult for the older women to use the phone, as was highlighted by Doris. The noise on the wing made conversation a challenge, especially for older people who may find their hearing is compromised. Doris was often upset after calling her husband, as they were usually not able to have an in-depth conversation owing to the noise levels on the wing and the number of other women standing around waiting to use the phone.

The prison service had introduced in-cell telephones across a number of prisons, but at the time of the research only five of the 12 women's prisons had this facility (UK Parliament, 2020). The older women I spoke to were being disadvantaged as they found it more difficult to hear on the phone and reported being more conscious than the younger women were, about having personal conversations in front of the other women. Therefore, as in Doris's case, the older women would often stop using the phones. By not considering that the older women might experience difficulties in this area, the prison was overlooking the needs of the older female residents. This issue did not affect the male prisoners as they all had telephones in their cells.

## Conclusion

Prison is about loss: loss of freedom and loss of autonomy in many things. Pains of imprisonment are experienced by all prisoners, but they are not experienced equally. Some losses apply more to people as they age but even as prisoners get

older the losses are gendered. Whilst prisoners of all ages can be separated from their children and families, this separation was usually felt more keenly by women, and while all older prisoners face the loss of ageing parents, my research found that the women were more cognisant of this loss, often through their role as carers.

The loss of self is also gendered. The older men I encountered could tell me what their future plans were and what their life was going to entail. As Calvin told me, *'I am literally going to go back to my old life'*, w*hereas* the women were less able to foresee their future lives and felt that their punishment, at their age, had a more permanent impact on their lives. Perhaps it was because their gendered roles as primary caregivers (Carlen, 2002) were so intrinsic to their lives that their sense of identity was strongly fractured by their loss of this role; or perhaps it was because older women were judged more harshly in society; or perhaps the disregarding of their life experiences and the indignity of being infantilised by the system made them unable to remember who they were and how they could move forward. Whatever the reason, many of the women did not understand how they could progress in life after prison. Therefore, the general pains that were deliberately and/or thoughtlessly inflicted upon the entire prison population were specifically aged and specifically gendered.

# Chapter Eight - The Pains of Ageing and Deteriorating Health

Much of the research undertaken on older prisoners has focused on their health issues. Prior research has centred on the male estate, given their larger numbers but this chapter looks comparatively at both older men and women. It explores some of the difficulties that older people in prison face, exploring how, once more, these pains of imprisonment are gendered.

Physical functions of the body develop in early life and peak in adulthood (Kalache, et al., 2005, p. 40). As people age, they can naturally experience physical degeneration as their bodies slow down and begin to deteriorate. However, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), the speed of decline is dependent upon a variety of factors: behavioural factors, like smoking or alcohol consumption; social environmental factors like educational attainment or living in poverty; or the physical environment in which people live. Prisoners are more likely to be drawn from poorer socio-economic backgrounds; therefore, these characteristics are more prevalent in the penal population.

In 2002 the WHO issued a policy on Active Ageing which aims to maintain the 'functional capacity' of people throughout their life by 'optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age' (World Health Organization, 2002, p. 12). Given the range of factors that can exacerbate people's functional decline it is perhaps unsurprising that people in prison, who arguably have no control over their social and physical

environment, reportedly age 10 years faster than other people of their biological age (House of Commons, 2013a). During this research it became apparent that the majority of the older prisoners that I spoke to were experiencing additional pains of ageing and deteriorating health.

> *Yeah. 100%, definitely. I think it's harder because of situations with your health. And just basically the general aches and pains are ten times worser than a younger person.*
>
> Sasha

## Functional Decline

*'I've had more aches and pains since I've been in here than I ever did outside.'*
Cyril

Almost without exception, all of the older men and women I spoke to were experiencing signs of ageing and slowing down to varying degrees. Many of the older prisoners were sanguine about this ageing process and were reluctant to draw too much attention to their aches and pains.

> *I think everything's a bit worse when you're older. You's a bit more resilient, I think, when you're younger.*
>
> Anastasia

The need to conceal these ageing aches and pains might be an attempt to maintain their prison 'front'. By admitting that they are ageing or finding certain tasks more difficult, they could be signalling their weakness to others, making themselves appear more vulnerable.

There were an array of physical impairments or illnesses that were faced by the older men and women I encountered. The types of illness mentioned to me included; diabetes, back problems, heart problems, arthritis, osteoarthritis, Chronic Pulmonary Obstructive Disease (COPD), high cholesterol, cancer, cellulitis and sepsis. Many people also reported to me that they suffered from a range of mental health issues including being bi-polar and suffering from

depression and anxiety. In addition, a number of the women were going through the menopause. Only one older prisoner told me that they had no health problems. All the others, even those who claimed initially not to have any health issues, had some form of health problems, whether they were physical or mental.

> *The other fella that I was just talking about, the guy who's got all sorts of medical problems, he's got--, he's diabetic, he's got COPD, he's got various associated illnesses with those two things as well.*
>
> Chaplin

The illnesses mentioned above highlight how the health of the older prisoners was deteriorating. Some of these afflictions were serious and life limiting, requiring ongoing medical treatment, often in hospital. These older people often felt that they were struggling to get the correct medical treatment they required, owing to the difficulties in arranging hospital appointments outside of the prison or getting to see the doctor inside the establishment.

> *The nurse said I'd had a heart attack, right, so I'm meant to go to hospital straight away if you've had a heart attack, yeah? Two days later they took me out there. So, they put me back on the wing. I was walking around and they went, "Come on, you're going to hospital!" Two days later!*
>
> Billy

Whilst these serious illnesses were onerous for the older people to manage, there were other pains of ageing and deteriorating health which could impact on the older population in a number of different ways. Although these health problems may not be life threatening, the ability of the older prisoners to control or cope with these pains was often impeded by the prison regime, and their inability to manage or resolve these issues made their time in prison more difficult to cope with.

## Declining Eyesight

*'It's the optician you have to wait a long time for.'* Hope

The loss of eyesight is perhaps one of the most common problems from which my participants suffered. From the age of 40 presbyopia begins to occur, where the lens that focuses the eye becomes less flexible resulting in the age-related loss of vision which makes reading problematic (Moorfields Eye Hospital - NHS, n.d.). A number of the residents had either come into prison without suitable glasses or their glasses had been lost or broken during their time in prison.

> *I came in here straight from court with just a pair of Poundland reading glasses. I couldn't see a thing for weeks. […] I was struggling, I was really struggling, for weeks, until I got me glasses.*
>
> Cyril

Good eyesight is something that can be taken for granted by those who have it but can make life very difficult for the prisoners who are struggling to be able to see properly.

> *Oh, I broke me reading glasses. And I need to get em fixed […] [MS: So how are you managing then, if you've broken your reading glasses?] I can still use them, I just got be careful I don't move me head too quick [laughing] I've tried to stick em with Sellotape - but it's no good! […] [MS: It's amazing you can see anything!] No, it's blurred! I can see shapes, but that's about all I can see!*
>
> Hope

It was generally difficult for the prisoners to get an appointment with the optician. The waiting time for appointments and then finally receiving the glasses was a process that could stretch over a number of months. Hope was one of the women who spent a lot of time on her own in her room, preferring to isolate herself from the rest of the wing. To pass the time she would sew. She was attempting to make a throw and was embroidering patterns onto a white sheet. This task was proving problematic for her as her glasses were broken. She had put in an 'app', to get her glasses fixed, and was apparently put onto a

waiting list but as the optician only visited the prison once a month there was, as she told me, '*obviously gonna be a bit of a delay'*. This inability to have her glasses mended made her time harder to endure as it stopped her being able to sew while she was locked in her cell.

Not being able to see or read properly could impact greatly on the lives of the ageing prisoner population, many of whom would prefer to undertake other activities rather than just watch television when they were locked in their cells overnight.

Some of the older prisoners also had to share rooms and, in an attempt to avoid aggravating their cell mates, were straining their eyes by trying to read in insufficiently lit rooms.

> *The lighting's not great, especially if I'm trying to see through the bathroom curtain, the bathroom light to not disturb my cell mate […] And yeah, literally, I'm holding my books like this to try and read now.' (Johnny is holding his arms outstretched in front of him)*
>
> Johnny

Not being able to see had a hugely detrimental impact on these prisoners. It curtailed their in-cell activities as well as their ability to work in the establishment or to take part in education. The trouble accessing the optician made these issues more pronounced as well as leaving the older prisoners struggling to take part in the prison regime.

## Hearing Loss

*'Once the noise gets to a certain level I can't hear!'* Ange

Hearing is another aging issue that routinely affects the older population. As people age, even those with relatively normal hearing can struggle to fully comprehend and follow conversations when there is a lot of background noise (Presacco, et al., 2016). The noise of a prison is unique and there is no escape

from it. The sound of many confined people, combined with the clanging of heavy metal gates, rolls around the long corridors. Hard surfaces reflect sound waves and in corridors that have hard surfaces, the sound waves bounce backwards and forwards. Without any soft furnishings, carpets or curtains to absorb the sound waves the noise is louder and continues on for longer.

> *The weekends I hate because of the noise I mean it drives you around the bend. Even me being deaf it drives you around the bend. I mean you think, you've got a couple of hundred people screaming at each other and talking. It's like an echo in there. […] I go back and stay in me cell. Do you know what I mean? Only because the noise, the noise is unbearable.*
>
> Benny

The loss of hearing can impact on the prisoners' experience. The sheer range of noises that can be heard when entering a prison can be overwhelming and very intimidating. But sound is also key to the running of the establishment. Prisons rely on sound to function. Bells are often used to mark the beginning and end of movements, tannoys are used to summon prisoners and make announcements on the wings and alarms can denote a problem or summon staff (Kelly, 2017). For prisoners who are profoundly deaf, their lack of hearing can impede their ability to participate. However, life can also be challenging for those older prisoners who have partial hearing loss or suffer from conditions such as tinnitus.

> *Well, I can't hear low tones. That's what my deafness is. If you was a right squeaky person I'd hear you from over the other side of the prison. But low tones I can't hear. But when you've got 200 low tones, coming at you, bombarding at you, because you can't hear the words all you can hear is burr burr burr do you know what I mean? It drives you around the bend.*
>
> Benny

Partial hearing loss can mean that although some people might struggle to hear certain tones, they are overly sensitive to others. This can create a physical discomfort for these older people which they have to endure, as prison is rarely quiet.

In my research partial hearing loss was isolating for the older population. It impeded their ability to join in conversations, as the noise level in the prison was so excessive it could often drown out other things that were being said. It could also lead to difficulties within the prison as the prisoners' lack of response could often be misunderstood for rudeness, which caused an issue with the other residents.

During the women's group which I facilitated, I repeatedly observed one of my participants not responding to comments that were made to her because she was unable to hear due to the background noise in the group. Her behaviour was routinely discussed by some of the other women who attributed her lack of interaction as rudeness, rather than deafness.

> *[MS: does the loss of hearing impact you in any way around the prison?] Yeah it does, cause girls they talk to my deaf side, and I don't hear them, but they think I'm ignorant, and that causes problems. So, I have to say to them, excuse me, but they don't always repeat it and they think you're being arsey with them.*
>
> Ange

Either because they cannot hear properly, which impedes their participation, or because their partial hearing loss causes them acute discomfort, noise was problematic for older prisoners. The level of noise and the harshness of the prison furnishings exacerbated the problem, causing physical discomfort for some prisoners with hearing problems.

## Denial of Ageing

'*No, no! I don't want the over 50s t-shirt!*' Bert

Despite the range of illnesses and physical problems facing the ageing population, most of my participants eschewed the idea that they were old. Ageing is a process that happens gradually and is often something that can be

seen in others, but not recognised within ourselves, as the realisation that you are old happens as gradually as the ageing process (De Medeiros, 2017).

> *I mean I am on certain medications but apart from that, no. I'm pretty fit really.*
>
> Doris

Repeatedly my participants, both men and women, despite having described their own ill-health, would take pains to distance themselves from the ageing process and to attempt to assert how fit they were.

> *Look at me, I'm 54, I'm still active. I still go to gym. I weight train. I do anything that I was doing when I was 16.*
>
> Micky

It is common for people to attempt to conceal or halt the ageing process (Gillick, 2007). By doing this the older people in my study were attempting to assert an element of control over a part of their lives that was beyond their influence. This denial of ageing was an interesting coping mechanism that allowed my participants to distance themselves from the label of 'old'. However, by explaining to me how things might potentially be a problem for other 'older people', but not for them, they were able to voice some of the issues that they felt might be facing the ageing imprisoned population.

> *For me, it don't matter to me, cos I used to work down the market and that, so I was out in all weathers. But some older people, they get really fragile. Like their joints and all that seize up because of this weather.*
>
> Roxy

Moreover, 'othering' the other older prisoners enabled my participants to assert who they were, to show me how they viewed themselves. This allowed them a way of re-establishing their personal identity in an establishment that had depersonalised people and reduced them to being viewed as a number.

> *[T]here a lot of people, there's a lot of people of my age who don't do anything because they are intimidated by going into the gym. Especially a gym in prison. […] I'm pretty lucky, I'm quite fit. I'm quite able.*
>
> *Calvin*

The range of health problems that accompany an ageing prison population can place a huge strain on the penal estate. Prisons have been historically built to house young men, and so the strain that an ageing population is placing on the system leaves them struggling to cope. There was a feeling, amongst both the women and men that certain aspects of prison life were actively contributing towards the deterioration of their physical well-being. As detailed at the beginning of this chapter, the WHO attributes the maintaining of functional capacity on the ability to have good health and health care, to be able to participate in society, and to live in a safe and secure environment (World Health Organization, 2002). Therefore, to assist active ageing the older population should be able to access good quality healthcare, participate fully in the regime and to live in an environment that meets the needs of an ageing population. However, this was not always possible for the older prisoner population as I will illustrate.

## The Pains of Healthcare

'*It took me ages to get to see the doctor.'* Benny

According to the WHO, the ability to access good quality healthcare in a timely manner is vital to maintaining the health of the ageing population. However, within both of my research sites my participants felt that their additional aches and pains were often compounded by an inability to access decent healthcare. The design of the prison regime often made the process of gaining medication or a medical appointment lengthier and more arduous than might be expected.

*They're not fit for purpose. Everything is a wait; it takes you six weeks to see a doctor here. Well, you know, that's ridiculous.*

Albert

Like most things within the penal environment, access to medical care was a slow and frustrating process which was complicated by the systems in place to manage the prisoner population.

## The Application System

*'If I were to write an App, every time I got an ache or a pain, I'd have a stack of apps a mile high, wouldn't I? But I'd never get an appointment.'* Cyril

The ability for people to access healthcare was often felt to be compounded by the 'app' system. All the requests in both of the research sites had to be submitted via a paper-based application system. If a prisoner wanted to access healthcare they had to submit an 'app' in writing into the application box. These requests were then disseminated to the required department where they were actioned.

*It just wasn't managed very well. I was only there six months and at least three times, after I'd put my app in, I'd get told they didn't have my repeat prescription. One time I watched the officer put it in the box for me, but they still claimed they hadn't had it.*

Connie

All of the older prisoners that I spoke to during this project complained about their inability to access healthcare in a timely manner. The application system was notoriously unreliable, with apps often reportedly going missing.

*I gave an app in for medication a while back. It never ever got put in. And I kept asking for my medication, and they'd say, 'no there's nothing here for you Dot', And it just kept going on.*

Dot

The process added a further level of frustration and uncertainty for the older people. This often left the residents in a dilemma of whether to trust in the

system and wait for their app to be processed, or to flood the system with repeated requests. However, many residents were concerned that they might be penalised if they put in extra requests or that they might appear on the list multiple times, thereby preventing other residents' apps from being actioned. There was no evidence to suggest that this was happening, rather that the system was overloaded with applications and often they did not reach their required destination.

> *I still have no reply. It's been three months [...] and I did put in a second app, but I don't know if it's time to put in a third one now. [MS: After three months?] Yeah. They might not even have a system for tracking how many times you've applied.*
>
> Johnny

The older prisoners were often reluctant to demand that their needs were addressed. Due to their placidity and acquiescence they usually chose to wait for a response rather than attempt to escalate the process, as the comment from Johnny above shows.

> *If I was at home-, if I was at home and I couldn't get to my thing, I just pick the phone up, phone my doctor, he'd send my prescription down to the chemist and the chemist would deliver it to me door, it's that simple, but it's not simple here.*
>
> Albert

In 2018, a House of Commons Health Select Committee recommended that 'Prison health and care services should be delivering standards of care, and health outcomes, for prisoners that are at least equivalent to that of the general population' (Health and Social Care Committee, 2018). However, the older prisoners were aware that the healthcare they could access while in prison was far from being on a par with what they could expect to receive in the outside world. The result of this system was that many of the older people were struggling to have their healthcare needs met, or their medication provided in

a timely manner, something that could impact on the health of the ageing population. This poorly managed system resulted in the residents feeling very frustrated as they struggled to get their medical needs attended.

## Lack of Autonomy

*'You know I never had a say in it, as far as they was concerned, I was a name and number. And I didn't have a say in it!'* Frankie

The older residents repeatedly commented on the obstacles in the process and how they were largely powerless to alter the situation. Sykes (1958) has discussed how the deprivation of autonomy was a 'pain of imprisonment' as the inmates in his study were subjected to the rules of the regime. This was evident in the older prisoners I encountered who were frustrated by the total power the healthcare regime was able to impose over them. They recognised the futility of trying to take on the system and were very much resigned to accepting their dependence upon it.

> *I just have to get on with it being honest with you. I just have--, you've got no choice. You know, you can--, I can stand out there and make all the fuss in the world but that's just--, as far as I could see that's pointless. You know, it's pointless me making a fuss. It's a process and it's just a process that I've got to suffer.*
>
> Albert

Their fatalistic attitude combined with their more compliant behaviour meant that the older people did not attempt to circumvent the system in any way. Again the 'old and quiet' nature of the older people engendered institutional thoughtlessness where their needs, in this case medical ones, were overlooked by the lack of consideration as to what their health requirements might be. Rather than attempt to demand access to healthcare, the older prisoners were more likely to wait until their app was actioned. The issues of the application

system compounded the length of time it was taking for the older residents to see a doctor.

> *It's very long. Because you put an app in to see the doctor. The app comes back, hopefully within the week and it will say an appointment has been made for you to see the nurse. But that's another week away. So, then you see the nurse who will tell you then you do need to see a doctor and that's then another two weeks until you get an appointment, so it's nigh on a month. Which is unacceptable, it really is unacceptable.*
>
> Connie

While it is not unusual for people in general society to wait in excess of a week for a doctor's appointment, the process of gaining an appointment often felt particularly arduous for the older prisoners. Repeatedly, as shown in Connie's experience above, the residents would ask to see a doctor, but be given an appointment to see a nurse first, before finally being referred on to see the doctor.

Adding in an additional layer of bureaucracy could, theoretically at least, have made the delivery of healthcare services more efficient as some inmates could have health complaints that would not require a doctor and could easily be treated by a nurse. Unfortunately for the older residents, this process seemed to increase the time that it took for them to receive any medical care. Access to healthcare can be difficult and impact on all people in prison; however, given the increasing number of ailments suffered by the older population, their need to gain access to a doctor is arguably more urgent.

## Urgent Care

'*You've got no chance, not a hope in hell!'* Cyril

Recent reports have highlighted that prison healthcare does not meet the standard of healthcare in general society (Health and Social Care Committee, 2018). This leaves vulnerable older prisoners with no autonomy to access their

required medical care. Possibly, as a result of not being able to acquire healthcare in a timely manner, there has been an increase in the number of 'natural' deaths in custody.

In 2020 there were 207 natural deaths recorded in prisons in England and Wales, 89 per cent of which were in prisoners over the age of 50 (Ministry of Justice, 2021d). These are described as 'often premature and avoidable deaths stemming in part from lapses in care' (Health and Social Care Committee, 2018, p. 14). Neither of the establishments where the research was conducted had 24-hour healthcare facilities or a hospital wing. Repeatedly I was made aware of the obstacles many residents faced when needing urgent medical treatment.

The staffing levels within most prison establishments were low. HMP Mansfield was significantly understaffed, and they were already operating a restricted regime to cope with the low staff numbers. The prison was then issued with a closure notice which resulted in the further loss of yet more staff. The skeletal staffing levels meant that it was problematic for a prisoner to be taken to hospital, as the ability of the establishment to provide two uniformed members of staff to accompany prisoners was restricted. This had resulted in some of my participants experiencing delays in receiving the correct medical treatment in a timely manner. It also engendered anxiety for other prisoners who were aware that if they required urgent medical treatment, it might be difficult for the prison to facilitate that.

> *I mean this problem with the hernia that I've got, the doctor, that I saw here, he said you've definitely got to get that done. If it does strangulate, and goes all blue in the night, you've got to go to the A & E immediately for an operation. Well, how am I gonna do that? That's not gonna happen! Because by the time you get someone in your cell, by the time you organise something. There's nobody here, there's no doctor on site. You've got no chance, not a hope in hell.*
>
> Cyril

Although there had not been an increase in the number of deaths at the two research sites I visited, the worry that the older people had regarding receiving urgent medical care was understandable and added to the stress of the situation in which they found themselves.

## Medication

'*I didn't have that with my medication I was taking outside.*' Gwen

Whilst this lack of access to urgent medical care could potentially prove fatal, there were further healthcare issues facing older prisoners, that whilst not immediately life threatening contributed to the additional ageing pains of imprisonment they faced. Many of the residents were mindful of their prisoner status and their inability to have any meaningful control over the healthcare they were receiving. This was noted in a variety of ways. Several of the older prisoners had pre-existing, long-term medical conditions and often arrived into custody with their prescribed medication; however, this was usually removed from their possession upon arrival into prison. Before these medications could be reissued, staff would need to confirm with the prescribing GP that these medications had indeed been issued for the relevant prisoner (Sullivan, et al., 2016). Delays in receiving this information from the external healthcare providers would impact upon the medication being dispensed in the prison, resulting in often long waits for the older prisoners to receive their medication.

> *I missed out on my medication for a couple of weeks ... when I first moved to E wing, so just after I arrived. There was a mix up with my medications. Luckily it wasn't life threatening, or anything like that. But it was two weeks without my normal daily dosage of blood pressure stuff.*
>
> Bert

So, whilst being without these medications did not necessarily place the older prisoner in immediate danger, being without them for a number of weeks could contribute to the already poor health that they were experiencing. Moreover,

their lack of control over these processes incrementally compounded their loss of autonomy, as they were unable to assert any authority over the procedure and were held captive at the whims of the prison system.

Even for those residents who were able to get their prescribed medication there were many further incidents of 'inadequate healthcare' (Health and Social Care Committee, 2018), perpetuating the feeling that the healthcare team was not acting in their best interests. Many residents noted that their medication was often altered without them being consulted about this change.

> *The minute you come into prison they go, nah! You can have [something else] for three nights, because they are addictive, they shorten your life. You can't have Diazepam because it's some sort of drug that we don't allow in prison. So, they change all your medication.*
>
> Anastasia

This deprivation of their prescribed medication further acted to undermine any sense of autonomy, as the choices that were available to them as a patient outside prison, were denied once they became prisoners. Part of these changes were the result of the strict rules that the prison service has about medications, as certain drugs are not permitted within the prison estate. Other alterations were as a result of the outsourcing of the healthcare to private providers and the drive for them to reduce costs and issue generic medications rather than specific branded ones. However, other changes, such as the frequency of the medication altering were never fully understood by the residents, leaving the legitimacy of the changes open to question.

> *I have had a problem with my repeat prescriptions, for [one of my conditions]. I take one in the morning and one in the evening, and for some reason, on two occasions, they've only given me the one, and someone's changed it, and put it down to just one in the morning.*
>
> Dot

In the example shown above, Dot had been hospitalised for a serious operation

and had been given the medication by the hospital consultant for her continuing treatment. For the older residents, who were often in poor health, such as Dot, these changes caused unnecessary worry and concern over their ongoing recovery.

The lack of consultation by the healthcare teams resulted in a general feeling of cynicism regarding the services that the prison was offering. The move to an alternative type of medication was always viewed with suspicion by the older prisoners and left them with the feeling that they were being disadvantaged and not being given the correct healthcare that they required; nor what they would be entitled to receive if they were not now viewed, first and foremost, as prisoners.

> *Three times I went there; three times they had the wrong tablets. They had the wrong form of Metformin and they tried to give me another tablet that I've never even heard of. So, I have the slow-release ones, slow-release ones act better with your bowels and your body and the food here. Cause it all comes into play the three things and if you don't have the right tablets then you can end up on the floor, but I had none for five weeks.*
>
> Ronnie

Many of the older prisoners spent time attempting to reinstate the prescriptions that they had been given by their outside medical provider, as they often felt that the alternatives they had been prescribed were not suitable for treating their conditions effectively. They perceived that they were being marginalised because of their prisoner status, as if their health was less important because of it.

### Getting the Medication

*'And every now and then they leave me off the roster to go and pick up my medication.'* Bert

A further issue, which added to the general malaise around healthcare, was that often, even if the residents had seen a doctor and been prescribed the correct

medicine, they still had problems obtaining their medication. People were regularly either left off the list to go and collect their prescription or, when they went to collect it, they were given someone else's medicine.

> *There are five people here with my surname. They tried to give me someone else's medication - a few times [...] I said to them here, 'You've tried to give me someone else's medication', I called the officer over and told him too. And you have to give em your ID card. I have to take that with me everywhere I go so they can see. And yet they still are trying to give me someone else's medication. Not even the complete same name, just the same surname! It's not right. If somebody else took that, God knows what would happen.*
>
> Gwen

> *I did get the wrong medication as well once. There were two people with the same surname, and I got the other guy's medication, I've no idea what it was. I did sleep well that night though!*
>
> Bert

Clearly there were implications for prisoners who received the wrong medicine. Not only was their health being put at risk, as they were not taking the correct medication for their particular illness, but they risked having a reaction to the prescription they had been given in error. Moreover, given the use of mandatory drug testing in the prison estate, they ran the risk of being found to have ingested drugs which they had not been medically prescribed. This could have resulted in sanctions being imposed on them from the IEP system or even being brought before an adjudication hearing.

## Disengaging from Healthcare

*'Anything to do with healthcare, I just grin and bear it!'* Sasha

The overall feeling from the older prisoners that I spoke to across both sites was that the healthcare was a substandard provision that, owing to the pressure of outsourcing, was struggling to meet the needs of the prisoners. Due to the attitudes of the staff, either perceived or real, there was a lack of trust of the medical staff. The older residents keenly felt their lack of autonomy and felt that

their health needs were perceived as unimportant. In an effort to rectify this apparent imbalance, some of the older residents would avoid interacting with healthcare, in an attempt to reassert their own feelings of self-worth.

> *That is the main bone of contention as far as I'm concerned its health care. It's a waste of space. I just wouldn't bother going. By the time you get your appointment you're alright anyway!*
>
> Cyril

By refusing to engage with healthcare, some of the older people attempted to assert some autonomy over their lives, albeit in a way that could be deeply detrimental to their long-term health. They would sometimes display a lack of trust in the medical system, as they felt that they would not receive proper and adequate care. Instead, they preferred to choose not to receive any medical treatment in prison. By this disengagement, rather than being given inadequate care over which they had no choice, they asserted their control by their refusal to engage with it.

> *I just can't wait for the ROTLS, to go and sort my health out. I just won't do it in closed conditions. I won't do it, to be taken in chains to go out to the hospital. And I won't go and see them downstairs, I won't let them, I mean they talked about having a jab, a flu jab or a hepatitis C jab and I was like, no. I'm not having anything; I'm not allowing them to do anything to me.*
>
> Sasha

As well as the worries about receiving substandard treatment, there was an additional worry about being taken out of the prison to receive medical care. All prisoners not eligible for ROTL have to be accompanied by an officer and will be handcuffed to them. The idea of being displayed to the outside world was a further mortification for some of the older people, which they attempted to avoid.

## Impact of the Environment

*'There's lots of suffering in here, but some people are suffering more.'* Frankie

As well as the issues that the older population faced simply as a result of getting older, and the complications that they faced getting those ageing issues addressed by healthcare, the physical environment also played a part in compounding the difficulties facing older prisoners. The prison regime, the building and the furnishings in the cells all contributed towards making life a little more problematic for older prisoners, as explained in the sections below.

### Lock up

*'I find it hurts a lot more over the weekend, because we get locked in at 4.30 - quarter to 5 and you're in the room until almost 9 o'clock the next day.'* Manda

In both of the sites the prisoners were required to spend long periods in their cells overnight. The men's establishment had a weekday overnight lock up from 5pm until 7am the following morning, whereas the women were locked up from 7pm until 8am the next day. Both sites had extended periods of lock up over the weekend. The cells in the prisons were all relatively small and usually contained a bed, a desk and sometimes a chair. Studies have shown that inactivity in older adults can lead to a decline in their physical abilities (Rejc , et al., 2018) and the impact of this enforced containment was often remarked upon by the prisoners. They were aware that the period of confinement, in a room that offered no real scope for movement, was detrimental to their physical wellbeing.

> *Because I've got osteoarthritis the more I move the better. When you stop its worse. When I get up from here now it will be painful. But the more you move the better. So stuck in a cell, especially on D wing, the room you've got to live in is very, very small. You can't really walk around on D wing in your room.*
>
> Connie

The staffing levels in the prisons necessitated that the prisoners spent longer locked in their rooms. On one of the wings in the male prison holding 120 men,

I was told on a number of occasions that there used to be seven or eight officers on the wing, but since the process of 'benchmarking', where the numbers of required staff were reduced in an effort to reduce prison costs, (House of Commons, 2015) and the introduction of VEDS, the Voluntary Early Departure Scheme, the numbers of staff had fallen. The number of staff now required to unlock the 120 men was four, but despite this, I witnessed the staff being asked to unlock when they did not have the correct number of officers on the wing. Sometimes they complied with the request and unlocked the men; other times they did not. 'They keep telling us to unlock but we've only got three of us here. They can fuck off if they think I'm gonna do that, it's just not safe' (fieldnotes). The results of these staffing issues directly impacted on the men, and arguably more so on the older men as the aches and pains of older age were intensified by the extended periods of lockup.

## Furniture

*'We don't want luxury! We just want something that is not uncomfortable!'*
Donna

Whilst no one expects the penal environment to be one of luxury, the prison furnishings, which could at best be described as functional, were often actively contributing towards the physical problems facing people as they aged. The main sources of consternation were the beds, which were furnished with very thin foam mattresses that compressed within a couple of months of use, and the lack of a chair to sit on that was comfortable and adequately supported people's backs.

> *When I get back to my cell I do struggle. Because the beds in this prison are a joke! [MS: I can imagine]. They're rubbish, they're a joke. They're not big enough, they're hard. The mattresses are no good. And everybody, probably without exception, wakes up with aches and pains. I've had more aches and pains since I've been in here than I ever did outside.*
>
> Cyril

> *You know the bed; I don't know what it is with these beds. I've really don't know, but my back, like I'm forever taking paracetamol, my back pain is bad cos of these beds.*
>
> Frankie

Given the extended time that people were spending in their cells, the uncomfortable furniture had begun to take a marked toll on the well-being of the older prisoners. The combination of the lack of space to exercise or move around in, combined with furnishings that were unsuitable to sit or sleep on, resulted in an increasing number of back problems. In the men's prison most of the men did not have the option of a chair to sit in and so had to sit on the bed. In HMP Womans-ville the women were provided with a moulded hollow plastic chair, which was universally condemned by all the women I spoke to. Not only was it uncomfortable to sit on but it was dangerous, and a number of the older women had fallen off the chair when attempting to sit on it.

> *And the chairs, they are absolutely awful. Shockingly bad. And so dangerous. […] Cos it's just like a bubble of plastic, it's just hollow. So, it's not weighted down at all. You could stand up and it would just flip. Really dangerous. But I couldn't sit in that chair for more than 10, 20 minutes.*
>
> Connie

In addition to being condemned by the older women, the chairs and the beds were also criticised by the staff. Yet, despite a number of the senior managers in the prison discussing openly the difficulties that the women were having with this furniture, the prison was not prepared to offer any other options unless this was requested by the healthcare team.

> *Actually, the furniture is not very geared to someone who's older, so the beds are uncomfortable, you know, the beds like a rock, the chairs aren't comfortable.*
>
> Governor Tania

The above quotation from Governor Tania displays an awareness by senior staff, that the furniture was unsuitable for the older women and was presenting problems for them. Yet, despite this consideration and understanding of the difficulties that the women encountered because of the furniture, no action was taken to resolve this issue. The staff were able to articulate how the substandard furniture was impacting on the physical well-being of the older women in their care. But repeatedly, they abdicated any responsibility for sourcing suitable furnishings by claiming that the prison policies would not allow for any additional furnishings due to the national contract that was in place.

In theory, the prisons had the authority to provide differential treatment to this ageing population. In the government's response to the Justice Committee's 2013 report on older prisoners, it stated that 'Our view is that prisoners should be managed on the basis of individual needs' (Ministry of Justice, 2013b). Therefore, arguably the prison had the ability to address these needs. However, because they required the older prisoners to have an assessment from a doctor before any changes could be made, for the reasons described earlier, many older people felt defeated by the process before they had even started and refused to engage. There was no doubt, as highlighted by the WHO, that providing suitable furnishings would improve the active ageing of the older prisoners. This in turn would allow them to be more productive within the establishment and reduce the potential healthcare burden that the ageing population was placing on the prison service.

As there was either no chair, or a chair that was inadequate to sit on, many of the residents sat on their bed instead. However, this presented its own problems for people's backs.

*I couldn't sit on the chair, so I used to sit on the bed. I do a lot of reading, as do most of the older population do, and you're sitting on the bed, and the platforms are, you know, that wide so you are leaning back, and two years sort of leaning back reading like that does unrepairable damage to your body, erm especially because of the long period you're sitting in that position. And you've no concept that you're actually doing that damage until the damage is done. The other thing as well is these things sort of come on and they come on gradually, […] and you're unaware of the damage that is being caused and you know you go and do a bit of washing up and you have got back ache, and that will go on for six or seven months you know. You get used to it … just the back and then eventually you go out and you get an MRI on your back, and they go well actually what you have is arthritis of the spine and this is only going to get worse. And then you realise that actually all of these things, all this lack of mobility, the furniture around you … and where you're younger you would be able to lay where you want and sort of get up and repair yourself, isn't you know, isn't reality anymore so you're erm… so you're doing yourself damage and you're unaware you're doing yourself damage.*

Trev

After years of being in prison and sitting on his bed, as the chair was too uncomfortable for him, Trev had been diagnosed with arthritis of the spine. This condition was progressive and had been exacerbated by the way in which he had been sitting in his cell, in addition to the lack of mobility due to his incarceration. While younger prisoners were subjected to the same furnishings and the same lack of mobility as their older counterparts, the impact that the prison regime had on the natural physical degeneration was marked and felt more keenly by the older prisoners. Here, Trev described the helplessness of the situation facing older people while they were locked up:

*I mean imagine you're in a cell from 5 o'clock to 9 o'clock the next morning, there is nowhere you can get comfortable, you can't sit in the chair because you are in constant pain, and you can't lie on the bed because you're in constant pain, and you imagine that they got to that. You are almost trying to find coping mechanism so if you're uncomfortable in your chair, you go to your bed, if you're uncomfortable in your bed then you sort of go to your chair so and those are the only options that you have got. Or you stand up but if you come to the point where you're uncomfortable in your chair, you're uncomfortable in your*

*bed, and you're uncomfortable when you're standing up, where are you going? You just sit there and suffer, don't you?*

Trev

The physical difficulties that many of the older residents faced when spending extended periods of time in their cells, and their inability to get these needs addressed by healthcare, might offer an explanation as to why getting out of their cells to work was so important to the older prisoners. However, their physical difficulties could often impact upon their ability to engage with the prison's work regime. Many of the work roles available in the prison were physically demanding with the women's prison having many roles in the kitchens or out in the gardens, while in the male estate there were roles in waste management and gardening. Despite their best intentions, some older residents found the requirement of the job too much for them to take as it exacerbated their physical difficulties.

*I went out in the gardens, and I was like, oh god, you know, I'm quite active outside (of prison) with my dog and that. But we were like raking and digging. And every night I was coming in and I was like oh gawd me back! You know I had to give it up, […] And I was like, yeah I can't cope. Me mind is writing cheques me body can't cash!*

Donna

I discuss the importance of work in more detail in the following chapter, but it is important to note here how the ageing pains of imprisonment interacted with the work roles available within the prison regime and could make finding meaningful activity more difficult as people aged. This inability to be active and engaged impacted directly onto the mental and physical wellbeing of the older prisoners.

## Gendered Differences

Both the older women and men I spoke to had similar pains of ageing and deteriorating health. Declining physical health and the impact of the prison environment were similarly experienced by both, as were the frustrations of dealing with healthcare. However, there were certain aspects of ageing health that were solely experienced by the women.

### Menopause

*'And when you are menopausal you do need a little bit more. We shouldn't but we do!'* Connie

Menopause is a natural ageing process that occurs in women, usually when they are in their late 40s to early 50s as their bodies begin to stop producing oestrogen (NHS, 2018). Whilst menopause is a natural process that all women will go through, there are a variety of symptoms that can occur. Whereas some women may experience almost no symptoms, many others may experience a range of problems that while not life threatening, can prove very difficult to endure. The symptoms of menopause include hot flushes and night sweats, difficulty sleeping, low mood or anxiety or problems with memory and concentration (ibid). Although the physical symptoms that occur during the menopause have not changed over the years, the social construction of it has.

Going through the menopause was once seen as a natural transition in life, moving into middle age, whereas now it is viewed negatively and as something that needs to be treated medically (Utz, 2011). The menopause is now constructed as the marker of a slide into old age, something over which women, no matter how hard they may try to fight against it, can stop. For the older women in prison who were going through the menopause, this presented an additional lack of autonomy that they had to endure, not just over how they

lived their lives but the physical changes that they were undergoing. Currently, the focus is on resolving these problems medically by treating the symptoms of menopause with the prescription of HRT, hormone replacement therapy, or by the use of multi-vitamins or specialised diets. However, for women in prison these medications or vitamins could be difficult to access and controlling the symptoms of the menopause, more difficult.

The prison was aware that a number of the women were suffering from the symptoms of menopause, and I was informed by a nurse in healthcare that a menopause clinic was offered to the women, yet very few of the women were aware of this service or had accessed it. This highlights a dichotomy in the prison: clearly the prison was aware of the needs of these older women as they had ostensibly provided a clinic for them; yet, the lack of women who had attended this clinic raised questions about why this service was not more widely advertised by the prison, or used by the women. Many of the women who discussed the menopause with me were struggling to find a way to adequately cope with their symptoms.

## Hot Flushes

*'Because you've got no control over whether you're hot or cold!'* Anastasia

Two of the main symptoms that caused the women the most difficulty were hot flushes and night sweats. The women had no control over the heat in their rooms which exacerbated these problems as once they began to heat up, they had no way of cooling down.

> *I asked for a fan, once a week, every week, because the night sweats were just incredible, and I was there during the summer. That's not catered for very well. And when you are menopausal you do need a little bit more. We shouldn't but we do.*
>
> Connie

For women in prison the inability to control the temperature of their environment was a major difficulty for them. Their rooms were small and often quite warm. The cells did not have radiators that could potentially be turned down, but large hot water pipes that ran through out the cells. One of the governors was aware of these issues for the women and had purchased a large number of electric fans that could, in theory, have been given to the women who were suffering from hot flushes.

> *I mean we've picked up now on all the kind of menopausal stuff. We've got stuff like fans for ladies now that they can have in their rooms if they're menopausal.*
>
> Governor Tania

However, despite this resource being available in the prison, being able to access a fan proved to be much more of a challenge for many of the women, with a number of obstacles to be negotiated before they were able to obtain one. Firstly, the women had to get an appointment to see someone in healthcare to see if they were eligible to have a fan in their room. The process of getting an appointment with healthcare, as has been discussed above, could often be rather laborious.

> *So, you put an app in to see the Dr for the menopause and they tell you no a nurse will see you. And then she'll tell you, you need to see a Dr!*
>
> Connie

Secondly, once the appointment had been arranged and healthcare had agreed that the women were eligible to have a fan, this had to be agreed by a governor. Then, providing the governor agreed that the fan could be given out, someone from the works department would then have to go to the women's room to check if the electricity outlets in their cells would be suitable to power a fan.

> *Now that basically, the nurse said it's got to go to [a] governor and get them agreed. Then they've got to come and check the electrics in your room! To see if that's OK. So that's probably going to be then next barrier that we have. They're probably going to come and say, 'oh your electric won't handle it.' They've said that already to a few people.*
>
> Anastasia

The electrics in the prison were old and more often than not, the women were told that their sockets would not be able to support running an electric fan.

> *I wanted something for the hot flushes, because they wouldn't let me have a fan. They kept saying, oh we'll get someone to check your plug, to make sure your electricity can take a fan, but nothing happened. […] one of my friends got one, but she was on a different landing. I don't know if that makes a difference or not. All I kept getting told was the electricity won't be able to handle it.*
>
> Connie

These barriers to getting a fan were viewed with huge irritation by the women. They again experienced feelings of helplessness and an inability to have any autonomy over their health or any way of managing their symptoms. Moreover, the inconsistency with the distribution of the fans was frustrating to the women. Many of them, like Connie, were aware that other people had been given a fan, and there was a constant discussion about why some women were able to get one and others not. This often resulted in the women feeling as though their word was not sufficient. The women felt infantilised and that they were forced to undertake numerous steps that they would not have been required to take outside of the prison environment. They felt they were unable to simply say that they were having hot flushes and be believed. The women's word was not considered sufficient to be given a fan, it needed to be authorised by healthcare, and then sanctioned by a governor.

This long-winded process highlighted the lack of agency that the women had over their own bodies and resulted in the governor's office being stacked with

boxes of fans that were not being distributed to the women who needed them. Additionally if, as many did, the women were attempting to manage their symptoms without resorting to HRT, there was a feeling their accounts of menopause-related difficulties would not be believed precisely because they were not on medication. Therefore, by attempting to assert some autonomy over their lives, by how they coped with their menopause or by simply refusing to engage with healthcare, they would likely suffer from further ageing pains of imprisonment.

> *If they think you're on HRT, you'll definitely get it, but if you're not than there is a possibility you won't get it. But I shouldn't be forced to go on other medication, for something that I don't want. I'd rather go without!*
>
> Roxy

The suspicion that they would not be believed was difficult for the women to live with and in some cases could impact upon their ability to get the correct medication that they required. There is a genuine issue in most prisons around drug use and a real problem with some medication being traded. Therefore, understandably the healthcare department had rules and procedures in place around the reordering of medications. One of the symptoms of menopause is problems with memory and concentration which can result in things being lost or misplaced. Selina had accidentally thrown away her new packet of HRT medication and had attempted to get healthcare to reorder her prescription for her. She was repeatedly told that she would need to see a doctor but would have to wait a week to see them. Eventually, one of the nurses agreed to reorder the medication. However, the stress that Selina went through from being off her medication was difficult for her and left her feeling angry and frustrated with the system.

> *So, the third time I went back to the nurses' station on C wing I spoke to someone who was really nice, she's head of the nurses, and she was brilliant. She just went, 'What? They should have just re-ordered it! It's simple, we're not talking about major anxiety pills, or anything like that.' So, she just ordered it, and the next day it was there. But I went through nine days without them […] I mean I had a headache because of this. I had a four-day headache, a four-day headache! And I think it was the stress and the anxiety of it, and I didn't sleep, I wasn't eating, I was angry, and then that frustration comes in, and then its anger, beating yourself up, why was I so stupid. So, you go through all of this unnecessary aggravation.*
>
> Selina

Again, we can see how the lack of an older prisoner policy, or even a female offender policy that sets out the needs of older women, can lead to their needs being disregarded. In an attempt to ensure parity, the healthcare policy was effectively discriminating against the older female prisoners by not recognising the differentiated needs that these older women had. Due to the biological differences between men and women, men do not undergo these types of physical changes. This aspect of ageing pains of imprisonment is uniquely gendered, as men will not be forced to battle against the system simply to access medical care for something that every woman will experience.

This infantilising of women in prison makes this time more challenging for them. Women in their 50s, who have had autonomous lives prior to their incarceration, are forced to subject themselves, not just to the medical gaze from the doctors and nurses, but they are also forced to discuss their biological changes with the prison staff in order to attempt to get their needs addressed, which is experienced as an additional form of humiliation.

## Anxiety

*'I do have bad days.'* Frankie

One of the more serious impacts of the menopause from which some of the women suffered was anxiety and depression. The loss of oestrogen can, for some women, impact greatly on their moods. This can be destabilising for women who are already living in an insecure and potentially violent environment. Yet, despite the problems that some women may experience from the menopause, the issues mentioned earlier of not being able to access healthcare in a timely manner, struggling to gain the correct medication, or having medication changed or altered, all added to even greater pains of imprisonment for menopausal women.

> *[The other prison I was in] took me off all my HRT medication. […] I'm back on my, I'm back on HRT now. Cos an incident happened last year, and I had to go to court for it. And it was [one of the governors] that got me back on my medication. You know I shouldn't have been left in the position that I was left in. Just taken off my medication, just like that. Nothing put in place, you know my head was all over the place. I didn't know if I was coming or going. Actually, I thought at one point that I was losing it. It was like I ... I was there but it wasn't me, if that makes any sense. ... I've been back on my HRT medication now for about ... 11 months, yeah about 11 months. And I seem to be doing alright.*
>
> Frankie

The consequence of Frankie being taken off HRT was a violent altercation with another prisoner which resulted in her serving more time on her sentence. Despite being put back on HRT, she was still suffering from panic attacks and struggled to cope with large groups of people; which could present something of a challenge in prison. Since this incident the prison had been proactive in moving Frankie to a smaller wing and getting her back onto HRT medication. The governor is now more conscious of the implications of the menopause.

> *I never really thought about it but the whole thing of going through the menopause and everything that that brings with it, and I think that is*

> *really--, I've seen a lady receive extra days on her sentence because of assaulting somebody who was having a really bad time going through the menopause. I think it can bring on--, I think we run the risk with suicide and self-harm, of, you know, depression, really low mood, tearful, that could lead to kind of self-harm or ultimately, you know, suicide, which is quite concerning.*
>
> Governor Tania

Governor Tania had previously worked in the male estate, so prior to moving to the women's prison, had not encountered the issues that menopause can bring. As a young woman, who had not gone through the menopause herself, she was not actively conscious of the psychological and physical pains of menopause and the problems that it might bring, until she encountered incidents within the establishment. Arguably, given the number of male governors and staff who work in the prison, they too, having no possibility of going through the menopause themselves, may also be less than aware of how these issues might impact the women.

PSO 4800, when it was in use for women prisoners, merely stated 'Some older women will need support and assistance as they go through the menopause' (HM Prison & Probation Service, 2008). This PSO has since been replaced with the Female Offender Strategy which makes no mention of older women at all. This shows clearly the invisibility of the ageing female offender within the prison population. Institutional thoughtlessness would suggest that the needs of the older women were not considered and were therefore overlooked. However, it was clear that the staff were aware of many of the needs of the older women going through the menopause, and yet again, despite the thought and consideration being made, those needs and the difficulties that menopausal women faced were being overlooked. Women who were struggling with the menopause could exhibit aggressive behaviours that could be misunderstood by staff, as Frankie's experience showed. This could result in them being

punished for their behaviour if their situation was not fully understood. Erratic behaviour was exacerbated by the obstacles gaining the correct medication from healthcare or having medication changed without the women being consulted.

## Pains of Infantilisation Revisited

Another relatively common issue for ageing women and men is that their bladder function is not as robust as it was when they were younger. The women's prison had an outdoor association time each day, where the women were allowed to leave their wings and go outside. However, once outside, like a school playtime, they had to remain there for the duration of the association time. This rule caused issues for some of the older women. A number of them relayed incidences where they needed to go back inside but were told they must remain outside until association time was finished.

> *Last week we were locked out there for an hour. I was busting to go to the toilet [...]. And I went up and I begged them and pleaded. Please let me go toilet, I'm in pain now. And they wouldn't let me in. They just said you should have gone before you come out. And I said 'Well I did but everyone's bladder is different. You can't assume that all these women out here are going to be able to hold their toilet!' I was in severe pain.*
>
> Manda

The older women were forced to remain outside, with no consideration made for their additional needs. The men were not subjected to such an infantilising process as during their association time, if they wanted to go outside, they were able to use the exercise yard attached to their wing block and could go in and out freely. Due to this rule, some of the women would not go outside, simply because they knew that they would have to remain there for the duration. This meant that the older women, who needed some form of exercise to prevent their ageing aches and pains, often did not take up this opportunity because of

the difficulties it presented them. Therefore, they were forced to sacrifice one of the few privileges in the prison day in order to manage a need associated with ageing.

## Conclusion

As people age they expect to experience some functional decline in their physical mobility, in their sight and in their hearing. They can also expect to develop certain illnesses that are more common in people as they age. However, for older prisoners these pains of ageing and deteriorating health were increased due to the conditions of their imprisonment. Their inability to access decent quality healthcare in a timely manner increased the problems that the older prisoners faced. In addition to this the hours that they spent confined in their cells overnight impacted on their physical health, exacerbating the speed of their functional decline. Whilst these issues could be problematic for all prisoners, they had a greater impact on the ageing population, as their need for healthcare was more significant than for the younger population. The older prisoners' bodies lacked the ability to recover from the aches and pains brought on by substandard furniture and the physical restraint of being in a cell for in excess of 12 hours at a time.

Whilst these issues were shared equally by both the older women and men I spoke to, the women had specific gendered pains of ageing, as they had to cope with the changes brought on by the menopause whilst being incarcerated, a process over which they had no control. Additionally, the women were often subjected to infantilising treatment which compounded their lack of autonomy. The problems that some women faced during their time in prison made their sentence often more difficult to endure.

Many of the staff displayed an understanding that older people had some increased needs, and certainly within the women's prison, it was clearly understood that the furnishings were having a detrimental impact on the older women. Yet, despite this clear acknowledgement of the needs of the older people, there was seemingly no ability for the prison to be able to improve these furnishings for the residents.

The older prisoners did not accept these pains of ageing and deteriorating health unquestioningly and attempted to find a number of ways to mitigate these pains. Some older people refuse to accept that their health may be declining and asserted that they were still as fit and able as they were years before. Others became stoic and attempted to reassert some autonomy over the total power being imposed upon them by the prison healthcare regime by simply refusing to engage with the system.

In the following chapter I look in more detail at how the older men and women sought to regain some autonomy in an attempt to mitigate those additional ageing pains of imprisonment they suffered from.

# Chapter Nine - Mitigating the Pains of Imprisonment

When people enter prison they lose a great deal of control over themselves and their lives. They undergo what Goffman (1968) describes as the 'mortification of the self' (p. 30). They will be given a number to identify themselves, they may have to wear prison clothes, their autonomy will be removed, and they will be subjected to the rules of the regime.

If someone is said to have agency it suggests that they are in a position of power (Bosworth, 1999). As Sykes (1958) tells us, prisons yield total power, resulting in one of the original pains of imprisonment, the loss of autonomy. People in prison are power-less as they are controlled and managed by the penal machine. Yet even in these circumstances where agency is severely limited, it still exists. People still have the ability to employ agency and to choose how they interact with the regime.

For Crewe (2009) the self-regulation in prison has dictated that prisoners must adopt an adaption in order to comply with the demands. He argues that the male prisoners he observed, chose to adopt one of a number of adaptations that allowed them to meet the demands of the prison. These ranged from being enthusiastically fully committed to the requirements of the regime, to being pragmatically resigned to complying with them (p. 156). Bosworth (1999) argues that while theoretically men rebel against the demands of the prison regime, women comply with it. The women in her study were unlikely to be

openly combative towards the system but were more likely to engage in 'small scale acts of resistance' (p. 131).

The previous three chapters have outlined the additional pains of imprisonment that were experienced by the older people in prison. The older people who I observed did not fall along the gendered fault line of men confronting the system and women conforming to it, nor did they adopt roles to cope. They did, however, find a number of ways to attempt to alleviate the ageing pains of imprisonment that they were facing. In this chapter I examine how these older men and women employed the limited agency that they had, in order to find methods or adaptations that enabled them to cope in prison, and I look at the gendered nature of these adaptations.

## Acceptance

*'What can you do? I can't do anything can I?*' Gwen

There was a high level of acceptance amongst the older prisoner population in relation to their situation. Many of the older prisoners freely admitted their crimes and had varying levels of remorse over what they had done, but even those prisoners who contested their conviction and claimed to be innocent of their crimes, had an air of acquiescence about them.

> *[T]he longer you go, I hate it, I hate it, I hate it. I hate myself, I hate this, I hate the food, I hate the mattress, I hate the officers, I hate my life. Your one day is like a week. […] if you just go: "well, I am here, and there's nothing I can do about it". And just get on with it, just face every day.*
>
> Selina

There was a strong sense from the older people that there was no point in railing against the system. It would not achieve anything and could actually make your time in prison more difficult to endure. Fighting your sentence would only elongate your time. The better solution was to accept the situation you were in and attempt to normalise your life as much as possible. The older

residents employed the limited agency that they had in order to achieve this; either through finding some benefit or positive from their sentence, through finding work that gave them purpose or even enjoyment, or through the forming of cohesive social networks. These strategies were not employed in isolation as many of the older people employed more than one of these tactics.

## Benefits of Prison

*'I'm grateful for prison.'* Lil

Maruna (2001) argues that in order to desist from crime, offenders need to 'make sense' of their lives. They do this by constructing a narrative of their life that gives them the ability to move forward. One of the aspects of this redemption narrative is termed 'tragic optimism' which involves finding an explanation for their crime (p. 97-98). Similarly, I found that in an attempt to rationalise their time in prison, most of the older men and women were able to tell me about a benefit they had gained from their sentence. One older prisoner, Alfie, developed a particularly strong life narrative.

## Alfie: A Case Study of Mitigation

*'The good thing is I come to jail, you know, and maybe that probably saved my life.'*

Alfie arrived in prison for the first time at the age of 59 and was serving a two-and-a-half-year sentence.

> *I was frightened, and I didn't think I would make the gate, 'til release. I thought I'd either be dead or I would kill myself, you know, suicide.*

After his imprisonment he lost his business and income but also his wife of 40 years, as she filed for divorce and took their family home. He was at a very low point when he arrived into custody and was scared about what his time in prison was going to entail. He spoke candidly about the trauma that he felt on arrival into prison and how he felt certain that he would not be able to survive

his incarceration. However, he did survive and in order to rationalise his time in prison, he developed a narrative script and employed a cognitive shift that he used to reinterpret his life circumstances. This allowed him to make sense of what he had done and gave him a coherent narrative that he could employ, both while he was in prison and once he had left when explaining to others why he had been in prison.

> *Like I said, the judge put me away, probably destroyed my life, but I destroyed it first by ruining everything. But then going to prison and seeing how low I'd got […]and after like it took me eight, nine weeks, bit by bit, it just made me turn and think. So, I had a choice, either become like I was, or change. So, I changed, and not intentionally changed, just slowly my mind got stronger and that was … that was more for me because like I said, as far as I'm concerned I weren't coming out of jail alive, I was going to die in here, whether I done it myself or someone else did it, that's how I felt. Now, I know I'm going out and I know I'm not frightened anymore, you know? And I know that I will have my lorry, I will have my business back, you know, I'm going to get it back.*

Alfie's narrative constructed prison as a positive event; it had not ruined his life but had in fact benefited him. In order to justify the time he spent in prison, he repeatedly pointed to the number of ways that prison had saved him. It had saved him from his illegal activities, that would have continued if he had not been arrested, but also it had saved him physically and emotionally. Physically his heart problem had been addressed during his time in prison; he had lost weight and started to exercise. While emotionally he felt he was stronger, more determined and in many ways a better man. He not only accepted the loss of his wife but felt prison had prompted her to be honest about her affair and put an end to the deception to which he had been subjected. He felt confident that he was going to be able to move on with his life.

> *I think in a way if I hadn't come to prison I might've done it again and took another £2,000 because I didn't care. And if I'd got away with that I'd have done it again, and again and again […]. So, coming into here and seeing the life […] this will either make or break people, […] I don't know, for me*

> *it changed me. You know, instead of being the fat prat I was, who was wanting to end everything and give up because everything had gone, […]. This man, straight hard working comes out.*

Alfie was an exceptional case; he was able to describe at length the positive impact that he believed prison had made on his life; however, to some degree many of the older people tried to find a positive in their prison experience as it was easier to serve their sentence if they could find some benefit in their incarceration.

## Changing and Improving

The older women tended to focus on how their time in prison had improved their minds, whether through taking educational courses or joining the book club.

> *But then in a way I think to myself, since I've come in, I've done my level one in English I've done it in maths, I've done other exams, I've done other courses, I've got certificates to prove it.*

Ange

By comparison, the men focused on their physical improvements either in health or weight loss.

> *I was … when I first came here, I was 18 stone 6 […]. And I was unfit and never went to the gym or nothing. Since I've been in here, I've lost two stone, I've been to the gym, two or three times a week! I love it. I feel better!*

Benny

This gendered difference was interesting as the women were focused on their mental development, whilst the men were more likely to concentrate on their physical improvement. The men's physical interest follows the traditional lines of masculinity in prison as being entrenched in the physical body. Men, by changing the physical shape of their body are said to be displaying their masculinity, not just by their physical appearance, but by their ability to show

they can impose self-control (Jewkes, 2005). For most of the older men, there was neither the ability nor interest to make overt displays of masculinity through physically building up their muscles, but perhaps by improving their physical health and losing significant amounts of weight they were able to present their own version of masculinity.

In society, the physical attributes of women are often subjected to scrutiny and objectification in the media. This objectification results in women becoming overly concerned about their physical appearance which can result in mental health problems and low self-esteem. (American Psychological Association, 2007). In prison, women's bodies are less subjected to the male gaze, due to the lack of men in prison, but they are scrutinised under the 'legitimated punitive stare' (Carlen, 1998). There is little privacy in prison and the women could feel physically exposed by this lack of privacy and their inability to keep their female biological activities to themselves. The flap in their cell door could be opened by the staff at any time and they could be caught unawares.

> *There are night checks. They're not meant to look through the flap in your door, but sometimes they do. You never feel comfortable on the loo or getting dressed!*
>
> Selina

Possibly the women's disinterest in physical improvement was a response to this additional scrutiny that they were facing in prison, or just being somewhat partially removed from the male gaze has allowed their physical appearance to be less central to their concerns. However, this implies that interest in one's appearance is solely premised on making oneself attractive for the benefit of potential suitors and this is not necessarily the case. Another possibility is that this could be a response to the lack of mirrors in the prison, which meant that

the women were not able to look at their physical appearance freely, therefore it became less important.

Women's behaviour is constantly critiqued, and women are inundated with the message that they need to change, to improve themselves. Self-help and self-improvement books are predominantly marketed towards women, reinforcing this idea that they are not good enough and therefore must change (Riley, et al., 2019). Carlen (1983) argues that women in prison are not there simply to be punished, as the male prisoners are, but that they are there to be improved so they can conform to social expectations of female behaviour. Accordingly, the need to improve the mind might be reflective of the messages that the women were getting from the prison and as a result of the activities that the prison offered them.

## Work

'*Keeping busy is the key to getting through this*.' Lil

Employment was another tactic that was used to mitigate the pains of imprisonment. There was a shortage of work roles in both establishments, yet despite this, with very few exceptions, the vast majority of the older residents had jobs whilst they were in prison, with almost all of them working full time. They often lamented that they were not able to work longer hours. Indeed, some older residents had more than one job as they found the time spent in their cells particularly difficult. They relied upon their ability to spend as long as possible at work in an attempt to combat the monotony of prison.

> *[M]y job its perfect for me I thought it would keep me busy. […] And then with the magazine, and the Shannon Trust, working with people who can't read. I've really enjoyed helping people. It's good to keep busy!*
>
> Sasha

The older residents seized on their ability to work, filling up their time with endless roles and projects. In the women's prison there was sometimes the opportunity for these roles to spill over into the weekends, which the women relished.

> *I just work. I work 7 days a week in the kitchens and in the officers' mess. I just goes to work, just to get off the landing and get out.*
>
> Gwen

Work was undoubtedly a means of keeping occupied. Practically, just by keeping physically busy, many of the older people found their working days would rush past in comparison to their evenings or weekends. But work was more than this. It also gave the older people a sense of normality and the feeling of being free from the confines of the prison and its regime. Work provided a means of escape, as mentally if not physically, it took them outside of the prison. Meaningful work helped provide the older residents with a sense of balance that eased the pains of their prison sentence.

> *It just feels like, well I'm outside really. Cos I've got two nice ladies I work with, they work for Carillion, they don't work for the prison service, so that's ... that's a plus, so I haven't got officers around me all day long [...] yeah I love it over there.*
>
> Donna

For Donna, working with non-custodial staff allowed her to perceive herself as being outside of the prison regime. She enthused about her time at work and enjoyed those few hours where she was mentally able to discard her prisoner status, enjoying the feeling of having a 'proper job'. Even for the older people who worked in roles where they were interacting with prison staff, their work gave them a sense of purpose and allowed them to move away from their prisoner identity. Dot worked on the prison reception and told me that when new prisoners arrived, '*they often call me miss because they don't think I'm a prisoner*'. Dot took great pride in this perceived difference as she felt this

marked her out from the other prisoners. Some roles, like Dot's, were only afforded to trusted residents. Red Bands, in the men's prison, were trusted prisoners who had roles such as Samaritan's listeners and equalities representatives, and they were able to move around the prison with self-determination. They were allowed onto other wings and into some of the office areas of the prison, out of bounds to the majority of the prisoners. Others had induction roles that meant they would meet every person who came into the prison.

> *I guess it's because ... everybody knows me from the gym, so everybody talks to me anyway. They know that, they know what my job is in the gym, I'm number one up there.*
>
> Calvin

These prized roles allowed the older people the opportunity to present their non-prisoner identities and reclaim a sense of who they were. These jobs, and the trust that came with them, gave them autonomy, albeit in a limited way. They were able to show themselves as being different to the other people in the prison. These positions allowed them to claim an authority in the prison as they had met everyone there and were known by the other prisoners because of this. The privileges that came with these roles could be double-edged, as Selina told me, '*It does create certain problems with other ladies*', as her elevated status, whether it be perceived or otherwise, could mark her out as a target to some of the women who felt she received preferential treatment from the governors.

Sloan (2012) argues that work in prison allows men to perform their masculinity, as according to Tolson (1977, cited in Sloan, 2012), it is through work that a boy becomes a man. However, both older men and women turned to work and used their roles to mitigate their pains of imprisonment. Neither men nor women showed a gendered propensity towards work; however, the

non-prison work roles that were available fell along gendered lines. The men's jobs centred around horticulture, mechanical workshops, waste disposal and other production line work, whereas the women's working opportunities were in sewing, photography or working in a call centre. Many of the older men were physically unable to display hegemonic masculinity openly (Connell, 1987) but were able to use their roles in the prison to perform their version of masculinity which was slightly less physically demanding. However, they were performing masculinity not necessarily because they were working but due to the nature of the work they undertook.

The women's prison did not have specific jobs that were more favoured by the older women. Many of the older women tended to work in isolation or with only one other person, whereas the men's prison had two work roles that were largely populated by older men. These jobs differed from other positions within the prison as they offered much calmer environments in which the older men could work. The majority of older men were found working in either the bike workshop or horticulture.

Gaining a job in either of these places was a badge of honour and showed that you were trustworthy. The location of the gardens was felt by the prison governors to provide a weakness in the security of the prison, as it was relatively easy for parcels of contraband to be thrown over the fence at this point. A large parcel was recovered by the prison staff containing phones and drugs shortly after I began my research in the prison. This resulted in all of the horticulture workers being removed from their post and being replaced with older men. This move highlighted how the prison perceived the older men as being a lower risk than the younger men and more trustworthy. Similarly, in the bike workshop the men were seen to be more trusted, due to the nature of

the tools to which they had access. During the time of my research, four of the ten men in the bike workshop were over fifty.

## The Bike Workshop

*'I enjoy working with bikes. I was lucky to get here, that was a bonus.'* Bert

In HMP Mans-field one of the places where the older population regularly worked was the bike workshop. This was a charitable enterprise whereby old bikes were donated to the prison and the prisoners then reconditioned them for the charity to sell on. The bike workshop was very different from the other industries; it had a completely different atmosphere, unlike any other part of the prison. On my first visit to the workshop I noted, 'I feel like I've stepped into the outside world. The noise and shouting that is prevalent in varying degrees around the rest of the prison is strangely absent here' (fieldnotes).

On entering the workshop, you could be forgiven for thinking you were in any normal factory or garage; in fact, it was quieter than most you would visit. The radio played quietly in the background, an accompaniment to the banging noises coming from the bikes being fixed and the gentle banter amongst the men. The feeling of normality was jarring against the rowdiness that was going on outside those walls.

> *No, it doesn't feel like you're in a prison. Not in here. I'd rather be here than down there [on the wing].*
>
> Bert

The bike workshop was run by a prison officer who ruled his domain with a seemingly old-fashioned attitude. He showed little compassion for the men working for him, what their issues might be, how they might have come to be in prison. He expected compliance, and he seemed to get it. He remarked to me one day, 'I'll ask you nicely, I'll tell you to do it and then you'll hit the floor'

(fieldnotes). Despite this somewhat antiquated attitude all the older men were very glad to be there and felt lucky to have that job.

> *I mean at the moment; all I've been doing is this job and keeping my head down. Just doing the day-to-day routine. That's pretty much I think the best way to get through this. […] Yeah. It does help. I mean being in the cell, it's a bit of a mind killer. Being active and doing things I enjoy; I enjoy working with bikes. I was lucky to get here, that was a bonus.*
>
> Bert

In contrast to the other industries in the prison, the prison officer (PO) in charge of the workshop was able to choose whom he had working for him. Before they got a job in the workshop the PO would have interviewed them, spoken to the wing staff, looked at their records and spoken to the staff who allocate the prisoners to their activities. This interview process was unusual in the prison, and it meant that only prisoners who were considered fully trustworthy were selected. In addition to this the PO demanded dedication to the job, as the men had to commit to working for all of the nine available shifts each week. This meant that they were unable to attend any other activities in the prison such as education or going to the gym. Even getting to healthcare at the appropriate time could prove challenging. This advanced vetting procedure was unique in the prison as the other industries simply had men allocated to their work parties.

> *If it wasn't for the cycle workshop I don't know what I'd do all day.*
>
> Cyril

In the bike workshop the four older men worked together on one side of the building, whilst the younger men were on the other. Whether this was deliberate or not was uncertain. What was apparent was the enjoyment which the men gained from the work and the atmosphere.

Although there was not the overt toxic masculinity that could be observed in some of the other areas of the prison, like the gym, it was undoubtedly a very masculine environment, but it was also strangely antiquated. Perhaps this was due to the calm atmosphere or just the somewhat outdated practice of fixing things with their hands, but it felt like another time.

> *This is like a proper job, not like the other shite they got round here!*
>
> Danny

Working with the bikes was rewarding for the older men; they relished the ability to work with their hands, to engage in a role that normalised their time there. Moreover, working in this very masculine environment allowed these older men to perform their masculinity in a way that many of the older men struggled to do within the prison setting.

Three of the four older men in the workshop were on the same wing. They all repeatedly mentioned how lucky they were to be able to work at this job and to be on their wing. Cyril told me that he was expecting to be released shortly and as he was 67 he would not be working once he left the prison, but he lived locally and was hoping to get a voluntary job at the bike charity where he would continue to fix the bikes.

> *I'd work here all day long and I'd stay here until 6, 7 o'clock at night, and I'd be here at 8 o'clock in the morning. All these breaks in between is a pain. Because you get into doing something and then you have to stop, we'd achieve a lot more if we didn't have to do that. And even if they didn't pay us, it wouldn't matter to me, whether you get paid or not, I couldn't care. It's just something to do, and the time goes quickly, and it's something I like doing.*
>
> Cyril

The bike shop provided the few men who were lucky enough to work there, with a job that they felt to be worthwhile. Some of the other industries in the prison were not mentally stimulating such as attaching cargo nets to a rope or

putting plastic plumbing parts into bags. In the bike workshop there was a sense of pride that the older men felt in making something. Intentionally or not, the bike workshop provided the older men with a job that gave them personal satisfaction. In addition to filling their day, which made their time go more quickly; it enhanced the men personally, something not easily achieved in the prison environment. Moreover, it was instrumental in helping these older men mitigate their ageing pains of imprisonment.

## Coping

*'That's the only thing. I've got to work! I've got to work. Or this would... this would drive you nuts.'* Donna

Work was used by the older residents not just as a mechanism for passing the time, but it also assisted them with their mental well-being. Both men and women used their limited agency to find work roles that provided them with this much needed outlet, but from the women's perspective the need to work was overwhelming and was utilised as a coping mechanism for them to deal with their sentences. The ability to remain active both physically and mentally was widely recognised by the women as a tool to help promote their mental well-being.

> *I think if I didn't have my job I'd go insane. You know, some people like working, others don't, and I suppose I'm just one of them people that like to be kept busy. […] [MS: Do you find it easier to keep busy?] Yeah, but then I also find, cos I've been in a long time it's important that I have structure there, to keep myself busy.*
>
> Frankie

Work was vital to many of the older women I spoke to. In order to address the mental health problems from which many of the women suffered, they threw themselves into their roles and sought solace in their ability to keep busy.

> *So, my job is brilliant. I don't think, if I didn't have my job I couldn't cope. I couldn't cope ...I couldn't cope.*
>
> *Selina*

Selina had spoken candidly about her anxiety and depression and was constantly busy and spent almost all of her time out of her cell performing one of the many roles she had undertaken. She found it difficult to sleep at night and would often greet me in the morning with tales of what work-related tasks she had been doing in her cell overnight. One day I noted, 'She is always busy in an effort to outrun her emotions' (fieldnotes). Her work allowed her to combat the anxiety she felt from being in prison and being separated from her child and was a coping mechanism which she embraced.

The downside of the older people's need to work was that often, as with the cycle workshop, the roles that they were given were full time and they were told specifically that this would mean they would not be able to attend other activities within the prison such as education or the gym. So once again, as I discussed in the previous chapter, often when the older people asserted their autonomy, it involved sacrificing other activities that would be beneficial to them.

> *[W]hen I arrived here, because I wasn't allocated a job I was going to the gym. So, it was good I was using my time and then when I got a job they said, you cannot go to the gym. This job is full time, you can't go to the gym, you'll have to fit the gym in around other times. Which you can't here. It really is mainly only once of an evening, and they do it when you've just had your meal, which is a joke. Because that's the last thing you feel like. So, I haven't been going. So, I have noticed the pain in my back is horrendous.*
>
> Sasha

Sasha was not alone in this predicament. Many of the older people were aware, as the previous chapter discussed, how being in prison was exacerbating their ageing pains, through the restriction of movement and the lack of suitable

furnishings. This placed the older workers in a dilemma, as many of them were aware that exercise was conducive to easing their aches and pains, but their desire to work, and be out of their cells as much as possible, meant that they often sacrificed their ability to exercise in favour of keeping themselves mentally stimulated.

> *And if you ask for time off to go to the gym you get told no! […] Apparently they were going to do yoga, but again it was during the day when you were at work.*
>
> Connie

Once again, the thoughtlessness of the institution placed the older people at a disadvantage. By not considering the additional needs of the older people the prison was forcing them to choose between their physical and mental well-being.

## Social Support

Prison forces people into situations where they must live in close quarters alongside others. These other cell mates are allocated seemingly at random, and the prisoner has no control over whom they are likely to be sharing a cell with, meaning that they are forced to have some form of 'social relationship' (Goffman, 1968) which is beyond their control.

> *It was horrendous. I was put into a cell with another girl, there was no key to the cell, there was no key to the locker. All my stuff got stolen. And they were smoking spice in the cell, and there's nothing you can say, nothing you can do.*
>
> Agnes

Being placed with cell mates who were incompatible was a problem for all prisoners but many of the older residents were in prison for the first time and found the initial allocation of cell mates on arrival at the prison somewhat of a

shock. The accommodation at the women's prison was all single cell accommodation so this was not an issue for them. In the men's prison there was a mixture of shared and single accommodation so for some of the older men this was still a challenge they encountered. Even if not sharing a cell, prison forces you to live in close proximity to others but strips you of the ability to choose who those people are.

Maslow (1943) argued that human beings had five needs; these were physiological, safety, love, esteem and self-actualisation. The first four needs arise due to deprivation and are tiered, so you have to fulfil the need on the bottom tier before you can move to the one above. Prison is a place of deprivation and although it fulfils the most basic physiological needs by providing food and shelter, it falls short in providing the other needs. For Maslow, belonging to a social group is one of our basic psychological needs, but the lack of security felt by many in prison can make forming these vital social connections more difficult. Trust is a key factor in forging friendships, yet prison places you in a situation where trust is difficult to attain as you know little about those whom you are in prison with, other than they have broken the law, and therefore are not seen as trustworthy.

On entering prison, you are cut off from all your existing external social relationships and the nature of communication in prison makes those external connections difficult to maintain; this means that forging social networks is vital in prison. Being part of a group improves people's well-being as it stops them becoming socially isolated; additionally, it provides them with help in dealing with material hardship and it reduces the risk of being vulnerable to attack or exploitation from others (Crewe, 2009). However, making these social connections in prison is difficult, as the prison controls whom you are with and

has the ability to move people in or out of wings or establishments quickly and often without explanation. Crewe (2009) argues that prison friendships are formed around locality, where the person is from, or their ethnicity. While this may be the case for younger prisoners most of the older residents attempted to form their social groupings around age as well.

> *You know water tends to find its own level and the mature guys tend to stick together because they have experience and the interest in different things.*
>
> Trev

In some cases, the older people were able to employ their agency and seek out other people of a similar age with whom they could form social connections. Their ability to do this was dependent upon where in the prison they were situated. In HMP Mans-field around a third of the over 50s were located on the enhanced wing. This afforded them the opportunity to form friendships which provided them with much needed support.

> *So, a lot of us older people will find other older people to chat to.*
>
> Alfie

However, as I mentioned in chapter six, not all of the older men were as lucky; the rest of the older men were distributed around the prison on wings with few other people of a similar age. This lack of thought as to where the older people were located disadvantaged some of the older men, as was discussed previously in the case of Johnny. The ability of the older people to utilise their agency to form some kind of protective group, was often dependant on their location within the prison.

Unlike HMP Mans-field, HMP Womans-ville did not have any wings where large numbers of older women were housed together. Instead, the older women were dispersed around nine of the eleven wings with between four to six women on

each wing. As I highlighted in chapter five, some of the wings had no association area, so the women tended to stay in their rooms making it difficult to establish connections with other people of a similar age. The over 50s group that I ran during the research, provided the women with a vital opportunity to mix with other older women from around the prison, which in-turn allowed them to develop social groups.

## HMP Womans-ville: The Over 50s Group

*'That's my bit of release that is. Like I just sit there. Its comfortable, cos you're not on edge.'* Roxy

The over 50s group ran every other Saturday morning for six months. The group was held in a classroom behind the gym. There was no prison staff in attendance at the group. It was just me and between 14 to 18 older women. There were tables and chairs which we arranged into a large rectangle so the women could sit around the outside facing inwards. The rationale for running a group came from previous research I had undertaken with RECOOP, an organisation who specialise in providing services for older people in prison. Many of their staff run groups in prisons and often discussed the benefits of these sessions for the older people; indeed, the groups are often praised in HMIP reports (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2017).

> Focusing heavily on social interaction, activities within the Day Centres are designed to create an environment where prisoners feel relaxed enough to make positive changes to the way they interact with other people. This allows them to overcome the barriers created by closed environments and, in turn, promotes social-inclusion and wellbeing.
>
> (RECOOP, 2021)

The group allowed the older women to spend a couple of hours away from the wings and to come together with others of a similar age, or at least spend some time without the much younger women around. The aim was to bring some semblance of normal life into the bounds of the prison. The format of the

sessions was varied but it usually involved either a quiz or some arts and crafts, coffee and biscuits and lots of lively conversations.

> *I think the main thing is you get to meet with people of your own age, which sometimes you don't have time, or they don't come out on exercise, so you get to know different people. And just being with people that you maybe have a conversation with.*
>
> Doris

One memorable session had a quiz on catchphrases from old television shows and adverts. I noted afterwards, 'what a simple idea but how amazing the response. No one took the quiz too seriously but the memories it produced were amazing. It gave the women lots to laugh and reminisce over' (fieldnotes).

This collective coming together and sharing of memories was such an ordinary act, one that is undertaken across the world when friends gather. But this ordinary act was taking place in a setting that was extraordinary. The ability to forget, even for a few moments, was remarkable and lifted the women's mood and could, I was told, keep them going over the remainder of their weekend in which they would predominantly be locked behind their doors.

> *I don't think the younger women have the need for proper conversation. A proper chat. Like we have on the mornings at the women's groups. That was great. You didn't feel that you couldn't say this, or you couldn't say that, or you'd look a dick saying this.*
>
> Connie

The group was not run perfectly by any means and there were a few issues that became apparent. The group was not overseen by the prison, rather, they allowed the group to take place due to my presence. Early on in the process we did not establish any formal rules or regulations which made retrospective attempts to institute any order quite challenging. In addition, the day-to-day preparation for the group was undertaken by one of the older residents, and this created problems with who would, or would not, attend the group. She did

not want certain women in the prison, whom she did not like, to attend the group and would sometimes actively avoid telling some women when the group was being held. Equally, some older women did not like her, and they chose not to attend because of her.

Despite the imperfections around its implementation the group was a great success for the six months that it ran. The group provided the older women with a space where they felt safe and secure; this allowed them the ability to develop a strong social network that gave the women a sense of belonging.

> *For that short period of time, where you ... It doesn't feel like you're here. And it's having, the women who can all chat together. Without somebody kicking off, or without somebody screaming or somebody coming out with huge obscenities or stuff like that. It's good, its good. Its time away from the wing and it gives you that sense of normality. […] You know? It just gives us a sense of normality.*
>
> Selina

Attending the group humanised the older women's time in prison, by providing them with the opportunity to mentally 'leave' the confines of the prison. The absence of any prison staff heightened this sense of freedom and presented the older women with a unique opportunity to have some liberty, in what was usually a very controlled environment. The time away from the wings and the more volatile members of the prisoner society allowed the women to relax and enjoy themselves. The women who attended the group all enjoyed the social aspect of the company. It was often commented on that the lack of an association room made it difficult for them to talk to other people, so they seized this opportunity to forge connections with other women. The ability to be part of a group enhanced their feelings of belonging which helped with their mental wellbeing and assisted them in overcoming the ageing pains of imprisonment they suffered from.

# Conclusion

Agency in prison might be limited, but the older prisoners were not completely without it. They had the ability to influence some aspects of their time in prison. The majority of the older people employed three methods to cope with their time in prison. They worked, they formed social networks and they found some positives to take from their incarceration. These mechanisms were not mutually exclusive. For example, Alfie employed all three, as did many of the other older people.

By finding a benefit to their time in prison, the older people were able to justify this time and refute the feeling that being in prison was wasting what time they had left of their lives. The benefits largely split along gendered lines with the men displaying their masculinity through their physical self-improvement while the women focused more on their mental development. The reasons for this were not entirely clear but could well be a result of the gendered nature of women's imprisonment, which focuses on the improving of women as well as the punishment of them.

Almost all of the older people found a benefit from their work within the prison. Most of them were working full time and a number had more than one job. Many of the older people had also gained trusted roles and through these jobs they were able to mark themselves out as being different from the other prisoners. They found these jobs to be rewarding and provided them with the feeling of escape, of being outside of the regime. Not only did the work make the time pass more quickly, but for the women, it also provided mental well-being, whereas the men experienced a sense of accomplishment and self-worth.

Social relations are one of the basic human needs, and despite the difficulties that prison presents to forming these relationships, a number of the older people were able to form beneficial social support networks. The prison could help or hinder this process and consequently it was easier for some people to do this than others. The men on the enhanced wing were fortunate to have a reasonably large group of other older men to choose from, and as a result, there were several different social cliques that had been able to form. Others were less fortunate and struggled to find any commonality with the people on their wing. However, if they were able to obtain a job in one of the sectors that had a large number of older people, they were able to forge friendships there.

The lack of consideration of these issues, by those managing the prisons, contributed to these difficulties. Not having an older prisoner policy meant that the needs of older people, such as wishing to socialise with people of a similar age and outlook, were simply not considered. By reflecting upon the requirements of the older population, the prison could assist in making these connections easier to forge, either by considering where the older people were housed in the prison or by offering groups or clubs that allow older people to come together away from the wings. As I discuss in the next chapter, institutional thoughtlessness permeates throughout the prison estate, allowing the additional needs faced by the older population continually to be disregarded.

# Chapter Ten - Institutional Thoughtlessness and the Prison

The previous chapters have explored the pains of imprisonment, as they were experienced by the ageing prisoner population and then looked at how the older population used their agency to mitigate those pains. In those chapters I touched upon the concept of institutional thoughtlessness and how this can add to those ageing pains of imprisonment.

For Crawley and Sparks (2005) institutional thoughtlessness occurs as a result of prisoners being treated in a uniform way. This sameness approach overlooks the fact that some older prisoners will not be able to comply with the routines of the prison. The prison staff do not consciously consider the abilities of older prisoners and institutional thoughtlessness is the term that they use to describe these unwitting actions of the officers. This leads to the needs of the older prisoners being overlooked, not deliberately in an act of discrimination, but accidentally, as there are no rules and procedures in place to manage these additional requirements and so they are disregarded. In this chapter I explore whether institutional thoughtlessness can fully explain why the needs of older people in prison continue to be unmet. I examine how the lack of an older prisoner policy impacts upon the prisons, their staff and the older people imprisoned in them, at a macro, meso and micro level.

## Macro

At a macro level there were several factors that directly impacted upon the experiences of older people that I interviewed in prison. Firstly, there was the

lack of an older prisoner policy. Having a policy in place for older people at a macro level is vital if there is to be any implementation at a lower level. The overarching structure of any policy will impact directly on the experience of the individuals who might hope to be the beneficiary. Secondly, there was the amount of money spent on the prison service. The prison population has remained broadly stable since 2010 in England and Wales, but this was in contrast to spending on prisons. In 2018/19 the government spent £3.4 billion on the prison service. However, this figure was 10 per cent less, in real terms, than had been spent in 2009/10 (Institute for Government, 2020).

The reduction in spending levels linked directly to the third issue that impacted upon prisoners' experiences: the number of staff in the prisons. The fall in spending was largely a result of the reduction in staffing costs. Between March 2010 and March 2014, benchmarking and VEDS resulted in large numbers of experienced staff leaving the service (Ministry of Justice, 2014). The number of operational prison staff reduced by 26 per cent, and although staff numbers have increased by 14 per cent from 2014 to 2021, there are still 9,569 fewer operational staff working in prisons in England and Wales than there were in 2010 (Ministry of Justice, 2021b). The reduction in the numbers of staff has undoubtedly had an impact on the running of all prisons. The combination of no policy for older people, a decrease in the money available to spend in prisons and reduced staff numbers all coalesced and impacted on the experiences of older people in prison, as I will discuss.

The 2016 white paper announced that prison governors were to be given more power over how their prisons were run, stating 'we want governors to have the power and budget to determine how their prisons are run, including how to prioritise and deliver services within their prisons' (Ministry of Justice, 2016a).

They were to be given greater autonomy over a range of areas such as health, accredited programs and the operational framework of the prison. This change moved the decision making away from the centre and ostensibly gave the individual governors the ability to make decisions that mattered to their prisons. This devolution of power also effectively made the governors responsible for any failures of service provision within their prisons and left them attempting to provide all of their required services from a budget that was insufficient to do so.

So, instead of empowering prison governors to implement meaningful change for their prisoner population, the reality, for older prisoners, was that the lack of an older prisoner policy meant that unless they represented a large proportion of the prison population, the older men and women were easily overlooked amongst the other competing priorities within the prison. As I mentioned in chapter four, some prisons where the proportions of people over the age of 50 was high, had provisions for this group, such as day centres in HMP Leyhill or HMP Haverigg. In other prisons, where the proportion of people over 50 fell well below the national average, these older people were often overlooked. Therefore, the support that the older people received in prison involved an element of chance as to whether or not their establishment would cater for their age specific needs.

## Meso

The lack of an older prisoner policy directly impacted upon the facilities provided for older people at a meso level within the individual prison. The white paper gave governors autonomy over their prisons yet, because the focus of overarching policy did not fall on older people, their needs were not considered.

The main governor of the prison often sets the tone that the staff will adopt.

> *Certainly, I can say from our perspective, we are not particularly sensitive to age related needs in policy terms. I think generally we are sensitive in dealing with individuals whether its age related or not, but it's not sort of almost like enshrined in policy or necessarily embedded in the way that everybody works. And the risk with that of course is that … you miss people, you know, and it's … we talked earlier about, you know, if someone is self-isolating [why] is that because… you know, what's behind that? But again because--, because I suppose we don't have a huge population of older people, erm, again that comes with a risk that we'll overlook them if we haven't got someone looking for us, if that makes sense.*
>
> Governor Alfred

This quotation from the main governor of HMP Womans-ville shows how he believed that an older person's policy was not required, as the prison could manage the needs of the individual, essentially repeating the government's long held position on not instituting an older prisoner policy. However, the governor did also acknowledge that the absence of policy could lead to some people being overlooked, thereby recognising the capacity to contribute to institutional thoughtlessness.

This governor was aware that the needs of the women in his care were altering as they aged and was proactive enough to allow me into the prison to conduct the research. However, this notion, that a generic older prisoner policy was not required, permeated throughout the other staff in the prison. I was told repeatedly by staff at governor level that there was no need for a blanket older person's policy because older people all had different needs and requirements.

> *So, I think here we're very accommodating with the individual needs of people. What I become a bit reluctant to do is kind of put a blanket policy in, with how you do stuff because, a) it's not individual to that person and b) […], if I was to say that everyone over 60 could have a heater then, you know, that they could end up [with] the person that got issued with one [not] really needing it […]. So actually, I think you've got to look at--, […] as soon as you lose that bespoke way in which you deal with people, your*

*kind of not, in general and not just with elderly, I think you're not working very well.*

Governor Tania

There was a firm belief amongst the staff that the needs of the individual could be more effectively addressed on a case-by-case basis, rather than through the application of a policy for all older people. To an extent, the staff were correct in this notion. In both HMP Mans-field and HMP Womans-ville, if a prisoner had obvious additional physical needs that required additional assistance, it was usually provided.

*So, for an example, this lady who's come in who has got--, she has like ulcerated legs, etc, and mobility problems. So primary care do all her dressings, they do all her physical health in terms of her medication needs, her pain relief, her dressings. Social care staff come in and do her showering and helping her with that kind of level of personal care. […] And then we have the social care peers who go in every day, make her bed, have a coffee with her, have a chat, is there anything you need? […] and then you've obviously got the landing officers who then further support with kind of the personal officer side. So, you've kind of got a four-pronged attack in how you manage them. What's really important is you have that care plan, and that care plan is also shared with the staff so the staff know what's happening and that everyone talks to each other, which is where the likes of somebody like her will feature on our complex case, which means that each Monday we will discuss her and how her care needs are being met.*

Governor Tania

While this level of physical need was rightly being thoroughly addressed, the focus on the very old or the very infirm, whose needs were visible, meant that the requirements of the other older people were often overlooked. If a need was not immediately apparent, then this policy of focusing on the individual, placed the onus of obtaining the assistance on the older people. As has been noted repeatedly, both here and in other research on older prisoners, the older population were often 'old and quiet' (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons, 2004; Wahidin, 2006) and were unlikely to push to get their needs addressed.

There was an evident paradox between the high levels of understanding about the requirements that some older people might have, as displayed by some of the more senior staff, and the almost obstinate refusal to see how the older people continued to be disadvantaged by the individual nature of addressing people's needs.

## Perpetuation of Myths

One of the most often repeated myths, which circulated throughout both of the prisons, was that older prisoners had a calming influence on the prison population. This myth contributed to the disregarding of the needs of the older people. Almost every member of staff I spoke to would mention this, especially when I raised the issue of separate wings or spaces for older people.

> *Well, the older prisoners have a calming influence on the younger ones, that's true, but on the other hand when I go up onto 3s north, I often get a group of older ladies approach me and they get very intimidated. I put in an IR (incident report) recently about them getting bullied and stuff like that. And they get shouted at, it's all quite intimidating and they were all older ladies. And they often get overlooked up there, because there is a very ... there's a lot of young offenders up there that are very loud and in your face and quite hard to handle for people at times. And then the older ladies on there do get overlooked.*
>
> Officer Amelia

This quotation here from an officer beautifully highlights the perpetuation of this myth. At first, Officer Amelia told me, the oft repeated story, that the older people have a calming influence on the prison atmosphere. But then she immediately contradicted herself by telling me that it was not true that they had this calming effect. She admitted that the older people's needs were overlooked because they were not vocal enough in drawing attention to themselves, in essence, that their acquiescence was hurting them. She had witnessed and been concerned by the way some of the older women were being treated.

The problem with this myth, that older people bring calm to a wing, was that whenever the prison staff were questioned about offering older people wings or spaces for them to be on their own, this default position, which permeated at macro, meso and micro level, was their immediate response; so, no real consideration was ever given to the benefits that these spaces might provide for the older prisoners.

In HMP Mans-field, the wing which held most of the older men was routinely cited to me as an example of the calming influence of the older people. On this wing the atmosphere was certainly calmer, but this was not necessarily as a result of the older people being housed there. This wing had formally been an enhanced wing and the behaviour of all of the men there was generally more compliant. Yet, even in this calmer area of the prison, the older people still tended to band together, away from the louder younger prisoners. On the other wings, one or two quieter older men on a wing of 120, had no impact on the overall atmosphere of the wing.

In HMP Womans-ville, despite the awareness that the staff had, that older people could be more vulnerable on the wings, it was not deemed necessary for the older women to have a separate area for themselves. There was an assumption that the majority of the older women would be well-behaved and would therefore quickly move to the enhanced landing. However, this landing was on the fourth floor of the wing block and any older women who had mobility issues would be unable to be accommodated there. Accordingly, these older women would have to remain on the other wings that were predominantly populated by younger women.

## Inadequate Furniture

Another sign that the needs of older people were neglected was the furniture provided in their rooms. As discussed in chapter eight, many of the older men and women spoke to me repeatedly about the chairs and the mattresses and how they exacerbated their ageing pains of imprisonment. The mattresses were made from very thin foam; initially they were incredibly hard but within a few months they had compressed to almost nothing. The chairs were also uncomfortable to sit on and on a number of occasions, I was told how dangerous the chairs were, as they could turn over quite easily.

> *I won't have it in my room, I haven't got a chair in my room, because they are dangerous. I have fallen off it twice. And I'm quite stable. When I argued about it, and because I have got back problems as well, when I argued about it and then I had a normal chair in my room for quite a while, but when the room got searched then they took the chair off me and said that I must have one of these plastic bucket things. So, I'd rather not have any.*
>
> Manda

This lack of suitable furniture was recognised as a problem within the prison, as was the knowledge that the women often sat on their beds. The beds were more stable than the chairs but given that the mattresses compressed easily, sitting on the bed caused the mattresses to degrade even more quickly. This made sleeping a deeply uncomfortable experience and contributed towards them having more back ache. I asked a number of the governor grade staff about the furniture and there was a recognition that it was unsuitable for older people and actively contributed to their aging pains of imprisonment.

> *One thing I would change, if I was able to, is the plastic seating in the women's rooms. Because having sat in it myself, I know I'm not old, I'm not young, but I'm not old, it's not comfortable at all. And if we're expecting people to sit in that, and to have their meal, to sit in that to do study, it doesn't lend itself to allowing you to be productive. Is that just an issue for the older women? No, I don't think it is. I don't think that the*

*quality of the chair that we give is very good. It's just a one-piece plastic moulded seat that actually if you sit on it, you can't get your back or the back of your bum against the seat, you are sliding off all the time. Now if we were to break that down and say, well if you were enhanced you could have a different chair, that might be a way round it, I don't know. […] But with things like that we're kind of stuck with that cos it's a national contract and a national policy. Unless there's something from the doctor, […] there are always exceptions. We can, and we absolutely should, deal with the individual cases, but it's not about preferential treatment. It's interesting actually […] What is equality and what is fair? And if you imagine three people 4ft, 5ft and 6ft tall. And they want to watch a football match, but they've got no money, so they decide to lean over a fence. Well, the 6ft one can see no problem, the 5ft one has to stand on their tip toes and the 4ft can't see anything at all. So, the 4ft one is provided with a 2ft step, and the 5ft one is provided with a 1ft step, and the 6 ft is not given anything. You're not discriminating, you're just making everything equal. It's quite funny when you put it like that, you think well you're giving some people something but not giving everyone else it. It's not their fault they're 6ft tall. So sometimes, it's not always about equal treatment, it's about fair treatment. So, I think going back to the subject of the chairs I think with the older population if they needed to have a different chair, because of back issues or whatever it might be we'd have to look at it, we'd have to look at it.*

Governor Sam

Here the governor was able to articulate clearly his knowledge that the furnishings in the prison were unsuitable and indeed uncomfortable. He had attempted to sit in the chairs himself and was aware that they were substandard. He was also aware that the older women were suffering with additional aches and pains as a direct result of their incarceration, due to a combination of being locked in their cells for excessive periods of time and having no suitable furniture to sit on. So, here the argument of institutional thoughtlessness is perhaps inapplicable.

Institutional thoughtlessness allows people's needs to be overlooked because they have not been considered. Here we can see that clearly considerable thought had been given to the issues with the furniture. Despite having articulated his knowledge of the unsuitability of the furniture, Governor Sam

did not offer any solutions to address this issue. Instead, he focused on the institutional processes that he felt were intractable.

Firstly, he pointed to the issue that the furniture was provided via a national contract that they were unable to change. However, this was not the case as the chairs were not used in other prisons that I visited, nor had any of the women seen these chairs used anywhere except for a prison segregation unit. Also, this statement went against the aims of the white paper that gave governors control over their budgets in a move away from centralised contracts.

What is more telling was that he was able to convey, in perhaps an inappropriate analogy for discussing ageing women's infirmities and inequalities, why some people might need additional resources. Yet he was unable to comprehend that his argument could equally advocate giving all of the older women better furniture. Rather than explaining why all older people should not have an adequate chair, his analogy could explain why, due to their age, all the older women should be given furnishings that were more comfortable and provided support.

Again, the point was reiterated that the needs of the individual could be accommodated if there were medical grounds, but without the understanding that pre-emptive action would prevent the health of the older people deteriorating to the point where it became a medical issue. By giving the women more suitable furniture, their needs could be addressed before they deteriorated into a physical problem. Providing the older people with suitable furnishings is not about giving someone something that they do not need; it is about ensuring that the impacts of prison are not felt more harshly by someone due to their age. So, the needs of the older women here were not being overlooked because they were not being considered; they were considered, but

institutional processes were blamed for the prisons' inability to address those needs.

Additionally, this assumed policy of equality of outcome placed the responsibility of getting their needs met firmly with the older people, by maintaining that older people could have something, as long as it was sanctioned by a doctor. This is a process which, as I described earlier, requires the older people to be active and relentless in getting their needs met. In reality the older people, even if they did attempt to have their needs addressed, often gave up as the seemingly intractable process within the prison made it difficult to gain any headway.

The quotation from Governor Sam illustrates that institutional thoughtlessness does not satisfactorily explain why older people's requirements were being overlooked. The governor had thought about the needs of the older women at an individual level and was able to have a discussion about them. So why then, if there was an awareness at the meso level, were these needs not addressed?

The governor pointed to the bureaucracy of the prison service, blaming national contracts as the reason for the lack of suitable chairs, but if governors have been given control over their own budgets, surely they should have been able to take responsibility for the furnishings in their establishment? The pragmatic reality of running a prison is that the governor is left struggling to manage a budget that does not stretch far enough, whilst attempting to meet the needs of a number of competing priorities within the prison. The institutional processes at the macro level established whose needs had priority and therefore perhaps it was these processes that were preventing these thoughts being translated into action.

## Micro

Prisons now have fewer staff, a reality which directly impacts upon the individuals both living and working in the prison. The reduction in staff numbers was often commented on by the older staff. In the male prison it was frequently mentioned to me that their staffing levels had been reduced. I was told by one staff member, 'it's a joke – four of us to manage this lot. We can't keep up with everything they need' (fieldnotes). The decline in numbers had multiple impacts; for the staff, it made them feel more on edge as they could easily be overwhelmed by the prisoners, and, for the prisoners, it resulted in increasing amounts of time locked in their cells and less time on association. More importantly, from a practical point of view, it was impossible to address all the needs of those 120 men with just four staff. This shortage in personnel resulted in the staff only having time to attend to those needs that were either very visible or the needs of those people who vocalised their demands the loudest.

> *If you have got someone who is shouting and screaming at you that they're gonna slit their throat, and you might know for a fact that they're not gonna do it. But because they are making that threat, you have to do something about it. Whereas there might be 5 or 6 other people who are not shouting and having a scream up who are actually probably in a worse place than this fella is, aren't making a fuss, but they just want your help. So, it's just managing that; it's very difficult I think.*
>
> Officer Robert

> *Yeah, I think sometimes the officers get in the habit of the ones that are naughty, that are constantly in their face and in* the *office shouting about things, you take a lot more notice of, because you don't have a choice. And you want, some officers are like if I do that for her then it will keep her quiet and she won't get up to anything. Whereas some of the more quiet ladies, who just put in an app, leave it at that and then don't hear back. They sort of get overlooked because they're not coming in and harassing you all the time. I've noticed that.*
>
> Officer Amelia

These quotations, from staff at both HMP Mans-field and HMP Womans-ville, highlight clearly how in both of these establishments the officers were aware that those prisoners who demanded the most attention were most likely to receive it; demonstrating how the quiet nature of the older prisoners could lead to their needs being disregarded. The low numbers of staff meant that the prison officers had to focus on running the prison as smoothly as possible. Therefore, the needs of the individual could get lost in the melee unless their needs were very visible or inmates were very vocal in drawing attention to those needs, which the older prisoners were not.

Discussions with staff have showed that there was thought about the needs of the older prisoners and an awareness of their difficulties but something at an institutional level was preventing action from taking place. These more junior staff were aware that older people were less likely to protest loudly, but the lack of sufficient numbers of officers on the wings coupled with the requirement to meet the needs of the regime, allowed the needs of those more vocal prisoners to take precedent over the requirements of those quieter individuals.

## Jail Craft – A Disappearing Art

As well as losing staff numbers, the prison also lost valuable experience. The reduction in staff resulted mainly in the loss of the older more experienced officers. These officers were replaced by younger, less experienced staff and this has also had an impact on the ageing prisoner population. The new staff that were employed did not have the knowledge or 'jail craft', that many of the older more experienced prison staff had.

'Jail craft' is a knowledge that has to be learnt; it is developed through experience and results in officers making crucial judgements almost without

thinking (Liebling, cited in House of Commons, 2009). Officers who have good jail craft are able to use their skills to achieve order and security without resorting to excessive force. Jail craft reproduces occupational culture and establishes an institutional memory. It takes time to develop and is learned from watching other more experienced officers; however, if those officers are no longer in post, it will prove difficult for the new recruits to develop these skills.

Jail craft allows officers to maintain control in the prison without resorting to shouting and giving orders. Having good jail craft allows the officers to walk a fine line, not being too lenient that the prisoners can take advantage of the situation but not being so strict and over controlling that it gives them something to rebel against. Here officer Danny explained his use of jail craft.

> *It's a quiet wing. We won't have music playing loud in here. If somebody comes up and says the music last night gov was too loud then I'll, er, I did last week, I got on the tannoy at lock up, told everybody to shut up and listen, everybody stopped to listen, "If I hear any music through the doors I've got a baton, I will split your stereo in half with the baton. You can't have it loud." So, the next thing I know an officer comes down and says, "They're all running in and out of each other's cells to check that the stereos aren't too loud." So, it works, you know. There was no way I was ever going to go into a cell and pull a baton out, but they don't know that they genuinely believed, oh [Officer Danny] he's a bit loopy, he'll come in and bash my stereo to pieces. But there's no harm in that cos it has the effect. And just little things like that just keep a little bit of control. And it's not just me, there's other staff that will do it. Just a little bit of control that's all you need on here, you don't need to walk around bawling out orders, hollering and hooting.*
>
> Officer Danny

Officer Danny had honed his jail craft over his almost 30 years' experience and was able to get the men to behave without the imposition of strict rules. He had developed a gruff exterior but was well liked by the men on the wing, who knew him to be fair and reasonable. They would, very likely, realise that he would not

break their stereos if they were too loud, but equally they understood that playing music too loudly would have some repercussions and they were keen to avoid these. Officer Danny's jail craft allowed him to speak to the men in a way that a less experienced officer might not have been able to accomplish: the latter might have been perceived as behaving in an authoritarian manner, which some prisoners might find difficult to deal with.

New entrants into the prison service were not given the same length of training that the older staff had been given. Training was reduced from 12 weeks to just eight weeks (House of Commons, 2009). Previously there had also been age limits for recruits to join the prison service, to ensure that they had some prior life experience. In 1987, the age limit reduced from 25 to 20 and then in 1999 it was reduced to 18 (ibid). Formerly, new recruits would have been guided by older more experienced staff members in the way of jail craft, allowing them to learn vital aspects of their role on the job. The low levels of staff numbers, combined with the loss of so many experienced staff, meant that the mentoring aspect of the role was almost impossible to undertake.

> *So, week on week, we're now getting one or two new members of staff in consistently. And the potential issue with that is that we have only just settled a mix of [staff from other prisons and] old staff from here, and now we've got in the mix new staff, that we want to give our time and attention to, and to develop and nurture them in the way we want the job done. And the individuality of our prison, cos you'll learn the basics at college, but here is different. I don't think we are able to give all the time to them, at the moment, that we should. I think there are, not all of them, but some are potentially learning bad habits from our less effective staff. And that's my job, as the governor of the area, and my CM's job, to reign that in and to deal with that. But you very much feel that you are firefighting sometimes and I would love to be more proactive. [...] And that absolutely involves supporting our newer staff. Because if you've got a new member of staff that's 19, 20 years of age, and they're dealing with a woman of 55, 60, it's very difficult for there to be any common ground. And if you haven't got common ground, starting a relationship that's difficult at the beginning, it is even more difficult. If you throw in some common threads you can break down those barriers quite easily. It's all too easy to say, 'I*

*know exactly how you feel' or 'yeah I've been in a similar situation', but you can't do that unless you're experienced.*

Governor Sam

The above quotation, from Governor Sam, shows how prison management were aware there were differences between the more experienced staff and those new recruits who were joining the service. HMP Womans-ville had recently reopened prior to the research being undertaken, and had an amalgamation of staff from different places, some staff who had previously worked at the prison prior to its closure, others from a recently closed women's prison and some from another nearby prison. Additionally, they were receiving new recruits into the service. This resulted in a challenge, to attempt to merge these different staff together into a cohesive unit. The governor admitted that due to the low staffing levels, this had not been easy to achieve and that it was detrimental to ensuring that the novice staff members were being properly supervised and adopting the correct work ethos.

The basic training given to new recruits tended to focus on the security aspect of the role; therefore, they arrived at the prison with security as their primary focus. As a result of this they can be suspicious and mistrustful of the prisoners and can be detached from them and reluctant to engage with them (Arnold, 2016). One of the defining aspects of a prison officer's role is their ability to develop a relationship with those prisoners in their care (House of Commons, 2009). Their reluctance to engage with the prisoners can mean that it is then difficult for these new recruits to establish and hone their interpersonal skills that they need to develop their jail craft. This also means that they do not develop relationships with the prisoners, which can present difficulties understanding the requirements of the people to whom they have a duty of care.

As the older prisoners were quieter and less demanding, staff needed to engage with them in order to understand what their needs were so that they could be met. By not developing relationships, these newer entrants may well conclude, as the older people did not complain, that all their requirements were being met.

> *No, you can be in that room for days and days on end. Nobody'll come to the door, nobody'll give you any information or nothing. […] Here, I could be dead in that room in the morning. But nobody would know until roll call at night. You are just really left to it.*
>
> Agnes

Some of the women were aware that the staff were reluctant to engage with them. Those older women, who were more reserved and kept to themselves, felt invisible as they were overlooked by the staff, as this quotation from Agnes demonstrates. If the older women felt that they were unimportant, this was reflected in their diminished feelings of self-worth and lack of trust that the staff would hear and care for them. This made it difficult for them to go and seek out the staff to get their needs met, and impossible for them to gain the information that they needed to be able to function within the prison.

## Security or Care?

Hochschild, (1990) argues that there are two types of emotional labour, 'toe work or heel work' (p. 118). Toe work is intended to make the recipient feel better whereas, heel work involves adopting a sterner attitude towards someone. The job of a prison officer requires combining both toe and heel work into their role, (Peacock, et al., 2018). However, as prisoners are ageing and their needs change, the balance switches towards 'toe work' rather than 'heel work'.

This focus on security by the new recruits can exacerbate the tension between the two parts of their role, security and care, as their focus is on the 'heel work'. The job of the prison staff is not to punish people in prison; their being sent to prison in the first place is their punishment. The job of the staff is to keep the prisoners safe and secure. However, when the focus is on security, the care giving aspect can be overlooked. Part of the art of jail craft that needs to be learnt is perfecting the balance between security and care and knowing which one is required at any given time. As the prison population ages, this will alter the dynamics of the role of prison staff. Ageing prisoners will present less of a security risk to the staff; therefore, keeping order will be less of an issue. However, their requirement for care is likely to increase. This means staff will have to adjust to the transition in their role from custody to care.

These differing attitudes towards the role and how the various staff members managed the people in the prison was evident to the older prisoners. Staff in both HMP Mans-field and HMP Womans-ville spent time in the wing office but in HMP Mans-field there was noticeably more interaction between the staff and the men out on the wings. The staff at HMP Mans-field were older and more experienced and therefore their jail craft gave them the confidence to engage with the men. It was remarked to me on a number of occasions that many of the younger staff members at HMP Womans-ville had tendencies to remain in the office when they were on the wings, and they were reluctant to engage with the women.

> *But otherwise, the staff, I'd say 80% of the staff are very approachable. If they can help you they will. Which is nice. But I did find that they would sit in the office at the end of the wing. Not all of them, some would come up and down and see if you were alright, have a chit chat. A lot of the younger ones don't. They just sit in the office on the computer. But the older ones usually approach you, ask if you're ok, if you've got any problems or any issues. Which is quite nice, but it's how it should be!*

> *Because on C wing, there is no association room. The officers sit in the office and if they shut that door and you knock, if there's two of them in there they'll probably ignore you, which is just rude. Cos if you have got an urgent problem, some women have turned away crying cos they've been ignored. So, I think the officers, for the women, all the women, should be a lot more approachable and have that door open. And walk up and down the landing every now and again!*
>
> Connie

This lack of interaction with the older prisoners, who were quieter, had been noted. This could present a problem for the older people whose needs were often less visible. If the officers were not prepared to engage with the prisoners, they would have no way of knowing if those quieter prisoners were experiencing problems and as a result they would be unable to fulfil their duty of care to them.

The prisoners were aware that they could get different responses to their requests if they directed the request to a more experienced staff member.

> *A couple of the older ones, the older ones were better. They definitely tried for me. If I need something or asked for something. Even with my enhancement. It came back from OMU but got lost. So, one of the older officers, he got me to do another one, handed it to me, signed it, and walked it to OMU and got them to do it. Then he walked back to a governor or a CM. So, the older ones, would try for you. But the younger ones, the younger officers, 'oh yeah put it on an app!' […] It was always nicer to see the older officers on your landing. Even though they still sat in the office, you knew you could go to them with a question. And if they couldn't answer it, they would try for you.*
>
> Connie

The prisoners could easily see the differing attitudes that some of the staff had. In the women's prison the older prisoners tended to gravitate towards the older staff members as they found that these officers were more likely to attempt to assist them with their problems. If they approached the less experienced staff members, the response would often be just to tell them to put in another 'app'.

This process was notoriously fickle and often no responses were received to the apps that were submitted.

In the men's prison, the main wing, with the largest proportion of older men, was staffed by some of the most experienced officers I encountered in the prison. Therefore, the older men on this wing had a better experience, as many of the staff were more mature and were steeped in jail craft. This knowledge and experience meant they were more comfortable engaging with the older men, which allowed them to have a better understanding of the men's needs and any problems they might have. Perhaps, due to their greater knowledge of jail craft or simply an awareness of what the older prisoners were going through, the older staff were perceived by many older prisoners as being more helpful.

The governor also noted the potential difficulties faced by the older people when being managed by staff who were much younger and less experienced, a point that was also made by many staff members. The newer staff were felt to be lacking in life experience which meant that they might find it more difficult to relate to the needs of the older prisoners, as they had yet to experience many of these issues.

> *[A]n older gentleman being told off by a younger person creates issues in itself as well because […] maybe some of them are obviously old enough to be their dads. And maybe the recruitment side of things is maybe not quite right, […] it seems to be they are targeting a very, very young, very inexperienced and very inexperienced in life some of them… an inexpensive work force, as opposed to when I joined the service. Mature man, family man, life skills … is able to converse with people, talk with people. I am not disrespecting the staff they are employing but I just think maybe they are just not targeting the right people… it becomes … cheap labour I think is probably the best way to describe it […] If you have got someone with a particular concern for want of a better word, they are unable to empathise with that particular prisoner because they have not gone through the cycle of life, I had gone through my teens, I had gone*

*through my twenties, my thirties. They don't have the understanding of someone who is dealing with separation or loss of a family member, they don't understand what it becomes for them, because they have not had enough skills in dealing with say a bereavement [...] They don't have empathy with the prisoners.*

Officer Gerry

This quotation from an officer shows how the change in staff is impacting not just the older prisoners but also the staff working in the prisons. Officer Gerry had over 30 years' experience as a prison officer. He voiced his concerns about how the lack of experience of many of the younger staff could impact on their ability to effectively manage many of the older prisoners' needs, as their understanding of what those requirements might be, was not fully formed. He felt that the younger staff's lack of experience put them at a disadvantage as they were unable to notice the problems that some of the older people might be displaying, especially as the more compliant nature of the older people meant that they were less likely to be explicitly vocal about their needs.

Like many of the more experienced staff, he expressed concerns about the training and skills that some of the newer staff had. This was also reflected by the older prisoners themselves, who voiced concerns about the younger staff being less likely to help them.

## Staff Turnover

Both of the prisons were experiencing a high turnover of staff. This also created problems as in some places there were not regular wing staff.

*There tends to be regular wing staff, but I think cos we're getting so many new ones [members of staff] at the moment everyone's trying to find their feet. I think once it's settled and we're not getting so many new staff I think it will be better and you get to know your prisoners.*

Officer Amelia

Having regular staff on the wing allowed the officers to get to know the people on their wing, enabling relationships to form between the prisoners and staff. By getting to know the prisoners, the staff had a better chance of developing a deeper understanding of the people under their care, to know what their needs and requirements were. This knowledge was vital when dealing with the older population who were much less likely to attempt to get their needs met in an overt fashion. This knowledge and understanding of the prisoners on their wing was a key aspect of jail craft. One of the problems with the large turnover of staff was that this knowledge did not build up and could lead to older prisoners, who struggled to get their needs met, being overlooked.

## Discussion

As I have mentioned throughout this thesis there has, as yet, been no policy implemented for older people in prison, despite this issue being raised to successive governments many times over the last twenty years. Therefore, it is valid to ask the question why? Why has this issue been repeatedly overlooked? The government cannot argue that it is unaware of the increasing numbers of older people in prison, as this has been brought to its attention numerous times; so, it is worth exploring the government's seemingly intractable position on this subject.

Government policy is usually thought of as an active process, where decisions are made, and a policy is implemented. However, an alternative theory suggests that government's inactivity can also be a deliberate choice. Doing nothing can be considered, in certain circumstances, to be good policy, especially if a policy might be publicly unpopular (McConnell & 't Hart, 2019). McConnell and 't Hart define an inactive policy as:

> An instance and/or pattern of non-intervention by individual policymakers, public organisations, governments or policy networks in relation to an issue within and potentially within their jurisdiction and where other plausible potential policy interventions did not take place (2019, p. 648).

It would have been a relatively easy process to implement an older prisoner policy so, can the intractable position be interpreted as a purposeful policy not to intervene? The 'calculated inaction' (p. 650) might be a financially based decision, as providing additional resources for older people would add costs to a budget that is already being stretched. Alternatively, the lack of policy might be a way of shifting the problem away from the centre to the individual prisons. This inaction absolves central government from any responsibility for the decision and places the burden on the shoulders of the individual prison governors under the guise of devolution.

On the other hand, the lack of policy makes time in prison more difficult for older people and given the large proportion of prisoners over 50 who are sex offenders, it could be that providing resources for this group is politically unpopular. Potentially, it might be felt that, by the process of less eligibility, prison for these older sex offenders, should be harder as a consequence of the crimes that they have committed. Currently, this is all conjecture but given the government's refusal to implement an older prisoner policy, there are merits to this line of enquiry.

This argument also calls into question the usefulness of institutional thoughtlessness as a concept for explaining the treatment of older people in prison. As I have shown, the government was not unaware of the rising numbers of older people in prison, nor the additional needs that this group of prisoners might have. It has even gone so far as to produce the Model for Operational Delivery (MOD) for older prisoners. This document highlighted to

governors the additional ways in which they might meet the needs of their ageing population. So clearly, by producing this document the government has shown that, to some extent, the needs of the older population have been considered, even if those thoughts have not translated into action. Perhaps a more useful concept with which to view these (in)actions is through the lens of non-performativity.

Ahmed (2006) argues that certain policies or procedures by institutions are non-performative, in that the words or utterances do not bring about the effect that they name. Her point centres around the production of race equality documents written by universities which, she contends, are not there to eradicate racism. They are non-performative documents, their intent was never to address any issues of racism; rather, they reinforce existing inequality and stop positive action being taken, as the presence of such documents allowed the institution to point to the documents as proof that they were not racist.

In a similar way, we could look at documents such as the MOD for older prisoners and consider this to be non-performative too. No action has been enacted as a result of this document because its aim was never to evoke any action. Rather, by its production, the government has been able to say that it had considered the needs of older prisoners and made suggestions that governors might wish to consider, should they have sufficient will and financial resources to implement these suggestions.

This non-performativity does not just occur at the macro level. It also informs decisions that are made at the meso and the micro levels as we can see the non-performative nature of words and actions at the individual prison level too. The governor grade staff I spoke to had considered the needs of the older population. I sat in a room with Governor Tania who showed me the boxes of

fans piled up behind her for the menopausal women. But she failed to see the irony that the fans were in her office, not distributed to the women who needed them. She was able to articulate to me the process that the women had to go through to obtain a fan, but did not understand the obstacles that the women had to overcome to get a fan sanctioned. So, despite being willing and able to attempt to meet the needs of the older women, her endeavours were continually blocked by the institutional processes that prevented the thoughts being translated into action.

## Institutional Ageism?

Institutional racism is defined not as being an overt action but rather a lack of action and a collective failure to provide. If we were to view ageism through this lens, would this provide a better explanation for why the needs of older people were overlooked? Is institutional ageism a more plausible explanation? The evidence presented in this chapter suggests that the needs of older people were considered by staff at the meso and micro level. Prison staff did not individually discriminate against people because of their age, nor deliberately set out to make their time in prison more difficult but the institutional processes collectively worked to produce this outcome. The prison service as an institution, was failing to provide an appropriate and professional service to the older prisoners because of their age. As, through its policy of equality for all, it failed to make adequate provision for older people due to the different and specialised needs which they had. In the following chapter I consider these points and question whether, rather than being institutionally thoughtless, is the prison service institutionally ageist instead?

# Chapter Eleven - Institutional Thoughtlessness or Institutionally Ageist?

Throughout this thesis the concept of institutional thoughtlessness has been used in an attempt to understand how and why the needs of older people in prison have been overlooked. However, there is a question as to whether this concept can fully explain these shortcomings within the prison service? I now consider if the concept of institutional ageism might offer a better explanation as to why older prisoners are consistently overlooked. I explore and define the concept of institutional ageism. Then by critically examining the concepts of institutional thoughtlessness and institutional ageism against the key findings from the research, at the macro, meso and micro level, I will explore which concept best helps our understanding as to why the needs of older prisoners were so consistently ignored. In order to do this, I examine how these concepts have been developed and defined, so that I can identify the distinctive markers of institutional thoughtlessness and institutional ageism. To find the distinctive characteristics of institutional discrimination (e.g. ageism), I examine the concept of institutional racism.

## Institutional Thoughtlessness

In chapter two I introduced the concept of institutional thoughtlessness. Before going any further, it might first be helpful to revisit exactly what is meant by the term. Institutional thoughtlessness has been a concept used widely in relation to research undertaken on older people within the criminal justice field, both with respect to older prisoners (Crawley, 2005; Crawley & Sparks, 2005;

Crawley & Sparks, 2006; Hayes, et al., 2012) and older people on probation (Cadet, 2020). It refers to a general pattern of behaviour culminating in the staff in prison unwittingly overlooking the needs of the older people. There is an expectation that the needs of older prisoners are the same as younger prisoners and that they are able to manage the system in the same way as their younger counterparts. As older prisoners are more compliant, they make fewer demands for their needs to be met and therefore their needs can be neglected.

The distinctive characteristic of institutional thoughtlessness is that it is an unconscious action. There is no intent to deliberately disadvantage older prisoners. The harm occurs either because their needs are not considered or because the policies of the prison create disadvantage. Institutional thoughtlessness is found more at the meso and micro level and tends to result primarily in harm to the individual.

## Ageism

Ageism is discrimination against people because of their age. The term was introduced in 1969, describing a form of discrimination similar to those based on sex and ethnicity (Butler, 1969). Ageism is defined as the perpetuation of ageist stereotypes, which disadvantage older people. It is considered to be the last acceptable prejudice, as the stereotypes of old age are widespread in society and are rarely challenged (Royal Society for Public Health, 2018). This type of discrimination can be experienced by all members of society, regardless of their gender or ethnicity. Ageism can occur at the micro level, interpersonally between people, at the meso level within people's social networks or at a macro level through institutional policies and the culture of society (Wyman, et al., 2018).

# Institutional Ageism

Institutional ageism may be thought of as the actions that are inherent within the operations of an institution that discriminate against people on the basis of age, although there is no fixed definition of institutional ageism. Butler (1980) posits that institutional ageism is the 'institutional practices and policies which, often without malice, perpetuate stereotypic beliefs about the elderly, reduce their opportunities for a satisfactory life and undermine their personal dignity (p. 8). One example might be an enforced retirement age. Older people are forced out of the job market, through the perpetuation of the ageist stereotype that they are less capable of working.

However, perpetuating stereotypes is not the only way an institution can be considered to be institutionally ageist. Some organisations do not provide services for older people or consider their needs. Healthcare systems worldwide have been accused of being institutionally ageist as they restrict older people's ability to gain treatment. This denial of treatment is as a result of the structures and practices that are in place, that consider people to be unsuitable for some treatments due to their age (Wyman, et al., 2018).

The varying descriptions for institutional ageism shows that the concept has perhaps been underdeveloped. To consider its meaning more fully it can be helpful to examine the definition of another more thoroughly studied institutional form of discrimination. The concept of institutional racism was scrutinised in great depth and defined by the Macpherson (1999) report. The concept of institutional ageism can be more fully developed by considering the definition of institutional racism and understanding how that definition was reached.

## Institutional Racism

Prior to the Macpherson report, institutional racism was a term that was used but had no fixed or clarified definition. When considering racism, the inquiry acknowledged that generally, police officers did not exhibit overt displays of racist behaviour but that the racism was more subtle and could be found in the systems of the Metropolitan Police. As the majority of police officers were white, the culture of the police force was reflecting those white officers' experiences (p. 6.28). Macpherson defined institutional racism as:

> The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people (p. 6.34).

One notable point made to the inquiry was that the principle of sameness was no longer valid; it was not sufficient to treat everyone the same, people should be treated according to their needs (p. 6.18). By considering how the definition of institutional racism was reached, it is possible to observe and draw parallels between the two types of institutional discrimination.

By using this more nuanced definition of institutional racism and applying it towards institutional ageism, we can develop the concept of institutional ageism and define it as:

> The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate service to people because of their age. This can be seen or detected in the processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and ageist stereotypes which disadvantages older people.

We can see that thoughtlessness is a component of this institutional discrimination, but on its own, it does not capture the breadth of mechanisms

through which discrimination against older prisoners occurs. The distinctive feature of institutional ageism, relative to institutional thoughtlessness, is that although both concepts are unconscious, institutional ageism encompasses a broader span. It takes place at the macro level and is found in the policies and processes of the prison service. Given the high-level nature of these policies, institutional ageism causes harms that are more widespread as they impact the whole group rather than just the individual.

Having defined these concepts I now consider the key findings of the research through the lens of institutional thoughtlessness and institutional ageism, to ascertain which concept is most useful in understanding the experiences of older people in prison. I will also explore the intersectionality of these concepts to highlight the gendered dimension to ageing in prison, to see if the concepts of ageism and thoughtlessness are clearer for men or women.

## Pains of Isolation

In chapter six I discussed the pains of isolation, how the older prisoner's social isolation increased due to their inability to form social alliances. The older men and women in the research expressed a desire to be able to mix more easily with people of a similar age. They found the interactions with younger prisoners difficult. Notwithstanding the noise and the threat of violence, either perceived or real, the older people keenly missed the ability to have shared experiences. People tend to form their social groups by 'choice-based homophily' (Melamed, et al., 2020), where they seek out people based on their similarities. These could relate to age, social class, ethnicity, or religion. In prison your ability to select your own social grouping is greatly constrained by the prison regime, which limits the choice of all prisoners as to who they can include in their social groups. But for the older people, as a minority within the

two prisons where the research was conducted, their ability to find people they wished to spend time with was even more limited.

The prison service in general is opposed to accommodating older residents together. Some prisons have wings for older people, but they are not widespread throughout the estate. Prison policy remains firmly entrenched in the idea that older people have a calming influence on the population, and where it is true that wings with an older population are quieter and more compliant, having a small number of older prisoners on a wing does nothing to alter the more volatile atmosphere of that wing.

Institutional thoughtlessness implies an inadvertent indifference, that the prison staff are unaware that this policy is disadvantaging the older prisoners. While there were certainly some junior members of staff who were unaware of how difficult it could be for the older people on the wings, the quotation below illustrates how most of the senior members of staff were cognisant of the difficulties that the older people faced when living alongside the younger prisoners. Therefore, this refusal to consider older prisoner wings was not done unwittingly.

> *I think generally the older population appreciate being located in an area where there isn't the hustle and bustle and the noise and the hi-jinks that a lot of the younger population gets up to. It's not about segregating people, cos actually the older population brings stability to a landing of younger people. But we absolutely have to think about their needs and not use them as a calming influence. They generally prefer to be on a landing where they can be settled and calm and do their own thing.*
>
> Governor Sam

When questioned about these issues, many of the staff provided examples of how the older people were more vulnerable and on occasions told me how the older people were being bullied by younger prisoners. Therefore, in this situation, where the disadvantages for older people were understood,

institutional thoughtlessness does not fully account for the refusal to accommodate older people together. If we apply the concept of institutional ageism we can observe how the application of ageist stereotypes, that older people have a calming influence on the wing, is contributing to the prisons reluctance to house older people together.

Another reason routinely given by the staff for the lack of older prisoners' accommodation was that it would be like '*living in an old peoples home'* and that the older people would not want to live amongst a load of *'old farts'*. This ageist stereotype was routinely presented by a number of staff and conjures up an image of very old people. However, due to the nature of the prisons, none of the establishments held very old prisoners. The majority of the men in HMP Mans-field were between 50 and 65, with only two men over that age; similarly, in HMP Womans-ville, of the women aged over 50 only one woman was over 70. Therefore, this ageist characterisation of elderly and infirm people sitting around waiting to be cared for was inaccurate, as in these prisons the cohort were almost all physically fit and able. The atmosphere would have certainly been quieter, but far from the image that was being evoked.

So, institutional ageism promoted the conjuring of these ageist stereotypes, and this in turn allowed excuses to be offered, that explained the prisons refusal to consider the benefits that wings for older prisoners might bring. By presenting older prisoner wings as potential care homes, or citing the calming influence that older prisoners brought to the wings, it allowed the staff to discount the benefits of accommodating older people together. It also led to the disregarding of the challenges that older people faced when they were in a minority within the prison; and how that translated into difficulties forming social groups when there was no one on the wing of a similar age.

Staff were aware that being isolated had a detrimental impact on prisoners' mental wellbeing as well as making their sentence more difficult. In the women's prison, the staff expressed empathy for the problems that the older women might face but did not feel that separate accommodation was necessary. As was mentioned in chapter 10, I was routinely told that as older women were better behaved than younger prisoners, they would be moved onto the enhanced wing more quickly. While it was true that there was a larger proportion of the older women on the enhanced wing, not everyone was able to move to the wing as it was at the top of four flights of stairs and therefore was not accessible to everyone.

One elderly woman, Ruby, was kept on the induction wing due to her inability to climb the stairs. The induction wing had a constantly changing population, as the women would spend the first few nights there before being moved onto the main wings; this reduced Ruby's ability to make any social connections. The atmosphere was also more unsettled and emotionally charged as the women were arriving at the prison and did not know what to expect. She complained about the noise and told me that she spent most of her time in her cell because 'it was just too much out there' (fieldnotes).

Again, thoughtlessness does not fully explain the decision to house the enhanced women on the top floor. When asked about the increasing ageing population, Governor Sam told me how in 1994, when the prison was housing men, they turned the fourth floor into an older prisoners' wing, which he noted was an absurd place to house older men.

> *If I look back now to when I started we actually had a landing up on the 4s south which was for older prisoners, and we were a male establishment then. And you think well this is ridiculous, you've got your oldest population up four flights of stairs.*
>
> Governor Sam

Clearly, he was aware of the difficulties of housing older people on the fourth floor, but still as the governor in charge of residence, he continued to use this area as the enhanced accommodation. When I pointed out that many of the older population were also on the enhanced wing and having to climb up the four flights of stairs, he responded that there was a lack of space in the prison and that only the top floor had sufficient space to hold the number of enhanced prisoners that they had, showing how pragmatism was also a barrier to enacting thoughtfulness.

In addition to not being accessible to everyone, this wing did not have any association area, so it did not give the women anywhere to congregate. This meant that even if they were on the enhanced wing, they would still be more likely to remain in their rooms, as there was nowhere else to go. The staff were aware of these issues and there was much discussion about having a wellbeing area where people could associate; however, this talk did not result in any action.

The women's group that I ran during the research offered the only opportunity for the older women to come together. The staff recognised the positive impact that the group was having on the women.

> *I've seen some improvements in some of the women just by engaging with it, some of our more problematic over-50s I think have come right down in their kind of risk because I think they're mixing with people who they relate to.*
>
> Governor Tania

The prison staff were very positive about the over 50s group, and I was repeatedly told '*it's really good and we will continue it when you go'.* Yet despite the recognition of the benefits of the social group after I left the prison the group did not continue to run, as I understand it, due to staffing issues.

Institutional thoughtlessness did not on its own explain this failure to address the needs of older people at a meso and micro level. In some cases, arguably the staff did not really consider what it must be like to be a minority within the prison, as the older people were. They perhaps did not think that making social connections would be more difficult for the older people than the younger prisoners, as the latter represented the majority of the prison population. But, for many of the challenges facing the older people, it was evident that the staff had thought about these problems, yet nothing had happened to address them. Institutional ageism offered a more rounded explanation for this lack of action. The perpetuation of ageist stereotypes and lack of policies that consider the needs of the older population made the lives of those older prisoners more difficult and compounded their pains of isolation.

## Pains of Loss

In chapter seven I explored the pains of loss as they were experienced by older prisoners. All of the older people experienced loss and separation from their families, but these losses were gendered as the older women articulated and felt these losses more deeply than the men. The older women felt the dual loss of both their parents and their children. They worried about the health of their very elderly relatives, whilst also worrying about their fledgling children who were left on their own when their mothers were imprisoned. They were in the same position as all women in prison, often held great distances from their homes and families, but in the unique situation of having parents too elderly to visit, and children unable to make the journey on their own.

The women's prisons ran family days so that mothers could spend an extended period of time with their children, and the focus of this policy was on the importance of mothers remaining in contact with their young children.

However, for the older women it was equally important for them to remain in contact with their wider families too. Most of the older women's families lived so far away that, even if they were able to make the journey, the time that it would take made it impractical to travel that distance for a visit that lasted less than two hours. As Gwen told me, *'It's too far, five hours here, five back […] they can't do it.'* As the prison policy focused on women with younger children, little consideration was given to the needs of the older women. No provision was made for the women to address their inability to maintain their family contact. Some of the older women were not receiving any visits because their family was too far away and in many cases their relatives were too old to make the trip, but again their ability to maintain family connections was overlooked.

The men tended to be housed in prisons that were closer to their families, but additionally they also had telephones in their rooms, making communication with their families easier to sustain. The women had to use phones on the landing which meant private conversations were impossible and it was often too noisy for some of the older women to be able to hear. As discussed in chapter seven, Doris was not receiving any visits and her only way of communicating was by letter or telephone. She struggled to be able to talk to her husband on the phone because of the noise but her inability to either see or speak to her husband was not recognised.

By way of comparison, there was a policy in place for foreign national prisoners and the difficulties of maintaining contact was considered for them. Those foreign national prisoners, who had not had a visit in the previous four weeks, were allowed a free phone call. Yet the needs of the older population were not considered in the same way, despite the staff at governor level displaying an innate level of understanding of these issues. Governor Tania made the point to

me about how foreign national prisoners were asked about their situation and what the prison could do to help them maintain their family ties. She could see the parallel between older prisoners and foreign nationals and how this lack of family contact could be detrimental to them. She suggested to me that *'maybe [we should] see older people and ask the same kind of questions.'* However, as there was a policy in place for foreign national prisoners this allowed their needs to be considered, whereas the lack of policies for older people meant that no accommodation was made for the older men and women who were not receiving visits.

The staff were aware of the unique problems faced by the older women, indicating that institutional thoughtlessness again did not adequately explain why the older people's needs were not met. Governor Tania recognised that leaving behind 18-year-old children was hard on both the women and the children. When discussing Selina's son, she acknowledged that '*in some respects he probably needs her more than he ever has.'* There was a recognition from Governor Sam that the focus was on mothers and children: *'we keep family contact quite small and it's mother and child or mother and children'*. Despite this awareness of the difficulties facing older women, little was done to address these issues. Governor Sam's solution was to extend the visits to include grandchildren. This solution benefitted some of the oldest women who had grandchildren, but it overlooked the women like Selina, who had left a young adult behind. It also disregarded people like Doris who had no children, just her husband who was too unwell to make the long trip to visit her.

In this way institutional ageism can be seen in the policies and practices of the prison. Where policies exist, such as the policy discussed above for foreign national prisoners, their needs are considered. Where policy is lacking, the

needs of these groups are overlooked. So, the policy provides the scaffolding which in turn forces the gaze of the prison to address these needs. The prison policy focuses on the needs of younger women with children, because the assumption is that the older women's children are also older and therefore their requirement to have contact is somehow diminished. Thus, the prison failed to provide an appropriate service to the older people that would assist them in maintaining their family ties because of institutionally ageist assumptions about exactly what needs the older prisoners might have and what deserving family ties should look like.

## Pains of Ageing and Deteriorating Health

In chapter eight I discussed the pains of ageing and deteriorating health. Here the lack of thought for the needs of older people was overwhelming. As people age it is expected that there will be some decline in their physical abilities. Fading eyesight is a predictable part of the ageing process. However, the inability for the older people to gain access to optician appointments made their experience in prison more difficult to endure, as their inability to see and to read properly impacted on their ability to take part in the regime. Again, this was not something that was unknown; the staff mentioned to me on more than one occasion that there were problems with the residents getting glasses and how difficult that made the older people's time.

> *I know sometimes they got a lot of problems with getting glasses in and stuff like that, that can take ages. Or getting healthcare appointments and stuff like that.*
>
> Officer Amelia

The majority of people, as they get older, experience aches and pains associated with ageing but the inability to gain timely access to medical care exacerbates these problems. Owing to the absence of policy for older people, there was

seemingly an acceptance, by both staff and prisoners, that this was something that just needed to be endured. The WHO has called for planning so that older prisoners could be given easier access to medical care (Williams, et al., 2014). Yet, rather than having policies that addressed the additional healthcare needs of older people, the prison service actively disadvantaged the health of older prisoners by expecting them to navigate a healthcare system that sometimes felt as though it was designed to be inaccessible. The applications that disappeared into the system and the delays and difficulties getting to see a doctor all coalesced to limit people's capacity to gain medical attention. The older people felt helpless and there was a feeling that the institutional processes were set up for them to fail.

It was not just the lack of access to medical care that impacted more heavily on the older prisoner population. As I have discussed in both chapters eight and ten, the physical surroundings and the inadequate seating and mattresses all coalesced with the extended periods locked in their cells, when these prisoners were unable to move around properly. This intensified those usual ageing aches and pains and made their time in prison physically more difficult to endure.

As I discussed in the previous chapter, staff were aware of these issues, but a lack of policy and a lack of impetus to do anything about it, prevented any action being taken. The convoluted practice of obtaining any special furniture meant that the older people were resigned to failure. Provision of a different mattress or chair would only be agreed to if sanctioned by a doctor, but a doctor would only agree to this if the prisoners were very ill. As these ageing prisoners were not ill per se; they merely required adequate furniture to prevent their ageing pains becoming worse and their prison sentence harder, they were unable to make any headway in this process.

The policy of treating everyone according to their needs that is the mantra of the prison staff, only worked for those people with very visible needs. The ageing prisoner, who struggled to sit and sleep, who woke each morning to the all too familiar pain, was being overlooked. This was not because thoughtlessly the staff were unaware of these issues, but because the ageist policies that permeate the prison service, a prison service designed primarily for young men, allowed these needs to be disregarded.

Following conversations with staff, it was not possible to say that these issues were thoughtlessly overlooked. It was clear from the data that there had been thought and discussion about what the older people were going through, yet no action was taken to address their situation. The prisons firmly contended that they effectively managed the needs of the individual, yet those individual men and women were suffering physically due to the conditions in which they were living, making their sentence more difficult to endure, simply because of their age. The mantra of equality, of treating everyone from a principle of sameness, disadvantaged the older population because their needs were less visible and because they were less likely to demand that their needs be met.

## Gendered Pains of Imprisonment

When Butler (1969) first discussed ageism, he compared it to both racism and sexism. I have revealed how the ageist policies disadvantage the older prisoners, but I have also highlighted throughout the thesis how the institutionally sexist policies within the prison service intersect with ageism and make the time of the older women in prison far more difficult. The older women, as a minority within a minority, experienced more severe challenges in prison, as the prison service does not provide an adequate service for any women. They were held further from home than the men were, they were held

in higher security establishments than was necessary for most of the crimes that they had committed and in almost all cases these prisons were not designed with women in mind. In addition to these issues, the older women then had to contend with the additional pains of imprisonment, their pains of loss, their pains of isolation and their additional gendered ageing pains of imprisonment. They had to struggle with their physiological ageing conditions, in an environment that did not cater for their needs, and they suffered the shame and ignominy of having to discuss, what would usually be a personal matter, with a range of prison officers.

The staff in the women's prison were certainly aware of the difficulties that the women faced. They displayed concerns for the needs of the women, yet the rules and procedures that were put in place, such as the method of obtaining a fan for menopausal women, were so overly complicated and drawn out that the bureaucracy set them up to fail, resulting in the fans not being distributed to the women. All of these factors culminated in making the experience for older women significantly more difficult as the sexist and ageist nature of the prison service policies combined.

## Thoughtless or Ageist?

Perhaps the answer to this inaction lies in the macro level policies. Older prisoners were absent from any prison policy, and this invisibility became ingrained in the processes that governed the prisons. Where older men and women were in the minority, there was no impetus to consider their collective needs and they were often overlooked, as other more demanding factions within the prisons insisted that their needs were addressed.

Institutional ageism is not an overt action, where the individual staff members deliberately take actions that make the lives of older people more difficult. It is the failure to provide an appropriate service to people because of their age. It manifests itself in the processes that are embedded within the prison service, and through these processes, the needs of the older prisoner population are neglected. This all stems from the failure to produce a policy for older prisoners and from the failure to recognise that although older people are not a homogenous group, there are a range of needs that are common amongst them; by not acknowledging these requirements it makes their sentence more difficult to endure.

There is no justification for saying that these needs were overlooked due to a lack of knowledge. Reports from arm's-length bodies and select committees have reiterated these points for many years. PSO 4800 contained a section on older women that pointed to some of the difficulties they might face, yet when this was replaced in June 2021 with the Women's Policy Framework there was no longer a section for older women. Indeed, there was no specific mention of older women anywhere in the document. It is this invisibility within the policy that translates into their invisibility within the prison environment.

This lack of policy meant that the institutional processes that governed the prison prevented any action taking place, even if there was a will to act. What resulted was 'non-performative thoughtfulness,' where thought was put in, problems were considered, solutions were offered, yet the institutional processes did not allow any action. The older prisoner Model of Operational Delivery was a striking example of non-performative thoughtfulness. This document offered a range of solutions that governors could employ for their older population, yet its purpose was non-performative. Its result was not that

governors implemented those examples of best practice, rather it appeared to be an exercise designed to show that thought had been given. This document could be referred to as evidence that the prison service was not institutionally ageist, but it did not provide any policy that the institutions were required to implement. What ensued was institutional non-performative thoughtfulness; and the evidence of its non-performative nature could be seen at the macro level, in the lack of age specific institutional policies; at the meso level, in the individual prison policies disregarding the needs of older people; and down to the micro level where there was recognition of the problems that older people were facing but a failure to implement any solutions.

## Institutional Non-performative Thoughtfulness

The purpose of this chapter has been to discuss which concept best helped to understand why the needs of older people have historically been overlooked within the prison system. However, the concepts of institutional ageism and institutional thoughtlessness are inextricably linked because thoughtlessness is just one component of institutional ageism; and together these elements resulted in institutional non-performative thoughtfulness which permeated the prison service at all levels; where any thought about the needs of older people was prevented from being converted into action due to the institutional processes. At a macro level the prison service can be viewed as institutionally ageist, as it failed to provide an appropriate service for the older people within the system. This failure to provide was ingrained in the policies, (or lack thereof) that the prison service produced to address the needs of people as they aged in prison. Institutional thoughtlessness occurred at the meso and micro level, as the institutional ageism became embedded in the policies of the prison, and the individuals were unable to effect any change, even if they were minded

to do so, as the systemic policies of the prison did not allow for any meaningful change to be implemented.

# Chapter Twelve – Concluding Thoughts

In this thesis I have argued that the pains of imprisonment for older people were qualitatively different than for their younger counterparts. I have demonstrated that older people faced additional pains as a result of their age but that those pains were not felt equally. Some of the additional pains of imprisonment were gendered as the older women felt them more keenly.

Older prisoners were more likely to experience the pains of isolation due to their greater difficulty forming social groups as they were not routinely housed on wings alongside other people of a similar age. Living alongside much younger prisoners could be unsettling due to the continuous noise and disruption they generated. The older, more compliant prisoners preferred to keep their heads down and get on with their sentence and found the constant disturbance problematic.

If they were given the opportunity, the older people would come together to form cohesive social groups, that would make their time in prison easier to bear. In HMP Mans-field some of the older men were fortunate to be on a wing with a large number of people of a similar age. In this situation they were successfully able to form social groups that helped ease their pains of isolation. Unfortunately, not everyone was lucky enough to be in that position; for those older people, held on wings without anyone close to their age, such as Johnny and Ruby, it was much more difficult to cope with their time in prison.

There were many pains of loss that were experienced by the older prisoners, but these pains were deeply gendered as the women were suffering the losses

more deeply. The older women were more vocal about the loss of their families, their ageing parents and their barely adult children and the guilt that the women felt at leaving them both. The older women believed that these losses were permanent as the age of their parents left them with the real possibility that they may not be alive by the time they were released. Their children were also moving on with their lives and would be autonomous adults by the time the women were released, so this precious time to spend with their families would be lost forever.

For the women, the pains of loss were exacerbated by their difficulties in maintaining contact with their families. They did not have phones in their rooms, as the men did; instead, they had to use communal phones on the wing. The presence of other prisoners made private conversations impossible, while the noise on the wing made it difficult to hear.

The men seemed more at ease with the loss of their family, with some preferring to do their sentence without visits at all. This potentially was a display of masculine bravado or perhaps a reflection of the gendered roles that the women embodied, that marked them as the primary carer for both their children and their ageing parents. For the men, these roles held less meaning and often their partners remained at home with any children, so they knew they were being cared for, while the women suffered from the guilt of having left them behind.

Another loss that was gendered was the loss of their sense of self. The men felt certain of where they would go after prison and what their life would entail, whereas the women struggled to imagine what their life would be like after prison. They were unable to envisage how they would live and what they would do for income. Many of the women had lost their homes while they were in

prison, along with all of their possessions and this added to their loss. Their identities, all that they were and all that they had been, had been stripped away by imprisonment. They were infantilised by the prison and reduced to their prisoner status. The loss of their roles and their identities left the women with a loss of their self, and this left them unable to contemplate what their future would be.

The third additional pain of imprisonment that the older people suffered was the pains of ageing and deteriorating health. The declining health of the older people did not have to be life threatening in order to make their time in prison more challenging. The expected aspects of ageing could make life more arduous for them. Fading eyesight or hearing loss, when compounded with an inability to access adequate healthcare in a timely manner, could deeply impact upon the older person's ability to participate in the prison regime. The delays in receiving medication could have longer term, more detrimental impacts on the health of the older prisoners, more so than for their younger counterparts.

The older prisoners exhibited a fatalistic attitude to these challenges; they were accepting of their situation and saw no purpose in attempting to fight against the system to get their needs met. Instead, they quietly endured their circumstances, whereas the younger more vocal prisoners drew attention to their wants and needs. This resulted in the needs of the younger, louder prisoners being prioritised above the needs of the older people. The older people also had to endure the impact that the physical environment had upon them. The furnishings and the extended periods of lock up exacerbated their ageing aches and pains, making their sentence more onerous for them.

Again, while all older prisoners were experiencing some pains of ageing health, these pains were not felt equally, and some pains of ageing health were only felt

by the older women. Those women who were going through the menopause faced additional pains as they struggled to cope with their symptoms. These were compounded by the complicated institutional processes that they were forced to go through in order to obtain access to appropriate medication or a fan. These processes were protracted and added an additional layer of bureaucracy, which further reduced the older women's autonomy to manage their own health. Although the prison reported that a menopause clinic was offered, none of the women I had spoken to were aware of the clinic or had attended it.

This reduced autonomy and increased bureaucracy caused the women additional frustrations in the prison. Not only did they have to overcome these additional obstacles, but the women felt they were not believed. Their word was not considered sufficient; they were unable to simply say that they needed something for the symptoms of their menopause. This had to be sanctioned by others in order to be believed, further denying them their agency. This process infantilised them and forced them to discuss their biological problems with a range of staff, leaving them embarrassed by this visible sign of ageing.

## Mitigation

Although I have shown at length the additional pains of imprisonment that the older men and women suffered from as a result of the ageist prison processes. I have also illustrated how the older people were not without some agency in this situation. The older people were able to find some coping mechanisms that helped to mitigate those additional ageing pains of imprisonment. They did this by finding a benefit or a purpose to their sentence, by working, or by forming social groups with other people of a similar age. These three methods were not exclusive and many of the older people were employing all three ways of

coping. The older people attempted to find some benefit in what they did with their time in prison. In some extreme cases, such as with Alfie, they claimed prison had not ruined their lives but saved them. The positives of prison again separated along gendered lines as the men focused on improving themselves physically, perhaps to present their own ageing version of masculinity, while the women changed and improved themselves mentally.

Another way the older men and women attempted to mitigate their pains of imprisonment was through work. Both the men and women used work as a coping mechanism; almost without exception all of the older men and women I engaged with worked full time. Work provided the older people with a sense of normality and was used as a way of mentally escaping the confines of the prison. Often the older people had 'prized roles' which gave them greater autonomy, allowing them to move more freely around the prison and onto different wings. Both men and women worked but the roles available in the prison were more gendered. The men's roles were in horticulture, warehouses or in workshops, whereas the roles available for the women involved sewing, photography and call centre work.

The older men could perform masculinity via these more masculine roles. Some of the men's roles, such as the bike workshop or horticulture, attracted larger numbers of older men and, in the old-fashioned male environment, the men found a place where they could escape from the prison and take pride in roles that produced something tangible. This need to work was not without issues. Many of the roles in the men's prison demanded full attendance. The men were only eligible to work in the bike workshop if they committed to working all the available sessions. This often meant the older men were unable to attend gym

sessions or obtain their medication, which impacted on their physical wellbeing.

Similarly, for the women work was not a panacea for all the pains of imprisonment. The women's roles did not afford them the ability to come together with other people of a similar age, as was the case with the men. However, despite the lack of interaction in the workspace, women displayed an overwhelming need to work, more so than the men. For the older women, work was a coping mechanism that distracted them from their emotions. However, as with the men, the long work hours left them unable to take part in physical exercise such as going to the gym or yoga classes. These sessions were usually run during the day and because of this, they neglected their physical health in order to protect their mental well-being.

The third way in which the older people mitigated the pains of imprisonment was by, where possible, forming social groups with other older prisoners. Where the older people shared a wing with other people of a similar age, they were afforded the opportunity to build their own social networks, away from the younger elements on the wing. The comfort that they gained from these friendship groups was evident but, not all of the older people were so fortunate and were placed on a wing with only one or two other people of a similar age. This refusal to house older people together made the prison sentence significantly more difficult for those older people. The older women embraced the over 50s group and used this as an opportunity to spend time away from the wings with their contemporaries as there was no other outlet for them to gather together within the prison. The group normalised their time and offered them the opportunity to socialise together in a way that they found relaxing and a release from the strain of the wing.

## Conceptual Shortcomings of Thoughtlessness

Throughout this thesis, I have used the concept of institutional thoughtlessness to attempt to explain why the needs of older people were overlooked, but time and time again I have seen that the needs of the older people were actually thought about. Yet, despite this consideration, due to the policies and processes of the prison and the prison system, nothing happened. This has led me to the conclusion that institutional thoughtlessness, on its own, is not a sufficient concept to explain why these older people were so neglected.

Using the Macpherson definition of institutional racism and applying it to institutional ageism, provides a wider concept by which to view these failings. Institutional ageism encompasses thoughtlessness so, it is not that one concept is more useful than the other, but rather that the thoughtlessness towards the needs of older people, is simply a part of the ageism that is prevalent in a prison system that was designed for young men. The lack of an older prisoner policy creates an inequality that permeates, not just at the macro level, but was felt throughout the system at meso and micro levels too. The mantra that a policy is not necessary, as the needs of the individual are met, was often repeated; yet, the needs of older men and women were neglected as their needs were not visible. Moreover, their small numbers meant that, without a policy to support them, they were invisible within the system.

This absence of policy combined with the inadequate funding of the prison estate and the lack of experienced staff. The scarcity of jail craft was felt more keenly by the older prisoners who were less likely to demand that their needs be met. The staff coped with inexperience and under-staffing by operating in a reactive way, dealing with the needs that were easiest to see, or most loudly

demanded. These less experienced staff lacked the skills to engage with the older quieter prisoners and to understand that the older people were more likely to require a different style of people management; they were less likely to need strict discipline but perhaps required more of a pastoral element of caring for their needs.

The choice not to implement an older prisoner policy thus far, has increased older people's ageing pains of imprisonment. The government is not unaware of the increasing numbers of older people in prison, nor of their different needs. These points have been raised on many occasions. This is why thoughtlessness, on its own, was not a suitable concept. I have revealed how institutional ageism is prevalent within the prison and its policies. This can be seen both by the lack of any older prisoner policy and in the Model for Operational Delivery document for older prisoners which is non-performative. The suggested adaptations for older people have not been enacted, as its effect was merely to show that thought had been given.

Institutional ageism can be perceived both in the refusal to produce an older prisoner policy and in the perpetuation of ageist stereotypes, such as older people having a calming influence on the prison population or the evoking of the image of an old people's home when discussing an older prisoners' wing. These ageist policies disadvantage older people and allow their needs to be unmet, even when those needs are acknowledged and considered at the micro and meso levels. The lack of policy meant that where older prisoners were a minority within the prison, their needs were continually overlooked. What resulted was institutional non-performative thoughtfulness, as the institutional policies, or lack thereof, prevented any consideration of the needs of older people being transformed into action.

For the older women, the intersectionality of age and gender meant that they were a minority within a minority and as such, were invisible within the system, as they were neither sufficient enough in number, nor loud enough of voice, to have their needs met. Sexual discrimination is not a new experience for most women but as they age, older women encounter a combination of sexism and ageism (Neumark, et al., 2019) which made their time in prison palpably harder. Moreover, now that the older women have disappeared completely from the new Female Offender Strategy, their invisibility in the system will become more acute.

## Recommendations

This thesis, as with other work that has been undertaken on the needs of older prisoners, calls upon the government to implement an older prisoners' policy as a matter of urgency. This policy should consider the differentiated needs of older people and should provide prisons with a framework they can use to care for their ageing population. As has been discussed in this thesis, this policy should offer older people the opportunity to reside on older prisoners' wings and ensure that older prisoners are housed in a single area so that they are given the opportunity to form social groups with people of a similar age. The use of older people's groups should also be adopted to help facilitate this.

The policy should also consider the health needs of people as they age and provide older people with appropriate access to preventative medical care. Older people should be provided with suitable furnishings and an appropriate exercise regime that can lessen the accelerated ageing pains of imprisonment that can occur as people age in prison. Furthermore, the specific difficulties of maintaining family contact and the age-related resettlement needs, that older people might experience upon release, should also be considered.

In the same way that Baroness Corston called for a differentiated treatment for women, so should there be a differentiated approach for older people within the criminal justice system. Older people are not a homogenous group, that much is true, but then neither are young offenders, female offenders or foreign national prisoners, yet policies exist for these groups. There are, however, some commonality of issues that are faced by older people, such as the Pains of Isolation, the Pains of Loss and the Pains of Ageing and Deteriorating Health. These ageing pains of imprisonment could be addressed if a policy was actioned that focused on these needs. Until the policy is in place, all the well-intentioned consideration by staff, will continue to result in non-performative thoughtfulness, and the older men and women in our prisons will continue to suffer from the additional ageing pains of imprisonment.

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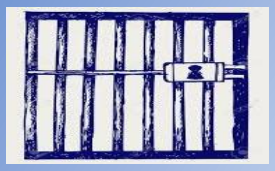
# Appendix i

Link to the NRC application form

https://kar.kent.ac.uk/id/eprint/92612

# Appendix ii

## Older Prisoners Research Project



### Who are you?

- My name is Madeleine Hughes and I am researcher at the University of Kent.

### What are you doing here?

- I am looking at problems facing older people in prison. These could be anything from not having suitable activities, to do to having problems getting around.

### What counts as older?

- In this case its everyone over 50!

### What will that mean to me?

- If you are under 50 – probably not much. Although you might see me around the prison. Part of my study will involve me watching what people are doing. So if you see me around watching people that's why. Watching how people manage in the prison is a key to understanding what some of the problems might be.

### I don't want you to watch me!

- That is fine. You are welcome to tell me this and I will respect your wishes or you can move away from where I am. No one has to be part of the study.

### What if I want to tell you what I think?

- In the 2nd part of the study I will want to talk to some people about their experiences – Both here and at other prisons you may have been in. It you are over 50 I will be looking for volunteers to talk to.

### Do I have to talk to you?

- No not at all. It is up to you. If you want to that is great. But you do not have to.

### I have other questions – how can I ask them?

- There are 3 ways of contacting me:
- If you see me around you can come and ask me.
- Or you can put in a complaint form – addressed to me – and I will answer you directly
- Or you can write to me at the University of Kent, SSPSSR, Gillingham Building, Chatham Maritime, Kent, ME4 4AG

E·S·R·C ECONOMIC & SOCIAL RESEARCH COUNCIL

University of Kent

# Appendix iii

**Interview guide - prisoners**

Initial Opening Question: These are intended to relax the participants and build up a little background information.

*Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?*

*If the participants are reticent in talking this broad general question would be broken down into more specific questions:*

*How long have you been here (at this establishment)?*

*What other prisons have you been in?*

*Do you have family nearby who are able to visit you?*

*Do you have Children?*

*Would you mind telling be how old you are?*

*The next section of questions aims to explore the experiences of these older prisoners.*

*Could you tell me about any age-related issues you have encountered whilst imprisoned?*

*Prompts - In relation to Health Care? Mobility issues?*

*Have you been able to access healthcare?*

*How is your physical health?*

*Do you have any particular aches or pains?*

*Do you work here in prison?*

*If you didn't work what would you be able to do here?*

*Or are you retired? If retired what activities are available to you?*

*Have you engaged with education?*

*What (if any) services have you encountered, either here or at other establishments, that were specifically for older prisoners?*

*Did you use these services?*

*Were they useful?*

*Did they help you?*

*Have you had to share a cell?*

*Do you think there are specific problems facing older prisoners?*

*What are they?*

*Are the issues with mobility? Healthcare? Social Care? Activities?*

*These questions are looking for the thoughts of older prisoners in relation to what different needs older prisoners may have and what services they feel they might be helpful whilst incarcerated.*

*Do you think older prisoners have different needs to younger prisoners?*

*Do they need specific help with mobility? Health care?*

*Should the prison offer specific courses for older prisoners?*

*Do they need specific help before release?*

*What do you feel that prisons could offer that would be most beneficial to older inmates?*

*Would segregation be helpful? An older persons wing?*

*Where do you feel things require improving?*

*Do you think older inmates have been marginalised?*

*Do you feel prison is more of a punishment at your age?*

# Appendix iv

**Interview guide - staff**

*Can you tell me a little bit about your role in the prison?*

*If the participants are reticent in talking this broad general question would be broken down into more specific questions:*

*How long have you been working here (at this establishment)?*

*What other prisons have you worked in?*

*The next section of questions aims to explore their experiences of older prisoners.*

*Do you have much contact with older inmates?*

*Could you tell me about any age-related issues you have noticed with the older population?*

*Prompts - In relation to Health Care? Mobility issues?*

*Can you tell me about aspects of your job that you find difficult to cope with when working with an older population?*

*Do you feel that the ageing prison population has changed your job at all?*

*If yes why?*

*If no – why not*

*What (if any) services have you encountered, either here or at other establishments, that were specifically for older prisoners?*

*Did people use these services?*

*Were they useful?*

*What do you think there are the main problems facing older prisoners?*

*Are the issues with mobility? Healthcare? Social Care? Activities?*

*These questions are looking for the thoughts of staff in relation to what different needs older prisoners may have and what services they feel they might be helpful whilst incarcerated.*

*Do you think the needs of older prisoners are different to younger prisoners?*

*Do they need specific help with mobility? Health care?*

*Should the prison offer specific courses for older prisoners? / Activities within the regime?*

*Do they need specific help before release?*

*What do you feel that prisons could offer that would be most beneficial to older inmates?*

*Would segregation be helpful? An older persons wing?*

*Where do you feel things require improving?*

*Do you think older inmates can be easily overlooked?*

*Do you think that a prison sentence is harder for someone to cope with when they are older?*