

***Review of literature on republican
and loyalist ex-prisoners***

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The terms ex-prisoner and prisoner used throughout this literature review refer specifically to ex-prisoners/prisoners with conflict-related convictions, those are convictions arising from the conflict in Northern Ireland.

The interpretations of research and information considered in this literature review belong to the author.

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Acronyms

DLA	<i>Disability Living Allowance</i>
EPIC	<i>Ex-Prisoners Interpretive Centre</i>
EU	<i>European Union</i>
GFA	<i>Good Friday Agreement</i>
INLA	<i>Irish National Liberation Army</i>
IRA	<i>Irish Republican Army</i>
NGO	<i>Non-Governmental Organisation</i>
OFMDFM	<i>Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister</i>
PTSD	<i>Post Traumatic Stress Disorder</i>
PUP	<i>Progressive Unionist Party</i>
RUC	<i>Royal Ulster Constabulary</i>
SIA	<i>Security Industry Authority</i>
UVF	<i>Ulster Volunteer Force</i>
UDA	<i>Ulster Defence Association</i>
UDP	<i>Ulster Democratic Party</i>
UPRG	<i>Ulster Political Research Group</i>

1. Introduction

This literature review considers approximately 150 pieces of existing research and information collated on republican and loyalist ex-prisoners and ex-combatants and their families in Northern Ireland.

Specifically, the research objectives were:

- (i) To identify available research and information which has been carried out or collated on this subject and catalogue this;
- (ii) To determine demographic and socio-economic information on ex-prisoners, ex-combatants and their families;
- (iii) To review the research to provide a robust evidence base on ex-prisoners and ex-combatants in relation to the following topic areas:
 - Employment
 - Social inclusion
 - Health inequalities
 - Barriers to services
 - Contribution to conflict transformation
- (iv) To identify gaps in knowledge.

1.1 Prisons and the 'Troubles'

The outbreak of the 'troubles' in Northern Ireland in the late 1960s quickly led to consequences in relation to imprisonment. Initially in August 1971, 350 men were arrested and interned (Coogan 1995: 126).

Internment without trial lasted for the next four years (Amnesty International 1971; Brady, Faul and Murray 1975; Compton Report 1971; Kennally and Preston 1971; McGuffin 1973, 1974; Faul and Murray 1974a, 1974b; Spjut 1986). A total of 1,981 people were interned: 1,874 nationalists and 107 loyalists (Bowcott 2010). The internees were held for the most part in a disused military air field called Long Kesh. In their compounds they wore their own clothes, had free association and made their own rules for order and cooperation (Adams 1990; Devlin 1985); they were recognised as political inmates.

As the conflict escalated in the early 1970s, the prisons began to fill with sentenced prisoners. The Diplock Report (1972) spelt out the arrangements for trying and imprisoning offenders. The offences for which activists were tried were known as 'scheduled offences', and trials took place in jury-less courts in front of a judge sitting alone. In effect, the legal arrangements represented the government's recognition that those being imprisoned were politically motivated activists. Those imprisoned demanded and, through protests and hunger strikes, won the right to be treated differently within the prisons, thus completing the picture of political motivation (Republican Press Centre 1977). Prisoners did not wear prison uniforms or carry out prison work; in addition, they maintained their military structures within the jail, complete with OCs (officers commanding) who dealt directly with the prison authorities.

As a result of the Gardiner Report (1975) government policy shifted: prisoners were to be treated as regular criminals rather than politically motivated offenders. This was resisted strongly by both loyalist and republican prisoners. It was the latter who set the pace in terms of resistance, refusing to wear the prison uniform and being clothed solely in towels and blankets; they became known as the 'blanket men' (Coogan 1987; Faul and Murray 1979). Eventually the protest escalated into a no-wash protest and then in 1980 and 1981, a series of hunger strikes which resulted in

the deaths of 10 prisoners. (Beresford 1987; Campbell et al. 1994; Collins 1986; Feldman 1991; Sands 1981, 1998, 2001; O'Hearn 2006; Robinson 1981; Yuill 2007). For a brief while women in Armagh Jail, who had also been on the no-wash protest, went on hunger strike (D'Arcy 1981; McCafferty 1981).

Throughout this period, the prisoners continued to resist (Corcoran 2003, 2006; McEvoy 2000a, 2000b, 2001; McKeown 2001; Moen 2000). There were conflicts over issues such as segregation between loyalist and republican prisoners, and over the strip searching of women prisoners in Armagh Jail (Aretxaga 1995, 1997; Corcoran 2003, 2006, 2007; Faul 1980, 1983; Rolston and Tomlinson 1986, 1988; Sinn Féin POW Department 1983). Eventually, political status was returned in all but name and the organisation of each of the H Blocks came under the control of each military group. Republican prisoners in particular demonstrated what was possible in this relatively 'liberated zone'. They organised self-education inspired by socialist ideas and the writings of Paolo Freire and created an Irish speaking wing in one Block (Mac Ionnrachtaigh 2009; McKeown 1998, 2001).

Loyalist prisoners in Northern Ireland did not have the experience of generations of imprisonment which was part of republican political culture and therefore did not have the same history of collective coping mechanisms; they often had less defined ideological commitment than republicans; finally, as a number of authors have attested (Crawford 1979, 1999, 2003; Garland 2001; Green 1998; Little 2009) and as we will consider later, loyalist prisoners and ex-prisoners have frequently acknowledged that they have been less well accepted in loyalist communities than republican prisoners and ex-prisoners have in their communities. This has repercussions not just while they are imprisoned, but also in terms of the space they have for social inclusion and involvement in locally based conflict transformation after release.

1.2 Peace Process: Prisoner Release and Beyond

In August 1994, the Irish Republican Army (IRA) declared a ceasefire, to be followed six weeks later by the Combined Loyalist Military Command.

The stance of republican prisoners regarding peace talks which went on outside the prison was that negotiations were to be about a resolution of the conflict, not their release as such (Coiste 2004a). Had they or their loyalist equivalents taken a stance against developments, the peace process would have had a more difficult time (Moore 1997).

The Good Friday Agreement (GFA) proposed the early release of prisoners; this was not an amnesty (as sought by prisoners), but a conditional form of release. All politically motivated prisoners were to be released by the summer of 2000, regardless of the length of sentence, provided it exceeded two years (Gormally 2001).

The early release of prisoners raised a number of legal and moral questions (NIACRO 1995). Some argued that early release undermined faith in the rule of law. Others claimed that the release was premature because it was not clear that the conflict was truly finished, a reference in particular to the retention of arms by illegal groups. Last was the suspicion that released prisoners would re-offend. There were counter-arguments available; for example, up to that point 374 life sentence prisoners had been released; 11 had had their licences revoked for unacceptable behaviour, and 1 had been reconvicted for and 2 charged with scheduled offences (Gormally and McEvoy 1995). In this context, early release appeared less of a risk than opponents suggested.

The Agreement was accepted by referendum in May 1998. The Northern Ireland Sentences Act allowed for early release in the North, and legislation was enacted to enable releases in the South. In Northern Ireland 447 prisoners were released early as a result – 194 loyalists, 241 republicans and 12 non-aligned (Shirlow et al. 2005).

The Northern Ireland Sentences Act established the Sentence Review Committee to oversee the early release of politically motivated prisoners. The decisions of this body rested heavily on the assessment of organisational rather than individual risk. A

prisoner with close affiliation to a paramilitary group which was on ceasefire was seen as a less likely risk than one who had weak or no organisational linkage. Thus the SRC released prisoners in situations where normal circumstances might not have justified this, in effect overlooking such issues as the future employment prospects of the prisoner, family relations, etc. The decision to release or refuse was thus highly politicised (Dwyer 2007).

Prisoner release was the most unpopular part of the GFA by far; it was supported by 31% of Catholics and only 3% of Protestants (NI Life and Times Survey 2000). Yet it was an important confidence-building measure linked to conflict resolution in general and demilitarisation in particular (McEvoy 1999; Page 1996, 1998). As it turned out, prisoner release ended up being one of the easiest parts of the GFA to implement in full and on time (Page 2000).

At the same time a number of issues, which directly or indirectly linked to the question of former prisoners, continued to plague progress.

The question of OTRs (on the runs) was one such issue (Boydell et al 2008; Conroy et al 2005). In 2005 the British government introduced legislation to clear up an anomaly which had arisen as a result of the early release of prisoners. Up to 150 people were wanted for offences committed before 1998 but who had gone on the run. The proposal was to hear their cases in a special court, at which the accused did not have to attend. If found guilty, they would be freed on licence without having to go to jail. The plan met with widespread disapproval and was shelved.

The issue of the decommissioning of illegal arms rumbled on for many years after the GFA (Mac Ginty 1999; Schultze and Smith 2000; Brown and Hauswedell 2002), especially in relation to republicans. The republican position was that decommissioning had to be seen as part of an overall package of changes that included demilitarization on the British side, loyalist decommissioning, substantive changes in policing and more. On the other hand, unionists and the British government stressed a 'no guns, no government' position. The IRA fully decommissioned its weapons in 2005. The Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) followed in 2009 and the Ulster Defence Association (UDA) in 2010. Many of the debates and activities involved in this process involved former prisoners.

Another issue which caused some slippage in relation to conflict transformation was the position of loyalists in relation to the peace process (Bruce 1992, 2001, 2004; Finlay 2001; Finlayson 1997, 1999; Gallaher 2007; Graham 2004; McAuley 1997, 2003, 2005; Rolston 2006). Many loyalists were at best ambivalent about the peace process, while others faded back into civilian society (Edwards and Bloomer 2004). At the same time, there was the emergence of 'new loyalism' represented by the Progressive Unionist Party, linked to the UVF (Cassidy 2008; Edwards and Bloomer 2004, 2005; Hall 2006, 2007; McAuley 2002, 2004) and later by UDA-linked groups, such as the Ulster Political Research Group and the Conflict Transformation Initiative (McAuley, Tonge and Shirlow 2010; Spencer 2008).

Since the Good Friday Agreement there have been officially no politically motivated offenders in the prisons, although there continue to be dozens of prisoners who self-define themselves in that way and who continue to resist in similar ways to their predecessors (Dwyer 2008).

1.3 Ex-Prisoners and Conflict Transformation

In the GFA the British and Irish governments pledged to **'continue to recognise the importance of measures to facilitate the reintegration of prisoners into the community by providing support both prior to and after release, including assistance directed towards availing of employment opportunities, retraining and/or re-skilling, and further education'** (Annex B, point 5. 10 April 1998. <http://www.nio.gov.uk/>).

Eight years later, the St Andrew's Agreement (2006, Annex B) stressed that the British **'government will work with business, trade unions and ex-prisoner groups to produce guidance for employers which will reduce barriers to employment and enhance re-integration of former prisoners'**. Consequently a working group was established in OFMDFM (Office of the First and Deputy First Minister) under the auspices of Northern Ireland's most senior civil servant and a voluntary code for employers recruiting people with conflict-related convictions was published (OFMDFM 2007) prior to the restoration of devolution. At the same time, there were difficulties in ensuring that the GFA promise was fully actualised. For example, the first Programme for Government of the devolved Northern Ireland Assembly did not mention the need to help reintegrate politically-motivated ex-prisoners (CFNI 2003).

In the initial years following the GFA the most committed support for ex-prisoners and their organisations came about as a result of the imaginative intervention of an NGO (Non-Governmental Organisation), the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland (Rolston 2007) which ensured that a European Union (EU) special peace programme for Northern Ireland which allocated €500 million (European Platform for Conflict Prevention and Transformation, n.d.), would include a budget line for ex-prisoner groups. Between 1995 and 2003, 61 ex-prisoner groups and a further 29 affiliated projects received €9.2 million from the EU peace funds (Shirlow et al. 2005), approximately 0.9 per cent of the overall budget.

The EU funds allowed for the dynamism of the ex-prisoner groups to be channelled into projects which proved beneficial not just for the ex-prisoner constituency but for the wider society (NIVT 2001). An independent evaluation (Harvey 2003) noted that

the work of the ex-prisoner groups contributed significantly to training and retraining, supported the process of healing, revealed a wide level of community involvement, involved participants in a manner which was in keeping with the best practice of community development internationally, and encouraged self-help.

The first ex-prisoners' groups during the peace process were Tar Anall representing former IRA prisoners and EPIC representing former UVF prisoners (Shirlow et al. 2005). In time groups representing former republican prisoners came to include Tar Isteach, Tar Abhaile, Fáilte Abhaile, Trá Ghearr, Cumann na Meirleach, Amach agus Isteach, Ar Ais Aris, Tús Nua, Bone Ex-Prisoners' Group, An Loiste Uir, An Eochair, Teach Fáilte, EXPAC and Coiste na n-Iarchimí, the last of these being an umbrella group for ex-prisoners linked to the Provisional IRA. On the loyalist side, other ex-prisoner groups included REACT, Charter, Gae Lairn, Lisburn Prisoners' Support Project, South Belfast PEP, Prisoners in Partnership, North Belfast Prisoners' Aid, Ulster Prisoners' Aid and LINC (McAuley, Tonge and Shirlow 2010).

1.4 Researching Political Imprisonment

While the conflict went on, there were few questions raised by prisoners or the organisations from which they came as to the negative effects of imprisonment. Such questions would have been seen as a sign of weakness, a betrayal of the struggle and a gift to the enemy and its propaganda machine. There were many accounts of prisoners' heroism, but very little that was self-critical.

In addition, there was remarkably little reliable research conducted by academics, NGOs or others into the negative effects of imprisonment among politically motivated prisoners and their families. With a few notable exceptions, prisoners, ex-prisoners, partners and children were rarely asked how they felt.

The peace process created the space to ask questions that could not be asked, or at least asked easily, before. These questions were asked by academics, NGOs, and indeed by groups representing ex-prisoners themselves. One conclusion is clear from this wave of research: we know much more about the experience of republican prisoners and ex-prisoners than we do about loyalists. This imbalance is in part accounted for by a number of factors:

- Republicans have found it easier to articulate a clear ideological position than loyalists.
- Republicanism has been more 'attractive' to journalists and academics from outside.
- Republican ex-prisoner associations have frequently been more prolific in terms of published output than their loyalist counterparts.

For the purposes of this literature review, one crucially important revelation emerged from recent research: despite the fact that resistance was an effective form of coping, imprisonment had many negative consequences even for politically motivated prisoners and their families.

- First and foremost was the finding that imprisonment had mental health consequences for prisoners and their families.

- Second was the acknowledgement that relationships with partners and children had suffered as a result of imprisonment.
- Third, release from prison raised a range of practical issues: about finances, employment and accommodation.

But alongside these problems, there was also the discovery that release also brought new challenges and opportunities, and eventually there was a positive story to tell about the contribution of former prisoners to conflict transformation.

We will look at all these issues in turn. But first, it is necessary to consider some statistics.

2. Statistics

The record of how many people experienced time in prison as a result of the conflict is less precise than might be imagined. We are on firmest ground in relation to internment in the early 1970s. Three hundred and fifty men were arrested and interned initially (Coogan 1995: 126). A total of 1,981 people (mostly men) were interned: 1,874 nationalists and 107 loyalists (Bowcott 2010).

Shirlow and McEvoy (2008) estimate that 15,000 republicans and between 5,000 and 10,000 loyalists were imprisoned during the conflict. But loyalists frequently put the figure higher in relation to their experience; Tom Roberts of EPIC (in Mitchell 2003) states that there were upwards of 12,000 loyalist prisoners.

Jamieson, Shirlow and Grounds (2010) conclude that politically motivated former prisoners make up between 14 and 31% of the population of Northern Ireland males aged 50-59, and between 4 and 12% of those 60-64. Some area studies have allowed for more precision. Thus the 640 republican former prisoners identified by Ritchie (1998) in his study of the Upper Springfield area represent 5.6% of the population of the area, and an estimated 11% of the population of 25 years and over. In his research O'Neill (1998) located 440 republican prisoners and ex-prisoners in the relatively small New Lodge Road area of Belfast, but does not say what percentage of the local population this number represents. Hamber (2005) says that over 800 republicans in Derry have gone through political imprisonment, and approximately 70 of those went through the no-wash protest.

Finally, 1018 women served time as politically motivated prisoners (Corcoran 2006). The vast bulk of these were republicans.

It must also be pointed out that these figures relate only to those who have been sentenced and served time for offences related to the conflict. Those combatants who were never thus processed represent another, probably large, group of people. Some of them have from time to time, anonymously, been interviewed by researchers and journalists, but there is no systematic study of their experiences and the effects the conflict had on them. It is impossible to ascertain whether these experiences differ significantly from those of their fellow ex-combatants who were imprisoned.

3. The Literature Review

We now turn to those published pieces of work which pertain directly or indirectly to the situation of prisoners and ex-prisoners in Northern Ireland. There is a wealth of detailed information on the situation of this constituency in relation to

- health and mental health,
- relationships with partners and children,
- the experience of release from prison,
- reintegration and social inclusion,
- obstacles to inclusion,
- employment and unemployment,
- residual criminalisation,
- and ex-prisoner involvement in conflict transformation.

Some of the findings of the literature review are that:

- A substantial number of ex-prisoners experience poor health as a result of their prison and pre-prison experiences.
- A substantial minority of ex-prisoners display symptoms of serious psychological trauma, including PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder): depression, hyper activity, hyper alertness, negative self-appraisal, loss of sleep, deep-seated emotional stress.
- Although many prisoners were unmarried when first imprisoned, half of those who were married later divorced.
- Release from prison was often highly traumatic, with worries about personal security, emotional problems, relationship problems with partners and children. Difficulties in readjusting to life outside prison included anxiety, depression, anger, fear and isolation. Alcohol dependency and

attempted suicide were sometimes the result.

- Some ex-prisoners felt they did not fit in and that there was an unbridgeable gap between the ex-prisoner and those who had not been to prison. Loyalists were more likely than republicans to feel isolated in their own community.
- The majority of prisoners experienced financial difficulties when first released and continued to have such difficulties.
- Ex-prisoners will be between two and four times as likely as other pensionable age people to be entirely dependent on state benefits.
- Ex-prisoners are four times as likely to be unemployed as others in Northern Ireland; various factors militate against employment: the general economic situation, the refusal of employers to employ, security concerns, restricted access to training and ageism, as well as the statutory rules whereby ex-prisoners can be legally discriminated against in relation to employment opportunities.
- There is ample evidence that ex-prisoner groups have encouraged and continue to promote approaches to post-conflict transformation that embeds peaceful methods (Shirlow 2001).

3.1 Physical and Mental Health

Physical health, facts and figures

The research indicates that:

- 45% of ex-prisoners sustained moderate or severe physical injuries as a result of the conflict (Jamieson, Shirlow and Grounds 2010).
- 7.3% were disabled as a result of conflict-related injuries (O'Neill 1998).
- 27% of republicans and 9% of loyalists suffered serious injury due to the conflict (Shirlow et al. 2005).
- 37% rated their health as excellent, very good or good, and 28% as poor (Jamieson, Shirlow and Grounds 2010).
- 58% judged that they were in ill health (Shirlow 2001).

Imprisonment was not the only crisis to have been faced by ex-prisoners. 45% of those interviewed by Jamieson, Shirlow and Grounds (2010) said they had sustained moderate or severe physical injuries as a result of the conflict. 7.3% of those surveyed by O'Neill (1998) were disabled as a result of conflict-related injuries. Shirlow et al. (2005) found that 27% of republicans and 15% of their relatives had suffered serious injury due to the conflict, compared to 9% of loyalists and 1% of their relatives, and that a significant number of both loyalist and republican former prisoners had lost a family member or friend during the conflict. To take one specific example of trauma: 39% of republican ex-prisoners and 25% of their relatives had been intimidated from their homes, compared to 33% of loyalist ex-prisoners and 20% of their relatives (Shirlow et al. 2005).

Many prisoners went on to suffer other stresses, physical and emotional, during imprisonment. However, it is perhaps surprising the extent to which, in the few studies which looked at the issue, there were not more people reporting poor physical health. In one study, 37% rated their health as excellent, very good or good,

and 28% as poor (Jamieson, Shirlow and Grounds 2010). The results in an earlier study were less positive: 58% of ex-prisoners judged that they were in ill health. This varied little according to the age of the ex-prisoners at the time of the research (Shirlow 2001).

Where the picture becomes even more bleak is in relation to mental health.

Mental health, facts and figures

The research indicates that:

- 70% of ex-prisoners stated that they experienced poor or very poor emotional health (Shirlow (2001).
- 24% of republicans and 17% of loyalists reported symptoms of serious psychological trauma: depression, hyper activity, hyper alertness, negative self-appraisal, loss of sleep, deep-seated emotional stress (Shirlow et al. 2005).
- One quarter of former blanket men were judged to be in need of focused and immediate mental health attention, while another quarter could benefit from wider psychosocial support (Hamber 2005).
- 41% of ex-prisoners reported taking medication for anxiety or sleeping difficulties; 54% of loyalists and 56% of republicans reported feeling seriously depressed at some time since release; 32% said they had at times felt they did not want to continue living; 51% reported being troubled by memories or dreams; 72% of republicans and 64% of loyalists were over the threshold for hazardous drinking; overall 40% had probable mental health problems, with 19% of republicans and 18% of loyalists with high-end scores the General Health Questionnaire (Jamieson, Shirlow and Grounds 2010).

Shirlow et al. (2005) found that 24% of republicans and 27% of their relatives reported serious psychological trauma, compared to 17% of loyalists and 38% of their relatives. An earlier study by Shirlow (2001) revealed that 70% of ex-prisoners stated that they experienced poor or very poor emotional health; 78% of the female ex-prisoners in the sample stated this. Various symptoms of PTSD were identified by at least three out of four ex-prisoner respondents: depression, hyper activity, hyper alertness, negative self-appraisal, loss of sleep, deep-seated emotional stress. Those released in the previous five years were most likely to suffer from hyper vigilance, insomnia and feelings of apathy and exhaustion. Those released earlier revealed higher levels of irritability and the tendency to freeze, panic run or feel terror stricken. 67% of those who said they were in poor or very poor health had experienced PTSD symptoms in the previous four weeks.

Hamber (2005) also found a range of symptoms in his sample of 21 former blanket men. Some felt they had become hardened and detached. Others reported anger, impulsivity and control, social withdrawal, depression and claustrophobia/agoraphobia, intrusive thoughts, feelings of guilt, anxiety, flashbacks, sleeping problems, alcohol problems and relationship difficulties. His conclusion was that about one quarter required focused and immediate mental health attention, while another quarter could benefit from wider psychosocial support, including self-help groups and a listening ear.

Other local studies confirmed this general picture. In north Belfast O'Neill (1998) found that republican ex-prisoners recounted difficulties in readjusting to life outside prison, where initial feelings of euphoria were replaced with anxiety, depression, anger, fear and isolation. Alcohol dependency and attempted suicide were mentioned as responses to this. Three ex-prisoners from the area had committed suicide. And in west Belfast Ritchie (1998) found a mixed picture; only 30% of the 640 former prisoners surveyed said they had difficulty adjusting to life afterwards. At the same time, those who experienced the worst on release – in terms of lacking confidence, feeling unsettled, or having difficulties in relation to personal security – were those who had served the least, between one and five years.

As Jamieson and Grounds (2002) found, release has clearly been a stressful experience for many, with initial euphoria followed by a period of over-stimulation

and then depression. Their sample consisted of 18 former prisoners. Many expressed profound sadness at leaving their comrades behind in prison. Changes in the built environment and in other aspects of daily life were shocking – supermarkets, escalators, domestic appliances, the price of commodities. For many, used to the intensely political atmosphere in prison, the lack of political engagement among people they met was frustrating. Coping with crowds was a problem and many found small talk excruciating. They found they could not talk about their prison experience to anyone other than another ex-prisoner. Seventy-eight percent of the sample had to deal with delayed mourning, and blamed themselves for hastening the death of the relative while they were in prison. 56% reported alcohol problems and 11% had suicidal ideation. Of the respondents who completed the BDI (Beck Depression Inventory), 27% revealed moderate to severe depression, 64% mild to moderate, and only 9% were in the normal range. Of those who completed the BHS (Beck Hopelessness Scale); 67% had moderate scores, 25% mild and 35% were in the normal range. 17% of the entire sample had scores revealing full PTSD on the PPTSD (Purdue PTSD Scale Revised).

In a later study of 190 ex-prisoners, Jamieson, Shirlow and Grounds (2010) added further evidence of the mental health consequences of imprisonment, with the added focus of looking specifically at the fact that the ex-prisoner population was ageing.

- 41% reported taking medication for anxiety or sleeping difficulties (51% of loyalists and 35% of republicans; 46% of women).
- 54% of loyalists and 56% of republicans reported feeling seriously depressed at some time since release. For women the percentage was 65.
- 32% (38% of loyalists, 27% of republicans) said they had at times felt they did not want to continue living.
- 51% reported being troubled by memories or dreams (50% of republicans, 54% of loyalists, 62% of women).
- Two measures of alcohol dependency were used: FAST and CAGE. The former showed 72% of republicans and 64% of loyalists over the threshold for hazardous drinking; the latter showed 53% of republicans and 55% of loyalists over the alcohol dependence threshold. These scores are twice the Northern Ireland average. Even with lower scores, women ex-prisoners were

two and a half times more likely to be alcohol dependent than women in the rest of the population.

- Only 14% (16% of republicans and 11% of loyalists) reported no psychological harm.
- 84% of those who reported severe psychological harm also reported severe harm in their close relationships.
- 54% (58% of loyalists, 42% of republicans) felt they had suffered in their ability to express affection. Women were less likely to report this.
- 60% (64% of loyalists, 59% of republicans) said their ability to confide in others about personal problems had suffered.
- There were links between living alone and having suffered severe psychological harm, expressing emotion and being bothered by memories or dreams, all of which were substantially higher for those living alone than the rest of the sample.
- 31% of republicans and 29% of loyalists said they were not getting the help they needed with their psychological problems, especially in relation to being older ex-prisoners. There was an admission that this was partly to do with machismo, but most were open to appropriate help, for example, peer counselling. Outside the peer group, many felt there were problems about disclosure.
- Respondents' answers to the General Health Questionnaire revealed that 40% had probable mental health problems, with 19% of republicans and 18% of loyalists with high-end scores. For women the score was 33%.

The authors conclude their comprehensive report with a long list of suggestions to be considered. They include the following:

- that consideration should be given to putting the provisions of the voluntary code of guidance to employers in relation to ex-prisoners on to a statutory basis.
- that policy makers recognise that older former politically motivated prisoners constitute an 'at risk' group of older people.

- that, in line with the Veterans-UK scheme, there is a need to inform primary care practitioners about the specific needs of former politically motivated prisoners.
- that community-based groups providing counselling and support should include assessment to identify complex clinical needs as a routine part of their activities.
- that there be greater representation of former politically motivated prisoners as service users on relevant advisory or advocacy bodies.
- that former politically motivated prisoners and community groups should expand existing peer support and counselling programmes addressing addiction-related and mental health problems, and should share best practice.

It bears repeating that the admission of such mental health consequences of imprisonment was not forthcoming during the conflict. For example, ex-prisoners who spoke to Jamieson and Grounds (2002) said they survived prison through various coping mechanisms, including stoical determination and focusing on the present rather than the future. Despite that, depression was an ever-present danger but they hid their fear of it behind a macho veneer. Prison visits often involved holding back, for both prisoners and relatives, and as a result, some prisoners reported becoming more detached over time. In prison they learned quickly not to show their feelings. This was partly because of the all-male environment, but also because feelings revealed to prison officers could be seen as a form of weakness, detracting from their ability to resist (Tar Anall 1998). Given that, it was a huge leap to recognise, as half of those questioned by Hamber (2005) did, the need for counselling and psychological services for ex-prisoners. However, there were difficulties in relation to such counselling, as ex-prisoners themselves admitted (Coiste 1999b; Coiste 2004b). They reported a previous reluctance to engage with statutory bodies which, they argued, had not sufficiently engaged with the republican community. Ex-prisoners support groups like Tar Anall, established in 1995, were out in front in terms of providing counselling which is politically sensitive to the needs of ex-prisoners and their families. From 2000 Tar Isteach in north Belfast provided dedicated counselling under the guidance of an experienced clinical social worker, himself an ex-prisoner. The republican ideal in relation to counselling was a network

of trained counsellors within the ex-prisoner community, liaising with statutory bodies when required.

3.2 **Relationships**

Relationships, facts and figures

The research indicates that:

- Republican prisoners were young when first arrested: 23% aged 15 to 17 (Ó hÁdhmaill 2001); 17.9% in the Upper Springfield area under 18 (Ritchie 1998); almost 70 percent were aged between 16 and 20 (Shirlow and McEvoy 2008).
- For loyalists, 30 percent were aged between 16 and 20 when first arrested (Shirlow and McEvoy 2008).
- For around 50% of those who had been married prior to imprisonment, the relationship survived (Jamieson and Grounds 2002). The divorce rate for ex-prisoners was 52%, 17% higher than Belfast average (Shirlow 2001).
- 84% of partners cited financial problems as the most prominent effect of imprisonment (McEvoy et al. 1999).
- Partners were wary of the prisoner's release; with anxieties about independence (35%), sex (43%) and re-learning to live together (60%) being most cited (McEvoy et al 1999).
- One in 7 female partners of ex-prisoners reported domestic violence (Shirlow 2001).

64% of the 100 republican ex-prisoners surveyed by Ó hÁdhmaill (2001) had been imprisoned when 21 years old or younger. 23% were aged 15 to 17 when first imprisoned. Similarly, Ritchie (1998) found that 17.9% of ex-prisoners in the Upper Springfield area were first imprisoned as children (under 18) compared to only 12.6% first imprisoned when over 25. Shirlow and McEvoy (2008) found that almost 70 percent of the republican ex-prisoners they interviewed had been jailed first between the ages of 16 and 20; for loyalists the figure was 30 percent. And Alonso (2003)

points out that in 1975 70% of republicans prosecuted were under 21 years old. In 1979, it was 53%.

Given the youth of those surveyed, it is not surprising, as Jamieson and Grounds (2002) point out, that only a minority of men had been married before imprisonment. That said, for half of those who had been married prior to imprisonment, the relationship survived. Shirlow (2001) puts the divorce rate for ex-prisoners he studied at 52%, 17% higher than the Belfast average.

The situation in relation to imprisonment and relationships is a mixed one. Rolston and Tomlinson (1986) noted the power of political ideology to bind politically motivated prisoners and their partners together. On the other hand, prisoners themselves have noted that one of the great pains of imprisonment was the void left by separation from family (Tar Anall 1998). For partners there were practical problems as well. Imprisonment of male partners exacerbated financial difficulties for women, and was mentioned even by those who were proud of their partners' involvement (Boydell et al. 2008). 84% of the 239 respondents surveyed by McEvoy et al. (1999) cited financial problems as the most prominent issue. Other problems included concerns relating to children, depression, health issues and concern about their continuing relationship with the partner. 79% of the 100 respondents surveyed by Ó hÁdhmaill (2001) stated that imprisonment had had a severe adverse effect on their family.

There exists a relative silence in relation to the specific problems involved in being a prisoner's wife. Given the very few factual accounts in this area (A Prisoner's Wife 1996; Hall 2010), it has often been left to novelists (Holland 1981) to paint a grim fictional picture of the woman as imprisoned as the man, him by bars, her by the judgements of the community that as a hero's wife she has to be morally incorrupt and needs to be policed accordingly.

Prisoners formed a solid group with fellow prisoners which in a sense substituted for family (Tar Anall 1998). So for them release meant leaving behind this family to which they were accustomed to return to one which had grown and developed in their absence. It was clear that they could not merely fit in where they had left off. There were, for example, difficulties involved in re-establishing family relationships

where women had learned to be self-sufficient and children have grown up in their absence (McShane 1998). Women with family members involved in conflict found difficulties of renegotiation and redefinition of status when the males returned (Boydell et al 2008; Sales 1997; Shirlow and Dowler 2009). Partners had a range of concerns regarding the release of a prisoner. Among them were concerns regarding the effects of release on their relationship, with worries about independence (35%), sexual anxieties (43%) and re-learning to live together (60%) being cited frequently (McEvoy et al 1999).

Boydell et al (2008) found that respondents were reluctant to discuss direct or indirect domestic violence in this situation. At the same time, they found some evidence of it by returning male ex-prisoners. One in 7 women questioned by Shirlow (2001) reported domestic violence and some stated their partners had not been violent prior to imprisonment.

3.3 **Children**

Children, facts and figures

The research indicates that:

- Children displayed a range of negative behaviours in response to the imprisonment of a parent, from bed-wetting, sleep difficulties and nightmares to constant crying (McEvoy et al. 1999)
- 71% of children who had witnessed their parent's arrest did not cope well, compared to 58% of children who were not present at the arrest (McEvoy et al. 1999).
- 75% of mothers told their children of the father's imprisonment. Other children were told that their father was working away from home (69%) or was in hospital (23%) (McEvoy et al. 1999).
- 57% of children visited their imprisoned parent at least fortnightly, 31% monthly and only 13% less than once per month (McEvoy et al. 1999).
- Visiting jail was often a mixed experience for children (Spence 2002).
- Children, especially teenage children, found it difficult to cope with the parent's release after imprisonment (Tar Anall 2005).

The issue of the effects of imprisonment on children was rarely considered during the conflict. One exception is the research by Coulter (1991) on Irish politically motivated prisoners in England and their families. She considers the direct effects of imprisonment on children, including financial difficulties, the pain of separation and the trauma of visits.

In the most rigorous research on the issue, partners of prisoners reported a range of negative behaviours in their children, from bed-wetting, sleep difficulties and nightmares to constant crying (McEvoy et al. 1999). There is a particular significance

when the child has witnessed the parent's arrest. 71% of the children of 93 parents surveyed whose partners' arrest had been witnessed by the children felt that the children were not coping well, compared to 58% of those whose children were not present at the arrest (McEvoy et al. 1999: 189).

A clear culture of secrecy existed in relation to a parent's imprisonment. Although 75% of those interviewed by McEvoy et al. (1999) said their children knew the father was in prison, the younger the child the less likely they were to have been told the truth. Protective lies told to children included that their parent was working away from home (69%) or was in hospital (23%).

Despite the difficulties raised by imprisonment, partners, usually women, kept family relationships going. They visited prison regularly – 88% at least once a week – and frequently brought the children on visits: 57% at least fortnightly, 31% monthly and only 13% less than once per month (McEvoy et al. 1999). Even those with partners imprisoned in England visited more frequently than partners of ordinary English prisoners, despite the distances and difficulties involved.

Prison visits were fraught occasions; sustaining open and honest conversation was difficult, especially when children were present. In general awkward and stressful topics were avoided so as 'not to spoil the visit' (McEvoy et al 1999).

There is a small number of studies which have given priority to the voices of children (Rolston forthcoming 2011); among them are the reports on two focus groups with children of republican prisoners carried out by Tar Anall (2000, 2005), the former involving group discussions with children of prisoners on the impact their parents' imprisonment had had on them, the latter following up five years later; the report of a focus group with children of republican prisoners in Derry carried out by Cunamh (2002), and a report on interviews with children of UVF prisoners conducted by Spence (2002).

These children reiterated many of the points made in the academic research: the difficulty of maintaining a relationship with a parent in prison (Cunamh 2002), the range of physical and psychological consequences for children associated with their parent's arrest and imprisonment (Spence 2002), the culture of secrecy surrounding imprisonment (Tar Anall 2000). It was clear that mothers often told these lies to

protect the child from information which they felt they were too young to assimilate (Spence 2002).

For the children interviewed, visiting jail was often a mixed experience – the face to face contact, and yet the inability to talk freely, not only because of the presence of prison officers, but also because of the pressure to be seen to be coping (Spence 2002).

And the father's final release proved problematic in many ways, the initial elation being replaced by tensions as the father sought to re-establish his authority in the face of resistance, especially from teenage sons and daughters. '... when he came back he started to tell us what to do, and I wasn't used to it. I was thirteen and I just went out and went nuts 'cause I wasn't going to let him tell me what to do' (Tar Anall 2005).

3.4 Prisoner release

Prisoner release: facts and figures

The research indicates that:

- Returning to society is often highly traumatic for ex-prisoners, with worries about personal security, emotional problems, relationship problems with partners and children (Ruddy, in Mitchell 2003).
- Difficulties in readjusting to life outside prison included anxiety, depression, anger, fear and isolation. Alcohol dependency and attempted suicide were sometimes the result (O'Neill 1998).
- 84% of partners questioned worried about how the ex-prisoner would fare in terms of getting a job; financial difficulties were feared by 77% (McEvoy et al. 1999).

For politically motivated prisoners there is ambivalence involved in release – adulation mixed with anxiety. As Ruddy (quoted in Mitchell 2003) argues, ex-prisoners often return as heroes to their communities where they make a major contribution. At the same time, the return is often highly traumatic, with worries about personal security, emotional problems, relationship problems with partners and children.

The same point is stressed by Tar Anall (1998): release back into republican communities was a mixed experience, with sympathy and support, but also oppressive expectations. For example, some felt that they were expected to relate closely to republicans in the community rather than with others. Others felt that there was an expectation that they would go off the rails in some way. The adulation of the community could be misconstrued as a sort of hero worship, leading the ex-prisoner to act in ways which the community would later come to resent. The community of the prison was relatively simple, with people sharing a common ideology; in contrast,

the community outside is a kaleidoscope of attitudes and could be an exhausting place in which the ex-prisoner has to learn to cope.

In a study in North Belfast, republican ex-prisoners acknowledged that their fears about release were realised. They recounted the difficulties in readjusting to life outside prison, where initial feelings of euphoria were replaced with anxiety, depression, anger, fear and isolation. Alcohol dependency and attempted suicide were mentioned as responses to this (O'Neill 1998).

Prisoners were not alone in their anxiety. Partners too had a range of concerns regarding prisoner release. The most common, cited by 84% of the 239 people surveyed by McEvoy et al. (1999) was about how the ex-prisoner would fare in terms of getting a job. Financial difficulties were also feared by 77% of those questioned.

There was also the fear that the returning prisoner would have problems coming to terms with the partner's independence. In this light, one child of a prisoner, quoted in Tar Anall (2000), provided astute advice to returning prisoners, 'Play second fiddle to your wife for the first few months, because she is the one who has been coping with the children all the years. And if she's been doing a good job up to then, why should you try and change it. Watch and learn.'

3.5 Reintegration and Social Inclusion

Reintegration and Social Inclusion: facts and figures

The research indicates that:

- Some ex-prisoners felt they did not fit in and that there was an unbridgeable gap between the ex-prisoner and those who had not been to prison (Jamieson and Grounds 2002).
- Loyalists were more likely than republicans (18% versus 8%) to feel isolated in their own community (Jamieson, Shirlow and Grounds 2010).

Release was not merely about re-incorporation into the family, but also into the community and society. In international literature this is labelled reintegration (Pobal and NEVA 2007). In the Northern Ireland situation some prisoners (especially republicans) resisted notions of reintegration because of a desire not to display any signs of weakness (they have no particular social or psychological needs) or because of a rejection of the label of 'criminal'. But, as Gormally and McEvoy (1995) argued shortly after the ceasefires, when early release became a topic on the agenda, reintegration was necessary not merely for the ex-prisoner but, perhaps more importantly, for society overall. Barriers to reintegration were potential obstacles to peace.

Gormally (2001) reiterated this point in a later study. The concept of reintegration is resisted by republicans in particular because of its insinuation that they were not integrated in their communities. The concept, he argued, needs to be seen as involving a two-way process: ex-prisoners should be encouraged to take up opportunities for education, training, etc., while society needs to change to ensure their inclusion. Gormally concludes that the state must recognize that reintegration measures must be based on the principle of self-help, with autonomous, ex-prisoner-controlled organisations delivering their own services.

Mitchell (2008) agreed, arguing that reintegration must be a two-way process – not merely former combatants recognising the state and its institutions, but the state conceding legitimacy to former combatants and their work.

Reintegration is thus justified at a number of levels: in relation to the human rights of the returning prisoner (McEvoy and Shirlow 2009), in terms of citizenship rights (McKeever 2007), and in terms of the survival of the peace process: those who are not afforded the protection of the law may have little stake in following its obligations (McKeever and O’Rawe 2007).

Most returning prisoners in Jamieson and Grounds’ (2002) study were welcomed back into their communities as heroes. But this had a down side too, with people’s unrealistic expectations of their ability to sort out problems. Many felt they did not fit in and that there was an unbridgeable gap between the ex-prisoner and those who had not been to prison. Solidarity with other ex-prisoners was a lifeline, but also a way of excluding others.

There was, however, a clear republican/loyalist differential in terms of community inclusion (Crothers 1998; Kelly 2011; Shirlow et al. 2010). Jamieson, Shirlow and Grounds (2010) surveyed 73 loyalist ex-prisoners and 113 republicans and found that loyalists were more likely than republicans (18% versus 8%) to feel isolated in their own community. Loyalist ex-prisoners found themselves facing rejection by mainstream unionism. The Orange Order, for example, saw the early release of politically motivated prisoners, loyalists as well as republicans, as part of a ‘long train of concessions’ (McAuley et al. 2010). Consequently, loyalists have less acceptance in their communities than republicans have in theirs, and republicans have had an easier time establishing their legitimacy in the wider nationalist community (Mitchell 2008).

3.6 Obstacles to inclusion

Financial difficulties, facts and figures

The research indicates that:

- The majority of prisoners experienced financial difficulties when first released – 93% of republicans and 84% of loyalists (Shirlow et al. 2005), 81% of loyalists and 75% of republicans (Jamieson, Shirlow and Grounds 2010).
- 48% of loyalists and 64% of republicans continued to have such difficulties (Shirlow et al. 2005).
- Only 35% (29% of republicans and 44% of loyalists) will have made at least ten years of National Insurance Contributions by retirement age; fewer than 1 in 10 are paying into a private pension fund (Jamieson, Shirlow and Grounds 2010).
- Ex-prisoners will be between two and four times as likely as other pensionable age people to be entirely dependent on state benefits (Jamieson, Shirlow and Grounds 2010).

There was also a range of practical difficulties facing released prisoners, including finance, housing and employment. The vast majority of the 300 ex-prisoners surveyed by Shirlow et al. (2005) – 93% of republicans and 84% of loyalists – had experienced financial difficulties when first released and 48% of loyalists and 64% of republicans continued to have such difficulties. Jamieson, Shirlow and Grounds (2010) found that 77% of their respondents had experienced financial difficulties since release, 81% of loyalists and 75% of republicans. 40% (49% of republicans, 34% of loyalists) said that their financial problems had not lessened in the previous five years. It was not just the lack of money, but also problems in relation to handling money. Often imprisoned at a young age, and with a decade or more in prison, many had little experience of budgeting or financial management. Some of those

researched by Jamieson and Grounds (2002) got into severe financial difficulties but neither sought nor received advice on sorting things out. They had little experience of the welfare system and little patience for dealing with welfare bureaucracy.

A little highlighted fact has been that ex-prisoners are facing into middle age and beyond without many of the supports necessary to cope (Jamieson and Grounds 2008). For example, the problems facing them fit neatly into the analysis of the March 2005 consultation paper *Ageing in an Inclusive Society* (OFMDFM 2005). Yet, there is almost no recognition in this or other policy literature that this ageing population exists. To date there has only been one piece of research on this issue – Jamieson, Shirlow and Grounds (2010). They found that few of their sample of 190 ex-prisoners had made financial preparations for retirement. Only 35% (29% of republicans and 44% of loyalists) will have made at least ten years of National Insurance Contributions by retirement age. Fewer than 1 in 10 were paying into a private pension fund. The risk of poverty in old age is almost certain. They will be between two and four times as likely as other pensionable age people to be entirely dependent on state benefits.

Employment and unemployment, facts and figures

The research indicates that:

- Many republican ex-prisoners had higher educational qualifications than the rest of the population but experienced an unemployment rate of 53% compared with 10.4% for Catholic men generally (Jamieson and Grounds 2002).
- 62% had experienced unemployment prior to imprisonment and 56% had no experience of full-time employment prior to imprisonment; 14% had been on a training scheme since release; 89% had experienced unemployment since release, 25% for more than ten years; 57% had experienced direct discrimination (Ó hÁdhmaill 2001).
- Restrictions to self-employment included the unwillingness of banks to

lend to ex-prisoners (Ó hÁdhmaill 2001).

- For republican former prisoners, unemployment or short-term employment is the norm; the longer someone has spent in prison, the less likely they are to find employment afterwards (Ritchie 1998).
- 40% of republican former prisoners and 30% of loyalists were unemployed; former prisoners tended to find jobs as taxi drivers, doormen, labourers – low-paid and within their own communities (Shirlow 2001).
- Ex-prisoners are four times as likely to be unemployed as others in Northern Ireland; various factors militate against employment: the general economic situation, the refusal of employers to employ, security concerns, restricted access to training and ageism, as well as the statutory rules whereby ex-prisoners can be legally discriminated against in relation to employment opportunities (Jamieson, Shirlow and Grounds 2010).

Perhaps the biggest obstacle to inclusion relates to employment (Coiste 1999c). As Gormally (2001) argues, ex-prisoners have needs in relation to economic and financial stability; they face problems in relation to paid employment, not least that the prison experience provided no preparation for the discipline of work. It may have taught them collective solidarity, but not individual discipline. There are also obstacles to employment in law and in other sources of discrimination. But it must be accepted that long-term peace cannot be consolidated by excluding former combatants from mainstream employment.

Jamieson and Grounds (2002) found that for the republican 18 ex-prisoners they contacted employment was the single greatest obstacle to successful resettlement. Many had higher educational qualifications than the rest of the population but experienced an unemployment rate of 53% compared with 10.4% for Catholic men generally. Many reported concerns about security issues in terms of seeking and maintaining employment. The safest areas to work in were their own, but these were areas of highest unemployment. Another issue was whether to reveal a criminal

record and thus fail to get job, or hide it and hope not to be discovered and sacked. For many, the only outlet was insecure, cash-in-hand work in the informal economy.

There is a wealth of information from research as to the details of the experience of ex-prisoners in this regard.

Ó hÁdhmaill (2001) found the following in his survey of 100 republican ex-prisoners:

- 62% had experienced unemployment prior to imprisonment, 5% for more than ten years.
- 56% had no experience of full-time employment prior to imprisonment.
- 43% of those who had experience of full-time employment had worked in construction and a further 29% in service industries.
- 44% had had academic or other qualifications prior to jail.
- 29% had been on an apprenticeship prior to jail.
- 53% gained academic qualifications during imprisonment.
- Only 14% had been on a training scheme since release.
- 10% got a degree, 6% a profession and 3% a trade since release.
- The main reason given (by 70%) for failing to obtain training or qualifications after prison was concern about security.
- 45% stated that discrimination was a major barrier to further training.
- Many called into question the value of current training on offer; it was not linked to jobs, or to the specific needs of ex-prisoners.
- 89% had experienced unemployment since release, 25% for more than ten years.
- Most employment available to them was in their own areas, as taxi drivers, doormen, or in small building firms.
- 54% of those in employment worked in the community sector.
- Only one of the sample was self-employed. Restrictions to self-employment included the unwillingness of banks to lend to ex-prisoners.
- Overt discrimination was another reason for non-employment. 57% had experienced direct discrimination.

Shirlow's (2001) findings are in agreement. Employment was a major problem for ex-prisoners because of their lack of, or lack of relevant, skills. Negative attitudes, political vetting and state policies all worked against them finding a job.

- 66% of the 100 ex-prisoners surveyed were economically inactive.
- 33% of those in employment were in the informal sector.
- 40% of republican former prisoners and 30% of loyalists were unemployed.
- Former prisoners tended to find jobs as taxi drivers, doormen, labourers – low-paid and within their own communities. Some had found employment in the community sector as a result of Peace money.
- 91% of republicans and 82% of loyalists said that the refusal to work in the 'other' community led to difficulties in finding employment.
- More than three quarters of republicans and their relatives and 64% of loyalist former prisoners and 53% of their relatives were in receipt of welfare benefits.

Jamieson, Shirlow and Grounds' (2010) research survey of 190 ex-prisoners paints a similar picture:

- 51% were in paid employment, 30% working full-time – 36% of loyalists and 27% of republicans.
- Political ex-prisoners were four times as likely to be unemployed as others in Northern Ireland. 26% were unemployed, and 16% in receipt of sickness or disability benefit – loyalists 21% and republicans 13%.
- Both groups of ex-prisoners were more likely than others in Northern Ireland to be on Disability Living Allowance (DLA). Mental ill health was correlated with being unemployed and on DLA.
- Those interviewed list a series of factors which in their view militate against employment: the general economic situation, the refusal of employers to employ, security concerns, restricted access to training and ageism.

O'Neill (1998) surveyed 40 republican ex-prisoners in North Belfast.

- 50% had no qualifications, 27.5% had GCSE or equivalent, 2.5% had A levels or equivalent, and 20% had a degree.
- 50% were in employment, 2.5% in full-time education and 2.5% in full-time training; 70% had been in regular employment pre-prison.

- 85% had been involved at some time in voluntary work in the community, such as women's groups, or working with children, youth, the elderly, culture or community development.
- All said imprisonment had placed restrictions on their prospects of finding employment.
- 87.5% had reason to believe their personal details were in the hands of loyalists, a factor lessening their ability to find employment.
- 95% had suffered harassment from the RUC and British army, another factor lessening their ability to find employment.
- 90% said imprisonment had adversely affected their personal development, especially in relation to education and work skills.
- 95% said they had no help while in prison to improve their employability.
- 97.5% said they had received no help after release (other than from family, friends and community networks) in improving their employability.

And in West Belfast, Ritchie (1998) found the same for the 640 republican ex-prisoners he surveyed.

- Over half had some apprenticeship, educational qualifications or a trade before imprisonment and were therefore well placed to enter the labour market.
- However, none received any trade qualifications within prison, although some completed educational qualifications.
- For former prisoners, unemployment or short-term employment is the norm. The rate of long-term unemployment (over 12 months) in the sample was 87.5%, 5% higher than in the population aged 35 or over in the area.
- The longer someone has spent in prison, the less likely they are to find employment afterwards.

3.7 Residual criminalisation

Employment difficulties were part of a package of experience for ex-prisoners which has been termed 'residual criminalisation' (Coiste 1999c; Shirlow and McEvoy 2008; Shirlow et al. 2005). Under the terms of their release, ex-prisoners are released on licence. The GFA did not grant an amnesty. Under the Rehabilitation of Offenders (NI) Order 1978, convictions of more than two and a half years can never be spent. Additionally, under the Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998 it is legal to refuse employment to someone whose political opinions 'approve or accept the use of violence for political ends', the effect, although not the intention, of the Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998 is that no politically motivated convictions, regardless of length, can ever be spent (McKeever and O'Rawe 2007). Together these legal blockages become part of the overall problems facing former prisoners in terms of accessing employment opportunities and financial services.

Coiste (2003c) itemised the various ways in which the impact of having a prison record impacts on the lives of all politically motivated ex-prisoners.

- Being barred from many areas of employment, e.g. the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service.
- Explicit legal blocks such as the Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order which bars them from employment as police officers.
- Acquiring a licence for driving a taxi (this restriction no longer applies).
- Disclosure of 'criminal' convictions when seeking employment.
- Accessing finance for self-employment.
- Acquiring a mortgage or insurance.
- Adopting children.
- Receiving compensation for criminal damage or injury.
- Foreign travel, in terms of harassment at security checks, or refusal of visas.

The lack of hard evidence on some of these factors points to the need for further research. But, in the meantime, like other ex-prisoner groups, when Coiste lobbied around these issues, it was on the basis of information about blockages obtained from its members. Coiste (2003d) maintained that:

- Discrimination against political ex-prisoners should be made illegal.

- Criminal convictions attached to political ex-prisoners should be expunged.
- An island-wide policy initiative is needed to implement the commitment regarding ex-prisoners contained in the GFA.

Loyalist ex-prisoners point to an additional number of blockages which are particularly if not uniquely relevant to them (Kelly 2011). They have found difficulty in engaging in security-related employment because of the operations of the Security Industry Authority (SIA) (Northern Ireland Office 2006), and cite instances of their children being discriminated against in terms of joining the armed forces because of their parent's criminal record.

Under section 2(4) of the Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998 it is legal to refuse employment to someone whose political opinions 'approve or accept the use of violence for political ends', thus disadvantaging politically motivated former prisoners. A voluntary code for employers – *Employers' Guidance* (OFMDFM 2007) – introduced after political pressure from ex-prisoner groups, states that if their conviction was not directly relevant to the nature of the employment it does not need to be a barrier to employment. However, ex-prisoners report that revealing a past conviction is frequently a sure way to refusal of employment, the voluntary code notwithstanding (Jamieson, Shirlow and Grounds 2010).

A significant court case in 2003, *McComb*, regarding an application for Judicial Review, advises that factors such as the individual risk presented by the applicant, as well as the collective risk of the organisation to which the person has affinity, are relevant in considering employment. But there is no legal requirement for an employer to take these matters, in the context of changed political times, into consideration. In short, ex-prisoners are not entitled to the same protection from the law as other citizens; this is, as McKeever and O'Rawe (2007) conclude, in effect, a form of double punishment.

That said, there has been some amelioration in relation to residual criminalisation. As stated earlier, restrictions on ex-prisoners acquiring a taxi driving licence no longer apply. More substantial have been the effects of the extension of the SIA's remit to Northern Ireland from December 2009. The SIA is authorised to regulate the private security industry, dealing in particular with door supervisors, vehicle

immobilisers on private land, security guards, key holders, close protection operatives, cash and valuables in transit operatives and CCTV (public space surveillance) operatives. The Northern Ireland Office/Department of Justice worked with the SIA to help develop a policy taking into account the Government commitment to remove unnecessary barriers to employment for those convicted of offences which are conflict related and pre-date the GFA

When applicants are assessed against the criminality criteria, they fall into one of three categories: Automatic Grant, Automatic Fail, and Consider Additional Factors. Political ex-prisoners should fall into the last of these categories. Where politically motivated ex-prisoners can verify that their sentence was completed prior to the GFA or that they were released early under the terms of the GFA, and there are no further 'normal' sentences to be considered, the presumption is that the applicant will be granted a licence to work in the private security industry. However, ex-prisoner groups have reported that people with conflict-related convictions have experienced ongoing issues in relation to SIA registration and their experiences of the registration process have not been entirely positive.

3.8 Conflict transformation

There is ample evidence that ex-prisoner groups 'have encouraged and continue to promote approaches to post-conflict transformation that embeds peaceful methods' (Shirlow 2008).¹

The ex-prisoners' groups which sprang up in the mid to late 1990s in both loyalist and republican constituencies initially took up issues of direct importance to their members, especially emotional and psychological support and help to compete in the employment marketplace (Bruce et al. 2009; Coiste n.d., 1999a; Gormally 2001). But as time went on they branched out into a wide range of social and political issues, which together sought to influence the progress of conflict transformation (Coiste 2000, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c, 2003e; EPIC 2005; Feron 2006; Gribbin et al. 2005; McEvoy and Shirlow 2009; McEvoy et al 2004; McKevitt 2008; Shirlow 2008; Shirlow et al. 2010; Tar Isteach 2008; White 2010; White et al. 1998). They were able to have this influence because of their legitimacy in their local communities, albeit a legitimacy which was often greater for republicans than loyalists. They were indigenous, organic (Cassidy 2008), rooted in their respective closely bonded working class communities.

As the largest ex-prisoner group in existence Coiste na n-larchimí shows the reach of the work of such groups. Coiste began in November 1998. At its height it represented 24 groups of former IRA prisoners and employed 95 staff throughout the island of Ireland. As its publications indicate, it has been involved in issues much wider than simply the direct concerns of ex-prisoners: nation building (Coiste 2003a, 2003c), outreach to victims' groups (Beyers 2007; Coiste 2004c; White 2003), contacts with all major sectors of Irish society: Protestants, unionists, churches, political parties, trade union movement, women, youth and the business community (Coiste 2004b); and local business set up schemes and proposals (Coiste 1999a). At the heart of such involvement was a commitment to self-help and community development ideals (Ó hÁdhmaill 2001). Likewise republican ex-prisoners were

¹ Currently Peace 3 money, channelled through the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland, is supporting work with ex-prisoners in three areas: one along the border, one in South-East Antrim, and the third more widely. The last of these is the one which has the highest profile: 'From Prison to Peace'. It involves work with An Eochair, Charter, Coiste na n-larchimí, Teach na Failte and EPIC. Cf. <http://www.communityfoundationni.org/opencontent/default.asp?itemId=235&searched=1§ion=LEARN>.

convinced that the appropriate route for providing support in relation to counselling and family skills for former prisoners was through prisoners' self-help structures (Ritchie 1998).

A similar process, albeit slightly later, took place on the loyalist side (Gribbin et al. 2005; Hall 2009; Smithey 2008; Spencer 2008). For most loyalist prisoners, political awareness followed on from imprisonment. That political awareness had effects on their release from prison, with former prisoners involved in direct political party organisation – the PUP and to a lesser extent the UDP and UPRG – and in community-based organisations. These developments preceded the GFA but took on a heightened significance after it. Former prisoners moved from involvement in prisoner aid associations to prisoner-led schemes and programmes. They have had involvement in relation to transitional justice, employment, education and training, inter-community work, anti-sectarianism, anti-racism, interface violence, truth recovery, housing, welfare advice, gender issues, community restorative justice and social economy projects (McAuley et al 2010).

Gribbin et al. (2005) provide a comprehensive list of the activities that ex-prisoner groups involved in loyalist conflict transformation initiatives carry out:

- Representing and challenging existing thinking and practice within loyalism.
- Diffusing situations which could destabilise the wider peace process.
- Actively engaging in seeking to influence policy on conflict management.
- Constructively engaging with former adversaries.
- Acting as conduits between statutory bodies and the community.
- Seeking to develop a transferable model of peace-building.
- Contributing to community empowerment.
- Building bridges with civil society.
- Dealing with people alienated from mainstream society whom statutory bodies often find hard to reach.

Interestingly, having given these groups work diaries to complete, the authors found that each loyalist conflict transformation initiative was contributing a significant amount of additional time each week to routine and unplanned conflict transformation activities.

Global comparisons reveal that when these same skills of self-help and self-reliance which had been of value in prison resistance are at the core of post-prison organising – as in Mozambique, Uganda and Eritrea – they contribute to a successful, efficient and cost-effective DDR, demilitarization, demobilization and reintegration, compared to cases such as Angola, Cambodia and Liberia where these principles were not central. Ex-prisoners in Northern Ireland have been centrally involved in local conflict transformation and indeed cross-community activities, in the loyalist case in particular showing a level of courage and openness ahead of that of many elected politicians. What ex-prisoners needed was not reintegration narrowly defined, but a robust programme of reconstruction and a recognition of the skills and political wisdom they had to take a lead role in that reconstruction (Rolston 2007).

Ex-prisoners have been tireless in using their existing leadership skills and learning new ones, nowhere more noticeably than in conflict-transformation in their communities (McEvoy and Shirlow 2009; Shirlow et al. 2010). But Gormally (2001) has astutely pointed out that not everyone would see it this way. Some critics see their involvement in communities as simply another way for them to dominate these communities, and they have been blocked in various ways. One key example was the unwillingness of the government and the police to wholeheartedly endorse community restorative justice, despite the insistence of its proponents that it is an imaginative and effective solution to problems of localised petty criminality (Auld et al. 1997; McEvoy and Mika 2001, 2002).

For many outside commentators, the most surprising contribution to conflict transformation has been the contacts between former prisoner groups across the divide. These contacts reveal a generosity often missing from mainstream political parties (Shirlow and McEvoy 2008). As Shirlow et al. (2005) point out, 81% of the 150 republican former prisoners and 47% of the 150 loyalists they surveyed said they had been involved in community work since their release, especially interface work. And Mitchell (2008) lists such contacts as part of the impressive contribution of loyalist ex-prisoners specifically to conflict transformation:

- Establishment of networks of former combatants' organisations.

- Provision of leadership to paramilitary groups – attempting to challenge their thinking and find ways to move forward non-violently.
- Challenge to current practices of paramilitary groups – whether in terms of restorative justice, removal of flags and murals, or control of interface violence.
- Engagement with republican ex-combatants.

Some of the 190 ex-prisoners questioned by Jamieson, Shirlow and Grounds (2010) felt that they had wasted their time and talents as a result of the conflict. More republicans (44%) than loyalists (26%) felt they would look back on their lives with a sense of achievement. For women, the percentage was 50. Others questioned stressed that the conflict had helped them to discover unrecognised personal strengths. These are the strengths that many of them are putting to good use in terms of transforming conflict, building peace and ensuring that there is no repetition of past violence.

4. Summary

A number of broad conclusions can be drawn from this intensive literature review.

- (i) For various reasons, few questions were asked during the conflict about the negative effects of imprisonment. These reasons included the belief that collective identity trumped private problems, that showing emotion or distress was a sign of weakness to the authorities and therefore conceded too much in the conflict with those authorities, that it went against the macho image and self-image of the prisoners. In this situation, there were no loud demands from prisoners or their supporters for counselling or emotional support, either during imprisonment or on release.
- (ii) So, while the conflict went on, there was almost no reliable research into the negative effects of imprisonment among politically motivated prisoners and their families. Almost no one asked prisoners, ex-prisoners, partners, children how they felt.
- (iii) It was only as the conflict began to transform into the peace process that such questions were asked, and increasingly so, by prisoners and ex-prisoners themselves, as well as by researchers. The peace process created the space to ask questions that could not be asked, or at least asked easily, before.
- (iv) The most notable and perhaps most controversial finding was that imprisonment had mental health consequences for prisoners and their families, even in a situation of solidarity and resistance. For this reason, seeking counselling from outside sources or establishing counselling services within ex-prisoner groups was no longer the taboo issue it once was.
- (v) Secondly, and also controversial, was the realisation that relationships with partners and children suffered during imprisonment.
- (vi) In addition, renewing these relationships when released from prison was not necessarily an easy or straightforward task.
- (vii) Release from prison raised another raft of issues around practical matters such as financial security, finding a job and accommodation, as well as the

looming question of ageing and the financial problems this might bring for a population bereft of skills, savings and pension contributions.

- (viii) Of these post-prison difficulties, the greatest existed in relation to employment. Ex-prisoners found their path to secure employment blocked not only by their own fears about security, and the prejudices of others, including potential employers, but also by legislation and policy which meant that discrimination against them on the grounds of their record was not deemed illegal.
- (ix) In the same vein, ex-prisoners report difficulties in dealing with service providers in both the private and public sectors. In the former, for example, there can be difficulties in obtaining insurance or start-up capital for business purposes, while in the latter, barriers can exist in terms of obtaining compensation for injury.
- (x) At the same time, release also brought new challenges and opportunities, not least in relation to conflict transformation. These opportunities have been enthusiastically embraced by both republican and loyalist ex-prisoner groups in terms not only of developing their own organisations but in terms also of contributing to community development in their local communities and furthering conflict transformation, not least by contacts and joint activities across the divide between ex-prisoner groups.

5. Gaps in knowledge

There are imbalances in the state of knowledge deriving from research on the ex-prisoner and ex-combatant constituencies in relation to the conflict in and about Northern Ireland: which may point to possibilities for further research.

- Much more is known about the prison experience of republican prisoners than loyalist prisoners.
- On the republican side, much more is known about the prison and post-prison experience of prisoners and ex-prisoners from the IRA than those from other republican groups, such as the INLA and Official IRA.
- Almost nothing is known about the situation of current dissident prisoners.
- There is no direct research available on ex-combatants who have not been imprisoned. It is difficult to see how this gap could be filled.
- More is known about the experience of male prisoners and ex-prisoners than about females. Given the paucity of female prisoners on the loyalist side, this relates mainly to republicans.
- There is a body of knowledge about the effects of imprisonment, both during and afterwards, on prisoners' families, but arguably there is room for more research in this regard, especially in relation to the wives and partners of prisoners.
- Within that, relatively little is known about the effects of imprisonment on prisoners' children, both during imprisonment and after release.
- There is very little research about the effects of imprisonment on the wider immediate family of prisoners, such as parents and siblings.
- A substantial body of knowledge exists regarding the mental health and employment difficulties facing ex-prisoners, but there is less research available on the relationship difficulties of ex-prisoners and their partners; to date there has only been one study of the effects of the ageing process on ex-

prisoners; and very little research has focussed specifically on the experience of prisoner's wives while their partners have been in prison.

- The issue of residual criminalisation has been well rehearsed, but there is room for further research. In particular, more case studies could be gathered of the experience and effects of residual criminalisation on ex-prisoners.
- In addition, beyond the anecdotal level, almost nothing is known about the attitudes and practices of employers and service providers in relation to ex-prisoners. How widespread is the practice of employers failing to embrace the voluntary code for employers and why do they do so? Is there a difference between employers in the private sector and those in the public sector? How systematic is the refusal of service providers to meet the needs of ex-prisoner clients? For example, it would be valuable to ascertain the position of banks in relation to lending to ex-prisoners for the purposes of business start-up or to examine the attitudes and practices of insurers towards ex-prisoners. All these questions provide scope for further investigation.
- Although not directly the focus of this paper, very little is known about the connected issue of the experience of prison officers.

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