

‘You can’t tell anyone how you really feel’: Exploring emotion management and performance among prison staff who have experienced the death of a prisoner

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Title:

‘You can’t tell anyone how you really feel’: Exploring emotion management and performance among prison staff who have experienced the death of a prisoner

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None

Abstract:

This article explores how prison staff manage their emotions when dealing with the death of a prisoner. It seeks to extend current understandings of emotions in prison work by exploring emotion management and performance among prison staff who have experienced a prisoner's death. It utilises Hochschild's (1983) concept of emotional labour, which has informed previous studies of emotion in prison work, and contributes to this existing research by applying extensions of Hochschild's ideas developed by Bolton (2005) and Korczynski (2003). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 17 Irish Prison Service staff who have experienced prisoner deaths. A contribution of this article is that it demonstrates the shifting emotional practices and preoccupations of prison staff through the stages of dealing with a prisoner's death. This article finds that shared expectations regarding the management of emotional responses to prisoner deaths promote the necessity of concealing emotional vulnerabilities within and beyond the prison walls.

Keywords:

Prison officers, prison governors, emotion, emotional labour, deaths in prison

1. Introduction

Previous research identifies that prison staff can be emotionally impacted by the death of a prisoner (Borrill et al., 2004; Ludlow et al., 2015). Some studies have found that these impacts may endure long after a prisoner's death, with staff using a range of emotion management strategies to regulate and perform these emotions (Crawley, 2004; Tracy et al., 2006). Much of what is known about the emotional reactions of prison staff to the deaths of prisoners is gleaned from explorations of staff experiences of suicides (Borrill et al., 2004; Ludlow et al., 2015; Wright et al., 2006). The negative emotional impacts of experiencing the death of a prisoner are a prominent focus within this research. Research on staff experiences of suicides noted flashbacks and distress as common issues (Borrill et al., 2004; Wright et al., 2006). Officers may also experience feelings of loss and in the aftermath of a suicide (Snow and McHugh, 2002). Experiences of suicide may also prompt heightened awareness and anxiety about future incidents (Arnold, 2005).

Much of the discussion of how staff manage these emotional impacts is focused on humour. Research has consistently highlighted humour as shaping staff approaches to managing their emotions following the death of a prisoner. Humorous exchanges between staff after the death of a prisoner may aid in reconstructing their experiences of the incident (Tracy et al., 2006). Additional insights are found in studies that examine the broad nature of prison work, with dark humour described as 'palliative' (Crawley, 2004, p. 44) and a 'coping mechanism' (Arnold, 2016, p. 278) in the aftermath of suicides and other serious incidents. Additionally, research indicates that formal support is underused by staff following their experiences of suicide (Borrill et al., 2004). Ludlow et al. (2015) emphasise the need for prompt and

effective support for staff who experience a suicide, underlining its importance in ensuring effective management of future suicide risk.

Despite this increasing recognition of the emotion work prompted by the death of a prisoner, an incomplete picture remains. Research on staff experiences of suicides has described how staff engage in emotional labour through humour and detachment to conceal negative emotional reactions, with little focus on staff encounters with other types of deaths, such as drug-related deaths, natural deaths and homicides. Moreover, limited insights exist that attempt to draw these emotional reactions together and understand how prison staff manage and perform their emotions across the different stages of their involvement with a prisoner's death, from the emergency response through the long-term aftermath. This article therefore explores the ways in which prison staff manage and perform their emotions when dealing with the death of a prisoner. A key contribution of this article is that it explores emotion management and performance arising from staff experiences of deaths across three temporal contexts, from during an incident, to the immediate aftermath and then in the time beyond. It focuses on the chronology of these incidents to provide an account of how the emotional practices and preoccupations of prison staff change following the conclusion of an emergency response to a death, and considers staff engagement with formal support provided by the Irish Prison Service as well as informal support between colleagues. Specifically, this article examines the experiences of prison officers and governors in the Irish Prison Service who have dealt with the death of a prisoner. Some key features of the literature on emotion management and performance in the workplace are discussed, followed by an overview of research on emotions in prison work. Substantive findings on emotion management and performance for staff who experience the death of a prisoner are then outlined. The findings

presented herein can inform future explorations of emotions in prison work, and have implications for policy on support for prison staff who experience the death of a prisoner.

2. Managing emotions at work

Research examining the ways in which people use and manage their emotions in the workplace has become a significant area of study. Emotion management and the concept of emotional labour have been explored in research across a range of occupational settings since the 1980s, including prisons. Emotional labour, as developed by Hochschild (1983, p. 7) is 'the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display'. Workers are expected to manage their feelings and emotional expression in accordance with feeling rules. All organisations have their own feeling rules, anchored in the organisation's history, culture and values, indicating emotions deemed appropriate to the occupational setting (Hochschild, 1983). Those who transgress feeling rules may be viewed as untrustworthy and incompetent. Within these rules, emotions are managed through strategies of 'deep' and 'surface' acting. Deep acting refers to efforts to 'stir up' and express a required genuinely felt emotion (Hochschild, 1983, p. 43). Surface acting is the simulation of unfelt emotions in order to demonstrate a professionally appropriate display, or the suppression of genuine, but inappropriate, emotions. Hochschild (1983) emphasises the negative consequences of emotional labour, while others suggest that emotional labour is not always harmful to workers (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993).

Since Hochschild's work, perspectives on emotion management in the workplace have been extended to account for the complexities of organisational life. Hochschild distinguishes between emotion management in the private and public realms, arguing that 'emotion work' is

performed in the private sphere, while 'emotional labour' is performed in work for monetary reward (Lewis, 2005). Bolton (2005) advocates for recognition of emotion management skills in the workplace that are not commercially motivated, developing a fourfold categorisation of emotion management. This includes presentational (emotion management according to accepted social rules of social interaction), philanthropic (emotions offered as a gift), pecuniary (emotion management for an organisation's commercial gain), and prescriptive (emotion management adhering to professional/organisational rules of conduct). Bolton's typology emphasises the complexity of emotions in organisations as the management of emotion cannot be restricted to one category. Rather, individuals can move between different types of emotion management for different purposes, with organisational priorities not exclusively defining emotion management (Lewis, 2005).

Bolton's work also suggests that distinctions should be made between emotion management used in interactions with colleagues and emotion management used with clients. Hochschild (1983) briefly considers emotional labour between colleagues, noting that emotional labour becomes collective when workers rely on each other for mutual emotional support. Korczynski (2003) develops this idea to advance his concept of 'communities of coping' in the workplace. He observes that individuals attempt to deal with the emotions experienced in different work situations by seeking support from their colleagues, thus forming 'communities of coping'. These communities therefore constitute a crucial part of workplace social relations, and provide spaces for philanthropic emotional support (Lewis, 2005). These communities may be part of what Knight (2014, p. 173) describes as a wider network of emotional resources; formal and informal outlets that help workers to 'counteract the silence' imposed by feeling rules.

While Hochschild's (1983) work has been operationalised in several studies of prison staff (Crawley, 2004; Nylander et al., 2011), these later concepts have yet to find influence in studies of emotion management in prison work. Taking these more recent extensions of Hochschild's ideas into account allows the current study to more fully account for the complexities of emotion management for prison staff who have experienced the death of a prisoner. Additionally, by utilising ideas from Bolton (2005) and Korczynski (2003) alongside Hochschild (1983), the study makes a contribution to the literature emotion management in prison work discussed in the next section.

3. Emotion management and performance in prison work

Previous research recognises that prisons are emotional places and that the emotions generated by working in prisons are 'many and varied' (Crawley, 2004, p. 131). Studies of emotional labour in prison work have primarily focused on exploring how feeling rules shape how prison staff manage and perform the emotions generated by their work (Crawley, 2004; Nylander et al., 2011). The negative emotional effects of prison work have also been observed (Arnold, 2005), along with the capacity of these emotions to 'spill over' into officers' personal lives (Crawley, 2004; Lambert et al., 2015).

Crawley's (2004) ethnography of prison officers in England offers the most comprehensive account of emotion management in prison work. Drawing on Hochschild's ideas on emotional labour, she observes that prison work is 'inextricably tied up with the management of certain emotions', such as anger, fear, stress and sympathy (Crawley, 2004, p. xv). She suggests that emotion management in prison work has two dimensions; officers must manage emotions that the prison generates within them while also dealing with emotions expressed by

prisoners. Emotions must be regulated within the constraints of professional and institutional feeling rules that caution against emotional identification with prisoners.

Research with Swedish prison officers similarly observes the multi-dimensional nature of emotion management in prison work (Nylander et al., 2011). Again, Hochschild's work is used to explore the emotional strain that may result from the conflict between the competing tasks of officers' management of prisoners' emotions and control of their own emotional display. Both Crawley (2004) and Nylander et al. (2011) briefly acknowledge the architecture of the prison as significant in affecting the emotional tone of staff interactions. More broadly, research suggests that the feeling rules of prison work have labelled emotions such as fear, sadness, anxiety and guilt as unacceptable within the prison environment (Arnold, 2005; Crawley, 2004). Expressions of such emotion are seen as 'an admission of mental weakness' (Crawley, 2004, p. 136), which prompts prison staff to conceal these feelings and use strategies of dissociation and detachment to avoid emotional discomfort (Arnold, 2005). Similarly, Crewe and Liebling (2015) highlight governor's reluctance to share unacceptable feelings such as self-doubt with peers of managers, noting that governors rarely talk to each other about the emotional dimensions of their work. These shared expectations about emotional expression also mean that staff may have difficulties in acknowledging the feelings they experience at work (Arnold, 2016).

For these reasons, Crawley (2004, p. 140) observes that empathy for prisoners can be troublesome to display, as prisoners are often 'perceived as unworthy of such emotions'. Balancing the appropriate degree of empathy with professional distance is a familiar challenge for prison staff (Walker et al., 2018), who are keenly aware of the 'emotional danger' of showing empathy for prisoners (Lindahl, 2011, p. 24). Tracy (2005, p. 268)

indicates that prison staff also perceive emotional displays of empathy as carrying operational dangers, finding that staff at the two US prisons in her study adopted an 'emotional posture' of suspicion as a method of protection and control. These challenges, coupled with the reputational risks associated with showing positive concern and compassion for prisoners, leave little room for emotional displays of empathy within staff groups. Accordingly, staff may adopt an 'emotional posture' of suspicion. Previous studies of prison staff and prison life have also highlighted the ubiquity of humour in prison settings (Arnold, 2016; Nielsen, 2011), and its function as 'a strategy for conveying, disguising and managing emotion' (Crawley, 2004, p. 44). Humour assists staff in projecting an emotionally hardened and unaffected image to colleagues and prisoners (Arnold, 2005). Often typified as 'black' or 'dark' in nature, it provides an outlet for staff to safely deal with the more emotionally challenging aspects of their work (Arnold, 2016).

The capacity of the emotions experienced in the prison to 'spill over' into the home is recognised in previous research (Crawley, 2004; Lambert et al., 2015). For prison staff, the line between the prison and the home can regularly become blurred (Lambert et al., 2015), often affecting family relationships (Crawley, 2004). Over time, officers learn to maintain boundaries between their work and home environments, hoping to diminish the impact of events in the prison on their personal lives (Kauffman, 1988). Some staff may choose to speak about the emotions generated by their work with family, while others resist talking about their feelings to protect their homes from this 'spillover' (Crawley, 2004). While spillover from work to home can produce deleterious effects for staff and their families, Crawley (2004, p. 137) observes that it is the preferred alternative to engagement with workplace support and the ensuing image of being viewed by colleagues as 'needing help'.

Consequently, findings from the current study may identify potential recommendations which could be implemented to better support staff who experience the death of a prisoner.

This article contributes to the literature on emotion management in prison work by presenting an exploration of how prison staff manage and perform their emotions arising from their experiences of the deaths of prisoners. It seeks to draw staff emotional reactions to prisoner deaths together and understand how prison staff manage and perform their emotions across the different temporal phases of involvement in dealing with the death of a prisoner, from the emergency response to the immediate aftermath and the time beyond.

4. The current study

The findings presented in this article are drawn from a broader study of prison staff experiences of prisoner deaths in the Irish Prison Service. This project sought to develop the limited literature on staff encounters with prisoner deaths by providing an in-depth account of the operational and emotional contexts of these incidents, including an examination of how staff manage and perform their emotions during and after the deaths of prisoners.

These issues were explored through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 17 Irish Prison Service staff conducted during 2014-2015. Participants were recruited across the 14 prisons in the Irish Prison Service estate at the time of data collection.¹ A purposive sampling approach was used, and all officer and governor grade staff with experience of dealing with the death of a prisoner were eligible for the study. Participation was open to both serving and

¹ Fourteen institutions comprised the Irish prison estate at the time of data collection, consisting of 11 closed, medium security prisons, two open centres with low security and one semi-open facility with traditional perimeter security but minimal internal security. There are now 12 institutions in the Irish Prison Service estate, following the closure of two prisons in 2017.

retired staff, both to broaden the pool of potential participants and in recognition of Miles and Huberman's (1994, p. 34) suggestion to 'work a bit at the peripheries' of the phenomenon being investigated. Two participants were recent retirees, while the remaining 15 worked in the Irish Prison Service at the time of data collection. The participant cohort included a variety of prison grades, and this range of roles emerged by chance. Six participants worked as Prison Officers, four as Assistant Chief Officers², one was a Chief Officer³, and five worked in Governor grades. The sample also included one Nurse Officer who had spent 13 years as a prison officer prior to obtaining a nursing qualification. The 15 currently serving participants were working in nine of the 14 prisons in operation at the time of the interviews. Almost all participants were men, with the exception of one female officer grade participant. While this gender configuration may appear unbalanced, these demographics are reflective of the broader under-representation of female staff throughout the Irish Prison Service (Roche, 2016).

Participants had experience of a range of causes of death, including suicides, homicides, drug-related deaths and deaths by natural causes. The data examined in this article therefore relates to participants' experiences of a variety of causes of death, rather than solely focusing on suicide. Thirteen participants had encountered multiple deaths in custody during their careers. Nine of these participants gave precise numbers between four and 25 deaths, while four offered vaguer estimations such as 'a few' and 'a multitude of experiences'. Four participants had experienced one prisoner death during their careers.

² Assistant Chief Officers are the first line of management. There is typically an Assistant Chief Officer on duty in each accommodation block or unit.

³ Chief Officers are the most senior uniformed grade in the Irish Prison Service. Their primary duties comprise oversight of uniformed staff, including attendance and behaviour.

Ethical approval for the study was granted by the Dublin Institute of Technology Research Ethics Committee and the Irish Prison Service. Interviews followed the chronological progression of participants' encounters with prisoner deaths, beginning with the emergency response to the incident and concluding with reflections on the impact of deaths in custody on their professional and personal lives. The interviews lasted an average of 101 minutes each, and were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were analysed using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) analytical framework. Themes were identified and refined using an inductive approach, beginning with open coding of all transcripts (Patton, 1990). Participants' discussions of emotion management were grouped into three temporal contexts: their experiences during the emergency response to the incident, their experiences in the immediate aftermath of the death, and their experiences in the time beyond the immediate aftermath. Accordingly, the results are presented using this thematic structure.

5. Results

5.1 Managing emotion during the emergency response to the death of a prisoner

Participants' accounts of their experiences of the deaths of prisoners reveal a professional expectation of a tightly controlled emotional display during the emergency response. Most believed that this was necessary for operational reasons, and advocated for emotional neutrality and detachment as a means of 'getting on with the job':

You can't get too much emotional about it. Like, I brought a fella from [the prison] to [the hospital], and we were told he was going to die on the way. Be prepared, he was dying, like. But you can't get emotional. Sure, I've a job to do!

(P16, Prison Officer)

Responses to the deaths of prisoners were evaluated by participants with regard to the emotional display of the staff involved. A successful response was one that saw staff appearing detached throughout, focusing on procedures and remaining calm:

There wasn't a sense of panic in the air. There was a sense of urgency in the air, but not panic. There wasn't panic or anything. A lot of that was to do with the type of people who were there at the time. There could have been panic, but there wasn't. It was an effective response.

(P02, Retired Prison Officer)

Participants across all grades saw professional competence as being aligned with emotional detachment. This view shaped the feeling rules for staff encounters with deaths, with emotions that might disrupt the response process, such as fear and sadness, regarded as inappropriate, and thus unprofessional. In addition to potentially damaging an individual's reputation within the prison, transgressions of these feeling rules also threatened the operational response to a prisoner's death. All participants recalled working with colleagues when dealing with a death, particularly for body handling and ligature removal. With a collective effort required to effectively deal with a death or medical emergency, those who failed to manage their emotions in accordance with feeling rules disrupted the actions of their colleagues. For managers, continuity of operations was an additional concern here:

I can't afford an officer to get all blubbery and upset if someone is dead. I will look after them and I understand, but I need them to hold themselves together right just

until I know what's going on, and then I can move them out ... You can't afford for some fella to be getting upset like that. Because is he gonna flake in the middle of something and then you're on your bloody own?

(P07, Governor)

5.2 Managing emotion in the immediate aftermath of the death of a prisoner

In the immediate aftermath of an emergency response to the death of a prisoner, participants recalled coming together with colleagues to discuss the incident. Emotion management became an increasingly collective act during this time. Expressions of humour and, in some circumstances, empathy for deceased prisoners and colleagues were permitted in the immediate aftermath as they were viewed as part of necessary catharsis for 'moving on'. Beyond this, a neutral presentation was expected, and emotional displays typically associated with the immediate aftermath of a death, such as appearing upset, were 'certainly not the done thing' (P03, Assistant Chief Officer). Participants also described feeling more aware of their presentation to colleagues, as these collective emotion performances brought increased visibility, and thus scrutiny, of their emotional display:

If you had a physical injury, a cut, a broken bone, there was no problem. 'Look at me, my bloody wrist is in bits here.' There was no problem in saying that. But you would never say, 'I feel a bit fuzzy up here' because you were afraid of being laughed at.

(P11, Prison Officer)

Several participants recalled emotional responses that would be regarded as inappropriate in the immediate aftermath of the death of a prisoner, including anger, sadness, disappointment

and guilt. These emotions particularly related to suicides, homicides and drug overdoses. While the natural deaths were not 'good deaths' (Bradbury, 2000, p. 59), in that they were unexpected and occurred 'at the wrong place at the wrong time', their circumstances proved less troubling than unnatural deaths:

Like, I've had men collapse and they'd be in their fifties, from heart attacks and health problems. And you'd resuscitate them or whatever ... It sounds terrible, but if it's a health problem you don't feel it as much, there was nothing anybody could have done, do you know that kind of way?

(P14, Assistant Chief Officer)

Many described engaging in surface acting to suppress or conceal these feelings: 'I'm in the middle of a prison, and I would bite my tongue off before I would cry in there' (P14, Assistant Chief Officer); 'If you did feel sad or whatever about it, you bloody wouldn't show it!' (P05, Prison Officer). The reputational damage among colleagues associated with such transgressions could be deep and enduring:

Ah it sticks like glue. And it's thrown at you the whole time there. Absolutely, you're destroyed by it. It would be thrown at them alright. They'd be going [crying noises] or called 'Wobbly Head' or whatever. But very rarely at them, they would talk *about* them.

When they're not there?

Yeah, and in a derogatory manner.

(P09, Assistant Chief Officer)

5.2.1 Humour

As the prison transitioned from the emergency response to staff managing its aftermath, the atmosphere between staff also transformed, with space opening up for conversation about the incident. For most participants, these exchanges were typically humorous, with jokes and laughter used to 'break the ice' (P03, Assistant Chief Officer). Like officers in Crawley's (2004) study, participants used humour as a means of communicating and concealing emotion. Beyond softening a heightened mood caused by the occurrence of a death, humour acted as a 'social proof' (P10, Governor) among colleagues, aided participants in projecting a hardened and detached image after the incident (particularly for unnatural deaths), and bolstered staff camaraderie.

The humour described by participants had numerous forms, including storytelling, joke telling, sarcasm and teasing. It was characterised as 'black humour' or 'graveyard humour', with many using language such as 'dark', 'sick', 'dry' or 'perverse' in their descriptions. Some viewed it as an occupational necessity, and framed it as a necessary 'coping mechanism' (P10, Governor) following a prisoner's death, regardless of the nature or cause of death. It provided a medium through which staff could quickly offload or neutralise any emotional reactions that may transgress feeling rules. Black humour and banter were therefore seen as safer approaches to talking about the death of a prisoner:

I do the black humour thing better. I'm a bit more bolstered by that than somebody asking me how I'm feeling. I have to look at this person tomorrow. I'm not going to tell them how I'm feeling, absolutely no way. That's like making a fool of yourself at the office party; you just don't do it! [laughing]

(P14, Assistant Chief Officer)

Post-incident collective humour also served as a means for staff to regulate the emotional display of their colleagues, reinforcing the feeling rules for those who appear to have forgotten them. A governor participant described how this process unfolded among both officer and governor grade staff:

They wouldn't *allow* you to be miserable. You wouldn't have permission to be miserable. So you'd come in miserable, and you wouldn't be allowed to stay that way because they would absolutely cut you in two and slag you off until you had no choice but to shake yourself out of it. They would actually be slagging your bloody moroseness. And tell you to cop yourself on or making a few comments and so on. And before you knew it, you were laughing away with them and you'd no reason to be in the dumps about it, you know.

(P07, Governor)

Although the deceased prisoner was a focus of much of this humour, several participants expressed discomfort with jokes that focused too much on the presentation or position of the body, particularly in cases of unnatural deaths such as drug-related deaths and suicides, revealing limits of acceptability in this context. Between staff, these boundaries were enforced by those in supervisory or management roles, who would moderate humorous exchanges with individuals and in groups. One governor recounted an incident from his time as a Chief Officer wherein a prisoner had passed away while holding a cigarette, which caused a junior colleague to comment, 'Have a look at your man here, it's good proof that smoking kills you.' He described his discomfort with the remark, reflecting:

I mean, that's a stupid thing to say. And it was probably because he was shocked and upset, you know. But I remember calling him when we were finished what we were doing, calling him over and telling him. And he said, 'I didn't know what to say I was so shocked to see somebody dead in the bed, I didn't know what to say.' And that's fair enough. But people have to be aware that at the end of the day it is somebody's son or husband or brother or whatever, and it is difficult to find somebody dead.

(P04, Governor)

5.2.2 Empathy

Participants' accounts reveal an expansion in feeling rules in the time following a death to accommodate expressions of empathy. While black humour remained the more common means for participants to relate their experiences to their colleagues, empathy and compassion for the deceased prisoner was accepted as a human reaction to death, and was permissible when framed in the context of broader social reactions to death. Empathy for deceased prisoners related to their loss of life more broadly, rather than being focused on the nature or cause of their death:

There would be something wrong with you if you didn't have some degree of empathy for the loss of life, no matter who they were ... If a person loses their life, and if you don't have some degree of human sadness about that well then there's something wrong with you in my view, you know. I don't think you have to get all watery and whatever about it, just acknowledging what happened.

(P02, Retired Prison Officer)

Like humour, expressions of empathy had distinct boundaries. These were more restrictive than those imposed on humorous exchanges and observations, however. Language was important in this context; participants who spoke about expressing empathy for a deceased prisoner in the presence of colleagues warned of the dangers of being too effusive in their sympathies:

It's important that you say it the *right* way. I mean, if you start coming out and saying, 'God, I feel so sad about that, that's awful.' I just think that's the wrong way to say it, because you could be perceived, and with some degree of understanding, people would think, 'Is he for the birds or what? He's in the Prison Service.' Whereas it's better if you could say a more neutral, but nonetheless a statement of fact such as, 'It is sad that something like that should happen.'

(P02, Retired Prison Officer)

Those who ventured beyond acceptability in articulating their empathy for the deceased could become the subject of ridicule: 'They'd brand the officer as a 'Lag lover'' (P03, Assistant Chief Officer); 'It'd be, 'Ah you're soft', 'Lag lover', 'Sure he's dead anyway'' (P06, Prison Officer). Expressions of empathy for colleagues who responded to a death were not as tightly regulated however. Prison staff culture encourages positive concern for fellow staff (Kauffman, 1988), and empathising with those involved in the incident was accepted within the professional feeling rules, particularly if the officer had limited experience or if the nature of the death was particularly challenging: 'We'd talk about how we'd feel for the person that found them, and you'd be aware of the knock-on effect' (P14, Assistant Chief Officer).

5.3 Beyond the immediate aftermath: Managing emotions and finding support

The long-term aftermath of participants' experiences saw their emotional practices and preoccupations change once again. The emotion management discussed above saw participants suppressing or repackaging unacceptable emotions to facilitate operational continuity and brief collective catharsis. In the long-term aftermath, participants focused on mitigating the emotional impact of their experiences in their personal and professional lives.

All participants reported changes in either or both their work and home lives following their experiences of prisoner deaths. For some, these changes were positive, such as increased awareness of suicide risk or greater confidence in dealing with medical emergencies. Other participants suggested that their encounters with deaths altered their feelings about prisoners more broadly. The depth of involvement with the deceased or their death was meaningful here, as these participants reported a long or familiar relationship with the deceased, which affected their emotional responses to the death, in addition to broader issues of prison life. Speaking about a prisoner who died by suicide, one participant reflected on the impact that his relationship with the deceased had on his feelings about staff-prisoner relationships:

The fact that I could separate a fella who'd murdered [someone], and thought of him as a human with a dreadful background and felt sorry for the poor bugger, that didn't do me any harm as a person. There used to be an ethos in the Prison Service that we're the officers, they're the lags; us and them. There still has to be a certain bit of division between the two, there is a line that must not be crossed, but it's softened from what it was for me. I think that did me some good, both as an individual and a prison officer.

(P11, Prison Officer)

Many however felt that their encounters with the deaths of prisoners had negatively impacted their professional and/or personal lives. Some disclosed that their experiences had transformed their relationships with spaces in the prison, most commonly the location of a death, which was avoided in an effort to suppress a possible re-experiencing of any inappropriate emotions associated with the event. Most participants reported some spillover of their experiences of deaths in their personal lives, with some remarking that they did not identify this spillage until much later. While the nature of the deaths that invaded participants' home lives were varied, the majority related to unnatural deaths, with natural deaths representing a smaller number. Many issues experienced by participants related to the visual and olfactory sensations of dealing with bodies and the negative emotions that accompanied these memories. Difficulty with visual memories of deaths was a prominent issue, particularly for those who dealt with a suicide by hanging. These participants described experiencing strong visual flashbacks or having trouble with depictions of suicide in film and television:

At times it does come back to me, mainly if you see it in films or TV, someone hanging. It kind of brings you back to what happened that day.

(P13, Prison Officer)

Other reported issues included sleep loss, flashbacks and frequent mental re-examinations of the incident, and these experiences mainly related to suicides and drug-related deaths such as overdoses. In contrast, participants did not disclose similar issues in the aftermath of natural deaths.

5.3.1 Finding support at work

The feeling rules offered limited opportunities to find emotional support for these issues within the prison walls. At the time of the study, formal support for Irish Prison Service staff who had experienced the death of a prisoner was provided through the Employee Assistance Programme in the Civil Service, with several staff working as Employee Assistance Officers within the Irish Prison Service. In addition, there are Staff Support Officers in each prison, who act as the first point of contact and referral. The Staff Support Officer – referred to by most participants as the 'Sad Stories Officer' – was a part-time position at the time of study, with staff performing a peer support and referral role in addition to their regular prison duties. Several participants cited concerns about confidentiality and access given the peer-led and part-time nature of this role. Similar observations have been made regarding formal support for prison staff in England and Wales (Borrill et al., 2004; Ludlow et al., 2015). A Critical Incident Protocol was also in place for staff who have experienced a death in custody, and this may include the provision of psychological support for staff, if necessary (Irish Prison Service, n.d.). The majority of the sample did not access any support provided by the Irish Prison Service, citing concerns about image and stigmatisation:

If you go to the [Staff Support Officer] you're seen as being a nancy. Or people would say, 'I'm not fucking talking to him'; that's the attitude.

(P09, Assistant Chief Officer)

Informal support could be found with colleagues within the confines of the feeling rules. Beyond humour, there were limited avenues for speaking about these issues with colleagues.

The sharing of 'war stories' about the different deaths participants and their colleagues had experienced was another acceptable medium for the speaking about emotional reactions to the deaths of prisoners:

It's cathartic, absolutely. And people often sit around and they often refer to it in work, sitting there and swapping war stories. Yeah it is, it's a great way. Because it's a *safe* environment of saying how you felt at the time. And it's good to be able to do that. And it's even more satisfying to hear when somebody else says they felt the same. Like if they say, 'Sure I was the same, I was shitting myself. I didn't know what to do.'

(P04, Governor)

Access to collegial support differed between grades, however. These differences related two primary concerns, space and time. Regarding space, the locations, and thus nature, of informal peer support differed according to the spaces accessible to participants. Communal coping through storytelling and reassurance was reported by governor and chief officer participants, taking place in spaces that were allocated solely to their ranks. Several of the governor participants spoke at length about the supportive nature of group storytelling, with each example taking place in management areas, spaces to which they had regular and exclusive access. A frequently cited benefit was that these rooms were closed off and more intimate than larger communal spaces such as the staff mess, offering increased shelter from professional expectations. In contrast, participants in lower grades had access to a more limited array of spaces in which to form 'communities of coping' (Korczynski, 2003). Moreover, messes and other communal areas were spaces of increased visibility and larger numbers, resulting in greater enforcement of feeling rules, which limited opportunities for

support: 'You wouldn't walk into the mess crying. Everyone can see you!' (P17, Nurse Officer).

Time was also significant in participants' engagement with collegial support. Like space, time for communal coping was experienced differently across grades, due to the variations in temporal distributions of staff routines depending on their roles. Once again, managers appeared to have more time to come together to communally cope with deaths in custody, while the collective emotional labour of those working on wings and landings was influenced to a greater degree by temporal considerations such as unlock times, shift patterns and cell check timings. When asked about the nature of the talk between his colleagues in the immediate aftermath of a prisoner's death, one participant responded:

Um, well Colette the unfortunate thing is we go back to doing our duty, you know, that's just it. Our checks still have to go on. [*Yeah*] We have to double check to make sure that nothing actually happens during the course of that night so we just went back to doing what we did. That's just the reality of it you know.

(P03, Assistant Chief Officer)

For some officer grade participants, this was a source of frustration, as they felt they had limited time to collectively recover from their experiences. This particularly rankled some, as they felt it may thwart their efforts to keep their encounters with prisoner deaths out of their home lives:

There should be a few minutes to get together and say, 'Listen, how are you feeling?' You know, 'What were you thinking about when you took the knife off her or when

you stopped her taking those tablets?’ Get people to talk and get people to get it out of their system and be open about it and de-stress, debrief, go home to their family ... they take off their work mask and they put their social mask back on and they become civilians and humanised again.

(P05, Prison Officer)

5.3.2 Protecting the home from spillover

Thirteen of the 17 participants highlighted the importance of maintaining separation between their experiences of deaths at work and their lives at home, with most of these discussions containing some reference to the idea of 'leaving work behind' when returning home from the prison. This view was maintained by participants across all grades. While participants' families were often concerned about their emotional and physical wellbeing following their experiences of prisoners' deaths, many were determined not to discuss these incidents and their emotional reactions while at home:

My father was a prison officer. But I only found out what happened on a day-to-day basis when I joined up. He never spoke about it. And I never tell my wife anything about our work. I *never* speak about deaths, never open my mouth to her. She doesn't need to know about that.

(P09, Assistant Chief Officer)

In the long-term aftermath of participants' encounters with the deaths of prisoners, the realms of work and home were demarcated by the passage between them. The journey between work and home was transformative; experiences and enduring memories of prisoners' deaths were

'left behind' (P01, Retired Prison Officer) or 'compartmentalised' (P11, Prison Officer) as participants began to prepare themselves to return to their personal lives. A number of participants identified landmarks along their route home as the boundaries between the two worlds, places where they felt their thoughts shifting from the incident to their personal lives. One participant, who had experienced several unnatural and natural deaths, spoke about how markers along her commute aided in maintaining separation between her life at home and her experiences of these the deaths in the weeks and months that followed:

On the way home it was 'shut off', and on the way back it was 'shut on'. So it wasn't a conscious thing that I did, but it was something I was aware of. I would click into prison officer mode the minute I would go through the toll bridge. The minute I'd hit the booth and the barriers move, I'm now in prison officer mode. And then on the way home, bang, I'm back into mammy mode.

So are you coming back to your home life?

Yeah. And it's not a conscious thing. It's just something that I'm aware of. And I tend to do it now when I hit the airport. It's nearly like a switch that goes on; you've processed what's happened that day on your little drive up the road.

(P14, Assistant Chief Officer)

Moving between these separate worlds also bolstered participants' emotion management competencies. Dealing with emotions on the journey between work and home not only prevented spillage of their experiences of prisoner deaths into the home, but also assisted participants in adhering to feeling rules and presenting an acceptable emotional display at work:

I live 60 miles from [the prison]. Normally by the time I'm home I have the steering wheel beat up and I've everything sorted and I've dealt with it. And then the next day I'm back in work and everything looks normal; to me, to everyone.

(P15, Governor)

6. Discussion

This article explores participants' accounts of emotion management and performance during the emergency response to a prisoner's death and in the immediate and long-term aftermath of these incidents. A contribution of this article is that it demonstrates the shifting emotional practices and preoccupations of staff through and following the emergency response to a death, thus deepening understandings of emotion management in prison work. The research findings suggest that prison staff have limited avenues for emotional expression during and following the emergency response to the death of a prisoner. Within the prison, most emotions are managed with Bolton's (2005) prescriptive category, regulated by professional feeling rules that demand an appearance of competency and resilience, which directed participants towards emotional displays of detachment and humour. Emotional displays that betrayed these expectations were unacceptable as they indicated emotional vulnerability to colleagues, other prisoners and family.

While previous research has identified the 'emotional danger' (Lindahl, 2011, p. 24) of empathy in prison work, in the time following a death, empathy is permitted as it is an 'accepted convention of feeling' (Bolton, 2005, p. 133) to express empathy following a death, regardless of its nature of cause. This indicates the flexibility of feeling rules in prison work, with presentational emotion management permissible depending on the circumstances and the

'implicit traffic rules of social interaction' (Bolton, 2005, p. 133) outside the prison. The nature of staff relationships with deceased prisoners is also meaningful, as those who reported closer involvement with a deceased prisoner indicated that the emotional impact of their experiences was enduring and transformative.

Previous research offers brief insights into the role of humour in both impression management and collective coping following the suicide of a prisoner (Crawley, 2004) and incidents of suicide-related behaviour (Sweeney et al., 2018). The current study corresponds with these analyses in finding that humour was an important part of collective emotional labour following participants' experiences of all types of deaths, including suicides. The findings reported here also add a perspective to previous research that elucidates the boundaries of this humour. While the deceased prisoner was the central focus of much of the humour exchanged following their death, participants' accounts did not reach the 'cadaver rhetoric' seen in research with professionals who more regularly deal with death, such as emergency services personnel (Scott, 2007, p. 357). As discussed earlier, humour focused on bodies, such as their appearance or position, was regarded as exceeding limits of acceptability. This was a particular issue for unnatural deaths such as drug-related deaths and suicides. Unlike professionals who regularly encounter death, dealing with bodies is not a frequent task for prison staff, and while humour aids in surface acting, it may not be able to sustain cognitive reframing or reinterpretation of the physical nature of a prisoner's death (Moran and Massam, 1997).

Feeling rules also extended to participants' perspectives on engagement with formal support. This support was eschewed by most in favour of 'mutual morale raising' (Hochschild, 1983, p. 115) achieved through informal peer support, primarily in the forms of humour and

storytelling. Philanthropic emotion management is seen through the stories shared between colleagues, with previous experiences offered as gifts of reassurance (Bolton, 2005). These efforts to 'cope communally and socially' (Korczynski, 2003, p. 58) were similarly regulated, however. In this way, emotions were pushed out of many spaces in the prison, particularly large communal areas such as staff messes. The current study therefore lends support for Crawley's (2004, p. 132) suggestion that prison officers' emotion performance is geographically distributed, with specific spaces on the prison's 'emotional map' understood in the context of which emotions are acceptable at these sites. This article further develops these points by identifying staff grades as a factor in the spatial and temporal experiences of collective emotional labour. While participants in management roles occasionally found space for a more varied emotion performance in cloistered areas, such as governors' offices, in many cases, the lack of space and time for emotional engagement led to the emotional effects of participants' experiences being squeezed out beyond the boundaries of the prison, invading participants' personal lives.

Although participants' experiences altered aspects of their professional practice, their encounters with prisoners' deaths appeared to have a more enduring impact in their personal lives. The traumas reported by participants were all experienced while outside the prison walls, pushed out and hidden as a result of the 'silence' (Knight, 2014, p. 173) imposed by feeling rules, as well as uncertainty and scepticism regarding formal workplace support. Accordingly, these traumas remained hidden from the view of the prison, concealed from colleagues and the organisation. Bennett (2016, p. 166) identifies similar 'hidden injuries' in his exploration of the working lives of prison managers, observing that cultural expectations regarding professionalism concealed mental and physical ill-health. Moreover, participants' attempts to protect their homes and families from spillover led to the emotional impacts of

these experiences not only remaining hidden from observation by the prison, but also from their families. This research therefore contributes to understandings of prison spillover and the impact of prison work on the lives of prison staff, and in particular builds upon the work of Crawley (2004) and Lambert et al. (2015) by exploring how prison staff experience and manage spillover arising from their experiences of prisoners' deaths.

The findings regarding spillover also lend support to recent work by Kinman et al. (2017), who suggest that clearer boundaries between work and home can protect prison staff from the negative emotional impact of experiences at work on their wellbeing. While participants in the current study identified physical boundaries between their work and home lives, many also reported several instances where these boundaries had been breached. These findings, accompanied by the low esteem for workplace support, suggest that critical incident support provided by the Irish Prison Service may not align with the emotional demands experienced by staff following the death of a prisoner. Some UK-based studies have also hinted at deficiencies in staff support following prisoners' deaths (Borrill et al., 2004; Ludlow et al., 2015). While the findings presented herein are from a small-scale study, they highlight the need for greater evaluation of the alignment between emotional support provided to prison staff following the death of a prisoner and the emotional impacts of these experiences. Such evaluations are vital for effective policy development in this area.

The size of the participant cohort reflects the in-depth and exploratory nature of the study. Accordingly, no claims of generalisability are made in this article (Denscombe, 2014). However, the richness of the data collected facilitates deep exploration of the emotional practices and preoccupations of prison staff arising from their experiences of the death of a prisoner, as well as highlighting the nuances that are implicit to emotional labour in prison

work. Another limitation relates to the gender breakdown of the sample. While this may be mitigated by the diversity in grades and experiences within the cohort, the study was somewhat restricted in drawing out the 'gendered nature of emotional labour' (Lewis, 2005, p. 568) for prison staff dealing with deaths. In addition to extending understanding of the study topic, the findings presented herein were also found to be in alignment with previous research with staff in other countries. However, there will be differences between prison staff approaches to managing emotions generated by encounters with prisoners' deaths that are contingent upon the historical, cultural and political contexts of the jurisdictions in which they work. Future research on this topic in other prison systems would deepen understandings of the impact of cultural expectations on prison staff approaches to emotion management during and following the deaths of prisoners, and indeed other major incidents.

7. Conclusion

Emotion management and performance during and following the death of a prisoner was a challenging task for participants. The current study illuminates these challenges, highlighting the individual and collective contexts of emotional labour in prison work, and its spatial, temporal and processual facets. The extant literature on prison staff encounters with the deaths of prisoners offers limited insights into how emotions are experienced, managed and performed by staff who deal with these incidents. The research presented herein has sought to extend this existing scholarship, and to explore more fully the emotional texture of death work in prisons. This article finds that feeling rules oblige staff to manage their emotional display while also managing their role in the operational response to the incident, motivated by an awareness that their colleagues are relying upon them to remain emotionally detached regardless of the nature of the prisoner's death. In the aftermath of the deaths of prisoners,

professional feeling rules prescribe management and expression of felt emotions, placing spatial and temporal regulations on displays of humour, empathy and collegial support. Above all, these shared expectations regarding emotion management promote the necessity of concealing post-incident vulnerabilities inside the prison. This article therefore concludes that the implications of involvement with the death of a prisoner can often find life beyond the boundaries of the prison walls, pushed out by feeling rules, and thus remaining hidden from institutional and organisational management.

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