

**FACING THE FUTURE:  
AGEING AND POLITICALLY-MOTIVATED  
FORMER PRISONERS IN NORTHERN  
IRELAND  
AND THE BORDER REGION**

**EXPAC**

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## **Preface**

The research on which this report is based was commissioned by the Ex-prisoner Assistance Committee (EXPAC) in Monaghan, and funded under a grant from the European Union Special Fund for Peace and Reconciliation in Ireland (Peace II) through Border Action. The report describes a small survey and interviewed-based study on ageing and former prisoners in Ireland which was conducted in 2007/8. It highlights a range of needs among older ex-prisoners and makes recommendations for further work to address them. The research was carried out by Ruth Jamieson and Adrian Grounds with the assistance of EXPAC.

The introductory section of the report briefly outlines the background and aims of study. Section two describes the number, age and community profile of older former prisoners. Sections three, four and five summarise the methods and key thematic findings. Section six considers the possible implications of our findings and makes recommendations for further work and forms of support.

## **Acknowledgements**

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## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Background of the project**

There is a significant cohort of ageing former paramilitary prisoners in Northern Ireland, who are now, or soon will be, in their fifties or sixties, yet we know little about their lives as older people. Former politically motivated prisoners suffer significant psychological disabilities, ill health and multiple social and economic disadvantages as a result of their criminalisation and their experiences of the conflict and imprisonment. We also know from research on analogous groups that former prisoners' problems are likely to worsen with age. The effects of imprisonment and problems of resettlement for both republican and loyalist ex-prisoners and their families are well documented.<sup>1</sup> For example, we know that politically motivated former prisoners as a group suffer significant psychological disabilities and multiple social and economic disadvantages as a result of their criminalisation, experiences of conflict and imprisonment. They suffer *inter alia* the effects of physical injury, trauma and long-term captivity, family separation (including intergenerational effects) and bereavement as well as the loss of important life chances (adoption, employment, etc.) (Jamieson and Grounds 2002; Shirlow 2001; McEvoy et al 2004). The impacts of incarceration and post-release resettlement are felt not only by those who were imprisoned but also by their partners, children and other family members. In sum, it could be predicted that paramilitary imprisonment directly affected between 100,000 and 200,000 persons in Northern Ireland.

### **1.2 A life course perspective on ageing and social exclusion**

There is clearly a need for research to explore the different dimensions of ageing and exclusion among former prisoners and their families. We think the most appropriate approach to this issue is a life-course perspective. In brief, a life-course perspective understands the passage of a person's lifetime as a social and physical process; it posits the life course as variable *flow* rather than regular and predictable *stages* of the life cycle

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<sup>1</sup> See Jamieson, R. and Grounds, A. (2002) *No Sense of an Ending: The Effects of Imprisonment amongst Republican Ex-prisoners and their families* Monaghan Seesyu Press; Grounds, A. and Jamieson, R. and Grounds, A. T. (2003) 'No Sense of an Ending: Researching the Experience of Imprisonment and Release upon Republican ex-prisoners', *Theoretical Criminology* 7(3): 347-362; McEvoy, K.; Shirlow, P. and McElrath, K. (2004) 'Resistance, Transition and Exclusion: Politically Motivated Ex-Prisoners and Conflict Transformation in Northern Ireland', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 16(3): 646-670; Shirlow, P. (2001) *The State They Are In: An Independent Evaluation* Coleraine: University of Ulster, Social Exclusion Research Unit and Shirlow, P. and McEvoy, K. (2008) *Beyond the Wire*, London: Pluto.

(Elder 1994; MacLean and Elder 2007).<sup>2</sup> From this perspective identity (or intersecting identities such as being older, being a man, being a veteran or being an ex-prisoner) is seen to be something that is experienced in relation to time and temporality (Hockey and James 2003; Elder 1994) and this conception of the life course are consistent with a developmental and biographical narrative approach to understanding the experience of ex-prisoners.<sup>3</sup> A person's life course and assumptive world is structured by events, transitions, passages and trajectories (Dewilde 2003, Kaufman 2002).<sup>4</sup> At the existential level a life course disrupted by long-term imprisonment involves a sense of rupture, of time lost and an awareness of limited time left in which to rebuild intimate and social relationships as well as economic life (Jamieson and Grounds 2005).<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, any given person's life course is shaped not only by time and events but also by the operation of a political economy (O'Rand 1996 cited in Dewilde 2003) which produces socially structured trajectories of inequality.<sup>6</sup> The conflict in Northern Ireland, like many other wars, was fought predominantly by young working class men and the impact of the conflict, particularly the impact of imprisonment on the trajectories of their lives has been mixed.<sup>7</sup> There may have been gains in education, self awareness and self reliance offset by time lost, psychological harms and criminalisation. The impact of imprisonment on later economic well being is a particularly stark example of these sorts of socially structured trajectories. Dewilde (2003) and others argue that there is also a strong relationship between life events such as injury, emotional trauma or imprisonment and later social exclusion.<sup>8</sup>

We know that the harms of imprisonment, like the experience of chronic and acute trauma experienced by combat veterans persists beyond the actual period of incarceration into later life and may impact negatively on general health and well being (Hunt and

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<sup>2</sup> Elder Jr., G. H. (1994) 'Time, Human Agency, and Social Change: Perspectives on the Life Course', *Social Psychology Quarterly* 57(1):4-15; MacLean, A. and Elder, G.H. (2007) 'Military Service in the Life Course', *Annual Review of Sociology* 33(1): 175 - 196.

<sup>3</sup> Hockey, J. and James, A. (2003) *Social Identities Across the Life Course* London: Palgrave Macmillan, p.7, 9; Elder (1994).

<sup>4</sup>Dewilde, C. (2003) 'A life-course perspective on social exclusion and poverty', *British Journal of Sociology* 54(1): 109-128; Kaufman, J. (ed.) (2002) *Loss of the Assumptive World: A Theory of Traumatic Loss* London & NY: Brunner-Routledge

<sup>5</sup> Jamieson, R. and Grounds, A. T. (2005) 'Release and adjustment: perspectives from studies of wrongfully convicted and politically motivated prisoners', in A. Liebling and S Maruna (eds.) *The Effects of Imprisonment* Cullompton: Willan.

<sup>6</sup> O'Rand, A.M.(1996) 'The Cumulative Stratification of the Life Course', in R.H. Binstock and L.K. George (eds.) *Handbook of Ageing and the Social Sciences*, 4<sup>th</sup> Ed. San Diego: Academic Press cited in Dewilde (2003).

<sup>7</sup> Appy, C. (1993) *Working Class War: American Combat Soldiers and Vietnam* University of North Carolina Press. See also Kohen, A.I. and Shields, P.M. (1990) 'Reaping the Spoils of Defeat: Labour Market Experience of Vietnam-Era Veterans', in C.R. Figley and S. Leventman *Strangers at Home* NY: Brunner/Mazel, pp.181-211.

<sup>8</sup> Dewilde (2003) op. cit., p.125.

Robbins 2001; Krystal 1995; Elder and Clipp 1989; Elder et al 1994; Irwin and Owen 2005; Settersten 2006; Jamieson and Grounds 2002, 2003; Shirlow 2001).<sup>9</sup> We also know that the guilt and trauma associated with encounters with death typically may give rise to depression and anxiety, related co-morbidity in the form of alcohol or drug dependency, and preoccupation with death. As we have seen in the long-term health outcomes of prisoners of war, these negative impacts on physical health and well being are likely to increase with age (Ursano and Benedek 2003: 23).<sup>10</sup> It might be expected that paramilitary ex-prisoners would also have a higher mortality rate and greater prevalence of ill health in older age than their age peers. Prisoners of war have been found to have prevalence rates for depressive and anxiety disorders that are 3-5 times higher than the general population and greatest in those who were young POWs and those who underwent the harshest treatment in captivity. Along with a higher prevalence of chronic disease observed in former prisoners of war, captivity appears to have had a role in premature, abnormal and unsuccessful ageing some individuals (Hunt and Robbins 2001).<sup>11</sup> Anecdotal accounts suggest similar phenomena amongst some former paramilitary prisoners.

This study set out to achieve two fairly modest but important aims. First, we wanted to gather basic descriptive information about former prisoners as a group (their number, ages, and community locations). The second was to investigate the current situation and needs of former politically-motivated ex-prisoners' *as older people* now and in the future.

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<sup>9</sup> Hunt, N. and Robbins, I. (2001) 'Long Term Consequences of War: the Experience of World War II', *Aging and Mental Health* 5(2):183-190; Krystal, H. (1995) Trauma and Aging: A Thirty Year Follow-up', in C. Caruth (ed.) *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press; Elder Jr., G. H. and Clipp, E.G. (1989) 'Combat Experience and Emotional Health: Impairment and Resilience in Later Life', *Journal of Personality*: 311-341; Elder Jr., G. H., Shanahan, M.J. and Clipp, E.C. (1994) 'When War comes to Men's Lives: Life-Course Patterns in Family, Work and Health', *Psychology and Aging* 9(1): 5-16; Irwin, J. and Owen, B. (2005) 'Harm and the Contemporary Prison', in A. Liebling and S Maruna (eds.) *The Effects of Imprisonment* Cullompton: Willan. ; Settersten, Jr., R.A. (2006) 'When Nations Call; How Wartime Military Service Matters for the Life Course and Aging', *Research on Aging*, 28(1): 12-36; Jamieson and Grounds 2002, 2003; Shirlow 2001.

<sup>10</sup> Ursano, R.J. and Benedek, D.M. (2005) 'Prisoners of war: long-term health outcomes', *The Lancet*, 362, *Supplement 1*: 22-23.

<sup>11</sup> Hunt and Robbins (2001) op.cit.

## 2. The demographic profile of former prisoners in Northern Ireland and the border counties

### 2.1 Estimating the size of the former prisoner population

It is difficult to ascertain the precise number of people who were imprisoned for politically-motivated offences during the recent conflict in Northern Ireland. It is possible only to make very rough estimates of the number of former prisoners based on available information on the operation of the criminal justice system during the 1971 -1998 period. One estimate, based on numbers provided by ex-prisoners groups, is that approximately 15,000 Republicans and some 5,000 -10,000 Loyalists were imprisoned for politically-motivated offences while second estimate suggests a higher upper limit of 30,000 former prisoners.<sup>12</sup> For example, the disparate range of published sources of relevant statistical information on the operation of the criminal justice system includes contemporary research findings, contemporary NIO policy briefings, declassified Cabinet documents, command papers and written parliamentary answers.<sup>13</sup> None of these provides a complete picture and there are real problems with the consistency, detail and completeness of data reporting over time.<sup>14</sup> But despite their very considerable limitations, these sources are all we have to work with.

There are two relatively simple ways of approaching the problem of estimating former prisoner numbers. The first is to start with the available figures on the number of receptions into Northern Ireland prisons and then to calculate the number of politically-motivated prisoners based on existing estimates of the proportion of prison population reported to have been sentenced for scheduled or 'terrorist-type' offences.<sup>15</sup> A second approach is to start with the official numbers of people charged with scheduled or terrorist-type offences and to use the prevailing conviction rates by mode of trial and

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<sup>12</sup> See respectively McEvoy, K. (2001) *Paramilitary Imprisonment in Northern Ireland: Resistance, Management and Release* Oxford: Oxford University Press, and Shirlow, P. (2008) *Politically Motivated Former Prisoners: Evaluation of the Core Funding Project, 2006-2008*, Belfast: The Community Foundation for Northern Ireland.

<sup>13</sup> The principal statistical sources are: (i) Annual statistics on the number of people arrested and subsequently charged with terrorism and serious public order offences (published by the RUC/PSNI); (ii) 'Statistics on Security' produced by the Northern Ireland Office and placed in the House of Commons Library which were quoted from time to time in responses to Parliamentary questions in the Official Report; (iii) Annual NI prison population statistics; (iv) Commentaries on NI Crime Statistics (published by the NIO); (v) Judicial Statistics, and (vi) Home Office Criminal Statistics.

<sup>14</sup> The NIO was anxious to present a positive picture of 'security successes' and in the course of a discussion of how to do so, one civil servant rejected one means of reporting security statistics on the grounds that "*In effect it amounts to an admission that we do not know how many people are being convicted, which, short of embarking on a special exercise, is true, but not the sort of thing we want to publicise.*" CJ4/ 1238.

<sup>15</sup> The term 'terrorist-type' offences is used interchangeably with scheduled offences in the 'Statistics on Security' prepared for the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland by the Northern Ireland Office. The term 'scheduled offence' refers to those offences deemed suitable for trial by judge alone and are defined in the schedules of successive Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Acts. They comprise offences most likely to be associated with terrorism and range from common law offences like murder and kidnapping to offences relating to explosive substances or inchoate offences like adding an abetting.

offence type to calculate paramilitary prisoner numbers. Both methods are flawed but do yield a rough idea of the size of the former paramilitary prisoner population.

## 2.2 Official statistics on the Northern Ireland prison population

Our interest is in determining the number of people who were imprisoned for politically-motivated offences relating to the conflict in Northern Ireland. Prison statistics record the total number of *receptions* into prison in Northern Ireland, but an adjustment needs to be made to take account of the proportion of receptions that were ordinary prisoners. In addition, any estimate of the former politically-motivated prisoner population must include not only those who were imprisoned within Northern Ireland, but also those imprisoned in other jurisdictions as well as those who were interned.

Table 1. *Estimated number of politically-motivated prisoners, 1971-1998*

75% Receptions into NI Prison 1971-1998  [All receptions 54,560]	Less 20% Adjustment for double-counting	Plus Number Interned (1971-1975)	Plus Number Imprisoned Outside NI		Total
			ROI <sup>16</sup>	England & other <sup>17</sup> (1974-1998)	
38,192	30,554	2,257	1560+	305	34,671+

### 2.2.1 Proportion of ‘ordinary’ versus politically-motivated prisoners

We know from several written answers by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to parliamentary questions that during the conflict about three quarters of the sentenced

<sup>16</sup> Hogan and Walker’s (1989: 243, note 62) figure of 1390 persons convicted between 1972 and 1986 plus 170 persons convicted 1989 and 1990-1996. See written answers, ‘Special Criminal Court’, Dáil Éireann, Vol 482-04 Nov 1997 and Vol 401 -04 July, 1990. At the time of writing statistics persons convicted by the Special Criminal Court were not available the years 1987, 1988, 1997 and 1998.

<sup>17</sup> See Table 4. ‘Persons detained under the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Acts 1974 and 1976 and charged with offences under these Acts, by section(s) under which charged and outcome, Great Britain, 29 November 1974 to 26 March 1984’, and Table 5. ‘Persons detained under the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Acts 1974 and 1976 and charged only with criminal offences other than under the Acts, by principal offence, where charged and outcome of charge, Great Britain, 29 November 1974 to 26 March 1984’, *Home Office Statistical Bulletin Statistics on the Operation of Prevention of Terrorism Legislation, 1984*. Issue 10/84. Also see Table 5. ‘Persons detained under the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Acts 1984 and 1989 and charged with offences under these Acts, by section(s) under which charged and outcome’, Great Britain, 22 March 1984 to 31 December 1998’, and Table 6. ‘Persons detained under the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Acts 1984 and 1989 and charged only with criminal offences other than under the Act, by principal offence, where charged and outcome of charge, Great Britain, 22 March 1984 to 31 December 1998’, *Home Office Statistical Bulletin Statistics on the Operation of Prevention of Terrorism Legislation, 1994*. Issue 2/95.

prisoners in the NI prison population were serving sentences for terrorist-type offences.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, one way of roughly estimating the former prisoner numbers is to take 75% of the total NI receptions into prison (1972-1998) minus a 20% adjustment for double-counting those who served more than one prison sentence,<sup>19</sup> and adding those who were interned as well as also those who served sentences in the Mainland UK or the Republic of Ireland for offences connected with the conflict in NI. Some account also needs to be taken of the fact that because some people served more than one prison sentence, they would have been received into prison on more than one occasion and consequently counted more than once. The best available estimate based on written answers and memoranda available in the public record is that the reconviction rate was around 20% or less.

### 2.2.2 Prisons outside Northern Ireland

There are a number of sources of information on the number of people who served sentences in prisons outside Northern Ireland: the Home Office Statistical Bulletin, ‘Statistics on the Operation of the Prevention of Terrorism Legislation’, written answers in Hansard provide data for the mainland UK and the Judicial Statistics provide data for the Republic of Ireland.

According to figures supplied to Hogan and Walker (1989: 243, n62) by the Irish Department of Justice, 1390 persons were convicted before the Special Criminal Court between 13 June 1972 and the end of 1986. Written answers in the Dáil Éireann on the operation of the Special Criminal Court’ provide number for most but not all of the years from 1987-1998.

### 2.2.3 Internment

There are two fairly close estimates of the number of people interned between 1971 and 1975. In a written answer to Parliament in May 1977, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland reported that a total of 2257 people had been interned between the introduction of internment on 9 August 1971 and its ending on 31 December 1975. Hogan and Walker (1989: 94), who put the total at 2169, also provide a breakdown of numbers by putative political affiliation. See Table 1 below.

*Table 2. Number of persons interned, 1971-1975*

<b>Number Internees</b>	<b>HC Deb 16 May 1977 vol 932 c37W</b>	<b>Hogan &amp; Walker (1989: 94)</b>
	-	

<sup>18</sup> See HC Deb. 30 June 1981 vol 17 c358w and HC Deb. 1 July 1983 vol 44 c161w and HC Deb. 11 May 1977 vol 392 c37w.

<sup>19</sup> The reconviction rate (for scheduled offences) of people who had been released in 1984 after having served a prison sentence for terrorist-type offences was reported to be 20%. See HC Deb 4 July 1995 vol 263 cc157-8w. This coincides with the proportion of men in our sample who had served more than one sentence.

Suspected Republicans		2,060
Suspected Loyalists	-	109
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,257</b>	<b>2,169</b>

Taken together these different estimates indicate that at least approximately 35,000 people received custodial sentences for politically motivated offences or were detained on suspicion of them between 1971 and 1998. The method by which this estimate was arrived at is summarised below in Table 2.

### 2.3 Statistics on the number of persons arrested and subsequently charged

A second approach to estimating the size of the former prisoner population takes the number of persons arrested and subsequently charged with terrorist-type offences as its starting point. Here the number of paramilitary prisoners is calculated by starting with the number of people charged and then estimating the numbers convicted in the light of prevailing sentencing outcomes (custodial or non-custodial). The RUC produced yearly statistics on the number of people arrested and subsequently charged with terrorism and serious public order offences from 1972 onwards<sup>20</sup> provide a reasonable indication of the volume of people who were processed through the criminal justice system during the conflict for those types of offences. Police statistics for the period August 1972 to December 1998, record the number of people arrested and subsequently charged as 18,258. However, not all those charged were convicted and not all those convicted received custodial sentences. Therefore, charge rates on their own cannot tell us prison numbers. Nevertheless the police statistics on the number of people charged can be interpreted on the basis of what is known about the operation of the criminal system during the conflict, for example, the conviction rates for different modes of trial at different points in time.<sup>21</sup>

### 2.4 Conviction rates

According to Hogan and Walker (1989) the conviction rates for persons proceeded against for scheduled offences in 'Diplock' courts between 1973-1986 averaged over 92% (The lowest rate was 83% in 1973 and the highest was 96% in 1979 and 1980).<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> The PSNI have continued reporting this. See PSNI – Table NI-SEC-09: “Number of people Arrested and Subsequently charged with Terrorist and other Serious Public Order Offences, [31/07/] 1972-30/09/2007” at [http://psni.police.uk/index/departments/statistics\\_branch.htm](http://psni.police.uk/index/departments/statistics_branch.htm). Apart from the number of persons charged reported for 1973 [1,414], the quarterly “Statistics on Security” (which were based on a collation of RUC charge sheets) tally with the PSNI figures. See Part II p.5. PRO (Kew) file, CJ4/1238.)

<sup>21</sup> Police statistics tally with data on the number of persons proceeded against and convicted provide by the Northern Ireland Office under FOI request ref. 08/126.

<sup>22</sup> See Hogan and Walker (1989), Table 4.2, ‘Persons proceeded against in the Crown Court for scheduled offences, 1973-1986’). Note also that these conviction rates for Northern Ireland are significantly higher than the 73% average conviction rate reported by Hogan and Walker (1989: 243, n62) for the Irish Special Criminal Court for roughly the same period 1972-1986. The DPP for Northern Ireland put the conviction rate c. 1975 at 90% for scheduled offences tried on indictment. CJ4/1238.

These figures are consistent with the Boyle et al (1980: 74, Table 6.6) finding that during 1979 the Diplock Courts dispensed custodial sentences at a rate of 91%. Moreover, both of these estimates tally with the conviction rate of 92.2% derived from figures on prosecutions and convictions for scheduled offences (1978-1999) provided by the NIO.<sup>23</sup> If the Hogan and Walker average estimate (92%) reflects the prevailing conviction rate for the whole period from August 1972 to the end of 1998 then somewhere in the order of 16,797 people were imprisoned for scheduled offences in Northern Ireland.

*Table 3. Numbers charged and convicted of scheduled offences, 1972-1998*

Number Arrested & Subsequently Charged, 31 July 1972-1998	Conviction Rate 92%	Less 20% Adjustment for Double-counting	Plus Number Interned	Plus Number Imprisoned Outside NI		TOTAL
				ROI <sup>24</sup>	England & other	
18,258.	16,797	13,438	2,257	1560+	305	17,560

As with estimates of former prisoner numbers based on receptions into prison, the estimate based on charges and convictions inevitably reflects up to 20% double counting because some people served more than one prison sentence in one or more jurisdictions. Thus the most conservative estimate, based on numbers charged and adjusted for possible double counting, is about 13,400, and about 17,600 if internees and people imprisoned outside Northern Ireland are included. It makes sense to add the number of internees to numbers convicted since the NIO regarded conviction and detention as 'a combined process'.<sup>25</sup>

## 2.5 Gender

Although there are no detailed figures on the gender distribution of paramilitary prisoners, we do know that their numbers were heavily skewed towards males. Corcoran (2006: 8-9) estimates the gender ratio amongst Republican prisoners as roughly 20:1 men to women.<sup>26</sup> The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland provided statistics on the Northern Ireland prison population broken down by age, sex, 'terrorist type offences' and

<sup>23</sup> Number of persons proceeded against and convicted for the years 1978 - 1999 were supplied by the NIO under FOI Request ref. 08/126.

<sup>24</sup> Persons convicted between 1972 and 1986. See Hogan and Walker (1989: 243, note 62).

<sup>25</sup> See CJ4/ 1238 (19 September 1975).

<sup>26</sup> Corcoran, M.S. (2006) *Out of Order: the political imprisonment of women in Northern Ireland, 1972-1998* Cullompton: Willan.

paramilitary affiliation in Parliamentary Written Answers on several occasions. He provided a useful snapshot of the age and sex of prisoners in one such answer on 1 July 1983.<sup>27</sup> Although he said that he was not able to supply an estimate of the number of politically-motivated prisoners in custody, he was able to give the total number of prisoners (convicted and on remand) by sex and age, and did offer the observation that about 75% of the total prison population were serving sentences for terrorist-type offences. (These figures are reproduced in Table 4 below.)

*Table 4. NI prison population including those persons detained in young offender centres, by age and sex as at 19 June 1983*

AGE Years	Per cent (all prisoners)	Male		Female	
		Convicted	Unconvicted	Convicted	Unconvicted
Under 18	( 3 %)	41	36	3	-
18 but under 25	(38 %)	733	203	11	6
25 but under 30	(33 %)	722	102	20	2
30 but under 40	(19 %)	419	65	1	-
40 but under 50	( 5 %)	99	23	1	2
50 but under 60	( 1 %)	24	7	1	-
60 and over	(.04%)	6	3	-	-
		<b>2,044</b>	<b>439</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Total All Prisoners 2530</b>		<b>All males 2483</b>		<b>All females 47</b>	

Source: HC Deb. 01 July 1983, Vol. 44, c161W, written answers.

As can be seen in Table 4 above, the gender ratio of prisoners in June 1983 was 53:1 men to women, or roughly 2 % of prisoners were women. This is significantly lower than Corcoran's (2006) generally accepted estimate that 5% of politically-motivated prisoners were women.

## 2.6 Age

Few officially published statistics report the ages of those imprisoned for politically motivated offences. Nevertheless, there are one or two statistical snapshots of the age of the 1970s politically-motivated prisoner cohort, the period with the highest incarceration rate for scheduled offences. If the age profile of this 1970s group is representative of all politically-motivated prisoners over the whole period of the conflict, then it seems likely that the majority of former prisoners would now be well into their 50s and this is

<sup>27</sup> HC Deb 01 July 1983 Vol. 44, c161W.

supported by the findings of contemporary research on the Diplock courts. Boyle et al (1980) analysed the age profile of Diplock defendants in 1975 and 1979 and found that, overall, defendants tended to cluster in the 17-21 years age group, but that Loyalist defendants tended to be slightly older than Republicans. In 1979, for example, 56% of Loyalist defendants were 25 years or older as compared to 28% of Republicans.<sup>28</sup> Ninety per cent of the Boyle et al. 1975 sample of Diplock defendants was over 17 years of age at the time of conviction, and more half of these were in the young 17-21 age group. This means that the youngest members of the 1975 cohort would be 50 or over now. Moreover, the twenty per cent of those convicted who were 25 years or older in 1975 now would be in their late 50s or early 60's. See Table 5 below

*Table 5: Age of Diplock defendants, 1975 and 1979*

Age	Loyalist %		Republican %	
	1975	1979	1975	1979
14-17	14 %	2 %	7 %	8 %
17-21	42	13	63	45
21-25	11	28	13	19
25-30	16	22	8	13
30-40	8	21	4	7
Over 40	4	4	1	4
Age not known	5	9	4	4

*Source:* Boyle, K., Hadden, T. and Hillyard, P. (1980 *The Legal Control of Political Violence*, London: the Cobden Trust. (p.23, Table 3.2)

The Boyle et al (1980) distribution is also consistent with the age profile of politically-motivated prisoners provided by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in June 1983 summarised in Table 4 above.

An analysis of the characteristics of protesting and conforming (to prison rules) PIRA prisoners done by the NIO provides another age snapshot of politically-motivated prisoners.<sup>29</sup> The NIO analysis, which is summarised in Table 6 below, indicates that 90 % of PIRA prisoners were aged 19 or above in July 1977. If the age profile of this particular IRA cohort was typical of all politically-motivated prisoners, then most former prisoners would be 50 years or older now.

*Table 6. Age distribution of PIRA prisoners at 25 July 1977*

<sup>28</sup> Boyle, K., Hadden, T. and Hillyard, P. (1980 *The Legal Control of Political Violence*, London: Cobden Trust. See also Boyle, K. Chesney, R. and Hadden, T. (1976) 'Who Are the Terrorists?', *New Statesman* (6 May 1976).

<sup>29</sup> "Protesters/Conformers Analysis as at 25 July 1977, Male Prisoners with PIRA Associations", PRO, CJ4/ 1687.

Age on Committal Under Sentence	N = 235	Per cent	Current Age 2008
17 years	5	2 %	48
18	19	8 %	49
19	45	19 %	50
20	39	17 %	51
21	32	14 %	52
22	12	5 %	53
23	16	7 %	54
24	11	5 %	55
25	7	3 %	56
26-30	32	14 %	57-61
31-40	14	6 %	62-71
Over 40 (nil)	2	.08 %	71+

Source: PRO, CJ4/ 1687, "Protesters/Conformers Analysis as at 25 July 1977, Male Prisoners with PIRA Associations"

## 2.7 The Geographical Distribution of Former Prisoners

Just as there are problems estimating the total numbers of former prisoners and their current ages, so too there is little or no precise information in the public domain about where former prisoners currently live, or about the numbers former prisoners who were displaced or who relocated away from their communities of origin after release. Although it is safe to assume that a significant number live in or around Belfast and Derry, many live in small towns and rural areas in Northern Ireland, the Border region and Dublin. Table 7 below, which is based on the NIO analysis of protesting PIRA prisoners in the Maze on 25 July 1977 shows the communities of origin. If this sample is representative of all Republican prisoners, then roughly 68% were from urban communities (Belfast 54%, Derry 32%) and the remainder (32%) from the NI counties or county towns.

Table 7. *Communities of origin, PIRA prisoners in NI*

Community of Origin	Number	Per cent
Belfast	127	54%
Derry	33	14%
NI Counties: Antrim, Armagh, Down, Fermanagh, Londonderry, Tyrone	75	32%
<b>Total</b>	<b>235</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: PRO, CJ4/ 1687, "Protesters/Conformers Analysis as at 25 July 1977, Male Prisoners with PIRA Associations".

Harvey et al (2005: 68) estimate that about 3500 politically motivated former prisoners were born in the South, some 2000 of whom probably live in border counties of Louth, Cavan, Monaghan, Leitrim, Sligo, Donegal. A report commissioned by the Area Development Management/Combat Poverty Agency (ADM/CPA) on people displaced to and from the southern border counties as a result of the conflict suggests that the counties with the greatest concentration of displaced people are Monaghan, Louth and Donegal (Ralaheen 2005: 46, 64). By contrast Loyalist former prisoners tend to be concentrated in Belfast, Lisburn, North Armagh, and pockets of Derry and East and North Antrim. As might be expected, ex-prisoner projects are based in places near group they serve. Loyalist ex-prisoner groups are located in Belfast, Derry, Lisburn, Carrickfergus, Ballymena, Armagh and Portadown. Republican ex-prisoner groups are based in Belfast, Derry, Magherafelt, Strabane, Letterkenny, Lifford, Sligo, Ballinamore, Monaghan, Clones, Dundalk and elsewhere (Gormally et al 2007).

Communities are pivotally important factors in people's access to employment, goods and services (e.g. transportation and health services) as well as to important social support networks. Former prisoners who live in rural areas, especially those without access to a car, experience greater difficulty connecting to these important factors in social inclusion. Transportation routes tend to be concentrated around focal points as are key specialised services (health services) so access to such provision is harder for people living in rural communities, especially those nearer the border because they have to negotiate the additional problem of jurisdictionally divided services.

### 3. Methods

This research on older former prisoners had two aims. First, we wanted to gather basic descriptive information about former prisoners as a group (their number, ages and community locations). Secondly, we wanted to explore the current situation and needs of older former politically-motivated prisoners living in Northern Ireland and the border areas. The issues explored in this exploratory research were complex and sensitive and the sample was small (19, including 10 survey respondents and 9 interviewees). The hope was to refine the research instruments through this pilot study as ground work not only for a larger study but also to prompt refocusing of public policy discussions on the situation of former prisoners and their needs as older people.

Trying to determine the size and distribution of the former prisoner population proved to be more difficult than we anticipated initially because the existing public domain statistical information on politically-motivated prisoners is both scant and inconsistent. Clearly private considerations preclude conducting a census of former prisoners and consequently we were forced to fall back on available criminal justice statistics and estimates from ex-prisoner groups themselves. Hence the demographic information on former prisoners on which our report is based is the product of both a review and analysis of official statistics and public records and the collection of basic descriptive information (on prisoner numbers, ages and current residence) as part of both the interview and survey components elements of the research.

#### 3.1 Self-completion survey

The self-completion survey was designed to investigate the current circumstances and health and well being including psychological well being of ex-prisoners, as well as to elicit their views on the impact of the conflict and imprisonment on their lives and their thoughts about their future needs as they grow older. The survey contained items from standardised tests for general health and additional questions designed to explore the current experiences of older former prisoners, their evaluation of the past and engagement with the future. The health and well being element of the survey comprised self-report measures from the GHQ12, and the FAST and CAGE tests for alcohol dependency. It also included specific items relating to the exposure to traumatic events, personal and social relationships, and being an ex-prisoner. Other items explored both existential and practical aspects of the future, e.g. their expectations of life and the extent to which older former prisoners had considered or had taken action regarding their old age or retirement and their level of knowledge about the sources of support they might look to in the future as older people.

Both the survey and interviews were carried out in the spring and early summer of 2008. Wherever possible we tried to recruit the participants from our earlier (2002) study on the effects of long-term imprisonment for both the pilot survey and interviews.<sup>30</sup> The target population for the survey was ex-prisoners living in a range of communities in Northern Ireland and Border Region. The final version of the survey included 135 items, which was

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<sup>30</sup> Jamieson and Grounds (2002) op. cit.

proved quite daunting for respondents and we were fortunate that they thought the issues covered were sufficiently important to make the effort to complete it.

### 3.2 Interviews

The interview element of the research was designed to follow-up on a sample of the former prisoners we interviewed in the spring and summer of 2000 about the effects of imprisonment and their experience of resettlement. The aim was to re-interview at least half of the participants from the earlier study as well as a small number of other older former prisoners. We conducted biographical narrative follow-up interviews with six of the original 18 participants and also interviewed three others for the first time.

The aim of the follow-up interview was to locate the former prisoner's experience in the context of their individual biographies and life course and to experience of other, older former prisoners. The interview schedule was designed to enable open-ended exploration of key aspect of the participants' experience and life course. The guide included a combination of items developed for our 2002 study and some new questions on aspects of ageing, the current context and the future. It opened with questions on the former prisoner's current circumstances and then asked interviewees to reflect on their past experience, evaluate changes in themselves and their lives and then to look forward to the future.

The semi-structured interview schedule followed a biographical narrative format. It opened with questions on the interviewee's current circumstances and invited them to comment on changes to key areas of their lives since their first interviews in 2000. The areas covered included work, accommodation, money, health and family relationships, own personality, social integration and future outlook. The interviews closed by asking if there were any forms of help or support the former prisoner needed but was not getting and interviewees were asked to comment on the needs of other older former prisoners now and in the future.

We were mindful that we were asking participants to explore complex and difficult areas of their lives and were careful to obtain their freely given, informed consent, and to guarantee anonymity, confidentiality and the right to refuse to answer any question or to withdraw at any time.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> See Carlson, E.B. (ed.) (1996) *Trauma Research Methodology* Lutherville, Md.: Sidran. The research adhered to the ethical guidelines for research of Social Research Association and the British Psychological Society.

## **4. Survey findings**

### **4.1 Background**

The small pilot survey was divided into four sections designed to elicit information on key aspects of their background (biographical and prison history), current living situation (accommodation, benefits and employment), current health and well being and their thoughts about the future.

The survey sample consisted of 10 ex-prisoners living in a range of communities in Northern Ireland and the border region. As with the interview element of the research, we tried to enlist the participants from earlier (2002) study on the effects of long-term imprisonment as far as it was possible.<sup>32</sup>

The average age of the former prisoners surveyed was 52.1 years (range 39-58 years). The average number of years they had spent in prison was 11.7 years (range 7-18 years) and all but one had served this time in one continuous period of incarceration. The average length of time spent in the community since their release was 17.3 years (range 9-24 years).

### **4.2 Current Circumstances**

Half of the men were single. Of these three were living alone and two were living in the family home with a parent. Half were married or cohabiting and six had no children. The types of accommodation they lived in ranged from their own homes (5) or family homes (2) to private rented (1), housing executive (1), or employer provided housing (1). Six were living in Northern Ireland and four in the Republic of Ireland, most were in small towns or cities and the rest lived in rural areas.

### **4.3 Work**

Only four of the survey respondents were in employed full-time. The remaining six were either unemployed (1), living on sickness benefit (2), or working part-time (3).

Just over half (6) said that there was at least one source of employment income in their household, but many (7/10) of the survey respondents said that they themselves had had difficulties getting access to welfare entitlements and most (9/10) also thought that former paramilitary prisoners are more likely to be on benefits than others of the same age living within their community. Given their difficulties securing employment it is not surprising that most (9/10) of the men surveyed said that they had had financial problems since their release and consequently most (8/10) reported having problems with meeting their financial obligations. Less than half (4) reported any improvement in their financial situation. Over half (7/10) of the men said that they had sought advice in the past 5 years

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<sup>32</sup> Jamieson and Grounds A. (2002) op.cit.

on financial issues and that they would also do so in the future. Equal numbers reported having received (4) and not having received (4) financial help from their families.

#### **4.4 Retirement**

All but one of the men surveyed planned to retire in the jurisdiction where they currently lived. Only half of them expected to have made the required 10 years national insurance contributions towards a state pension by the time they reach retirement age (65 years) and only one had made any savings for retirement in the form of a private pension plan. None of those who will be ineligible for a state pension (5) had any savings for retirement. Moreover, their knowledge about of state benefits for older people was quite poor and limited to an awareness of the basic state pension (which only half of them expected to get), free travel and fuel payments. The precariousness of their financial situations was a constant worry for many especially when contemplating their futures as older people without savings or pensions.

My greatest fears are financial. I would like a guarantee that we could pay for essentials, e.g., heat, light, food, clothes, car.

Financial support, by the government but this will not rectify the damage already done by imprisonment.

Concerns about money extended to the issue of health for one survey respondent living in the Republic Ireland:

The health service in Ireland whether North or South is becoming more private by the day. The clear message is, if you want something done quickly, pay for it and it is done next week. Otherwise go to the back of the queue, and wait for an appointment, a bed, a doctor and so on. (Never, never, never.) It's a well known fact that more people from socially deprived areas are unhealthy than those from well off backgrounds. Rich people pay for their health care. Poor people can't. Ex-prisoners are mostly poor and because of this will fall into bad health in the future, if not already in it.

The fairly bleak prospects for retirement faced by former prisoners are in stark contrast to the retirement packages offered to ex-combatant state actors, for example, former members of the RUC and UDR.

#### **4.5 Health**

The health section of the survey included the 12 item General Health Questionnaire<sup>33</sup> (GHQ-12), a widely used screening test for psychiatric morbidity in the community. Additional questions were asked about medication and general physical health. Two further self-completion screening tests, the CAGE<sup>34</sup> and FAST<sup>35</sup>, were used to screen for clinically significant alcohol dependence and hazardous drinking behaviour.

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<sup>33</sup> Goldberg, G. Williams, P. (1991) *A Users Guide to the General Health Questionnaire*. Windsor: NFER-Nelson

<sup>34</sup> Mayfield, D., McLeod, G. and Hall, P. (1974) The CAGE questionnaire: validation of a new alcoholism instrument. *American Journal of Psychiatry* 131: 1121-1123.

The CAGE is a four item yes/no questionnaire in which score of 2 or more indicates clinically significant alcohol dependence. Seven out of 10 survey respondents had CAGE scores of 2 or more, 6 respondents had scores of 3 or more, and 4 respondents had the maximum score of 4. In the FAST test a score of 3 or more (out of the maximum of 16) indicates possible hazardous drinking. Nine respondents completed the FAST test of whom four met the threshold score of 3 or more, and all of these had high scores (10+). The one respondent who did not complete the FAST test stated that he was a recovering alcoholic.

These findings, although based on a small sample, are worrying and suggest the need for some form of alcohol education intervention. They also warrant further investigation of the underlying contributing factors for this hazardous drinking behaviour. One former prisoner in our 2002 study suggested that there was a relationship between hazardous drinking in his own community and unacknowledged emotional problems:

I know so many people now, just on the Falls Road who need help - desperately, desperately need help and they are not getting it. What happens now is that there is a drinking society, a drinking culture and they deal with it through drink. The help – and if they don't finish up with a bad psychological problem ..... A lot of them finish up alcoholics and finish up in hostels, finish up sitting in the corners. I know a whole lot who have already. I know at least three that's died – not getting any help whatsoever.

Alcohol abuse has been recognised as a significant contributing factor to individual illness and mortality in Northern Ireland (especially arising from liver disease and mental and behavioral disorders), and the most affected group is 45-59 year old men.<sup>36</sup> The high scores on both the FAST and CAGE screening tests in our survey were associated with men being single and living alone, as were their scores on the GHQ-12.

The GHQ-12 consists of 12 items, each scored 0 or 1 according to whether the respondent reports experiencing the symptom during the last month. A total score of 4 or more indicates that significant mental health problems may be present. Three men were over this threshold, with GHQ-12 scores of 4 or more; seven men had GHQ-12 scores of 0-2.

Over half the men (6) reported having medication prescribed by their GPs for psychological symptoms during the previous year; for anxiety and sleep disorders in six cases, and for depression in three cases.

Respondents were asked to rate whether they judged their current physical health to be excellent, very good, good, fair or poor. Six rated their physical health as 'poor' (4) or 'fair'(2). Four rated their physical health as 'good' (2) or very 'good'(2).

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<sup>35</sup> Health Development Agency & University of Wales College of Medicine (2002) *Manual for the Fast Alcohol Screening Test (FAST)*. London: Health Development Agency.

<sup>36</sup> Health Promotion Agency for Northern Ireland / NISRA (2008) 'Alcohol-related deaths in Northern Ireland', at <http://drugsalcohol.info/ArticlePrintView.aspx?id=d87cb4f3-5068-4e9f-bfl-99>

The sample was small, but there appeared to be an association between having significant psychiatric symptoms, GP treatment, self-medication with alcohol, and impaired physical health, as shown in figure 1 below. Another contributing factor may be that men living on their own are more likely to have poor health behaviour than those who are married and cohabiting.<sup>37</sup>

*Figure 1. Relationships between high GHQ-12 scores, positive screening tests for harmful alcohol use (CAGE & FAST), and receipt of prescribed medication for psychological symptoms during the last year.*

Case number	GHQ-12 ≥ 4 (Actual score in brackets. Max score 12)	CAGE ≥ 2 (Actual score in brackets. Max score 4)	FAST ≥ 3 (Actual score in brackets. Max score 16)	Medication (for psychological symptoms in last year)	Physical health (self-rating)
1	+ (10)	+ (3)	+ (11)	+	poor
2	+ (4)	+ (3)	- (2)	-	fair
3	+ (7)	+ (4)	+ (14)	+	poor
4	- (2)	+ (4)	+ (12)	+	fair
5	- (0)	- (0)	- (0)	+	good
6	- (0)	- (1)	- (1)	-	v. good
7	- (0)	+ (4)	Not completed	+	poor
8	- (0)	+ (4)	+ (10)	+	fair
9	- (0)	+ (2)	- (0)	-	v. good
10	- (0)	- (0)	- (1)	-	good

#### 4.6 Impact of imprisonment

In addition to the GHQ-12, we asked survey respondents to rate the personal costs or physical and psychological harms they had experienced in a range of areas as a result of

<sup>37</sup> Davidson, K. and Arber, S. (2004) 'Older Men: Their Health Behaviours and Partnership Status', in A. Walker and C.H. Hennessy (eds.) *Growing Older: Quality of Life in Old Age* Buckingham: Open University Press.

the conflict and their imprisonment. These self-ratings were on a 4 point scale ('no harm', 'mild harm', 'moderate harm' or 'severe harm').

The results are summarized in figure 2 below. When asked about physical harm, half reported that they had suffered no physical harm, one reported having sustained mild physical harm, and four reported suffering either moderate harm (2) or severe harm (2). By contrast, all of the respondents reported sustaining some degree of psychological harm with nine out of ten rating this as moderate or severe, (severe in 5 cases). Ratings in particular domains of psychological harm were as follows. All ten men judged that their involvement in the conflict and their imprisonment had damaged their abilities to form a successful, close relationship with a partner, to express affection, to express worry and unhappiness, and to confide about personal problems. The harms experienced in these four areas were rated as severe in four, three, six, and five cases, respectively. All reported some estrangement from family members, and this was rated as severe in four cases. All but one of the men reported that suffering had been caused to family members as a result his imprisonment and involvement in the conflict; the suffering of their families was rated as severe in four cases.

*Figure 2. Self-ratings of the personal costs of involvement in the conflict and imprisonment (no of cases)*

Type of harm	No harm	Mild harm	Moderate harm	Severe harm
Physical injury	5	1	2	2
Psychological harm	0	1	4	5
Ability to form successful, close relationship with a partner	1	3	2	4
Ability to express affection	1	4	2	3
Ability to express worry and unhappiness	0	3	1	6
Ability to confide about personal problems	0	3	2	5
Estrangement from family members	0	3	3	4
Suffering caused to family members	1	0	5	4

#### 4.7 Thoughts about the past and future

A further set of questions addressed the men's attitudes towards their past experiences, social adjustment since release, and their outlook for the future. For each statement they were asked to choose the response that best represented their experience ('strongly disagree', 'agree', 'neither agree nor disagree', 'disagree', or 'strongly disagree'). The findings are summarised in figure 3 below.

As described above, all but one of the men reported financial problems since release. Most had sought financial advice during the previous five years. Only one reported making financial provision for retirement, and eight of the ten men thought they would have difficulty in affording to stay in their current homes after retirement.

All the respondents reported experiencing refusal of employment since release, and all but one said it had not been easy to find employment they were qualified for. Most (8) thought it was now too late for them to find a meaningful job.

Half the men reported feeling isolated in their own communities because of their past imprisonment. One of the rural respondents also expressed concern about his possible future social isolation:

I live in a rural area, miles from friends my own age. I will be isolated in old age. I would like to have some help keeping in contact with my friends.

This highlighted an important issue for rural men generally, especially those living on their own, namely the need to foster the development of their social networks. Former prisoners living on their own in rural areas are at greater risk of social and emotional isolation and they need to be able to participate in social inclusion initiatives without being stigmatised by the fact of having been in prison.<sup>38</sup>

Most men (8) thought that ex-prisoners generally had more physical and emotional problems than other men of their age, and that ex-prisoners tended to hide the problems they faced.

Most of the men (7) considered themselves to have psychological problems for which they needed, but were not receiving, help. Over half reported feelings of depression since release and times when they had not wanted to go on living. The men were also asked

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<sup>38</sup> See ICBAN, Social Inclusion Working Group (2008) 'Men and Cross-Border Social Exclusion', at <http://www.socialinclusion.ie/documents/MenandCrossBorderSI.pdf>. The 2006 report of the North Leitrim Men's Group, *Men on the Border* details the geographical and social isolation and multiple disadvantages (low income, unemployment, underemployment, poor mental health, poor access to amenities, transportation and services) that may be suffered by single men in rural communities. Former prisoners living on their own in such areas are more likely not less likely to suffer in these ways. See report at <http://homepage.eircom.net/~nlmensgroup/NLMG%20research%20project-full%20report%20Version%202.html>

three questions about possible post-traumatic stress symptoms, namely whether they had directly witnessed terrible scenes that continued to cause upsetting memories or avoidance behaviour. Most (7) reported such experiences. Four reported feelings of anxiety or panic when reminded of such events.

Eight of the ten men said they had not been able to find a sense of purpose for the future from a political point of view, and only two thought that in old age they would look back on their lives with a sense of achievement. Most (8) felt they ought to have more years ahead of them than they probably had. All but one of the men considered their families and friends lacked good understanding of what they had been through in prison, and this had not improved over the last ten years. Nine of the ten men thought that the peace process had not made it easier for former paramilitary prisoners to cope financially, emotionally and socially.

Figure 3. Self-ratings of attitudes towards past experiences, social adjustment since release and future outlook (no of cases)

Statement	Agree or Strongly Agree	Neutral	Disagree or Strongly disagree
<b>Financial</b>			
I have had financial problems since release	9	1	0
I have/did make financial preparations for my retirement	1	0	9
I will not have any financial difficulty staying in my current residence post-retirement	1	1	8
I have sought advice in the past 5 years on financial issues	7	0	3
I will seek advice in the future on financial issues	7	2	1
My financial problems have improved over the past 5 years	3	1	6
<b>Employment &amp; social adjustment</b>			
I have been refused employment due to my imprisonment	10	0	0
I think former political prisoners are more likely to be on benefits than others of the same age living within my community	9	1	0
Since release it has been easy to find the type of job I am qualified for	1	0	9
It is too late for me to get a meaningful job	8	1	1
I feel isolated within my community due to my imprisonment	5	1	4
<b>Psychological problems</b>			
My fellow former prisoners have more physical and emotional problems than others of their age	8	2	0
My fellow prisoners are good at hiding the problems that they face	8	1	1
I directly witnessed terrible scenes during the conflict that I do not want to think about, but I am still bothered by memories or upsetting dreams about them	8	1	1
I directly witnessed terrible scenes during the conflict that I do not want to think about, and I try to avoid situations that remind me of them	7	3	0
I directly witnessed terrible scenes during the conflict that I do not want to think about, and if something reminds me of them I feel anxious and panicky	4	5	1
Since release I have not had times of feeling seriously depressed	3	0	7
Since release there have been times when I have not wanted to go on living	6	0	4
I have problems for which I need psychological help but I am not getting it	7	2	1
<b>Attitudes to past and future</b>			
I feel I ought to have more years ahead of me than I probably have	8	2	0
Since release from prison I have been able to find a sense of purpose for the future from a political point of view	1	1	8
As I get older my capacity to deal with the past gets easier	0	4	6
Since release from prison I have been able to find a sense of purpose for the future from a personal point of view	4	0	6
I think it is likely that I will live until at least seventy	4	3	3
I think I will be happy in the future	1	6	3
I have no-one close to me who is likely to look after me in old age	4	2	4
I think that in old age I will look back on my life with a sense of achievement	2	3	5
I feel more settled in myself now than I did ten years ago	4	2	4
My family and friends have a good understanding of what I went through during the conflict and in prison	1	0	9
My family and friends have a better understanding now of what I went through during the conflict and in prison than they did ten years ago	0	1	9
I find it easier to talk now about what I went through during the conflict and in prison than I did ten years ago	1	3	6
The peace process has made it easier for former political prisoners to cope financially, emotionally and socially	0	1	9



## **5. Interview findings**

### **5.1 Background**

As with the survey element of the research, we tried to enlist the participants from earlier (2002) study on the effects of long-term imprisonment as far as it was possible. We interviewed six interviewees had been participants in the original 2002 Expac study and three others who were interviewed for the first time in the spring of 2008. Five currently lived in Northern Ireland and four lived in the border area of the Republic.

The interview sample comprised nine former prisoners from a range of communities in Northern Ireland and the border region. All were men and all but two were over 50. The average age of the former prisoners interviewed was 51.6 years (range 42-63 years). The average number of years the interviewees had spent in prison was 13.3 years (range 3-16.5 years) and all but one had served this time in one continuous period of incarceration. The average length of time spent in the community since release was 23.6 years (range 10-29 years).

### **5.2 Current circumstances**

Most (7) the former prisoners interviewed were married or cohabiting at the time of interview. Two were single and living alone. Four had no children. Of the five who did have children (their or their partners), two had fairly young families (children aged 2- 8.5 years) who were likely to still be financially dependent when their fathers reach retirement age. The types of accommodation they lived in ranged from their own homes (5), or family homes (1) to housing executive (1) or employer provided housing (1). Most were living in small towns (2) or cities (4) and the rest lived in rural areas. Only two of the interviewees were in full-time employment. The remaining seven were unemployed (3), living on disability living allowance (2), or working part-time (2).

Most the interviews said that their current accommodation was adequate. Those who did not tended to be men living on their own. One thought that single men were a low priority for the housing executive and that consequently they were allocated the least desirable accommodation:

I was on the waiting list for housing when I was single - divorced - and never got it. I mean I think they offered me a flat in Twinbrook and when I drove up to see it, it was nice sunny day and there was rats playing on the front ... and I just didn't even get out of the car. I just said, 'Take me out of here.' You know, it was just... single man; we'll put him in there. That was it.

Not being able to afford to stay in their current accommodation or to maintain it in the future was also a worry for both men living on their own and men with partners and children and for most their financial problems were inextricable from the issue of employment.

### **5.3 Work**

Finding and keeping meaningful employment was a major obstacle to resettlement for the former prisoners in our 2002 study and this has continued to be the case for the men we interviewed in 2008. Only two of the interviewees were in full-time employment and the rest were

unemployed, living on disability living allowance, or working part-time. Four of those who were unemployed or working reduced hours part-time had recently lost jobs in either the construction industry or the voluntary sector where they had been employed on ex-prisoner projects. Security concerns had limited the former prisoners' opportunities to work immediately post-release and continued to do so, but to a lesser extent. Having a criminal conviction also continued to be a major barrier to employment, especially to employment in the public services. The public services sector is the biggest source of employment across all regions of Northern Ireland, particularly in Belfast where public services comprise 40.1 % of all jobs.<sup>39</sup> Restricted access to employment because of security concerns or having a criminal record were also significant factors in former prisoners' exploitation at work and their tenure of work (casual versus contract employee) and also made it more likely that they would be forced to fall back on casual work in the informal or night economy, for example pirate taxi driving or working on the doors of clubs. For most of the former prisoners we interviewed lack of employment or underemployment and its effects on their financial situation was the most pressing practical concern. These findings suggest that many former prisoners continue to encounter the same barriers to finding meaningful work that they did when we spoke to them in 2000, a time of strong economic growth in both the north and the south of Ireland. Now, eight years on, they are still looking for work, but as older workers in a much less favourable economic climate. For example, although the construction industry represents only 10% of overall employment in Northern Ireland (and 6.7% of employment in Belfast), some 25% of Catholic men work in the construction sector.<sup>40</sup> It is also one of the main sectors (apart from the community sector) where former prisoners have been able to find employment.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, it is not surprising that the effects of current economic down turn were acutely felt by the former prisoners who were or had been employed in the construction industry. One unemployed former prisoner, now in his early 50s, who had been working as carpenter, summed up his situation:

... I'm in the building trade so it's... at the minute we're in a 'crunch' as they say and the building [trade] is just falling apart. I mean from Christmas you could see it dying here in Belfast, literally dying. [...] Most of the building sites that were supposed to be opening up, haven't opened up and they're still waiting and waiting and waiting... I was guaranteed nine months work and the guy says, 'Look, I'm still waiting on the job opening...' and it [work] was there for me, but nowhere is open. It's hitting not just ex-prisoners but it's hitting all over. Ex-prisoners feel it a wee bit more because ... the likes of me when I came out of prison, I found it very hard to get employment because one, I was afraid to go into different areas, I wasn't very confident about going into a Protestant area and I would have been frightened.

Having a criminal record also meant that he was daunted by the prospect of having to travel to Europe to try to find work:

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<sup>39</sup> The areas where former Republican prisoners tend to live are also among those with lower employment rates than other areas of Northern Ireland (e.g., Castlereagh, Carrickfergus, North Down, Lisburn and Newtonabbey). See *Northern Ireland Labour Force Survey: 2006 Local Area Database*, Belfast: NISRA, Table 5. Working Age Employment by Industry.

<sup>40</sup> Compared with 10% of Protestants working in construction in 2002/3. See National Statistics Online, 'Northern Ireland Labour Market', at <http://statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id+965>

<sup>41</sup> According to the LFS, the unemployment differential (ratio of rates) between Catholics and Protestants (the difference in the unemployment rates of the two communities calculated by dividing the Unemployment rate of Catholics by that of Protestants) stood at 1.4 for Males in 2003, down from 2.0 in 2001. See Table 15, *2003 Labour Force Survey Religion Report Update, June 2005* Belfast: NISRA.

You are in the building trade and it fluctuates. With the building boom it's great but now with the crunch, it's horrible. I am very worried. I mean, where do I go? ... from here [Belfast]? I am carpenter. Do I go to Holland or Germany? ... And I am an ex-prisoner. What way am I going to be treated when I go into these foreign places? Is all that going to follow with me? That's one of the big problems I have and I mean, I don't even have a pension. You know the state pension even would be minimal for me. [...] My future, the more I'm getting into it, is looking bleak. When I hit 60, I am going to still be working. At 65 I'm still going to be working. At 70, if I'm still able, I'll have to work. I'll be doing something, you know stacking shelves somewhere, but I mean I could not live on the state benefit, so... it's a case of necessity. [...] To be honest it's very bleak for me, the more you delve into it.

Another former prisoner who had been working for an EU funded ex-prisoner project which has since come to an end summed up his situation:

Now probably most people would think that working for that group and working on a project like that you would have been able to expand your network of contacts and that when it ended you could slot in somewhere else. But that's not the case. A lot of the groups that we would have worked with – their funding is coming to an end too ... [we're] all going to be in the same boat so it's going to be difficult... I'm back to square one. I'm going to be looking work and I am going to have the same problems as I had before - filling in application forms and the one particular question is are you an ex-offender or have you been in prison or whatever way they word it, it's getting round that, it's whatever way.. If you put that down then you don't get the job. If you don't and they find out you lose the job so with all that's happened politically and all that's happened with the European money, it hasn't made that situation any better for ex-prisoners. They can still be discriminated against for the mere fact that they were in prison, you know.

So, in sum, a number of factors militate against former prisoners finding and keeping employment. Personal security concerns may limit geographical mobility. Having a criminal record continues to be a bar to many forms of employment. Increasingly age and physical incapacity impose practical limits on hitherto accessible forms of ex-prisoner employment such as construction or club security work. The winding down of EU funding Peace and reconciliation ex-prisoner groups eventually will sunset or curtail employment in ex-prisoner groups and many more former prisoners find themselves 'back to square one' only this time they will be ten years older. Their poor employment prospects and precarious financial situations seem set to continue or worsen in the near future along with rising unemployment,<sup>42</sup> stagnant growth, inflation in the cost of basic necessities like fuel and food and deflation of major assets such as housing. It is arguable that former prisoners only face the same challenges as other people in their communities who are trying to get by or looking for work, but this is to ignore the fact that former prisoners have the added disadvantages of being older and having a criminal conviction.

#### **5.4 Retirement and the future**

We asked the former prisoners what their thoughts were about retirement and whether they had taken any steps to save or set up a pension. One man said that the best way of understanding the situation he found himself in respect of retirement to try to imagine the likely trajectory of his working life had he not gone to prison:

I'd say I'd worried more about it [retirement] than thought about it. Again no real plan about retirement but I do know other people who haven't been to prison and they would have... this is

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<sup>42</sup> The overall unemployment rate for Northern Ireland was 4.6% in November 2007. *Labour Market Statistical Bulletin Monthly Labour Report, January 2008*. Belfast: NISRA.

the thing about it, you know, when you're dealing with lost time. I lost time in prison when I should have been doing things that my peers were doing and they're at this stage and I'm not anywhere near it so you know where I should be in a situation – I suppose a way of explaining it would be that [had he not gone to prison I might be thinking] I know what I'm going to do when I retire, when I'm 64, but I'll still have people working for me. I'll still be doing work, but I'll have people working for me if you know what I mean. I'll have a joinery company or a building company and I'll have 4-5 men working for me but I won't be working. I'll just be going on seeing that things is done right, like meeting deadlines, looking at plans and that you know, that I would spend most of my weekends pottering about in the garden and any work that needed done, cutting high hedges or anything like that, I'd get somebody and pay them to do it and I would have enough money to go a have a few pints at the weekend and watch the football in the pub and go home. Some people has that plan. I don't. And I think ex-prisoners wouldn't have that plan because they're so far behind everyone else because of their time lost in prison... that's the way I feel, right. But I don't let it get in on me or let it concern me so much because there is nothing I can do about that. But the fact of old age and retirement at this stage, I'd worry about it. I'd worry about, what if [my son] wants to go to university? Would I be able to pay? Would we be able to pay and this type of thing? But I'd say more worrying about retirement for the fact that I know I'm not as well off as people who didn't lose the time that we lost.

Many of the former prisoners we spoke to said they avoided thinking about the future for a number of reasons. One found it upsetting to confront the reality of his future financial situation:

I have probably been in a state of denial about his really... and it's something that I haven't really given a lot of thought to and in fact avoided thinking about. [...] This is one of the situations [thinking about state benefits for older people] where I have actively not thought about it and I have found myself on occasions - say, for example, on the radio there would be programmes or people talking about pensions... and I've turned them off simply because - you know, it's the classic avoidance or denial [...] it's upsetting to me. All of a sudden I'm looking at less than 15-16 years to retirement and you know it all of a sudden came up on me. You know what I mean?

One observed that his unemployment rendered the idea of retirement rather meaningless:

I don't think about retirement because I don't know what it means. Retirement is something for people with employment. I don't have employment – I think of old age.

Another suggested that his avoidance of thinking about the future, including his future finances, might have to do with coping strategies and habits formed in prison:

The future now, I know it's there, but...

We ex-prisoners have a great ability at clouding things over and we don't look too far into the future. We do, but we don't plan for the future. I know I don't. I kind of – I'll wait till it happens. Deal with that when it's ... I see it with other ex-prisoners. It's basically one day at a time and you never know what's round the corner [...] and it comes from that thing about where you come from. You know, 'We've been in worse situations, on the blanket protest, with no clothes only a blanket rounds us, never seeing the light of day and only getting out one hour a week to go to mass' .. you see the situation where you are and you say, 'It's never going to get as bad as that.'... You'll always survive.

I don't think that far ahead to tell you the truth. Day by day I live.

## **5.5 Continuing impacts of imprisonment**

A number of studies have been done on the impact of long-term imprisonment on politically-motivated prisoners in Northern Ireland<sup>43</sup> and it is now well established that imprisonment has had complex and long lasting negative impacts on mental health, family relationships and children as well as very significant detrimental effects on employment. This body of research also indicates that along with a high degree of resilience significant levels of psychological harm were also common among ex-prisoners. A pivotal underlining assumption of this set of interviews, and those conducted for our earlier study (2002) is that the impacts of imprisonment can be properly assessed only in the context of the former prisoner's individual biography and life course. In brief, the key findings of the 2002 study were that former prisoners and their families faced complex issues of loss, psychological change and areas of experience that were not, or could not be, communicated. They also reported both structural and cultural barriers to social integration especially in respect of finding and keeping meaningful employment. At that time most of the former prisoners had been out of prison for over a decade and some were still struggling to come to terms with the losses and sacrifices of the past and finding a sense of purpose for the future. This set of follow up interviews explored the extent to which the former prisoners' circumstances and experience of self and relationships had changed. They also invited former prisoners to evaluate their current circumstances and past experience in the context of their own biography and life course.

One former prisoner's reflections on his own situation also distilled the mixture of losses and gains that many others reported too:

... All threads seem to run back to that period [of imprisonment] and how things got jumbled then and regardless of how much you think you've improved... you know very often I have found myself thinking about how things would have been different you know what I mean ... not to be completely negative about what did happen, there were certain things that did happen, that the prison experience gave me an experience that has been with me and has made me a different person I think, for good or ill and there's been some good in it. I can't really say it was all totally negative. But I do think it had its impacts on certain parts of my life and that they still impact and will do for pretty much the rest of my life... You never quite get away from it.

Another gave his assessment of how well former prisoners had resettled generally:

Now the bulk of prisoners I would say... it's very difficult to put a figure on it but perhaps 80% have after a fashion (and some more successful than others) have resettled, they have found employment, or they have come to terms with their unemployment, they have found accommodation, they have established some type of niche within society for themselves. There would be .... it could be high as 20% who have persistent ongoing mental or psychological problems...some are more acute than others and I don't think that for that particular section of people that their problems will go away with time. That's going to persist.

One of the things that was evident for many was that they had not or could not abandon the habit of stoicism they had adopted in prison and for that reason they found the question of psychological 'a hard one to answer' and that they saw their experience as a part of military experience:

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<sup>43</sup> See for example, Shirlow (2001) *The State They Are In: An Independent Evaluation*, Belfast: University of Ulster Social Exclusion Unit, and Jamieson and Grounds (2002, 2003) op. cit.

I was involved in a war and seen things a soldier sees.

For that reason it was hard for many to admit to having emotional problems:

... It was very important that you didn't show emotion. You didn't show fear, you didn't show that you weren't able to cope with situations. It was very important to show that you were a very strong person, that you were able to cope with anything and all that and to sort of erect...you almost invented yourself to fit the particular role so that ... you weren't vulnerable to attack from others or from situations that would have been very difficult you know.

Not admitting having problems was also related to a former prisoner's a desire to put prison and emotional distress behind him and to fit in socially:

I wanted to feel I was drawing a line under that part of my life [prison], but there was always an anxiety and fear at the centre and I guess I used alcohol to relieve that fear and feel part of the family or company or situation... I suppose I would have justified it [binge drinking] as making up for lost time.

Several interviewees reported self-medicating with alcohol to try to alleviate depression, anxiety or social ill ease. A significant number of interviewees reported that other former prisoners were using alcohol in the same way arguing strongly for the need to acknowledge and address the problem of alcoholism among ex-prisoners. As noted above in the discussion of survey findings, the high scores on the screening tests for hazardous drinking and alcoholic dependency reported above appear to bear this out. One interviewee made the astute observation that there was a real danger of 'reductionism' in attributing excessive drinking only to the effects of prison or the conflict rather than seeing it as a community-wide problem and epidemiological research on the prevalence rates for alcohol related illness in Northern Ireland lend support to his view.<sup>44</sup> He was not alone in recognising that any assessment of how older former prisoners were doing also needed to be put in the broad context of how other people in Northern Ireland were doing:

Now the positive element of it is that people [ex-prisoners] have managed to resettle [...] That's the positive element of the work that has been done and the passing of time and the decrease in tension and the lowering of resistance or lowering of opposition to the resettling of prisoners. Quite a number of them have managed to find employment, quite a number of them have re-established a relationship or relationships either in a partnership or family setting or with their siblings and that's the positive aspect of it. But there remains the other elements of it and it's not a ... this isn't a very black and white Manichaean situation where it's all good or it's all bad or we can separate it out. It runs across a type of a spectrum where some are doing a little better than others, some not so good and even those who have resettled reasonably well will still occasionally have the odd difficult day. But you have to take it that in society at large ... there are echoes of that as well.

There have been a number of epidemiological studies of mental health in Northern Ireland aimed at determining the extent to which the general population has been negatively affected by the conflict and these studies suggest, not only that mental health problems reflected in the rate of

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<sup>44</sup> See for example, O'Reilly, D. and Stevenson, M. (2003) Mental health in Northern Ireland: Have 'The Troubles' made it worse? *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* 57: 488-492 and Health Promotion Agency for Northern Ireland / NISRA (2008) op.cit.

suicide or mood and anxiety disorders increased between 2001 and 2006, but that these rates of illness were significantly higher for males and for people living in the most deprived areas.<sup>45</sup> Most studies have found an elevated rate of PTSD and psychiatric morbidity in Northern Ireland.<sup>46</sup> However, one comparative study of psychiatric morbidity in Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK found that, although the mean GHQ12 score for Northern Ireland were certainly high (at 11.41), they were not the highest (Wales). The researchers suggest that the fact the Northern Ireland score not as high as expected could be the result of the moderating effects of community coping mechanisms such as habituation to violence, denial and social cohesion.<sup>47</sup> While it is important to be reminded of people's capacity for resilience, it is nevertheless the case that the negative effects of the conflict are evident in across a whole range of areas of Northern Irish society, e.g. in the number of households on incapacity or disablement benefits.<sup>48</sup>

## 5.6 Social integration

Resettlement into the community after release inevitably involved negotiating the ex-prisoner identity, especially for those who relocated to a new community:

I am now settled in an area and if I knew that I had to do it all over again. If I chose to move to another area I'd have to start up with your next door neighbour and shop and who are you and where do you come from? That's just natural. People want to know are you from this county or that county ... I'd hate to have to go through that again so it means that once you have settled somewhere, you'd know it would be a problem if you went to move to some other area because you don't know how people are going to accept you. 'Oh that boy was in prison'. That's what people said and if you were in prison you must have done something bad or you must be a bad guy. Good people don't go to prison. So it's something that you have to live with and it's something that your family has to live with too, you know.

One former prisoner who had sustained serious and visible physical injuries said that he felt doubly stigmatised by his record of imprisonment and by his disability and that this deterred him from applying for work or engaging in social interaction with people he didn't know:

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<sup>45</sup> O'Reilly, D. and Stevenson, M. (2003) *ibid.*; O'Reilly, D. and Browne, S. (2001) *Health and Health Service Use in Northern Ireland: Social Variations, A report from the Health and Social Wellbeing Survey 1997*. Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (2007) *Northern Ireland Health and Wellbeing Survey 2005/06* Belfast: Central Survey Unit, NISRA; French, D., Quigley, D. and Mayock, M. (2004) *Health and Social Care Inequalities Monitoring System: First Update Bulletin 2004*, Belfast: Information Analysis Directorate, Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. Stewart, B., Quigley, D. and Mayock, M. (2007) *Health and Social Care Inequalities Monitoring System, Second Update Bulletin 2007*, Belfast: Information Analysis Directorate, Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

<sup>46</sup> O'Reilly and Stevenson (2003), *op.cit.* and Miller, R., Devine, P. and Schubotz, D. (2003) *Secondary Analysis of the 1997 and 2001 Northern Ireland Health and Social Wellbeing Surveys* Belfast: NISRA.

<sup>47</sup> Murphy, H. and Lloyd, F. (2007) 'Civil Conflict in Northern Ireland and the Prevalence of Psychiatric Disturbance Across the United Kingdom: A Population Study Using the British Household Panel Survey and the Northern Ireland Household Panel Survey', *International Journal of Social Psychiatry* 53(5):397-407.

<sup>48</sup> Northern Ireland had the highest rate (43%) of households receiving incapacity or disablement benefits in the UK in 2005/6. See National Statistics Online, 'Regional Profile Northern Ireland', at <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=1137>

...it hard to explain [...] See, whenever you come to that question [re criminal conviction], there's no point you know because you know the question's there... so it puts you off ... so you end up going into yourself, you know [...] especially having a disability too, being an ex-prisoner [...] Psychologically I don't like going near people who would look at me and would say, well they would surmise I am ex-republican ...because looking at my hand, my arm and my fingers ... especially in this society, they would know.

Former prisoners who live in isolated rural areas, like other rural men, are at greater risk of social isolation and are well aware of the implications for their old age:

I live in a rural area, miles from friends my own age. I will be isolated in old age. I would like to have some help keeping in contact with my friends.

This highlights an important issue for former prisoners who live in the country especially those living on their own and that is the difficulty of developing and participating in social networks. Former prisoners share the problems of other men living in rural areas and, depending on the prevailing politics of the locales where they live, may also have the added stigma of a criminal record. There are some excellent social inclusion initiatives aimed at rural men but few target the inclusion of former prisoners.<sup>49</sup>

## **5.7 Family relationships and understanding**

On the issue of whether there had been an improvement in his family's understanding what he had been through one interviewee remarked,

No, sometimes when I speak about things which happened, initially things will take a, 'Jesus that's terrible' form and then they'll turn round and say, 'God Daddy, that happened to you too.' You think to yourself, you don't want to poison the kids' minds or put things upon them but ... but they see things and say, 'God that happened to you too', you know. [Q. *And did they not say that before?*] Not really, maybe they were in denial.

Some former prisoners still felt pressured by the expectations of others to be emotionally strong and said that they did not think their relatives were aware of they found things difficult:

... I'm not sure that they are [aware]. I'm not sure that they are. I think people that are very close to me have a picture...well they know my characteristics, but I think they also have a picture of me that stands beside...they're familiar with my mannerisms but I think they have a picture of me that doesn't include sentimentality or an enormous amount of sentimentality and there is an element of it within the family and within the widest family that they do expect me to be tougher maybe than others [...] and to take a leading role and because of the [prison] history they expect me - I do believe they expect me - to have a harder shell than others and sometimes I do and sometimes I don't.

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<sup>49</sup> See ICBAN, Social Inclusion Working Group (2008) 'Men and Cross-Border Social Exclusion', at <http://www.socialinclusion.ie/documents/MenandCrossBorderSI.pdf> and also the report on the North Leitrim Men's Group (2006) *Men on the Border* at <http://homepage.eircom.net/~nlmg/NLMG%20research%20project-full%20report%20Version%202.html>

One interviewee suggested that his family's understanding of his prison experience and its effects on him had not changed substantially over the past eight years and that, if anything, his family was growing a little impatient with his continuing difficulties:

I suppose they'd have problems with seeing it as you using it as an excuse you know what I mean, 'That's only an excuse. I mean you're out now so many years, you're bound to be over that... You're long enough... you know there's only certain amount of time that anyone can be an apprentice to learning [to fit back in]... they should move on...' It's hard for anyone to fully understand it unless they've been through it themselves.

## 5.8 Disrupted life course

Imprisonment had a major impact on the life course of the former prisoners we spoke to, especially those who served long sentences. For some it permanently altered the trajectory of their working and family lives, leaving them out of synchronicity with their age peers, perpetually in the position of trying to 'catch up'. I was not just a case of time lost, but also of being out of time or out of step with others in terms of their life course:

The problem is not with the fact that you've been to prison... the problem's with the lost time. The problem is where we are at compared to people who didn't go to prison. That's the problem. I'm 50 now, right? I have a brother who never went to prison. He is at a situation where he has a little bit of work, he has people working for him, and he has a plan, but he's not getting up and working for somebody else. Now anybody at 50 who worked for their life should be at that situation... Ex-prisoners are like this unless they're the lucky ones who are very, very close to Sinn Fein and who have been catered for. But anyone who hasn't been catered for are in a situation similar to myself or maybe even worse. But it's where they are. A man or a woman at that age working with people who are only starting off, do you know what I mean - apprentices and low paid jobs ... are thinking 'What's wrong with him? Why is somebody at that age... he's an odd ball. He's not... this is a misfit. Do you know, this guy shouldn't be here. This guy should be in the office. This guy should be the foreman. He's shouldn't be down here cutting timber with a saw. He should be the foreman... there's a bigger problem with people understanding the fact that we're trying to catch up, but we're never going to catch up, if you know what I mean. We're trying to catch up on the time that's lost.

I am where I am because of the lost time.

Many said they felt that they should have more years ahead than they did:

Yes, yes, yes, yes, there's very much a sense, and it's only really recently that I am starting to realise how long... or what a chunk out of my life prison took. When I was in prison I didn't realise just how short a span a human has and how much two decades ...that especially in terms of one's adulthood that it was quite a chunk out of adulthood. I mean I often hear people say in terms of others going to prison, they're only in gaol for so long and I often think you don't realise just how big a chunk it's taking out of an adult's life. [...] I'd say over the last 3 to 4 years that I am starting to realise [...] how quickly a few years pass and that's really striking through to me now and when I think that 10 years from now I'll be retiring that when it really impacts upon me just how fast the time moves and the percentage of it that I've spent in prison.

But at the same time and often the same people said that they had not expected to survive the conflict:

There are days when I am amazed to have made it this long...

I didn't even expect to live to this age [53].

At this moment in time [age 50] I've lived longer than I thought I was going to.

Former prisoners who had moved away from their communities of origin after release could find themselves socially dislocated and some expected to remain so in the future:

In the normal run of events people spend ... they have a family to support them through old age, not everybody but a lot. The other side is that very often, particularly in Ireland, people have lived in the same district for quite a long number of years. Now some of these social patterns are changing, but a lot of people would find, if they did find themselves in a nursing home, that their neighbours would still know them... now I have lived here for [x] years so presumably some of my neighbours would [know me], but I haven't the same affinity. I wasn't at school with them ... I didn't work with most of them and I don't know if I could expect the same number of people to visit me occasionally in the nursing home that would have visited say my old neighbour [...] I don't know if I would have that. My old acquaintances for the most part still remain old prisoners and if they're scattered all around, can we move around [to visit one another]?

Another former Republican prisoner living in the South said that he was wary of going out socially because he knew he would inevitably encounter people who knew he had served a long prison sentence and delighted in pointing that the IRA had failed to achieve its goals in Northern Ireland:

'You done all that time for nothing'. It took you a long time to learn.'

His response to this was to avoid people or social situations where this was likely to come up and he felt marginalized as a result:

[...] You just pass the hand with them and move on. You wouldn't get into a conversation with them because if the conversation went on to politics you know you're on a hiding to nothing. I know that's a bit contradictory because there is a government in the North of a kind, the war's over. There is peace, but yet you have that where people because of it are more marginalised and more excluded from getting involved in society because of it.

Grundy et al (2007) have highlighted the role that social interaction plays in mental health and social inclusion. Their findings confirm what might be expected intuitively, namely that 'good mental quality of life' and emotional well being was associated with social interaction. This suggests to us the importance of the continuance of former prisoner networks in the future.

## **5.9 Evaluation of the past**

I take the view that it is impossible [to evaluate the personal costs of the conflict], that to count up how many lives are worth making social progress and I can't answer that question and I don't try to answer the question because it something for someone else. And I think if I tried to answer it, it would do me enormous damage mentally. I would much prefer had we been able to do it without that because in a very personal sense you know my three brothers are dead as a result of the conflict and one uncle, so I mean I am very acutely aware of the cost that involved; that's beyond counting. What damage I've done to others, but I suffered. It's a two-way street. Others are very aware of what I inflicted on them, but I can't measure that. And some other generation or somebody else will do it, but we have moved forward and we have moved forward significantly.

Today, I'm OK.

It's like anything. I think there are pluses and minuses. There are things that having to live that type of life ... I have had the benefit of experiencing things that most people won't. I have an insight into learning that most people don't. So there are pluses and minuses. Cost to my family is something that I will never be able to calculate, I think particularly my mother [...] but it's skirted round, but never done in depth.

A number of the interviewees expressed regret and disappointment about not having children and saw it as a continuing loss in the future and this was particularly poignant taken alongside the pleasure and hope for the future that many of the participants took in their children and grandchildren.

When asked how he thought he would look back on his life in old age, one interviewee said that he thought it would be with regret at having wasted his life and the lives of others in the conflict:

The thirty years are wasted. I mean if I look upon what has transpired, or what has manifested itself after thirty years of struggle, it's a complete waste of my, my days in jail, the suffering I caused my own family and the suffering I caused other people that I was instrumental in causing death and mourning to. What has come about wasn't worth one drop of anyone's blood nor one second in prison for anybody you know, so that sort of plays upon my mind that that this is ... better had we not done anything at all at the start and cause 3,000 odd deaths or not be part of killing... 3,000 deaths and end up with what we have got now like. It's a great tragedy.

One interviewee described himself as 'an angry old man' now because of his disappointment with the way things have turned out politically:

I am angry, I am angry at myself, that I was so fuckin' stupid, I believed the rhetoric you know and I believed what we were actually a revolutionary movement, and that bothers me and that I went into it with my eyes open you know, and maybe I was kidding myself on that we... this was going to be a revolution and that we are going to change the whole thing, but... it just was one of those things, like all failed things in the past...

We asked the interviewees what the conflict had taught them about life and about themselves. One said with considerable anger and disillusionment that it taught him that

I was able to sustain things, or not sustain things but to endure things, which I would never in my life though I would be able to endure and become involved in nasty things as well that I didn't think I was capable of. So it's an extraordinary situation made me do strange and extraordinary things and I mean, to spend three years scribing shit on a wall [laughs]... and think you're a revolutionary [laughs]. You read about these jokes about people doing it in homes, in sanatoriums who think they're Napoleon Bonaparte – there was me spreading the shite on the wall thinking I was Ché Guevara.

One interviewee recognised that in some ways Loyalist ex-prisoners must feel in a more invidious position than Republicans do in terms of stigmatisation and the lack of post-release support because Loyalists could see at closer hand the discrepancy between what they receive as ex-paramilitaries and the benefits the UDR were given on demobilization even though they both had fought on the same side:

I've had intimate conversations with members of the UVF. Loyalists feel it even more acutely because they know and worked with, on a military basis, members of the UDR during the conflict. They will say to you openly, 'Look, see whenever I was 17 my choice was to fight against you and the threat of Republicanism, was either join the UVF or join the UDR. I decided to join the UVF. My brother joined the UDR. He gets brought up to Hillsborough for a garden party and given a 75 thousand pound a year golden handshake. What did I get?' [...]. It's an immensely complex area because it's so riven with political manipulation and advantage that's its difficult to deal with. What it means is the rationale for dealing with you know the stuff that the Vietnam Vets have, the stuff that the post-Iraqi or Afghanistan soldiers have in terms of not allowing that to overspill into the Rambo-type situation when soldiers come back, right – all of the stuff is not being provided for people who went through exactly the same experience as conventional soldiers but because they were 'paramilitary' [they don't get the same care], right? Yet the chance of that overspill happening is every bit a great with them as it is with people who served in the regular, conventional regiments – and worse - because you have a living working example of where you're being discriminated against. So if you decided to join the UDR instead of the UVF you would get a pension, a golden handshake and all this sort of care, but because you didn't, you're not getting it. So I think you're right. It is immensely complex, but also immensely dangerous. And the only thing that the politicians or those that play politics with it have been able to rely on to date is the implementation of discipline by the organisations that people came from and that's beginning to wane and it frightens me.

This view resonates Samuel Stouffer's observation on the expectations of war veterans generally, and that is that

"There is one great fear in the heart of every serviceman and it is not that he will be killed or maimed, but that when he is finally allowed to go home and piece together what he can of life, that he will be made to feel that he has been a sucker for all the sacrifices he made."<sup>50</sup>

## **5.10 Areas where support for former prisoners has failed**

The restrictions and risks associated with residual criminalisation was a source of frustration for many. One interviewee suggested that

There should be legislation brought in to governance which creates confidence among ex-prisoners/ ex-combatants going forward. This would help to put some stability into their lives. Everyone is stating and accepting the war is over, so ex-political prisoners should be treated as if they never went to prison at all. Republicans are in Government but the party which most republican ex-prisoners belonged to have failed to address this issue. Failing to do this has left us all isolated. Going to U.S.A. is a risk. Work in some industries is a risk. This is a risk that people who didn't go to prison don't have to deal with. You would think the Sinn Fein party would have this on the top of their agenda. But no. We are on our own here. Life for ex-prisoners has to be planned by themselves and their families so they don't take too many of these risks and end up back where they started.

There were a wide range of responses to the question, "In relation to the needs of ex-prisoners generally, do you think there are forms of support that are lacking but that ought to be put in place for older ex-prisoners?" but no clear consensus about who should provide such help. The needs identified by the respondents ranged from a need for affordable housing and job training to counseling.

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<sup>50</sup> Stouffer, S.A. et al (1949) *The American Soldier, Part 2, Combat and Its Aftermath* New York: John Wiley & Son, p. 290.

I was in jail for all of my 20s and didn't get a chance to train for jobs – I need that help now.

I think that better training facilities should exist that would enable ex-prisoners to fit into the economy better. For example, having subsidised driving lessons and exam would go a long way towards increasing employment potential.

Help to train for a suitable job.

The state should provide [job training] and then we can contribute to the state.

A number of the men we spoke to identified the misuse of alcohol as an issue for former prisoners, especially men's reluctance to admit to 'having a problem with alcohol'. He suggested the need for some sort of health education in this regard:

There's a lot of ex-prisoners with alcohol problems you know. I think you would need something to deal with that. [...] Some kind of clinic or some kind of a health approach to it. I mean I'm not an expert on it, but ... they would be in the pub every day, twice a day so we could do something on that [...] you would have to start approaching them first, you know do it slowly. Don't be pointing the finger type of approach [...]

Similarly, a number of respondents identified the need for therapy, counseling or help with emotional problems as important areas of unmet need for former prisoners and this was certainly borne out by the findings of our health and well being survey. One respondent commented:

I think that a safe therapeutic space needs to be provided for the sharing of personal experiences pre and post release. I think this is very important and aids a search for meaning and integration of positive and negative experiences. I would love to meet with those with whom I shared a particular compound at certain times. Something about re-engagement on the prison level, and now on another level post-release.

I am a survivor with all sorts of baggage. I know I am still working through particular aspects of trauma. I don't feel like folding. I would love help. I don't know where to go to get it. I don't know of any route, body or organisation that I have enough confidence and trust in that I would go to. BUT I know I can survive... I am in a position where I am saying - and up until a few years ago I wouldn't have accepted this - I may not be a common example of what going on in the ex-prisoner community...there is a whole array of problems facing people.

I would love help with emotional development. I have a wee bit of concern with the advent of grandchildren coming along that maybe there's a side of me ... there's a richness in terms of that emotional involvement that I've never had before. Now I have to say sitting at this moment in time that I can't see where it is. If I did I would go looking for it but I would love to explore the possibility.

One interviewee emphasised the importance of avoiding reducing all conflict and prison-related trauma to a generic 'post release experience' and recognizing the very particular salience of events individual lives;

People talk to me all the time about the trauma of release, post-release, post traumatic stress - the trauma isn't about release. If you don't look at the circumstances of arrest, interrogation, imprisonment and sentence because they're all different and what I mean by that is this ... [it] is that people ask me ... I mean 'You're not an informer and you don't seem to have a very dim view

of people who are informers. Why is that?' And I go, well listen, 'A person who was caught dead to rights on a military operation wasn't interrogated because they didn't need to interrogate you because they had all of the evidence to put you in goal. But someone who they didn't have the evidence on, they beat the crap out of them or they played psychological mind games or they arrested their family to put pressure on them, etc., etc., etc. The individual circumstances determined the way in which they approached their interviews, their interrogations. Now if I had of gotten that [name] got in Castlereagh, would I have become a quivering blubbing mass – very, very likely. But they didn't need to do that to me. They had me dead to rights. So I don't think people are taking a holistic view of what people went through. [...] I just think that if you don't take it as a package, you don't understand it. And not only that, I just think it's what happens. People do it themselves. They do it almost as a survival mechanism, they try to segment the experience and I think it's a human trait. Once you segment it, you pick the segments that are easiest to deal with. So who deals with the hard parts? The hard parts, that's surely the biggest pieces that are going to give you the biggest difficulty. [...] I hasten to add - You will not jump in and get inside anyone's head. There are a whole lot of practical problems that have to be resolved to put people in the position where they can even start to deal with all that.

Another thought that the needs of former prisoners ought to be put in the context of the wider Northern Ireland society, which was also war-affected:

I am not sure that as a body of people that we have quite identified ... I don't think we have quite identified the amount of psychological damage that was done to ... the ex-prisoner world and I also suspect - I don't know to what extent this is relevant to your research - the wider community in Northern Ireland has been psychologically damaged to an extent that has really been ... I'm not sure whether it has been consciously or unconsciously buried, but it really hasn't been identified and the ex-prisoner community has suffered from that as well. I don't think we have quite the range of facilities to deal with this [...] we can't agree on the terminology [for describing the past as war or not war] never mind agree on care for former participants, those that supported the Crown and the government have provision for care, those that were on the other side because it isn't accepted that there was an insurrection or war or civil war, the other side has to be treated as criminal so all of this continues [...] the depth and seriousness of it [psychiatric cases] here in Belfast are way beyond what you would expect even in the most deprived areas of London [...] not just the ex-prisoner community but Northern Ireland in general has been psychologically traumatised in a way that is not being recognised and perhaps I would suggest that once we go to that then we have to accept that there was a conflict bordering on .. Do we want to call it a war? Do we want to call it an insurgency? Find a term that'll suit, but it certainly wasn't just a blip on the screen and there's so many things that we can't ... that we have to paper over because to take the cover off it, then that asks a further series of difficult and disturbing questions [...] The problems we have with ex-prisoners is that the services may not be there or the dedicated services are not there because I suppose partly because we haven't been able to be honest enough to come forward and identify that we need the services so it's very difficult to provide something that's not being asked for and, if we're afraid to identify our own problems ... and these are problems that I'm only .. to an extent I have been aware of it, but ... time has revealed them more starkly than I would have imagined. I think that's one part of it and I think that the other part of it is that we're completely unaware of the future [...] our vision, our focus has been a very narrow focus, a focus on how to extend the shelf life of ex-prisoner projects.

Ex-prisoners are victims of the conflict and should be treated as such. Support should be unconditional of political support for the peace process.

The fact that former prisoners continue to experience a whole range of problems and that many of these involve social and economic exclusion will surprise no one, but the prevalence and seriousness of some of the problems that are only beginning to emerge ought to.

## 6. Conclusions and recommendations

### 6.1 Conclusions

As we noted in our discussion of the former prison demographic above, it is difficult to make a precise estimate of former prisoner numbers because of the incompleteness, and inconsistency of official statistics for the period of the conflict in Northern Ireland. Nevertheless, it is generally accepted that there are 30,000 ex-prisoners or more living in Northern Ireland and the border areas. The majority are older and now in or approaching their 50s and 60s. Some, but certainly not all, feel more settled in their private lives and communities than they did in 2000 and this may be due in part to moving into a period of greater personal security and political stability. But one of the things we did not expect to find was that there has been so little change in the precariousness of their employment and financial situations. The problem of finding and keeping meaningful work has worsened for some, including those who had previously been employed full-time over the last 10 years or so. The effects of unemployment are not simply financial because work is not just about money. It also provides people's lives with structure and rhythm, important social connectedness and potentially also a sense of purpose, dignity and value. If the former prisoners who participated in this research are typical of former prisoners as a whole, then there is cause for concern as the men we spoke to said that they found it no easier now to find work than they did eight years ago. So there appears to have been a dismaying lack of progress on this issue despite its having been raised in virtually every report on the resettlement of former prisoners that has been done since 1998.<sup>51</sup> Historically ex-prisoners' restricted access to work, or work commensurate with their qualifications, has been product of a number of related factors: having a criminal conviction acting as both a formal and informal bar to employment; security concerns restricting travel to work and types of work; the effects of a skills deficit or lack of fit between skills and available work and a lack of employment opportunities in the communities where they live.<sup>52</sup> Although security concerns have eased and until recently at least there has been jobs growth in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, progress on the issue of discrimination on the basis of a criminal conviction for politically-motivated offences has been slow. As yet there is no statutory basis for preventing such discrimination and the voluntary code of practice for employers agreed in 2007 has not been adopted for the public service.<sup>53</sup> Like everyone else, former prisoners have a finite number of years in which to contribute to a state pension and for the participants in this research that window is now on average only 13.4 years. It may not be long, but it long enough to make the required ten years national insurance contributions – if people are employed. Former prisoners' economic marginalization as a result of restricted access to work has clear implications for their later lives. Economic

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<sup>51</sup> Gormally, B. Maruna, S. and McEvoy, K. (2007) *Thematic Evaluation of Funded Projects: Politically-Motivated Former Prisoners and their Families*, for Border Action, Shirlow, P. (2008) *Politically Motivated Former Prisoners: Evaluation of the Core Funding Project, 2006-2008*, Belfast: The Community Foundation for Northern Ireland.

<sup>52</sup> See *Labour Force Survey: 2006 Local Area Database*, op.cit.

<sup>53</sup> See OFM/DFM (2007) *Recruiting People with Conflict-Related Convictions: Employer's Guidance*, at <[http://www.ofmfinni.gov.uk/1.05.07\\_exprisoners\\_final\\_guidance](http://www.ofmfinni.gov.uk/1.05.07_exprisoners_final_guidance)> and Shirlow and McEvoy (2008), op. cit. pp. 95-98.

marginalisation pre-pension age is a potential predictor of poverty in later life and poverty is one of the biggest predictors of social exclusion and ill-health.<sup>54</sup>

### **6.1.1 Life course perspective**

As we argued in our introductory comments we consider a life course perspective to be the most useful and appropriate framework for thinking about older former prisoners and social exclusion.<sup>55</sup> A life course perspective understands the course of a person's life as a flow or trajectory over time and not merely a set of regular and predictable 'stages'. Any given person's life course is shaped by not only time and events, but by the operation of a socially-structured political economy of inequality that drive trajectories of inequality.<sup>56</sup> The conflict in Northern Ireland was fought predominantly by young, working class men. For example, the average age on imprisonment of the men in our study was just under 19 years. Although most were released 25-30 years ago, many are still out of step in many domains of life with their age peers who did not go to prison. The men we spoke to reported imprisonment changed the trajectories of their lives in a host of ways including a profound dislocation in time, sense of self, personal relationships, community involvement and engagement in work. In reviewing their lives and the impact of imprisonment on it, they saw some personal gains in terms of education and self development, as well as significant losses of time, important life chances and frequently, lasting psychological harm. Our findings suggest that many former prisoners continue to have difficulty forming and maintaining intimate relationships as evidence in the higher than expected number of single (never married, separated or divorced and childless) men living alone. We found that the social isolation of former prisoners is not limited to men living on their own. Many of those who were displaced or moved away from their communities of origin after release, especially outside Belfast and Derry, reported having rather tenuous involvement in their new community networks due to the stigma of imprisonment or the reticence of others. 'Ex-prisoners and ex-offenders' are named as a specific target group in the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme (LDSIP) managed by Pobal, but social inclusion activities are planned and delivered locally to respond to local economic needs. Consequently, in areas where they are a minority and no ex-prisoner groups exist to provide input into programme planning, the needs of politically-motivated former prisoners may be give short shrift. As Elster (1992) argues, questions of social justice and the allocation of scarce goods and necessary burdens get played out locally.<sup>57</sup>

### **6.1.2 Mental health**

The lives of the former prisoners we spoke to continued to be shaped by the effects of the conflict and prison experience in myriad ways. A significant number continued to suffer from psychological symptoms and especially from depression and anxiety. In some cases

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<sup>54</sup> Kohen and Shields 1990, op.cit., and Walker (1993), op.cit.

<sup>55</sup> Dewilde (2003) op.cit.

<sup>56</sup> O'Rand (1996) op.cit.

<sup>57</sup> Elster, J. (1992) *Local Justice: how institutions allocate scarce goods and necessary burdens*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

these symptoms were made worse by the misuse of alcohol as a form of self medication. What we know about analogous groups is that the effects of war experience can be late in onset and long lasting and persist well into a veteran's 50s and later life.<sup>58</sup> It is important also to note that trauma is not always and only synonymous with PTSD. For example, Iversen et al (2005) found that depression more common than PTSD among UK service veterans.<sup>59</sup> Their finding that mood and anxiety disorders were more prevalent than full blown PTSD is consistent with our findings in this study and the work we did in 2000-2002. Our findings suggest that former prisoners also suffer from similar mental health problems, but that a variety of intervening factors hampers their getting the help they need. Former prisoners may be unwilling to admit they are having problems because of pride or shame and the problem may be made worse by a resort to self-medication through drugs or alcohol and this is indirectly encouraged by masculine and community norms about drinking and the function of the pub as locus of social life.

### 6.1.3 Service provision

Ex-prisoner groups were uniquely positioned to provide support and understanding to others on their release and much effective work has been done, especially through their outreach activities.<sup>60</sup> But, ex-prisoners' needs are not static. They have changed over time and will continue to do so. As one interviewee observed, new ex-prisoner problems are likely to

... come on steam in about 10-12 years time when this large number of people will reach retirement age. Now most of the politically-motivated prisoners were of a generation. The people who flowed through the various organisations to which I am referring ... In my case I'm looking particularly at the Republican ex-prisoner community, but presumably the same broad difficulty will face the Loyalist community... the biggest intake into the Provisional IRA was in 1971 and the next big intake was 1981 because of the hunger strike - in the first case it was internment and Bloody Sunday and then in 1980-81 the hunger strikes - and the graph if you like of IRA intake there was a sharp spike in 1971, flat again to another sharp spike in 1981. It's not a constant 45 degree angle graph or a flat graph. So there'd be a large number of men and by and large men (and it was male), joined the IRA in ... [they] would have been between 17-18 years of age to 22-23 years of age, so just taking it on that a lot of them will be reaching 65 ... within the next 10 years and thereafter. I see a problem there because we are moving away from providing structured support for the ex-prisoner community. That [support] will not be there in 10 years time. And the real problem I suppose in some ways is that where 10 or 15 years ago the ex-prisoner community because of its age profile was better able, even without external funding, better able to provide some mutual assistance one to the other because they were of an age to physically move around and meet with and provide that type of comfort from one to the other and because ... enough of them had paid employment that they had some spare money to go and meet with them. My fear would be that post-65 people are neither physically able to spend the same hours and that progressively their fitness and health would decline ... and their financial circumstances won't allow them to move about with the same freedom...

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<sup>58</sup> See Elder (1994), Elder and Clipp (1989) and Hunt and Robbins (2001), op.cit.

<sup>59</sup> Iversen, A., Dyson, C., Smith, N., Greenberg, N., Walwyn, R., Unwin, C., Hull, L., Hotpopf, M., Dandeker, C. Ross, J. and Wessley, S. (2005) "Goodbye and good luck": the mental health needs and treatment experiences of British ex-service personnel', *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 186: 480-486.

<sup>60</sup> See Gormally, B. Maruna, S. and McEvoy, K. (2007) *Thematic Evaluation of Funded Projects: Politically-Motivated Former Prisoners and their Families*, Belfast/ Monaghan: Border Action.

So there will continue to be a place for both formal and informal self help and peer support among former prisoners.

One interviewee suggested that a piecemeal approach to meeting the needs of former prisoners through diverse ex-prisoner groups rather than the development of an overall programme of support meant that their difficulties remained unacknowledged and unaddressed. He also thought that the more serious problems that had been allowed to develop but not dealt with would manifest themselves in the future:

I know that this is a wee bit damning but I think that a lot of the stuff that was done for the last 16-17 years on ex-prisoners was small segments as opposed to taking any holistic view of how you deal with that constituency. Now a lot of people would say, 'Tough shit. They shouldn't have joined organisations, they shouldn't have been involved.' and we can go into a whole palaver about that but my biggest concern is that, if you can countenance that, that is an issue and a problem, is it going to create circumstances where the lid blows off the pot and it becomes a social consequence rather than an individual consequence? Because I think people in this society are quite prepared to deal with the individual consequences: "If you want to live in poverty because you decided to dedicate your life to the IRA, tough shit. You know, you shouldn't have done what you've done. You shouldn't have been a criminal." But that then spews out where someone has all of that resentment and all of that legacy and says, 'Listen, see then only thing I was ever any good at was killing people or robbing banks or...' 'See you how I'm going get a living now – I'll rob a bank', and they start robbing banks or [...] Now I think there is already [...] enough anecdotal evidence to suggest that the over spill is manifesting itself in things like alcohol abuse, drug abuse and domestic violence, and I have to say, I don't see anything that this University is doing to enquire into that. [...]

It was clear to us that although many former prisoners more willing to admit they needed professional help with their psychological difficulties now than they had been in the past, they were not always sure how to go about asking for it. One summed up the position of many whom admitted they needed help but were uncertain how to access it:

I don't know who should or could help me.

Opinion was divided on the issue of whether psychological treatment should be provided by some form of dedicated former prisoner service or by mainstream services. One interviewee thought that the dedicated ex-prisoner support was only needed where a former prisoner's problems were directly attributable to his (or her) prison experience:

You see, unless the fact that being an ex-prisoner's having done time is still impacting upon your life, then why can't you just tap into other forms of help...? I mean, unless you are specifically... your status where you are now, the fact that you have done time in prison is to blame for that, then that would be a case, but if it is not and you have come through prison and you have got a good job and have just retired or something like that, that's different you know.

On the other hand a number suggested that former prisoners had the same needs as ex-combatants in analogous groups and should have access to the same support and treatment services as were provided for state forces such as the police, the UDR or army veterans:

Older, politically motivated ex-prisoners need the same type of dedicated service provided by other veterans' agencies such as the British Legion. The best provider for such would be the E.U. since it's viewed as more neutral than either government.

Given that former prisoners are regarded by many, including many policy makers, as primarily responsible for the violence in Northern Ireland and therefore 'less eligible' for assistance than state actors, the provision of such services seems a distant prospect. There is no reason, however, that mainstream service providers in cannot not be given a greater training and understanding of the specific problems that older former prisoners experience. Both voluntary and public sector agencies engaged in social policy development and delivery in Northern Ireland confront the problem of dealing with 'intersectionality' (i.e., that people have multiple identities according to age, gender, religion, ethnicity, political opinion, dependents, criminal conviction, employment status, etc). For most former politically-motivated prisoners, the primary definer of who they are and what rights they may possess<sup>61</sup> continues to be the stigma of a criminal conviction.

It is now over ten years since the start of the peace process in Northern Ireland. During the conflict and the intervening period since the Good Friday Agreement support for ex-prisoners has been delivered though the voluntary sector by community and ex-prisoner groups. There were good reasons for this at the time, not least of which was the ex-prisoners mistrust of state institutions and preference for a self-help model. However, the funding for these activities has been reduced incrementally so that fewer and fewer ex-prisoner projects remain financially viable. There is little evidence of any significant parallel take up of responsibility for ex-prisoner care and support by mainstream public sector service providers. If voluntary sector provision is wound down without there being any simultaneous setting of targets in the public sector for meeting ex-prisoner needs, they needs are unlikely to be met. So, while we seem to be witnessing an 'institutional disengagement'<sup>62</sup> from ex-prisoner issues in the voluntary sector, we are not seeing much in the way of ex-prison needs being targeted by mainstream service provider. This is unlikely to happen if ex-prisoners do not initiate a dialogue on the issues that concern them as ex-prisoners and older people.

## 6.2 Recommendations

Grundy et al (2007) argue that because limitations in one aspect of an older person's life may quickly affect other dimensions, it follows that successful ageing must be seen as a process with multiple components. Gender, community, physical and mental health, social interaction and involvement and level of economic security are interrelated determinants of on older people's social inclusion. Former prisoners continue to confront serious obstacles to their successful ageing and social inclusion in across all life domains.

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<sup>61</sup> Schabas, W. and Fitzmaurice, P. (2007) *To Respect, Protect and Fulfil: A Human Rights-Based Approach to Peacebuilding and Reconciliation* Monaghan: Border Action; Shirlow and McEvoy (2008) op. cit.

<sup>62</sup> Atchley, R. (1988) *Social Forces and Aging: an introduction to social gerontology*, Belmont, CA: Wadsworth cited in Scharf, T., Phillipson, C., Kingston, P. and Smith A. E. (2001) 'Social Exclusion and Older people: exploring the connections', *Education and Aging* 16(3): 303-320.

The former prisoner we spoke to saw a clear need for action in respect of the removal of barriers to work, primarily the removal of criminal conviction as a bar to employment. They also identified a need for training, psychological support and treatment, and clear information about state pensions and provision for older people.

One of the things that appears to have been faded over the ten years since the Good Friday Agreement is recognition of the crucial role played by politically-motivated prisoners in ending the conflict.<sup>63</sup> Many now feel stigmatised, discarded and excluded. There is still time for older former prisoners to undertake training to enable them to find work and make the qualifying social insurance contributions that will entitle them to at least part of a basic state pension. The need to open avenues to work and training is urgent. Amongst other things, this will involve addressing the issue of criminal convictions for politically motivated offences acting as a bar to employment.

Our findings suggest that there remains an unmet need for psychological treatment among older former prisoners.

- Although there are real limits to the mutual help and support ex-prisoners can give each other with psychological problems, it should be recognised that ex-prisoner groups have a role to play in conveying the message that there is no shame in admitting to mental health problems and also in raising the awareness of primary care and social service providers of former prisoner reluctance to present with their problems.
- Ex-prisoner groups have a role to play in encouraging better health behaviour among former prisoners, especially those living on their own and particularly in respect of alcohol misuse.
- Our survey findings suggest that former prisoners' knowledge of state provision for older people is poor. Ex-prisoners need specific information about how to access advice and assistance on pensions, services and entitlements and many would be reluctant to approach social welfare agencies for such information directly, if they know which ones to go to. Similarly, a number of very useful websites exist, but not all former prisoners have access to the internet and some sites are not easily located using a simple 'google' search. Filling this information gap is an educational activity ex-prisoner groups could undertake with the assistance of the organisations like the Citizens Advice/ Information Bureaux or Borderwise.
- Most social welfare and health provision for former prisoners is delivered locally through mainstream state institutions such as the NHS or the Department for Work and Pensions in Northern Ireland or the Department of Health and Department of Social and Family Affairs in the Republic of Ireland. It follows

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<sup>63</sup> See for example, Ellison, G. and Shirlow, P. (2008) 'From War to Peace: Informalism, Restorative Justice and Conflict Transformation in Northern Ireland', in H.V. Miller (ed.) *Restorative Justice: From Theory to Practice*, London: Emerald, and Shirlow and McEvoy (2008) op. cit.

that service delivery agencies must be encouraged to include a consideration of the needs of older former prisoners' as part of their local service planning and delivery. Ex-prisoner groups might offer input into these processes, possibly in the form of briefing notes on important issues. Similar awareness raising activities could be undertaken in respect of relevant voluntary sector organisations.