

Impact case study (REF3)

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| Institution: Sheffield Hallam University | | |
| Unit of Assessment: UOA20 - Social Work and Social Policy | | |
| Title of case study: Transforming Probation Policy and Practice by Raising Awareness of Emotional Labour and Supporting Practitioners | | |
| Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2016 – 2020 | | |
| Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit: | | |
| Name(s): | Role(s) (e.g. job title): | Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: |
| Dr Jake Phillips | Reader in Criminology | 2012 - present |
| Dr Chalen Westaby | Senior Lecturer in Law | 2008 - present |
| Andrew Fowler | Senior Lecturer in Criminology | 2014 - present |
| Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2016 – 2020 | | |
| Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No | | |

1. Summary of the impact

The impact of emotion management in probation had never been recognised in national policy or practice. Research from Sheffield Hallam University revealed the way practitioners use and manage their emotions as part of their work, and the effect this has on staff wellbeing. The research has: raised awareness of the need to recognise and manage the effects of emotional labour; persuaded national policymakers of the need for reform; informed the development of a new national training programme to support practitioners, which has been rolled out to all probation line managers in England and Wales; and changed practice at a national and local level. In particular the research contributed to the government abandoning its controversial Transforming Rehabilitation strategy.

2. Underpinning research

The government introduced its Transforming Rehabilitation strategy in 2013. This programme divided probation in England and Wales into a public sector National Probation Service (NPS) and 21 new private sector Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs). In this new arrangement, probation practitioners working for the NPS almost exclusively managed high-risk offenders, while CRCs supervised low and medium risk offenders.

Research at Sheffield Hallam was undertaken by a group consisting of Jake Phillips, Chalen Westaby and Andrew Fowler. The research comprised interviews with practitioners, carried out in 2016, relating to the theme of 'emotional labour' in this new organisational context, with data analysed using thematic analysis.

Emotional labour refers to the use, or suppression of, emotions to be effective at work. Prior to this research, the term had not been used in relation to probation practice, and the emotional demands of the work were not appropriately recognised by probation policy or management. Three key findings from the research underpin the project's overall impact: i) emotion management is inherent to probation work, ii) it impacts on probation officers, and iii) more training and support is needed.

The findings demonstrated that emotional labour is essential for effective probation practice, but it had been neglected in policy, and in national training schemes such as the Skills for Effective Engagement, Development and Supervision (SEEDS) programme (launched in 2010) (R3). Emotions such as empathy are critical to good practice because they are used to 'get to know and understand the client', while practitioners simultaneously 'develop clear boundaries' by both displaying positive emotions and suppressing 'negative' emotions such as disappointment (R3). The findings suggest that the display of certain emotions (e.g. happiness, empathy) and

suppression of others (e.g. anger, frustration) are key to good one-to-one work with offenders, and also help to realise organisational goals (R5).

The findings also demonstrated that probation work is emotionally demanding. In an examination of the impact of Transforming Rehabilitation (R1), the team's analysis illustrated that dealing almost entirely with high-risk clients can be 'emotionally relentless'. Participants also presented serious concerns about the impact of the Transforming Rehabilitation changes on their work, with an acute sense of anxiety about the intensification of work and the volume of cases who pose a high risk of harm. Moreover, the research found that probation work affects practitioners' lives outside of work, demonstrating that the emotional burden of probation work is important, not just in terms of improving effectiveness, but in relation to staff wellbeing more broadly (R2). The nature and extent of the emotional labour performed by practitioners raised a considerable risk of burnout, which had not been fully acknowledged or investigated.

The overarching argument of the research was the need to recognise the emotionally demanding work of probation work at an organisational level, and to provide effective training and support to mitigate these risks to staff wellbeing (R6). For example, participants said that their work changed the way they parented their children and caused anxiety about how they should relate to their clients (R2, R4). Within this, the research argued: that supervision should be less managerial and more focused on enhancing practitioners' skills, competencies and confidence; that workloads should be reduced; and that staff should be provided with training to equip them with the necessary emotion skills - to be both effective and to manage the consequences of that aspect of their work.

3. References to the research

- R1. Phillips, J. Westaby, C and Fowler, A (2016). "It's Relentless": The Impact of Working Primarily with High-Risk Offenders. *Probation Journal*, 63 (2), 182-92. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0264550516648399>
- R2. Westaby, C. Phillips, J and Fowler, A (2016). Spillover and Work-Family Conflict in Probation Practice: Managing the Boundary Between Work and Home Life. *European Journal of Probation*, 8 (3), 113-27. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2066220316680370>
- R3. Fowler, A. Phillips, J and Westaby, C (2017). Understanding Emotions as Effective Practice. The Performance of Emotional Labour in Building Relationships. In: Ugwudike, P. Raynor, P and Annison, J (eds) *Evidence-Based Skills in Community Justice: International Research on Supporting Rehabilitation and Desistance*. (Policy Press). Available on request. <https://policy.bristoluniversitypress.co.uk/evidence-based-skills-in-criminal-justice#book-detail-tabs-stison-block-content-1-0-tab1>
- R4. Phillips, J. Fowler, A and Westaby, C (2018). Self-Disclosure in Criminal Justice: What Form Does It Take and What Does It Achieve? *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 62(12), 3890-909. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0306624x17751528>
- R5. Westaby, C. Fowler, A and Phillips, J (2020). Managing Emotion in Probation Practice: Display Rules, Values and the Performance of Emotional Labour. *International Journal of Law, Crime and Justice*, 61. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijlci.2019.100362>
- R6. Fowler, A. Phillips, J and Westaby, C (2020). Emotions in Context: The Marginalisation and Persistence of Emotional Labour in Probation. In: Phillips, J. Waters, J. Westaby, C. et al. (eds) *Emotional Labour in Criminal Justice and Criminology*. (Routledge). Available on request. <https://www.routledge.com/Emotional-Labour-in-Criminal-Justice-and-Criminology/Phillips-Waters-Westaby-Fowler/p/book/9780367152017>

All articles underwent rigorous peer-review and are published in leading journals in the field. R3 and R6 are chapters in edited books, published by Policy Press and Routledge, respectively. These books were peer-reviewed at proposal and manuscript stage by respected academic specialists, who provide rigorous independent scrutiny of their quality.

4. Details of the impact

Sheffield Hallam's research has: raised awareness within probation service (public and private) of the need to recognise and pro-actively manage the effects of emotional labour; persuaded national policymakers that current policies needed revision; and informed trade and wider media coverage of the issue. As a consequence of this awareness raising, the research has also: informed the development and implementation of SEEDS2, which includes a new, national supervision and line management meetings framework for the NPS; changed practice at a national and a local level; and contributed to pressure for government to review Transforming Rehabilitation, which was subsequently abandoned.

Influencing National Probation Reforms - Policy and Practice

Early in the project, Phillips featured on Radio 4's flagship documentary series File on Four (October 2016), which examined the impact of the Transforming Rehabilitation programme [E1]. He used R1 to highlight the pressure that the reforms had placed on NPS staff primarily working with high-risk offenders, and the increase in stress and the intensity of the work, described as 'relentless' by practitioners. In November 2016, Phillips was invited to contribute to a Justice Select Committee meeting about the emotional toll of policy reforms on practitioners. This seminar informed the Committee's decision to undertake a formal inquiry into Transforming Rehabilitation, with the Committee Chair Sir Bob Neill acknowledging that the team's contribution "*shape[d] our thinking*" [E2]. The inquiry report was damning of the programme and Transforming Rehabilitation was discontinued by the UK government in June 2020. Consequently, the private CRCs have been wound down and all probation work will return to the NPS from July 2021.

In March 2020, HM Prisons & Probation Service (HMPPS) published its Probation Reform Programme [E3], which highlighted the importance of ongoing staff training and support, and set out proposals for an updated national training scheme - SEEDS2. This was informed by Sheffield Hallam research, with the reform policy document specifically referring to the new incorporation of emotional labour, stating: "*Training is in development with advice from academics and practitioners. It builds on SEED components with additional content such as procedural justice and emotional labour*" [E3].

The team were also commissioned by HM Inspectorate of Probation to write an Academic Insights briefing [E4] based on the research (R1-6). These briefings inform debate and contribute to the evidence base, which underpins the Inspectorate's approach. In the briefing's foreword, the Inspectorate's Head of Research commented on the importance of the research in shaping the development of probation policy and practice: "*As shown, managing and displaying emotions is critical to effective practice... Jobs requiring high levels of emotional labour can be harmful to staff wellbeing and lead to burnout, and it is thus essential that sufficient attention is given to the emotional demands of probation work in policy, recruitment, training and staff supervision. This is of importance to the forthcoming probation reforms and also current delivery during the Coronavirus pandemic, which is requiring new ways of working, placing additional emotional demands on practitioners*" [E4]. These briefings are also actively used by HMPPS to inform their policy and practice [E3].

Informing National Training Programmes and Management Frameworks

In July 2018, HMPPS's Effective Practice Team contacted the team to discuss how their emotional labour research might inform a revised SEEDS national training programme, with specific emphasis on how best to mitigate the emotional demands on practitioners. HMPPS's Quality & Effective Practice Manager has confirmed that R1 and R2 "*both played a significant role in shaping the HMPPS SEEDS2 programme*" [E5].

In particular, SEEDS2 encompasses a new Supervision and Line Management Meetings Framework (SLMMF) for use across the whole NPS (12,000 staff), which was based on the research findings. The SLMMF responds to the findings by acknowledging the effect of emotional labour on practitioners, and implements systems for improving the support available to staff, such as practice observations and reflective supervision. The SLMMF now explicitly references the 'emotional demands of the work' as part of the supervisory process of probation practitioners and

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encourages practitioners to engage with the research findings [E5]. The team were also asked to develop a training package to support its implementation.

The SLMMF was rolled out across the NPS in January 2020, with line managers receiving three days training, informed by the research team, on how to support practitioners with the emotional burden that comes with this aspect of their work. One training day is dedicated to the 'emotional demands of the work' and providing appropriate support.

All NPS line managers (c.870) received training on the SLMMF and so all probation practitioners in the NPS (c.12,000) are now being line managed in accordance with this new policy. The work of the private CRCs will be brought under the NPS in 2021, and so the training will then be extended to all probation line managers in England and Wales.

The HMPSS Quality & Effective Practice Manager acknowledged Sheffield Hallam's influence on this work: *"The research into emotional labour within probation practice identified the impact of working with high-risk offenders and the need for appropriate supervision processes. The critique within [R3] of the previous SEEDS programme influenced the structure of SEEDS2, in particular the design and content of the course in development for practitioners... SEEDS2...improve[s] effective engagement of service users by empowering/supporting practitioners to use and apply a person-centred desistance approach"* [E5].

The Effective Practice Team subsequently commissioned Sheffield Hallam to conduct an ongoing piece of research, which seeks to understand the effect of SEEDS2 and the new SLMMF on practice and practitioners. In February 2020, a survey of managers and practitioners was conducted. 63% of respondents believed the training improved the quality of supervision they provide to their staff. A key element of the new SLMMF is observing sessions between practitioners and offenders, which are then used for reflective supervision, an important technique for managing the consequences of emotional labour. Following completion of the training, 87% of managers observed their staff, and 81% of them found this a useful process. 47% of practitioners supervised by a manager who had done the training said they had noticed a difference in their supervision, and 47% found observation improved their practice. Of those practitioners supervised by a line manager who had not done the training, 65% said that supervision *"provides me with sufficient opportunity to discuss the emotional demands of my work"*, whilst 73% of people whose line manager had done the training said the same, suggesting that the SLMMF is providing more opportunities to discuss the emotional demands of probation work [E6].

Supporting Practitioners and Changing Practice

By 2020 the project team had run workshops and lectures attended by around 650 front-line practitioners. This included an invited talk to the North West Lancashire Local Delivery Unit (LDU) in April 2019, attended by around 150 people; and a workshop as part of HMPPS's 'Insights Festival' (May 2019), which was attended by 20 people. Feedback from the events was overwhelmingly positive and demonstrated increased awareness of the topic. 89% of those attending the Insights workshop said it improved their understanding of emotional labour in probation, while all delegates said that they felt that there should be formal training around the performance and consequences of emotional labour [E7]. The positive feedback from these events led to the team being invited to talk to the Cheshire LDU in September 2019 (c.200 attendees) and the South East Lancashire LDU in November 2019 (c.150 attendees). They also gave a talk at HMP Askham Grange in September 2019 with around 100 attendees [E7].

The workshops have impacted on individual people and local areas by enabling them to learn about and adopt strategies for dealing with the emotional demands of the job. For example, following a talk delivered to teams in the North West division of the NPS (November 2019), the local co-ordinator said the presentation acted as *"a conversation starter in terms of how to manage the demands of the role by acknowledging the emotional labour required to perform in work. We have revisited Jake's input in team meetings and also in individual supervision with staff members"* [E7].

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Demand for, and response to, trade media coverage based on the research demonstrates the contribution it has made to debates around practitioner resilience. Influential criminal justice commentator Russell Webster wrote two articles (2017, 2018) citing R1 and R2. His blog has 4,600 subscribers, including probation practitioners and national media outlets. The articles have jointly received 7,465 reads worldwide [E8]. The National Association for Probation Officers (Napo) requested an article for Napo magazine (2019) and an invited talk to Women in Napo (2020), based on R1-3 and R5. The magazine is distributed to all members in hard copy and is available online via open access. The article, Emotion in Probation, has been shared on Facebook 186 times and has received 78 retweets [E9]. A 2019 article in the Probation Institute's magazine, Probation Quarterly, referenced R3. The magazine is circulated to all NPS and CRC staff (22,000 total) [E10].

Comments from probation practitioners in response to this dissemination of the research include:

"Excellent article... It's hard to talk to friends and family about a bad day at the office when it involves the recall of a predatory rapist. It's even worse when you have a gut feeling or a nagging doubt about an ultra-compliant sex offender who may or may-not be truthful about contact with his new girlfriend's child. Yes, spill-over is very real, you never really turn off, the fear of getting things wrong is constant" (comment on 2018 Russell Webster article) [E8].

And: *"I totally agree. We not only have to manage the stresses of high caseloads and risk, but also tread a very fine line with some clients to gain their trust, co-operation and compliance. It is emotionally draining on many levels and there is no recognition of this from the employer"* (comment on Napo magazine article) [E9].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

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- E1. 'Transforming Rehabilitation: At What Cost?', 9 October 2016, transcript: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/04_10_16_fo4_transformingrehabilitation.pdf
 - E2. Letter from Sir Bob Neill, Chair of the Justice Select Committee
 - E3. A Draft Target Operating Model for the Future of Probation Services in England and Wales - Probation Reform Programme (p.160,p.148): https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/873093/A_Draft_Target_Operating_Model_for_the_Future_of_Probation_Services_in_England_and_Wales_in_English_.pdf
 - E4. Academic Insights - April 2020: <https://www.justiceinspectrates.gov.uk/hmiprobation/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2020/04/Emotional-Labour-in-Probation.pdf>
 - E5. Copy of the SLMMF and email from Quality and Effective Practice Manager, HMPPS
 - E6. SLMMF evaluation dataset (anonymised)
 - E7. Compiled event evaluation forms and correspondence with local co-ordinators
 - E8. Russell Webster articles - October 2017 and January 2018: www.russellwebster.com/nps-high-risk/ and www.russellwebster.com/probation-balance/
 - E9. Napo contributions - June 2019 article and May 2020 talk: www.napomagazine.org.uk/emotion-in-probation/ and www.napo.org.uk/women-napo
 - E10. Leeanne Plechowicz, Review of Evidence-Based Skills in Criminal Justice: International Research on Supporting Rehabilitation and Resistance, *Probation Quarterly*, Issue 13, September 2019 (p.29)