Ageing and social exclusion among former politically motivated prisoners in Northern Ireland

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I would love everything to be rosy and gleaming again and it’s not going to be. I understand that, but we can work and make it better.
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Preface

The research on which this report is based was funded by the Changing Ageing Partnership (CAP) through its research seed grant programme (Grant no. R9162LAW). The report describes a survey and interviewed-based study on ageing and former politically motivated prisoners in Northern Ireland, which was conducted in 2008/9. It highlights a range of health and well-being needs among older former politically motivated prisoners and makes recommendations for measures to address them. The research was carried out by Ruth Jamieson, Peter Shirlow and Adrian Grounds with the assistance of the POW Consortium.

The introductory section of the report briefly outlines the background and aims of study. Section two summarises the methods used, sections three to six detail our findings and the final sections seven and eight consider the possible implications of our findings and make recommendations for further work and forms of support.

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Ruth Jamieson, Peter Shirlow and Adrian Grounds

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Summary

This report describes a study investigating the well-being and social and economic inclusion of former politically motivated prisoners in Northern Ireland. They constitute an important group of Northern Ireland’s ageing ‘conflict generation’. The research was funded by the Changing Ageing Partnership, and was carried out with the assistance of both loyalist and republican prisoner support organisations. The fieldwork included a survey of 190 former politically motivated prisoners (117 republicans, 73 loyalists), focus groups, and 25 in depth narrative interviews.

Almost half those surveyed were not in paid employment; this may reflect both health related disability, and continuing structural and legal barriers associated with conflict related convictions. Over three-quarters of those surveyed had experienced financial problems since release. Fewer than half of those who were still of working age had made ten years of contributions to any kind of pension scheme and none will have built up eligibility for a full basic state pension when they reach retirement age. The lack of employment and pension entitlements have stark implications for impending poverty in old age.

Over a third of respondents (39.9%) had GHQ-12 scores indicating the presence of clinically significant mental health problems, 32.6 % had received prescription medication for depression in the last year and 45.2% said that since release from prison there had been times when they had not wanted to go on living. Over half reported symptoms characteristic of post-traumatic stress disorder. Standardised screening measures for alcohol problems indicated that 68.8% of respondents engaged in levels of drinking that were hazardous, and 53.3% met the threshold for alcohol dependence.

We found high levels of resilience and reflectiveness amongst respondents and interviewees but also areas of significant psychological harm, and they graphically described the complex personal and emotional consequences for themselves and their families that had resulted from the conflict.

The research findings indicate a need for further action in relation to areas of employment, mental health, information and advice.

- Policy makers should explicitly recognise that older former politically motivated prisoners constitute an ‘at risk’ group of older people in Northern Ireland for both social exclusion and mental ill health.

- Measures are needed to prevent discrimination in work.

- Dialogue should be established between the former politically motivated prisoner community and the relevant bodies taking forward the developments arising from the Bamford Review of mental health services in Northern Ireland, with a view to adopting a model of mental health care for former politically motivated prisoners similar to the Community Veterans Mental Health Service scheme established by
Veterans UK and the Personnel and Veterans Agency of the Ministry of Defence, currently being piloted in the UK.

- Greater representation of former politically motivated prisoners as service users is needed on relevant advisory or advocacy bodies, for example, regarding age discrimination and mental health and addiction services.

- Former politically motivated prisoners and community groups should address attitudes of acquiescence towards hazardous alcohol behaviour among former politically motivated prisoners by incorporating alcohol education in health and well-being activities, de-stigmatising help-seeking, and supporting the dignity of recovering alcoholics through awareness activities. They should be funded to develop strategies, information resources and outreach programmes to tackle the barriers that prevent access to help.
1. Introduction

Northern Ireland’s conflict generation

This research is about former politically motivated prisoners who comprise one particular group of Northern Ireland’s ‘conflict generation’, which is the generation of people who were directly involved in the conflict. We estimate that about 90% of former politically motivated prisoners are now over 50 years of age: most would have been in their teens during the intense period of the conflict in Northern Ireland and many were imprisoned when in their late teens or early twenties.\(^1\) Their closest age and social class peers in the conflict generation would have been enlisted members of the British Army. The police, prison officers and emergency services personnel are likely to be in a slightly older age cohort. A further difference between former politically motivated prisoners and other ex-combatant or conflict affected occupational groups is that their state actor counterparts have occupational pensions and some have dedicated programmes to assist in retraining or to address psychological sequelae of their conflict related experience. Former politically motivated prisoners whose problems may be just as great, must rely on whatever forms of support or assistance are available from their own groups voluntary and community groups or their GPs.

A significant number of Northern Irish men and women over 50 had direct involvement in the conflict and have been profoundly affected by it in complex ways, as have their children. Yet in Northern Ireland policy on older people there is scarcely any acknowledgement of the ‘Troubles’ or the existence of this conflict generation, and no reference whatever to former paramilitary prisoners per se. This study is about them.

Research aims

The primary aim of this research was to investigate the well-being and social and economic inclusion of former politically motivated prisoners in Northern Ireland as older people. The project was funded by the Changing Ageing Partnership (CAP)\(^2\) and conducted during 2008/9 by Ruth Jamieson, Peter Shirlow and Adrian Grounds with the assistance of members of Coiste, EPIC and CHARTER. Our aim was to explore the experience of both republican and loyalist former prisoners as older members of Northern Irish society by gathering basic descriptive information on their current circumstances, levels of physical, mental and social well-being, their evaluations of the past, and their prospects for the future as they get older. Wherever possible we used available comparative data to benchmark how former politically motivated prisoners were doing in comparison to analogous groups or their age peers in Northern Ireland, other regions of Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland.

The purpose of this study was also to assess how imprisonment and involvement in the conflict has shaped the lives of former politically motivated prisoners as older people in

\(^1\) A member of the ‘conflict generation’ is someone who had direct involvement in the conflict and is now over 50. For example, someone who was 18 years of age 1970 is now 58 years, or was 18 in 1975 is now 53.

\(^2\) CAP Seed Grant No. R9162LAW
Northern Ireland. We hope that the research will open a conversation with policy makers and service providers about how the specific needs of older former politically motivated prisoners might be met and how former politically motivated prisoners themselves might contribute to this.

**Numbers of older former politically motivated prisoners in Northern Ireland**

Because there are so few official reports or statistics on the number of people imprisoned for conflict-related offences in Northern Ireland, it is difficult to make a precise estimate of their current numbers or their age profile. None of the information available in the public domain provides a complete picture of the operation of the criminal justice system during the conflict and there are problems with the consistency, detail and completeness of data reporting over time. For example, there are no published official statistics on the number of people imprisoned for conflict-related offences. One estimate, based on numbers provided by former politically motivated prisoner groups, is that approximately 15,000 Republicans and between 5,000 and 10,000 Loyalists were imprisoned for politically-motivated offences. More recently Sir George Quigley (OFM/DFM 2007) estimated that there are up to 30,000 former politically motivated prisoners in Northern Ireland. Using a method of estimating former politically motivated prisoners numbers developed for an earlier study we estimate that former politically motivated prisoners make up between 13.5% and 30.7% of the Northern Irish male 50-59 years cohort and between 5.4% and 12.2% of the 60-64 years age cohort.

Few would dispute that former politically motivated prisoners make up a significant proportion of older males (50+ years) in the Northern Ireland population. However, there is little or no recognition in the Northern Ireland social policy strategies on older people that former politically motivated prisoners exist at all, never mind that they are at greater risk than many other older people of physical and mental ill health and economic marginalisation.

Because of the likelihood that former politically motivated prisoners are excluded across a range of areas of well-being, we think it is important that their numbers should be determined as accurately as the available information permits. A more detailed discussion of their age profile and numbers is provided in Appendix 1.

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3 Apparently the NIO also lacked precise information about the numbers of former politically motivated prisoners in custody. As one civil servant observed about the reporting of reporting security statistics, “In effect it amounts to an admission that we do not know how many people are being convicted, which, short of embarking on a special exercise, is true, but not the sort of thing we want to publicise.” CJ4/1238.


6 Jamieson, R. and Grounds, A. (2008) Facing the Future: Ageing and Politically-motivated Former Prisoners in Northern Ireland and the Border Region, Monaghan: EXPAC/ Border Action. For a summary of how these estimates were derived, see Appendix 1.

7 This assumes that 95% of the politically motivated former prisoner population (39,804) is male and that 90% of former politically motivated prisoners are over 50 years of age. See Jamieson and Grounds (2008) pp.8-16. Also see OFM/DFM (2009) Profile of Older People in Northern Ireland Belfast: NISRA, Table 1.1.

Previous research on former politically motivated prisoners

There is now a considerable body of research and writing on the enduring effects of imprisonment and the experience of return to the community of republican and loyalist former prisoners and their families. These studies have identified a high degree of resilience among former politically motivated prisoners but also significant problems in areas such as psychological morbidity, extensive social and economic disadvantages, physical injury, family separation (including intergenerational effects) and bereavement as well as the loss of important life chances. These studies detail the continuing negative consequences of physical impairment, emotional and psychological damage, loss and embitterment felt by some groups and individuals. Much of this suffering has remained unspoken, unshared and absent from the public discussion.

Studies of analogous groups in other conflicts suggest that past experiences of conflict and imprisonment can become more personally complex and daunting with the onset of ageing, ill-health and the long-term consequences of penury and criminalisation. These emotional and material issues are not reducible only to the effects of former politically motivated prisoners’ past experience. Their current circumstances and future prospects are also shaped by ageing and wider social, cultural and political processes that are ongoing and which serve to prevent former politically motivated prisoners from moving on and into employment and settled civilian life. One of these exclusionary processes is the continuing influence of the criminal conviction records of former politically motivated prisoners.

We would argue that it is unhelpful to treat social exclusion as a set of risks or deficits. It is more useful to try to understand the logics and processes of exclusion in relation to the individual life course and vectors of social inequality.

Perspectives on ageing and social exclusion

There has been a need for a programme of research to explore the different dimensions of ageing and exclusion among former politically motivated prisoners and their families via a life-course perspective that understands the passage of a person’s lifetime as a social and physical process and which posits the life course as variable flow rather than regular and predictable stages of the life cycle. From this perspective identity (or intersecting identities) can be seen as something that is experienced in relation to time and temporality and this

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A conception of the life course is consistent with a developmental and biographical narrative approach to understanding the experience of former prisoners. A person’s life course and assumptive world are structured by events, transitions and trajectories. At the existential level a life course disrupted by long-term imprisonment involves a sense of rupture, of time lost, and an awareness of limited time left in which to rebuild intimate and social relationships as well as economic life. Furthermore, any given person’s life course is shaped not only by time and events but also by the operation of a ‘political economy’ which produces socially structured trajectories of inequality based on community, class and other areas of social difference. And as Alan Walker and others argue, early economic exclusion a predictor of poverty in later life. Dewilde (2003) and others argue that there is also a strong relationship between life events - such as injury, emotional trauma or imprisonment - and later social exclusion. The impact of imprisonment on later economic well-being is a particularly stark example of these sorts of socially structured trajectories.

We also know that the experience of chronic psychological trauma that may occur in long term imprisonment, and acute trauma such as that experienced by some combat veterans, can persist into later life with negative impacts on general health and well-being. The ‘guilt’ and trauma associated with encounters with death may give rise to depression and anxiety, preoccupation with death and related co-morbidity in the form of alcohol or drug dependency. And as we have seen in the long-term health outcomes of prisoners of war, the negative impacts on physical health and well-being are likely to increase with age. Given their experiences of captivity, it may also be the case that former politically motivated prisoners will have a higher mortality rate and greater prevalence of ill health in older age.

More generally, prisoners of war (beyond Northern Ireland/Ireland) have been found to have elevated prevalence rates for depressive and anxiety disorders that are between three and five times higher than the general population and greatest in those who were young prisoners of war and those who underwent harshest treatment in captivity. Along with a higher prevalence of chronic disease observed in former prisoners of war, captivity appears to have had a role in premature, abnormal or unsuccessful ageing in some individuals.\textsuperscript{20} Anecdotal evidence suggests that this may also be the case with former politically motivated prisoners. A further aggravating factor in terms of their current and future well-being is that the health behaviours characteristic of men, especially men on their own\textsuperscript{21} are very likely to conduce to or exacerbate the prevalence of ill health among male former ex-prisoners.

\textit{Citizenship and exclusion}

Former politically motivated prisoners are often seen as having primary responsibility for the suffering resulting from the Northern Ireland conflict, and they are made to bear the exclusionary stigma and legal consequences of a ‘criminal’ status. Paradoxically, they also may be seen as heroes and defenders within their own local communities. However, any such acceptance and enhanced status at the community level does not offset the negative consequences of having a criminal record. Vaughan (2000) has argued that imprisonment entails a form of \textit{temporary} loss of liberty or ‘conditional citizenship’ for inmates, one in which full citizenship may be restored on rehabilitation or release.\textsuperscript{22} However, unlike ex-combatants in many other post-conflict jurisdictions, former politically motivated prisoners in Northern Ireland experience conditional citizenship as a more or less permanent condition. In the absence of an amnesty on terrorism related offences, a conviction for a scheduled offence will never be a ‘spent’ conviction. So, in addition to having to manage a stigmatised identity, former politically motivated prisoners in Northern Ireland are permanently excluded by law from particular occupations, or activities. Hence, many former politically motivated prisoners argue that these legal restrictions on their work and family life amount to a \textit{residual criminalisation}, the effect of which is to entrench and perpetuate their social and economic marginalisation. What is evident here is the operation of both formal and informal “exclusionary codes”\textsuperscript{23} which maintain the social and institutional ‘closing off’ of opportunity to particular groups - in this case former politically motivated prisoners.\textsuperscript{24}

It is appropriate in this context to define social exclusion (after Berghman 1997) as the \textit{non-realisation} of citizenship rights.\textsuperscript{25} As Amartya Sen argues, understanding social justice as being ‘accomplishment-based’ is ‘linked with the argument that justice cannot be indifferent

\textsuperscript{25} Berghman identifies four key domains of citizenship: the democratic and legal system; the labour market; the welfare system and the family and community. See Berghman, J. (1997) “The Resurgence of Poverty and the Struggle against Exclusion: a new challenge for social security?” \textit{International Social Security Review} 50: 3-23.
to the lives that people *can actually live*’ (emphasis added).

This perspective on social exclusion is also consistent with Bryan Turner’s definition of citizenship as ‘that set of practices which define a person as a competent member of society, and which as consequence shapes the flow of resources to persons and social groups’. Turner argues further that the process of determining social or civic membership tends to work on the basis of dividing society into two groups, one comprised of people who enjoy full citizenship and the other which is comprised of those whose status or condition debar them from it. Being older and being a former politically motivated prisoner are two examples of many such potentially intersecting and ‘debarring’ conditions.

**Continuing criminalisation of former politically motivated prisoners**

As indicated above, one of the most powerful exclusionary processes affecting former politically motivated prisoners is their continuing criminalisation. Whilst it is important to be cognisant of the varied emotional and psychological needs of all members of a society that is emerging from conflict, our analysis is centred upon the only section of that society that remains legally debarred from full participation in many areas of social and economic life despite the expectations raised by the 1998 Belfast Agreement. Section 10, on prisoners, stated:

‘The Governments 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, re-training and/or re-skilling, and further education.’

Twelve years after that Agreement there are still significant restrictions on former politically motivated prisoners affecting adoption, travel, legal entitlements and employment, despite the onset and development of a post-conflict society built on principles of parity of esteem, mutual consent and inclusion. Both the Belfast Agreement and the St Andrew’s Agreement upheld political power-sharing and the development of facilities, funding and legislation to deal with a contested past. The release of prisoners, under the provisions of the Belfast Agreement, was contentious as has been the funding of former politically motivated prisoners groups. Most of the negativity that surrounds debates about former politically motivated prisoners has centred on past violent acts and the need to maintain social, cultural, symbolic and legal criminalisation. In effect, the development of peace and political transformation has been paralleled by former politically motivated prisoners experiencing debarment from full citizenship and civic participation.

Previous studies have identified the debarring legislation and wider forms of criminalisation that affect former politically motivated prisoners and their families. It is arguable that there

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28 ‘Criminalisation’ refers to the discursive framing of the conflict in Northern Ireland as essentially a ‘law and order’ problem rather than a political one and the attribution of criminal rather than political motivation to paramilitary actors that such a definition of the conflict entails (McEvoy 2001) op.cit. ‘Residual criminalisation’ refers to the legislative, attitudinal and practical barriers to full citizenship that stem from having a record for a conflict-related conviction (Shirlow and McEvoy 2008: 94) op.cit.
has been a failure within wider public discourse to understand that there remains a series of structured impediments to former prisoners with regard to entering civil life. Shirlow and McEvoy (2008) have noted that these include:

- the ‘disabling’ impact and alienation of former prisoners through their personal responses to imprisonment and release;
- the ongoing nature of criminalisation both formally and informally;
- public hostility and indifference that undermines the effectiveness of former prisoner groups;
- the legacy of conflict and the contested nature of victimhood.\(^{31}\)

To these we would add the risks of exclusion as older people.

### Promoting social inclusion in Northern Ireland

As part of its commitment to promoting social inclusion the Northern Ireland Executive established a working group to consider the key processes and risk factors that lead to the social exclusion of older people in Northern Ireland and set out its approach to promoting the inclusion and support of older people in its March 2005 consultation paper, ‘Ageing in an Inclusive Society.’\(^{32}\) The consultation paper emphasised that older people are vulnerable to multiple forms of disadvantage and exclusion in four key areas: poverty; physical and social isolation; fear of victimisation and illness and disability.

We have conceptualised ageing, well-being and inclusion for the purpose of our research as involving four interrelated domains: the life course (trajectories and turning points, statuses, and meaning and purpose); health (physical and mental health, health behaviour and care); social connection (intimate and social relationships, engagement in community life) and financial security (work, benefits, partners and dependents). This is illustrated below in Figure 1. The domains influence each other: As Grundy et al (2007) argue, because ‘limitations in one aspect of an older person’s life may quickly affect other dimensions’ it follows that successful ageing must be seen as a process with multiple components.\(^{33}\) Thus, for example, poverty restricts opportunities for social engagement, social isolation affects mental health, poor general health affects one’s capacity to work which affects financial security etc.\(^{34}\)

Given what we know about the effects of imprisonment, improving the prospects of independence and well-being in later life for former politically motivated prisoners in Northern Ireland is a difficult prospect. The stigma attached to paramilitary imprisonment is a key factor in continued exclusion from employment and continued economic marginalisation. Similarly, the physical and psychosocial effects of imprisonment which are associated with chronic ill health, depression, anxiety disorders, and alcohol and substance abuse, may have an increasingly damaging and isolating impact in the quality of later life and possibly also

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31 Shirlow and McEvoy (2008)
32 OFM/DFM (March 2005) op.cit.
that of former politically motivated prisoners’ families. This research is an attempt better to understand how and in what ways these social, economic, psychological and physical factors mediate the experience of growing older for former politically motivated prisoners in Northern Ireland.

Figure 1. Ageing, inclusion and the life course

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2. **Methods**

Northern Ireland is a very intensively researched society and there is now an extensive body of work examining people’s experiences both of the conflict and its aftermath. Inevitably this has involved exploration of areas of sensitive and difficult personal experience as well as contentious issues. As Connelly and Healy (2002) and Coogan (1987) have argued, quantitative analysis alone cannot unpack the processes at work within groups involved in or influenced by conflict, especially when the context is emotive or hidden due to issues of security and stigma.\(^{36}\) For that reason it is especially important that any such research is undertaken with sensitivity, objectivity and rigour and does not rely solely on either quantitative (e.g. surveys and statistical analysis) or on qualitative (e.g. interviews, focus groups) methods alone.\(^{37}\) The design of this study is triangulated, that is it employs a series of complementary methods which, by providing multiple routes to the same result, serve to enhance the interpretation of our findings and strengthen the conclusions.\(^{38}\)

The qualitative elements of the study (focus groups, interviews and feedback sessions) ensured that the statistical analysis of the survey data (the survey and diagnostic measures) was not divorced from the respondents’ accounts of their own lived experience, the effects of events and their meaning and emotional salience. The combination of the survey, follow-up focus groups and interviews enhanced the validity and integrity of the conclusions.

Because of the sensitive nature of the topics explored it was also important to undertake the research in a manner that included participants in the design and production of research findings and to ensure as far as possible that the physical, social and psychological well-being of all those who took part in this research project was paramount and that they both considered it to be worthwhile, and were not subsequently negatively affected by it. To achieve such goals and also to ensure the robustness of the research results, six different methodological elements were integrated into the study design. These were

- Discussions with former politically motivated prisoner (FPMP) groups to identify and confirm research issues;
- Discussions with FPMP groups to aid the design of the survey questionnaire;
- A *Survey* of 190 FPMP regarding current circumstances, health and well-being and the effects of imprisonment and conflict;
- *Focus groups* with each of the survey participant groups (by organisation and sample of survey respondents), to discuss survey findings and issues to be explored in subsequent interviews;
- *Interviews*
- *Feedback Workshops* with FPMP groups to obtain their views on the principal research findings

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Our research employed a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to gather basic descriptive and diagnostic information on the current circumstances and well-being of older former politically motivated prisoners who historically have been a hard-to-access group. Wherever possible we used available comparative data to benchmark how former politically motivated prisoners were doing in comparison to analogous groups or their age peers in Northern Ireland, other regions of Great Britain, and the Republic of Ireland. However, it should also be noted that the data presented in this initial report is descriptive and has yet to be subjected to statistical analyses. Further work on this is underway.

**Health and well-being survey**

The health and well-being survey was completed by a total of 190 former politically motivated prisoners: 117 republicans (of whom 26 were women and 73 loyalist men). The average age of all survey respondents was 52 years.

The survey questions covered economic circumstances, health (including mental health) and social well-being with a focus on issues relating to ageing. The final version of the self-completion survey included 125 items. It was designed to capture basic demographic and descriptive information about loyalist and republican former prisoners as well as patterns within and between groups in respect of key variables on ageing and social exclusion (employment, financial circumstances, personal and social relationships and health). The health and well-being element of the survey comprised the GHQ-12, which screens for significant mental ill-health, and the FAST and CAGE tests for alcohol dependency. It also included specific items relating to exposure to traumatic events, and medication use.

Other questions in the survey explored both existential and practical orientations to the future, including expectations of life, the extent to which former politically motivated prisoners had considered or had taken action regarding provision for old age or retirement, and their knowledge about sources of support they might need in the future as older people. The survey also elicited views on the impact of the conflict and imprisonment on their lives, their evaluation of the past, and their thoughts about their future needs as they grow older.

Once the analysis of survey data was complete, we conducted focus groups with loyalist and republicans to identify issues to be followed up in the in-depth interviews.

**Interviews**

We conducted in depth biographical narrative interviews with 25 former politically motivated prisoners (15 republicans, 3 of whom were women and 10 loyalists all of whom were men). The average age of the interviewees was 53 years with loyalists tending to be slightly older (average age of 54.5) than republicans (average age 52 years). The average length of time interviewees had served in prison was 9.5 years (range 3-23 years) with republican men having spent longer in prison (average of 14 years) than either republican women (average 6 years) or loyalists (average 9 years). The average time they had been back in the community was nearly 20 years (average 19.8 years, range 6-30 years).

The interview element of the research was designed to follow-up on the sample of the former politically motivated prisoners who completed the survey and the aim was to interview at
least 10% of the survey participants. The interviews explored individuals’ experiences, their life course and levels of subjective well-being. The interview schedule included a combination of items developed from the survey and focus group discussions as well as some new questions on ageing, current adjustment, reconciling the past and views on the future. Other areas covered included work, accommodation, money, health and family relationships, personality changes, social integration and future outlook.

As noted earlier, it was important that the events and transitions explored in the interviews were understood in the context of the person’s life course. The semi-structured interview schedule was therefore designed to enable open-ended exploration of key aspects of the participants’ life experiences, and the schedule followed a biographical narrative format and began with questions on the former prisoners’ current circumstances and invited them to comment on changes to key areas of their present lives. Interviewees were then asked to reflect on their past experience, and describe changes in themselves and their circumstances. The third part of the interview focussed on finding a sense of purpose and orientation to the future. The interviews closed by asking whether there were any forms of help or support the former prisoner needed but was not getting, and finally interviewees were invited to comment generally on how they viewed the needs of other older former politically motivated prisoners now and in the future.

It should be noted that a small number (9 survey respondents and 1 interviewee, i.e. less than 0.05 per cent) of the republican survey respondents originated or had relocated outside the Northern Ireland jurisdiction in counties Donegal, Louth, Monaghan and Sligo. We found no significant differences between their responses and the majority of respondents (99.5%) who were resident in Northern Ireland.

Both the survey and interviews were carried out in Belfast during 2008/9.

Feedback workshops

The former politically motivated prisoner Consortium organised a series of workshops in 2009/10 on our research findings aimed at briefing former politically motivated prisoners and community groups on the research findings and providing a forum for discussing how to move forward on most pressing issues identified.

Limitations and safeguards

Although the sample of republican women in the survey reflects their numbers relative to republican men, the group (N = 26) was quite small in statistical terms. Therefore, there are limitations to how representative these findings are of all female former politically motivated prisoners. Nevertheless the research does highlight a number of areas of difficulty for women that need to be addressed with the same priority as the problems experienced by the men.

We were aware of the fact that we were asking participants to explore complex and potentially distressing areas of their lives and we were careful to obtain their freely given, informed consent, and to guarantee anonymity, confidentiality and the right to refuse to
answer any question or to withdraw from the study at any time. They remain the owners of their own experience. We are grateful to them for their patience and willingness to participate.

3. Findings - current circumstances

Relationships

Just over half of all respondents (53.7%) were married/co-habiting, but a significant number of respondents were not (52.1% of loyalists compared to 40.2% of republicans). Of those who lived alone, 14.2% were single/never married, 13.2% were divorced (4.3% of republicans compared to 27.4% of loyalists), 14.7% were separated (17.1% of republicans compared to 11% of loyalists) and 2.6% were widowed (3.4% of republicans compared to 1.4% of loyalists). It is notable that living alone appeared to be associated with experiencing more difficulty across all domains of well-being a point we return to in Section 5.

Table 1. Relationship status of respondents by designation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Single/never married</th>
<th>Divorced</th>
<th>Separated</th>
<th>Widow(er)</th>
<th>Married/cohabiting</th>
<th>Not known</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Republican (n=117) (%within designation)</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>59.0</td>
<td>.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loyalist (n=73) (%within designation)</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>27.4</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>45.2</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All (n=190) (% whole sample)</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>53.7</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There were slightly fewer single/never married women (11.5%) than men (14.6%) and slightly more married/cohabiting women (57.7%) than men (53.0%). A higher proportion of women respondents were separated (17.9% of women and 14.0% of men), and a smaller proportion were divorced (7.7% of women and 14.0% of men). These differences may be explained by religious background, given the fact that all the female respondents were republican women.

Table 2. Relationship status of respondents by sex

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Single/never married</th>
<th>Divorced</th>
<th>Separated</th>
<th>Widow(er)</th>
<th>Married/cohabiting</th>
<th>Not known</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Men (n=164) (%within designation)</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>53.0</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women (n=26) (%within designation)</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>.0</td>
<td>57.7</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All (n=190) (% whole sample)</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>53.7</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Roughly half our respondents had children (46.4% having had children before their imprisonment and 47.1% had children after their release).
**Housing tenure**

The survey showed differences between republicans and loyalists in respect of housing tenure. Although some 43.7% of respondents owned or were buying their homes, a higher proportion of republican former prisoners (50.4%) than loyalist former prisoners (32.9%) were doing so. Conversely, a higher proportion of loyalists (42.5% compared to 29.9% of republicans) lived in rented NIHE (Northern Ireland Housing Executive) accommodation. A higher proportion of loyalists (65.8%) than republicans (49.5%) lived in rented accommodation or in homes that they neither owned nor were buying.

It is important to note, however, that these patterns of housing tenure may be associated with other factors such as relationships status, household composition, employment or health. For example, being in a long term relationship may be a factor in the finding that a higher proportion of republicans lived in their own homes. This difference could also be related to having a partner who maintained a mortgage during their partner’s incarceration, having a partner who was employed, or the fact that more republican respondents were in some form of employment.

Home ownership was also linked to emotional/psychological well-being, with those who were not living in their own homes being more likely to report poor emotional/psychological well-being. Non-home ownership and emotional and psychological well-being were also associated with organisational background with more non-home owning loyalists (63%) compared to non-home owning republicans (47%) stating moderate to severe emotional/psychological difficulties. This exemplifies how risk factors for social exclusion and poor quality of life may interact, and why it is important to view well-being and inclusion as part of a dynamic process and not as a ‘status’.

**Employment and income**

Tables 3 and 4 summarise present economic status. Just over half (50.5%) of the former politically motivated prisoners we surveyed were in some form of paid employment. Their rate of employment is lower than the employment rate of 72.4% of the (50 to state retirement age) cohort in Great Britain. Overall, almost a third (29.5%) were working full time, 12.1% part time and 8.9% were self-employed. As can be seen in Table 1 below, a higher proportion of loyalists (35.5%) than republicans (25.6%) reported working full time. Three times as many republicans as loyalists were working part time (17.1% compared to 4.1%) and twice as many republicans as loyalists were self-employed (11.1% compared to 5.5%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Republican (n=117) (% within designation)</th>
<th>Full Time</th>
<th>Part Time</th>
<th>Self Employed</th>
<th>Not known</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

Fewer women (19.2%) than men (31.1%) were employed full time, but three times as many women (30.8%) as men (9.1%) were employed part-time. Although the proportion of female former politically motivated prisoners working part time is broadly comparable to that of other women in Northern Ireland (38%), far fewer of the working women amongst the former politically motivated prisoners were employed full time in comparison with other women in Northern Ireland (19.2% compared to 62%). None of the women reported being self-employed.

Table 4. Respondents in work, by sex

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Full Time</th>
<th>Part Time</th>
<th>Self Employed</th>
<th>Not known</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Men (n=164)</td>
<td>31.1</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women (n=26)</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>.0</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All (n=190)</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Employment and disability**

Tables 5 and 6 below summarises the economic activity status of those who were not in paid employment. Around 1 in 4 (25.8%) of former politically motivated prisoners were unemployed, 15.8% were in receipt of some sort of sickness or disability benefit, 4.7% were retired and only 0.9% were on a training scheme. Loyalists (20.5%) were much more likely than their republican counterparts (12.8%) to be receiving some form of incapacity benefit. But, to put this in a broader context, it is estimated 10% of people of working age in Northern Ireland were receiving Disability Living Allowance (DLA) in 2006 and 19% of working age people in Northern Ireland were on at least one out-of-work benefit (i.e. jobseeker’s allowance, income support, incapacity benefit, severe disablement benefit or employment and support allowance). So, although both groups were more likely than others in Northern Ireland to be on DLA, loyalists were twice as likely to be receiving this form of state support. Although women were more likely to be unemployed than men were (30.8% compared to 25.0%), none were receiving DLA. This difference may be attributable to the relatively small number of women in the survey sample.

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42 This is lower than the 5% rate for self employment among women in Northern Ireland. Ibid.
Finally, it also should be noted that people who are not in paid work and are on DLA are more likely than others in Northern Ireland to be suffering from mental ill health, an issue which is discussed in greater detail below in section 4 below.\textsuperscript{44} Those on DLA are also more likely to be over 50 years of age.\textsuperscript{45}

Table 5. Respondents not working, by designation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Unemployed\textsuperscript{46}</th>
<th>Sickness/ DLA</th>
<th>Training scheme</th>
<th>Retired</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Not known</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Republican (n=117) (%within designation)</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loyalist (n=73) (%within designation)</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All (n=190) (% whole sample)</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6. Respondents not working, by sex

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Unemployed</th>
<th>Sickness/ DLA</th>
<th>Training scheme</th>
<th>Retired</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Not known</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Men (n=164) (%within designation)</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>.6</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>.0</td>
<td>.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women (n=26) (%within designation)</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>.0</td>
<td>.0</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All (n=190) (% whole sample)</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Former politically motivated prisoners and the Northern Irish labour market

A number of negative factors combine to increase the chances of former politically motivated prisoners being unemployed\textsuperscript{7} or underemployed. First, labour market conditions in Northern Ireland have deteriorated because of the economic recession. According to a recent survey of business activity in the private sector, Northern Ireland is being hit harder by the current recession than any other region of the UK and also the pace of decline since the start of 2010 has been greater here than in the Republic of Ireland.\textsuperscript{47} This is consistent with the findings of the 2009 Joseph Rowntree Foundation Update on Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion

\textsuperscript{44} The unemployed are \textit{five times} as likely as others in NI to be on sedatives and tranquillisers or anti-depressants. NACD/PHIRB (2009) \textit{Drug Use in Ireland and Northern Ireland, 2006/2007, Bulletin 6 Drug Prevalence Survey: Sedatives or Tranquillisers, and Anti-Depressants} Dublin and Belfast: National Advisory Council on Drugs and Public Health Information and Research Branch, DHSSPSNI, Table 22.

The Department of Social Development estimates that 44% of people who were on Incapacity Benefit or Severe Disability Allowance in 2008 had a mental health or behavioural disorder. DSD (Feb 2008) \textit{Incapacity Benefit or Severe Disability Allowance Summary Statistics}.

\textsuperscript{45} DWP (2008) op.cit.

\textsuperscript{46} “Unemployed” is defined here as ‘wanting, actively seeking and being available for work’.

\textsuperscript{47} Ulster Bank Purchasing Managers’ Index (PMI) for Northern Ireland at http://www.jprni.com/work/index.php?news=230
in Northern Ireland, the proportion of working age people who are not in paid work has ‘long been higher in Northern Ireland than in the rest of Great Britain and that during this recession, that proportion ‘has risen further and faster than any other part of Great Britain.”\textsuperscript{48} Moreover, even before the 2007 downturn Northern Ireland had a higher proportion of people working full time in low paid jobs (less than £6.50 per hour) than anywhere else in Great Britain.\textsuperscript{49}

Second, despite the existence of an employers’ voluntary code, having a conflict-related conviction remains a major barrier to employment. (The guidance is further discussed on pp. 28-29 below). At least half of the former politically motivated prisoners we surveyed reported that they had been refused employment because of their conflict-related conviction. This is especially true for employment in the public services, which provides the biggest source of employment (70%) across all regions of Northern Ireland, particularly in Belfast where 40% of all jobs are in the public sector. Another factor is the fact that the sort of employment that is open to former politically motivated prisoners tends to be centred on the community/voluntary sector (which is characterised by temporary contracts on projects with time-limited funding) or is low paid and short-term work.

Third, restricted access to employment because of security concerns or having a criminal record can lead to both exploitation at work and insecure tenure of work (casual versus contract employment) and makes it more likely that former politically motivated prisoners will be forced to fall back on casual cash-in-hand work in the informal or night economy, for example taxi driving or working on the doors of clubs. These jobs in the informal economy offer no protection against injury at work and typically do not involve the payment of national insurance contributions, leaving the people involved short of pension credits in later life. A related problem reported by a number of interviewees and focus group participants (and one shared by former politically motivated prisoners in other jurisdictions) is that they had experienced problems gaining and retaining work after once they got out of prison because of the combined effects of a poor labour market and police harassment at the time of their release:

... [It was] very hard to find work at the time, and work being scarce enough, but also … the level of harassment and … raids and stuff, people … I generally felt that you were putting people under a lot of pressure if you were asking them for a job because they would have been singled out for a lot of harassment.\textsuperscript{50}

Such security concerns varied in intensity at different points in the conflict, but when combined with poor economic conditions at the time of release, they also constituted aggravating factors in terms of limiting chances of employment.

Fourth, restricted access to employment is related to access to training. Access to training varies greatly according to type of employment a person has. The best access to training is in public sector jobs - precisely those occupations in administration, health or education, jobs that are \textit{de facto} closed to politically motivate former prisoners. Apart from community sector employment, the jobs that are relatively more open to former politically motivated

\textsuperscript{48} Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) (2009) \textit{Update on Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion in Northern Ireland}, key findings and Figure 2.
\textsuperscript{50} Conventionally case codes are left in the text of research reports, but given the sensitivities of the Northern Ireland context, we have omitted them in order to safeguard the anonymity of our research participants.
prisoners – such as plant and machinery operation and skilled trades⁵¹ - have poorer access to training.

Fifth, former politically motivated prisoners are not insulated from ageism in the labour market any more than any other older person is. Most of those surveyed were in their early 50s and over half (53.2 %) said that they felt that it is now too late for them to get a meaningful job.

In short, many factors militate against former politically motivated prisoners finding and keeping employment and the cumulative effect of these disadvantages is an increased likelihood of marginalisation in the labour market. Personal security concerns may limit geographical mobility. Having a criminal record for a scheduled offence continues to be a bar to many forms of employment. Increasingly age and physical incapacity impose practical limits on hitherto accessible forms of politically motivated ex-prisoner employment such as construction or club security work. The winding down of EU Peace and Reconciliation funding for politically motivated ex-prisoner groups could reduce employment in the community sector and many more former politically motivated prisoners find themselves looking for work. Their poor employment prospects and precarious financial situations seem set to continue or worsen in the future along with rising unemployment,⁵² stagnant growth, inflation in the cost of basic necessities like fuel and food, and deflation of major assets such as housing. Former politically motivated prisoners are facing the same challenges as other people in their communities who are trying to get by or looking for work, but with the added disadvantages of being older, stigmatised and having conflict-related convictions.

Employment and criminalisation

I do not have a ‘criminal’ record and I believe putting ‘no’ is the right thing.

As noted above, our survey respondents reported a high rate of unemployment. One in four (25.8%) of the former politically motivated prisoners surveyed was unemployed as compared to a Northern Ireland unemployment rate of 7.1% in the third quarter 2009 (the period in which our survey and interviews were conducted).⁵³ The former politically motivated prisoners we surveyed were almost four times more likely to be unemployed than others in Northern Ireland. The interplay of several factors probably accounts for these high levels of economic inactivity among former politically motivated prisoners - the combined effects of poor physical and emotional well-being, being refused employment because of a conflict related conviction, lack of skills and training, the missing years of employment experience due to incarceration, fewer employment opportunities for older people, lack of employment in their own communities, and the recent economic downturn especially in the construction sector.⁵⁴

⁵²The overall unemployment rate for Northern Ireland (which is currently 7.1%) was 4.6% in November 2007. Labour Market Statistical Bulletin Monthly Labour Report, January 2008. Belfast: NISRA.
⁵³The seasonally adjusted unemployment rate for the period June to August 2009 measured by the NI Labour Force Survey (LFS). (See NIE 14 October 2009.)
⁵⁴According to a Northern Ireland Executive press release (11 Feb 2009) on the labour market in Northern Ireland, the annual percentage increase in the number of people claiming unemployment-related benefits (January 2008-2009) in Northern Ireland was +62.0%, the highest since the claimant count series began in January 1971. Nearly 80% of this annual increase occurred in the last six months of 2008. Although this rate of
Being refused employment due to imprisonment

In assessing the impact of criminalisation we asked survey respondents whether they had been refused employment due to their imprisonment. Just over half (54.7%) of our respondents strongly agreed/agreed with the statement that they ‘I have been refused employment due to imprisonment’. Slightly more loyalists (61.7%) than republicans (50.4%) strongly agreed or agreed that they had been refused employment because of imprisonment, and more republicans (18.8%) as loyalists (9.6%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that they had had been refused employment for this reason. About a fifth (17.4%) neither/agreed or disagreed; this may be an artefact of not applying for certain types of employment due to a sense of fatalism concerning the chances of success; it may also reflect the numbers employed in interface or community relations work, in which being a former politically motivated prisoner may not be a debarring status.

The absence of statutory protection from employment discrimination on the grounds a person has a conflict-related conviction places former politically motivated prisoners in an invidious position. One the one hand, the experience of many is that being open about having such a conviction curtails not only their own employment opportunities, but also those of their family members. For that reason, some former politically motivated prisoners do not declare their history of imprisonment and live in fear of being found out, especially now that criminal record checks are now mandatory for many forms of employment. One female survey respondent described the insecurity and worry caused by her non-declaration:

I am very concerned about my job. Having said that, I have been concerned about the job the past fifteen years. I was always wondering if they had found out I am an ex-prisoner I am going to lose my job and how am I going to pay my bills? But this year it has heightened, really, really heightened, because the fact is I will be police checked sometime this year and my predicament is should I leave the job now? Or should I let them do the police check and then ... put a case to them that I am entitled to be in work and that as an ex-prisoner I have never committed an actual criminal offence? Again I don’t believe that would work because the prejudice against, especially Republican ex-prisoners - I don’t believe that would work. It leaves me in a situation with like about four credit bills, a large mortgage and the situation at the minute where things are so expensive. [...] My husband’s wage covers paying the mortgage and basically keeping a car on the road to be able to transport us, so it is a predicament that is very serious, very worrying and there is financial hardship for everybody, living a normal life usually just, but when this is living when you think you are going to lose your job it increases all of this. [...] I feel I can’t take a proper case, which frustrates me far more because of the implications for [person who also works] there.

On the other hand, declaring a conflict-related conviction could result in the dismissal from employment or denial of services such as household insurance. One former politically

increase has abated and is now the same as the rate of increase in unemployment for the UK as a whole (+0.6%), the seasonally adjusted unemployment rate in NI has decreased slightly to 6.9%. See DETI Monthly Labour Market Report (June 2010) at [http://www.detini.gov.uk/lmr_june_2010.pdf] [Accessed 16 August].

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motivated prisoner reported she had been dismissed from her job when her employer discovered she failed to declare a conflict-related conviction:

... I do think people have a right to try and reach their potential, and when I was young I would have liked to have been a nurse so I thought I wouldn’t mind doing nursing and... I had the training basically for a nursing auxiliary through working for mental health; so when I went to [name] Recruitment they actually gave me a very positive response and they were delighted and they were going to get me employment immediately. I was going to work in the Royal. But at the end of the interview they also asked me would I work for the Civil Service in which I enquired what exactly did they mean? What type of work? And they said the police. And at that I laughed and said, “No definitely not”. So I’d say the police check would have actually been about five weeks later - I got a phone call in work and it was a very, very nasty phone call from [name] Recruitment advising me never to contact them again and never to ever try and gain employment through them again because of my police check.

We found high rates of refusal of employment despite the existence of guidance to employers on when a conflict-related conviction is not relevant to the recruitment of employees. It is unclear, however, what the Executive’s current practice is on the recruitment into the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) or whether this has changed since the Ministerial answer (on 24 September 2007) to an Oral Assembly Question tabled by Gregory Campbell MP MLA asking the Minister “to detail what implications the employers' guidance on recruiting people with conflict-related convictions has for Civil Service recruitment.” The response of the then Minister for Finance and Personnel, Peter Robinson MP MLA was: “as the guidance has not been applied there have been no implications for recruitment to the Northern Ireland Civil Service. As the Minister responsible for recruitment to the Northern Ireland Civil Service it is not my intention to apply the guidance as I believe the existing recruitment policies and procedures provide appropriate arrangements for dealing with candidates with criminal records.”

Statutory barriers to the employment of former politically motivated prisoners in Northern Ireland

The low levels of employment reported by the former politically motivated prisoners in the survey sample are probably also influenced by legislation that restricts safeguards against discrimination in employment on the grounds of political opinion. Section 2(4) of the Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 states that any reference in the Order to a person’s political opinion,

‘… does not include an opinion which consists of or includes approval or acceptance of the use of violence for political ends connected with the affairs of Northern Ireland, including the use of violence for the purpose of putting the public or any section of the public in fear.’

In sum, an employer can disbar a person convicted of a conflict-related offence, or can remove from employment a person who when applying for a job did not state, when asked if they held a criminal conviction, that they held such a conviction. Moreover, the legislative framework, and the reality that employers and employment agencies have criminal record information regarding former prisoners at their disposal, are viewed by former politically motivated prisoners as perpetuating a form of criminalisation that is intimately connected to discrimination in general. The recent heightened concern to protect children and vulnerable
people has also lead to a significant growth in employers seeking information regarding criminal records, not least to identify potential employees who are sex offenders.

Although no formal legislative proposals designed to tackle discrimination against former politically motivated prisoners have yet been tabled, a British government-led task force produced a voluntary code in 2007 for employers and others to assist them in dealing with people who have conflict-related convictions (OFM/DFM 2007). That document advises that:

‘…conflict-related convictions of ‘politically motivated’ former prisoners, or their membership of any organisation, should not generally be taken into account [in accessing employment, facilities, goods or services] provided that the act to which the conviction relates, or the membership, predates the Agreement. Only if the conviction, or membership, is materially relevant to the employment, facility, goods or service applied for, should this general rule not apply.’ (OFM/DFM 2007, paragraph 2.5).

This Employers’ Guidance goes on to indicate that conflict related convictions should not bar former politically motivated prisoners unless the conviction was ‘manifestly incompatible’ with the job, facility, goods or service in question. The onus of demonstrating incompatibility would rest with the person making the allegation and the offence would not, per se, constitute adequate grounds. Any applicant affected by a negative decision should have a right of appeal and ‘it is expected that only in very exceptional circumstances that such grounds could be successfully invoked’ (OFM/DFM 2007: paragraph 2.8). As well as practical advice to employers on making assessments of decisions as to conflict related convictions, the document also provides for an appellate body (made up of the NIO, CBI and ICTU) known as a Tripartite Review Panel. That Panel would be able to receive complaints from individuals and be required to produce an annual report to the Secretary of State. The document also concludes that;

‘…if there is evidence that the voluntary arrangement is demonstrably not working it is the view of the Government that the voluntary arrangement should be put on a statutory basis.’ (OFM/DFM 2007: paragraph 6.2).

At the same time as the Employers’ Guidance was introduced (04 May 2007) the Northern Ireland Executive indicated that there was to be a review of the effectiveness of the voluntary code after 18 months of operation. However, almost three years later, there has been no review of the code’s effectiveness in getting former politically motivated prisoners into work. As indicated above, over half of former politically motivated prisoners surveyed reported having been refused employment due to having a conflict-related conviction, so clearly the code is not working for them. It may be that former politically motivated prisoners are not reporting cases of refusal of employment, or they may be excluding themselves from employment by not applying for jobs because they expect to be screened out of appointment short lists because of their histories.

A central problem confronted by former prisoner groups has been the lack of consensus about the nature of the Northern Ireland conflict. Consequently, despite the fact that the UK

55 See OFM/DFM (1 May 2007) Recruiting People with Conflict-Related Convictions, Employers’ Guidance. The current head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service, Nigel Hamilton, and Sir George Quigley, former permanent secretary and Chairman of the Ulster Bank co-chaired the working group. In addition to Loyalist and Republican former prisoner groups, it included representatives from the Confederation of British Industries (CBI), the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) and relevant government departments.
Government ratified Protocol 11 of the Geneva Conventions in 1995 that they will undertake the following:

‘At the end of hostilities, the authorities in power shall endeavour to grant the broadest possible amnesty to persons who have participated in the armed conflict or those deprived of their liberty for reasons related to armed conflict.’ (Art. 6 (5)),

the Government has never accepted that the Protocol has been applicable to the conflict in Northern Ireland. The 2006 St. Andrew’s Agreement only stated that:

‘The 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’ (Annex B, item 7)

The 2007 Guidance, described above, followed.

It is clear that for former politically motivated prisoners issues such as the recognition of prisoner of war status, the applicability of the Geneva Convention to the conflict in Northern Ireland, de-certification of conflict-related convictions or treating them as ‘spent convictions’, and funding of former politically motivated prisoners organisations remain pressing and contested issues. From their perspective government policy changes have been slow and limited, and other policies and discriminatory practices in relation to adoption, obtaining Public Service Vehicle (PSV) licenses, criminal injuries compensation, and travel to places such as the U.S.A., continue to have a negative impact on politically-motivated former prisoners and their families.

Despite the existence of the employment voluntary code, it is evident that former politically motivated prisoners still confront the outworking of a series of policies, processes and practices that sustain and entrench residual criminalisation. As a result of this, former politically motivated prisoners continue to be barred legally or informally from a significant number of political, social and economic positions. Such residual criminalisation is not merely symbolic – it has real material and social effects on the life chances of both politically motivated former prisoners and their families.

**Financial circumstances**

I’ve no money...

I'm full-time overdrawn in the bank. We have an overdraft of £200 and it's maxed ... every, every week ... And nobody, I don't think anybody can say we live in luxury or we have any outward signs of luxury ... as a family ... we don't. We just ... the bills are paid and some are behind; certainly some of them are behind.

Given their higher than average rate of unemployment, it is not surprising that many former politically motivated prisoners reported that they were in debt or had financial difficulties. We asked respondents whether they had experienced financial problems since their release and whether there had been an improvement in their financial circumstances over the last five years.
Having financial problems

When asked about their financial circumstances since their release just over three-quarters of survey respondents (77.4%) strongly agreed or agreed with the statement, ‘I have had financial problems since release’. More loyalists (80.8%) than republicans (75.2%) agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. More women (69.2%) strongly agreed than did men (53.0%). Overall only 8.4% of all respondents strongly disagreed or disagreed that they had had financial problems, although more women (19.2%) than men (6.7%) did so.

The following interview excerpts sum up the responses of many:

We have never been able to sort of get our heads above water, but then I just think that that is normal for people at the minute, I mean I have four credit cards, they are up to the max and I have no money left to spend’.

... With having a husband in prison then, you continually have no money, so you had to go to money lenders and stuff. So some weeks you just didn’t have the money to claim them back and you had to kind of hide. So I would be blacklisted that way, I wouldn’t be able to order off catalogues, you know for the kids for Christmas ... just never paid them to be honest. They still send me letters, but. The last letter I got was a lot of months ago, but I just put them in the bin, I don’t even open them.

I came to [support organisation] about six or eight years ago and it wasn’t so much that anybody could do anything for me but listen. I do feel that when people listen your burden is halved and in my case that is very true. There are times when I have got really desperate over. Oh Jesus, it makes you sick. I do believe people can become suicidal over financial worries.

To put these findings in context, Northern Ireland is a low wage economy. Recent research for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation indicates that single earner households on minimum wage do not earn enough to reach the UK minimum income standard (MIS) which is defined as 60% of the average household income. Similarly, ‘safety net benefits’ cover less than half of the MIS for working age people without children. Likewise single pensioners living alone are at higher risk of low income than all other groups.

Improvement in financial problems

Overall, fewer than half the respondents reported improvement in their financial circumstances in recent years. Over a third (39.5%) of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, ‘My financial problems have improved over the past 5 years’. More republicans (48.7%) than loyalists (34.3%) reported no improvement in their financial problems. In contrast, virtually all of those who were employed (39.0%) strongly agreed or agreed that their financial problems had improved in the last five years.

Problems meeting financial obligations

Respondents were asked to rate the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with the statement, ‘I have no problems meeting my financial obligations’. Over half (53.9%) reported that they were experiencing problems meeting their financial obligations. Republicans (55.6%) were more likely to report this than loyalists (50.6%), perhaps reflecting the higher proportion of loyalists in full-time employment. Only 23.1% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they had no problems in meeting their present financial obligations.

Anticipating having difficulties staying in current residence post-retirement

One of the potential long-term consequences of financial stress, unemployment or underemployment is not being able to stay in one’s home on reaching retirement. Even amongst those in employment an inability to save could lead to problems with rent or mortgages post-retirement. When asked to rate the how much difficulty they anticipated they would have in staying in their current residence post-retirement, nearly half of respondents (48.3%) thought they would have such problems.

Pension contributions and saving for the future

Having an occupational pension is an important factor in financial security in later life. The average age of the former politically motivated prisoners surveyed was 52.1 years (13 years away from state pension age for men and 8 years away for women), yet their knowledge of pensions and benefits for older people was very poor. Few reported having made financial preparations for retirement and, given the number reporting having financial problems; few are likely to be in a position to do so. The comments below exemplify what many former politically motivated prisoners thought about their prospects for retirement:

I’m too late.

There may not be a retirement age [for me] until I pop my clogs.
Preparation for retirement? ‘Absolutely nothing.’

I started paying into a personal pension plan about fifteen years ago and I stopped it after a few months. So basically, no, I couldn’t afford that either.

Eligibility for a basic state pension

Although most people who have reached state retirement age get some form of state pension, the amount they receive depends on the number of credited qualifying years, or years of paying national insurance contributions, that they have built up by the time they retire. The rules on state retirement age and entitlement to a basic state pension changed on 6 April 2010.

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58 Some of the statements in this section of the survey were worded negatively as a means of checking the consistency of responses between related survey items. In reporting findings on agreement/disagreement with a negatively phrased item, we have interpreted a negative response to a negative item as positive. Hence, disagreeing that you have not experienced something is another way of saying that you have done so.

59 The statement read, ‘I will not have any financial difficulty staying in my current residence post-retirement’. The findings are reported as with the double negative item above.
so that in the future the state retirement age for both men and women will be the same. This will be phased in incrementally between now and 2020. In addition, from now on the number of national insurance qualifying years (or appropriate pension credits) is reduced to 30 for both men and women and every single qualifying year accrued will give entitlement to some basic state pension. This means that each qualifying year a person accrues up to 30 years will count as 1/30th full basic state pension. So, for example, 10 qualifying years would yield 10/30ths or one third of a full basic state pension. This could be supplemented by a means-tested pension credit guaranteeing everyone a minimum weekly income (currently £132.60 for single people and £202.40 for couples).

It is important to note also that pension eligibility depends on individual circumstances. In certain cases, people may be credited with having paid NI contributions if their circumstances prevented them from doing so. For example, pension credits may be given for being incapable of working due to illness or disability, receiving a carer’s allowance, working tax credit, statutory maternity or adoption pay, being unemployed but actively seeking work, doing jury service, being on an approved training scheme or having served a prison sentence for a conviction which was subsequently quashed.

Respondents were asked whether they will have made at least 10 years of National Insurance Contributions (NIC) by the time they retire. Only a third (34.8%) of those surveyed (29.1% of republicans and 43.8% of loyalists) will have made this level of contributions by the time they reach state retirement age. Fewer than half of the former politically motivated prisoners who were still of working age (48.7% of republicans and 43.2% of loyalists) reporting having made 10 years contributions to any type of pension plan. None will have built up sufficient contributions to be eligible for a full basic state pension, but depending on individual circumstances, many former politically motivated prisoners are likely to meet the means test for guaranteed pension credit.

Financial preparations for retirement

Respondents were asked whether they had made any financial preparations for their retirement. Women (19.2%) were more likely to agree or strongly agree that they had made financial preparations for retirement than were men (12.2%), and men (71.3%) were more likely than women (65.4%) to report they had not done so.

Fewer than 1 in 10 of those surveyed were paying into their own private (non-state) pension plans (7% of republicans and 8.2% loyalists) and, only 1.6% of those who were paying into a

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60 There are proposals to bring forward the extension the state retirement age beyond 65 to 66, 67 and 68 years, but it is not yet clear when any such changes will come into effect.
61 Currently £95.25 per week for a single person and £152.30 for a couple.
62 A person who has been detained under a custodial sentence may be awarded Class 1 "credits", which can be taken into account for all contributory benefits, for a period of legal detention if: the sentence under which they were held is quashed on appeal at the Court of Appeal, Crown Court or High Court; if they apply in writing to NICO Decision Making Team, and if they do not continue to be detained under another conviction. This regulation applies only to those who have wrongly been convicted of a crime. A person who has been detained on remand, not following conviction, and is subsequently found “not guilty” is not entitled to “credits” for the period of detention. See 'NIM41240 - Non-benefit credits: post 1975 credited earnings: Stayed Credits (miscarriage of justice cases)', Regulation 9D of the Social Security (Credits) Regulations 1975 at http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/manuals/nimmanual/NIM41240.htm [Accessed 16 August].
private fund (1.2% of men and 3.8% of women) will have made 25 years of contributions by the time they retire. Being employed on 2-3 year contracts or a series of short-term contracts - which is typical of employment in the community sector - can make it difficult to plan for the future. One interviewee described how the uncertainty of short term contracts in the community sector made it hard to plan ahead:

… I never got a pension scheme since I got out of prison because our funding was only two years … and we were asked did we want to go for a pension scheme? We thought then, because it was only a two year project, we’d be unemployed, so it was advisable not … to get private insurance. And then you were out of work for a couple of weeks and then you’d get another three year contract and the same thing would come up, do you want to get private insurance? … The last job I was on, it was the same thing, it was a two year project and they asked me … my employer says, ‘Would you like to go for insurance?’, but then we were thinking the whole thing was … I’m too late, if I had have been in my early teens or late teens or something working, I know I would have twenty-five years, but apparently … I don’t know the ins and outs of … of the economics but I know if I started to get into private insurance now at my age … and with this project I’m on now, which is only another two and a half years […] I mean I kind of know … once I hit the pension age then life is going to be basic, it’s going be down to the very, very basics.

The implications of these findings are stark. As noted above, the former politically motivated prisoners surveyed currently on average have window of about 13 years (or 8 years for women) in which to make NICs or payments into a pension – assuming they can find and keep employment. Given that three quarters of ‘pensioners’ (men over 65 or women over 60) in Northern Ireland currently living in low income households (below 60% of the UK median income) were people with no occupational or personal pension, there can be little doubt that a significant number of former politically motivated prisoners will find themselves in that situation also - even after the relaxation of the number of qualifying contribution years to 30 in 2010. Most will have to live on benefits or work beyond the current state pension age (65 for men and 60 for women).

The combined effects of low pay, intermittent or precarious employment, and lack of occupational pension make for a far greater risk of poverty in older age. Poverty, in turn, is closely associated with social exclusion. The Department for Work and Pensions’ survey of households below the average income found that single pensioners living alone have a higher risk of being on low income than all other social groups. Kenway et al (2006) estimate that 40% of single pensioners and 20% of pensioner couples in Northern Ireland were receiving means-tested pension credits and had no source of income apart from the state. They are twice as likely as pensioners in Great Britain to have no private income.

The former prison may be in an even worse position: if there is no change in their employment situations they

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64 The state pension age (SPA) for women will increase to 65 between 2010 and 2020. The age band of women affected by these changes includes those who were born between 6 April 1950 and 5 April 1955. The SPA will rise for both men and women to 66 years between 2024-2026, to 67 in 2036 and to 68 in 2046. See The Pensions Advisory Service, ‘How does it work?’ at [Accessed 16 August].
66 Kenway et al (2006) op. cit., p. 31
67 ‘Older people with no private income’, Poverty Indicators, Northern Ireland, The Poverty Site, at [Accessed 16 August].
will be between *two and four times* as likely as other pensionable age older people in Northern Ireland to be entirely dependent on state benefits.

The introduction of the guaranteed pension credit reduced the numbers of older people living in poverty, but the current review of the benefits system means that there will be some uncertainty about eligibility for, and levels of, safety net benefits over the next few years. At this stage no one knows what the outworking of the Northern Ireland Welfare Reform Bill 2010 will be. But since one of its declared aims is to make benefit payments more conditional on willingness to accept work, the most significant changes are likely to be in eligibility for Incapacity Benefit and Employment Support Allowance. In its June 2010 Budget statement the British Government announced its intention ‘incentivise work’ through an overhaul of the benefits system and in particular to reduce the number of people receiving disability-related benefits by requiring more stringent medical assessments for all DLA claimants from April 2013/14.⁶⁸ Although any such changes to welfare provision or benefits would be UK-wide, they would require parallel legislation by the devolved Northern Ireland government.

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4. Findings - Health and social well-being

As we noted earlier in our discussion of employment, the proportion of the Northern Ireland population receiving Disability Living Allowance (DLA) is twice as high as in the rest of Great Britain and it is estimated that about 40% of those receiving Incapacity Benefit or Severe Disablement Allowance in Northern Ireland require this support due to mental ill health. Consequently, the health and social well-being section of the survey contained a range of items exploring general physical health, mental health, health behaviour, and self-report items on the impacts of conflict-related traumatic experience and imprisonment. These questions were designed to look at issues specific to older former politically motivated prisoners. Standardised health screening instruments were included to enable comparison of our findings with research on the health and well-being of the general population in Northern Ireland and Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland.

Self-rated general health

The health and social well-being element of the survey began by asking respondents to rate their own health (as ‘excellent’, ‘very good’, ‘good’, ‘fair’ or ‘poor’). Over a third (36.8%) of all respondents rated their own health as excellent, very good or good, compared to 28.4% who rated it as poor. Most (60%) rated their health as the same or better than it had been in the previous year. As would be expected, the highest share of those reporting poor health (56.7%) was among those on sickness/incapacity benefits.

Retired former politically motivated prisoners were the respondents who most frequently rated their health as poor (44%) and this may be associated with being older. However, a significant proportion of both those in full-time employment (26.8%) and the unemployed (28.6%) also reported being in poor physical health. About two thirds of those who had retired and reported ill health had received a GP diagnosis for a medical condition compared to about half of those who were employed full-time, self-employed or unemployed and who reported being in poor health. The conditions most frequently reported by former politically motivated prisoners were gastro-intestinal disorders and hypertension, problems that may be consistent with somatising stress. But because many survey respondents declined to answer this item we cannot judge whether these reports are representative. What we can say is that the concerns about ill health and premature mortality among former politically motivated prisoners were raised by focus group participants and interviewees alike:

... There’s a lot of prisoners I know … I’m still very close to them all, but the reality over the past lot of years is prisoners are ... are dying left, right and centre and they’re all … they’re all in their fifties, and it’s been put down mostly to that CR [riot control] gas that was dropped [in the Cages] because they’ve all died of cancer, right. And there’s been over … I think it’s sixty-eight have died and they’re only in their fifties. Just recently, the other day … last week another mate of ours was told, an ex-prisoner again, has been told he has cancer as well so I that’s all you’re hearing [...]That’s all prisoners talk about, they sit here and talking about ‘thing’s dead now’. I was reading ... people’s dying in the country who I didn’t even know had died ...

70 Dibenzoazepine, a riot control agent.
Their perception of greater rates of illness and premature death are not unfounded, although whether imprisonment is a factor is uncertain. There are marked social class disparities in the rates of premature mortality in Northern Ireland where those in manual and routine occupations are at twice the risk of early death as professional and managerial groups. For the long-term unemployed and those that never worked the risk of early death is three times as great.\footnote{Northern Ireland, Premature Death, Graph 2: By Social Class at \url{http://www.poverty.org.uk/i60/index.shtml} [Accessed 15 August 2010].}

**Mental health**

It is estimated that people in Northern Ireland are awarded DLA for mental health reasons at three times the rate in the rest of Great Britain,\footnote{Ibid.} and that some 40% of all awards for incapacity benefit and severe disablement allowance are for mental health and behaviour conditions.\footnote{Ibid.}

Although we noted significant differences between loyalists and republicans and between men and women, it is important to recognise that these patterns and differences in mental health and resilience may be mediated in complex ways by other factors such as individual biography and experience of past trauma, gender, economic status, living in a deprived community and overall health behaviour. As noted earlier, problems in one domain of life (such as physical or mental health) may affect other domains of social inclusion and well-being (for example, economic activity, social engagement and relationships, and self-esteem). Consequently, the mental health elements of the survey included both standardised screening tests for mental health and alcohol problems and a further series of questions designed to explore the perceived impact of imprisonment and the conflict on emotional functioning and familial and social relationships. The standardised mental health elements of the survey comprised the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12)\footnote{See Goldberg, D.P. Williams, P. (1991) *A User’s Guide to the General Health Questionnaire*. Windsor: NFER-Nelson.} which screens for significant mental ill-health, the FAST\footnote{See Health Development Agency & University of Wales College of Medicine (2002) *Manual for the Fast Alcohol Screening Test (FAST)*. London: Health Development Agency.} and CAGE\footnote{See Mayfield, D., McLeod, G. and Hall, P. (1974) The CAGE questionnaire: validation of a new alcoholism instrument. *American Journal of Psychiatry* 131: 1121-1123; Ewing, J.A. (1984) ‘Detecting Alcoholism, The CAGE Questionnaire’, *Journal of the American Medical Association* 252(14):1905-1907.} screening tests for hazardous drinking and alcohol dependency. Additional questions were asked about taking medication for anxiety/sleep disorders and depression.

**General Health Questionnaire -12 (GHQ-12)**

The GHQ-12 is a well validated twelve-item self-administered screening questionnaire for psychiatric morbidity for use with people living in the community. Respondents are asked to rate how they have been recently in relation to 12 different items (for example, feeling under strain, losing sleep over worry, feeling unhappy or depressed). Each of the 12 items is scored 0 or 1 according to whether or not the respondent reports experiencing the symptom in the
last few weeks. The total number of items scoring 1 gives the GHQ-12 score. A total score of 4 or more was taken as indicating a probable psychiatric disturbance, or ‘caseness’. Different threshold scores can be used for the GHQ: a score of 4 sets a relatively high threshold for case identification, and this threshold has been used in other surveys of the Northern Ireland population, for example by NISRA/ DHSSPS for monitoring health inequalities.77

Table 7. Below summarises the GHQ-12 findings for the 178 respondents who completed the questionnaire. (Twelve respondents (6.3%) did not do so).

Table 7. GHQ-12 Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>BELOW GHQ-12 threshold Scores of 0-3</th>
<th>ABOVE GHQ-12 Threshold Scores of 4</th>
<th>ABOVE GHQ-12 Threshold Scores of 4 &gt; NI AG E PEERS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Republicans (n=107)</td>
<td>58.9 %</td>
<td>41.1 %</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loyalists (n=76)</td>
<td>62.0 %</td>
<td>38.0 %</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men (n=160)</td>
<td>59.4%</td>
<td>40.6%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women (n=18)</td>
<td>66.7 %</td>
<td>33.3 %</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Respondents (n=178)</td>
<td>60.1 %</td>
<td>39.9 %</td>
<td>22.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

First, it is important to note that over half (60.1%) of those who completed the GHQ-12 had scores below the threshold for probable mental health problems and this points to a high degree of resilience among former politically motivated prisoners as a group. That said, some 39.9% of survey respondents had GHQ-12 scores of 4 or more indicating probable psychiatric symptoms. This finding is broadly consistent with the findings of a study on the impact of security duties on the mental health of British soldiers serving in Northern Ireland which found that their psychological difficulties increased by over 50% after deployment.78

Of those with scores over the 4 threshold, a sizeable proportion (18.7% republicans and 18.3% of loyalists) had scores at the high end of the GHQ-12 scale (scores of 8-12) indicating that they are likely to be living with significant mental health problems.

The survey findings also showed differences in mental health by sex with a higher number of the men sampled (40.6% compared to 33.3% of women) scoring above the threshold that

indicates mental health problems may be present. These rates were higher than those found amongst men and women in their age group living in the community in Northern Ireland, which have been reported to be 19% and 25% respectively. The difference was particularly marked for the male former politically motivated prisoners who were twice as likely to suffer some form of psychiatric distress as their counterparts in the Northern Ireland general population many of whom also have been negatively affected by the conflict and social violence (Ferry et al. 2008).

If our survey findings are representative of all former politically motivated prisoners in Northern Ireland, then it would appear that, as a group, they are substantially more likely than others in Northern Ireland to suffer from some form of psychological distress and male former politically motivated prisoners have an especially elevated risk of mental ill health. These findings underline the importance of former politically motivated prisoners being able to access appropriate and effective mental health services, a point we will return to in our concluding comments.

The former politically motivated prisoners we interviewed also were very candid about the mental health impacts of their experience of conflict-related violence and imprisonment. Their accounts of the psychological difficulties they confronted reveal a complex set of burdens and losses from the past including the mourning of lost friends, survivor guilt, fear, regret, anger and humiliation and this illustrates how questions of suffering and responsibility extend beyond simplistic victim-perpetrator categories. For example, one loyalist interviewee reported still being troubled by memories of the aftermath of a bombing in his community:

The, the only real symptom there … or only really bad feeling I ever got or a nightmare was when the Shankill bomb happened in 1993, you know, and I just arrived on the Shankill. I was actually up in the prison visiting that day and I actually got onto the Shankill Road when the bomb exploded. And like everybody else, we were in the rubble and trying to clear rubble and just to see the carnage; it was, you know, beyond belief. And, and … but these are things that I’ve … I used to wake up with nightmares thinking about things like that there, thinking about the pregnant woman that was lying there, you know, and things like that there. […] I would still think about it, but it’s certainly not so severe as it was at that time.

Another described continuing to mourn ‘fallen comrades’:

But they keep revisiting me, you know, so it's a thing that I have accepted it and I’ll take this to the grave with me because there's not a day goes past, not one day goes past that I don’t think of, of some of the lads that have fell by the wayside. It's sad but ... those, those guys knew what they were up against and sometimes I just feel lucky to be here when they're not here ... There's times, there's times I do feel I wished I was with them. Whether you put that down to guilt or not, I don’t know. But good guys, you do miss them and it’s, I suppose it's part of a comradely thing, that you do miss your friends, your comrades but there's nothing ... you can't change it.

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79 NISRA (2007) op.cit., Table ‘GHQ12 score by age and sex’, p.2.
80 Ferry, F., Bolton, D., Bunting, B., Devine, B., McCann, S. and Murphy, S. (2008) Trauma, Health and Conflict in Northern Ireland, A study of the epidemiology of trauma related disorders and qualitative investigation of the impact of trauma on the individual. Omagh and Belfast: The Northern Ireland Centre for Trauma and Transformation and the Psychology Research Institute, University of Ulster.
Another described his flashbacks of the beatings and the invasive and humiliating mirror searches he endured in prison:

I used to get flashbacks about going to gaol and flashbacks of the beatings and … the screws beating me … and I used to wake up in the middle of the night screaming, mad squealing, sweating, sweating like mad … and my partner she … she was quite scared, she thought there was something up and said, ‘Oh are you alright?’ and I said, ‘Aye’ and my heart was going like a f...ing … a trooper you know, a panic attack type of thing … I was just getting flashbacks with getting beat and threw over tables and over mirrors and … screws pawing your backside and … you know.

Another who had been on the Blanket protest talked about how he felt about the humiliation he experienced during the mirror searches:

… as I walked on down [after the mirror search] I could hear them tee-heeing and laughing and saying, ‘No, no, no it’s not a fully … it’s not a fully … it’s not a full hand of Ulster. You have a finger missing there.’ or ‘You have two fingers missing’. What they were talking about was that they had to tried to leave an imprint of the red hand of Ulster on my arse, and it didn’t work because your man didn’t get the slap in properly, but at the end of the day, you know, that’s how they got their amusement, you know what I mean? There’s you with a big red hand on your arse and them that’s laughing at you when you’re going back to your cell. So emotionally and physically, I would say more emotionally … I’d say blanket men were probably more emotionally damaged than physically … because a physical beating you can get over … but the humiliation and the … you know, like everything had a sexual undertone to it. They’d laugh at the size of your penis; they’d pass comment all the time from when you left your cell until you … until you went back in. What they got out of it I don’t know, but … it seemed to be a constant thing of degrading, harassing and … and just generally trying to make you afraid, trying to make you … I think they loved to see you in that position, you know, where you were afraid and you felt vulnerable.

The psychological legacy of the conflict for former politically motivated prisoners is not attributable only to the guilt or trauma associated with past paramilitary actions. The continuing burdens they carry are complex, individual and not limited to the perpetration or witnessing of violent acts. They also relate to feelings of loss, helplessness, fear and humiliation experienced during interrogation and imprisonment. It is not surprising that many reported taking prescription medication to alleviate their psychological distress.

Prescription medication for psychological difficulties

Prescribing patterns can provide a further indicator of mental ill health in the population. Respondents were asked whether or not they had been prescribed medication by their GP for anxiety, sleeping difficulties, or for depression, during the last year. This enabled us to compare the prescribing patterns for former politically motivated prisoners with others in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

I’m on diazs and triazs [diazepam and triazepam] … I don’t take it because I think they are just throwing it at you.

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Nearly half (41.1%) of all respondents reported taking prescription medication for anxiety or sleeping difficulties (sedatives and tranquillisers). A higher proportion of loyalists (50.7%) reported doing so than did republicans (35.0%). The prevalence rate for sedative or tranquilliser use among loyalists is five times the Northern Ireland average for men (8.2%) and among republicans it is three times the Northern Ireland average for men. These are stark statistics, especially when one considers the fact that the Northern Ireland prescribing data for men will include many other groups who are also likely to have been affected by the conflict, e.g. prison and police officers or members of the emergency services.

The proportion of women (46.2%) taking prescription medication for anxiety and or sleep problems was higher than both the overall average for the male former prisoners (40.2%) and over four times higher than the Northern Ireland prevalence rate for women (10.2%). The use of sedatives and tranquillisers for anxiety and sleep disorders among former politically motivated prisoners as a group (41.1%) is also far higher than for other older adults in Northern Ireland (12.5%). See Tables 8 and 9 below.

Table 8. Prescription of medication for anxiety and depression amongst men

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MEDICATION</th>
<th>Republicans (n=117)</th>
<th>Loyalists (n=73)</th>
<th>All male Respondents (n=164)</th>
<th>Other Men NI 2006/7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sedatives &amp; Tranquillisers</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>50.7</td>
<td>39.8</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-depressants</td>
<td>27.4</td>
<td>41.1</td>
<td>32.6</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9. Prescription of medication for anxiety and depression, by sex

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MEDICATION</th>
<th>All male Respondents (n=164)</th>
<th>All women Respondents (n=26)</th>
<th>Other women NI 2006/7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sedatives &amp; Tranquillisers (%)</td>
<td>40.2</td>
<td>46.2</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-depressants (%)</td>
<td>31.1</td>
<td>42.3</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

83 Ibid.
Respondents also were asked whether or not they had been prescribed medication by their GP for depression during the last year. Nearly a third (32.6%) of all respondents reported recently taking prescription medication for depression and more loyalists (41.1%) than republicans (27.4%) reported doing so. The rate was higher amongst women (42.3%) than men (31.1%). To put this in context, the estimated (2006/07) prevalence rate for recent/within the last year use of anti-depressants by older adults in Northern Ireland was 11.7% (12.4% for women and 5.8% for men).84 As a group, the former politically motivated prisoners were almost three times as likely to use anti-depressants as others in Northern Ireland and male former politically motivated prisoners are over five times as likely to do so.

Taken together, these findings suggest that the prevalence of drug treatment for anxiety and mood disorders among former politically motivated prisoners may be much higher than that of the wider Northern Ireland population.85 We explored these issues further in subsequent survey and interview questions about current and post-release experience of psychological difficulties (coping with traumatic experience and depression).

**Depression**

In the final part of the survey former politically motivated prisoners were asked about their experience of feeling seriously depressed since release. Only about 1 in 5 respondents (22.2% of republicans and 23.3% of loyalists) reported not feeling seriously depressed at some time since their release from prison. Over half the former politically motivated prisoners surveyed (53.5% loyalists and 55.5% of republicans) reported they had felt seriously depressed at some time since release. (See Table 10 below.) More women (65.4%) than men (53.1%) reported this and the gender difference is consistent with our finding that twice as many female as male former politically motivated prisoners are taking prescription medication for depression.

Table 10. ‘Since release I have not had times of feeling seriously depressed’86, by designation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Designation (% within designation)</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Not known</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Republican (n=117)</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>29.9</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loyalist (n=73)</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>34.2</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All (% whole sample)</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

84 Ibid.
85 According to the most recent DHSSPSNI (2009a) *NI Health & Social Care Inequalities Monitoring System, Third Update Bulletin 2009*, Table 2.26, over 1 in 10 of people in Northern Ireland (11.5%) were suffering from a mood or anxiety disorder in 2008 with there being a greater incidence (13.2%) in the most deprived communities.
86 Some of the statements in this section of the survey were worded negatively as a means of checking the consistency of responses between related survey items. In reporting findings on agreement/disagreement with a negatively phrased item, we have interpreted a negative response to a negative item as positive. Hence, disagreeing that you have not experienced something is another way of saying that you have done so.
Table 11. ‘Since release I have not had times of feeling seriously depressed’, by sex

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Not known</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Male</strong></td>
<td>(n=164)</td>
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<tr>
<td>(% within designation)</td>
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<td>18.9</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>23.8</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Female</strong></td>
<td>(n=26)</td>
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<tr>
<td>(% within designation)</td>
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<td>7.7</td>
<td>19.2</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>All</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>(% whole sample)</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>31.6</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One interviewee attributed his depression to his long term imprisonment but also thought that the social isolation of his job as a lorry driver, which he had been doing since his release, may have been an aggravating factor:

The job that I done for 19 years after I got out was all on my own ... driving ... out on the roads of Ireland, all over ... but on my own. Staying in hotels on my own ... and it, it's wearing me down. I can't ... know whether prison had a big part to play in that ... but it can't not have had. I can't, I can't pretend that it didn't have anything to do with it. In fact it probably had a big part to do with it.

Many of those who reported suffering from depression seemed resigned to it as something that ‘goes with the territory’ of being a former politically motivated prisoner. Yet there was also a recognition that stoicism that is so central to paramilitary culture comes at a price:

I can be severely depressed at times, but they’re the facts of life you know… [...] I think it just came with the territory all them years... I believe there should have been some kind of evaluation done on prisoners getting released […] because, as I say, friends of mine have committed suicide you know, and these are some of the people that I would never have expected in my life … well, who expects anybody? But these are some of the people who if you would have said, he’s going [to commit suicide]… you have laughed at it. There’s no way he would ever commit suicide, and it’s some of the strongest people in life that I, that I’ve believed were strong that have committed suicide …and these are people that have been through the system and went to goal …

The expectations of others and being called on to handle difficult situations, e.g. suicide, also may add to the stoicism problem:

... For instance, when my youngest brother committed suicide, everyone was saying that I was the strength in the family, that I kept them all going, that … you know, I was the one that was being the sensible one, was organising things etc, and that I was the strength there when everybody else was sort of broke up. But the fact of … the truth of the matter is that the day after the funeral, that I couldn’t come out of the house all day because I wept like a child all day.
One interviewee described how hard it could be to keep going at times given the burdens of the past:

Aye sometimes, yeah sometimes I do [think about death]… Sometimes I just wake up and … oh yeah sometimes I … sometimes life does get a bit hard, sometimes … sometimes I lie in bed in the morning and I’m staring at the ceiling going f… this, f…ing in prison all my life and work and … I’m not happy and … and drinking and … F…, if I got cancer I wouldn’t give a shit. If I’m going to get it, I’ll get it now. I can … I can do this and do that, get off the pressures of work, get off the pressures of … you’re always constantly thinking and I don’t know whether it’s a normal thing, it’s just that … Sometimes you look back and say, ‘Jesus Christ. I never had kids, I never had the opportunity, in prison all your life and, you know, I lost all my teens and my twenties and my thirties and my early forties and …

Despair, not wanting to go on living

We also asked respondents to rate how much they agreed or disagreed with the statement, ‘Since release there have been times when I have not wanted to go on living.’ Almost half the respondents (45.2%) indicated that they had not felt this level of despair. However, just under a third (31.5%) agreed or strongly agreed that they had experienced times of not wanting to go on living. More loyalists (38.4%) than republicans (27.4%) reported having felt this way. See Table 12 below.

Table 12. ‘Since release there have been times when I have not wanted to go on living’, by designation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Not known</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>(% within designation)</td>
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<td>(n=117)</td>
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<tr>
<td>(% within designation)</td>
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<tr>
<td>(n=73)</td>
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<tr>
<td>(n=190)</td>
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<td>14.7</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A higher proportion of men (32.3%) than women (26.9%) indicated that they had had times of not wanting to go on living, but because more women than men left this item blank, this apparent difference can not be confirmed. See Table 13 below.

Table 13. ‘Since release there have been times when I have not wanted to go on living’, by sex

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
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<tbody>
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<tr>
<td>(n=117)</td>
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<td>12.0</td>
<td>20.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>(n=73)</td>
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<td>13.7</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The issue of depression and suicide also came up in interviews. Many reported feeling distressed on hearing of the suicide of one of their own because of the strong sense of identification, mutual care and of solidarity among former politically motivated prisoners. One interviewee described the pressures that lead to his own suicide attempt, and here too we find the habits of stoicism and hiding problems getting in the way of asking for help even when unable to cope:

Well, a number of years ago I tried to take my own life, so I did. Err, and that resulted in a period of three months in [name] Hospital. I had a number of serious illnesses ... kidneys, liver, pancreas, gall bladder trouble ... But there would have been a contributing factor through alcohol prior to that. [...] People thought everything was hunky dory ... that I had really got it together, whereas my life was total chaos, so it was. I didn’t... I actually had convinced myself that I’d be better off dead and that the people that were closest to me in the world would be better off without me and that’s how I genuinely felt, and how wrong I know that is now. I just know that was so silly, but at that time I deliberately wanted to die and was very disappointed that I didn’t die. Whenever I woke up out of an induced coma I was so disappointed to look out the window and realise I was still alive. [...] So I just accepted that I needed psychological help and was... and [I] went through the State... went through the structures that existed, which I wasn’t totally comfortable about, but I knew that the drink had led me to, err, trying to take my own life. Therefore it was, I certainly needed help.

He went on to say that, although he did receive some psychiatric treatment, he felt he did not get enough contact with the clinician to help with the depression:

The... psychiatrists I seen were probably professional enough in their own right, but... they were good enough in their own way and the first interview that I had with him I thought was going absolutely fine but they’re... they’re limited to time and they’ve got other patients so they’re not going to be able to devote all of their time just to me personally. But I didn’t really feel... I didn’t really feel at that time that I... I thought I needed more help. And they were giving me an interview, a wee bit of therapy for about two hours and then not seeing me for another ten days. And I knew I needed much more than that. At that... at that particular time, once I left that room that day I wanted... all I wanted to do was to walk in front of a lorry. [...] I felt at that time, if this is the way they treat people who are sick, if this is all the help that you can get when you’re sick, it’s... it’s not going to... it’s not going to be of any benefit so it’s not.

One loyalist former prisoner talked about the problem of depression among former politically motivated prisoners in his community:

What we were worried about ... I would have went into a bar and I would have seen an ex-prisoner there ... And he would be sitting in the corner and he is staring into his pint. And I
don’t need to be a psychologist to know this guy has got a problem here. […] But where has he to go? […] The next thing you hear - and there have been several - ‘Did you hear [name] hanged himself”? […] With the benefit of hindsight you’d say [to yourself], ‘Why didn’t you do something? Why didn’t somebody do something?’

It was clear that many of the former politically motivated prisoners we surveyed and spoke to in focus groups, interviews and feedback workshops, were experiencing serious difficulties coping with anxiety and depression associated with past traumatic experience. They also expressed thoughts about suicide. As noted above, compared with others in the Northern Ireland population, the former prisoners in our survey were much more likely to have been prescribed sedatives or anti-depressants in the last year, and twice as likely to suffer from depression and/or anxiety symptoms. Although it is not possible to establish the suicide rate for former politically motivated prisoners, there was a troubling perception among both the republican and loyalist former prisoners we spoke to that the their suicide rate was likely to be higher than amongst other men of a similar age in their communities.

Research findings on suicide among older men in Northern Ireland are equivocal. Tomlinson (2007) estimates that the suicide rate among Northern Irish men aged 55-64 rose by 70% between 1995-2000. However, a more recent study by Largey et al (2009) found that, although the overall suicide rate in Northern Ireland is increasing (mainly due to the increase in suicides among young men aged 25-34), there has been a slight decline in the rate for men over 55 years. There are a host of biographical and social factors that influence suicide rates. Recent studies of suicide risk in Northern Ireland have shown that suicide risk is related not only to individual health factors, but also to social factors like living alone, social isolation, socio-economic disadvantage and possibly unemployment. As Dandeker et al (2003) point out in relation to suicide risk among service personnel, ‘if the individual does not have confidants to talk to, problems are often dealt with by increasing alcohol intake, which may in turn lead to increased impulsivity’.

Coping with past traumatic experience

My actions such as they were – how do I put this? – were one-to-one and I suppose some people could say, ‘Well I fired a rifle at 500 yards and somebody got hit’. And somehow or other you can justify that there you know because it’s not face-to-face. But close up it’s not a very John Wayne sort of action, you know.’ […] Until you put that gun to his head and the bullet goes in one end and out the other. And it’s... and the moment before you shoot him, the fear on his face and he’s one second, and he knows he’s going... he’s one second away from hell, you know?

87 Compared to a recent estimate, based on 2006 prescribing information, that almost 10% (9.7%) of the Northern Irish population was suffering from a mood or anxiety disorder. Stewart et al (2007), op. cit. p. 38.
In final section of the survey questions were asked about three aspects of being troubled by past traumatic experience: intrusive memories and dreams, avoidance of reminders, and anxiety and panic attacks. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement (‘strongly agree’, ‘agree’, ‘neither agree nor disagree’, ‘strongly disagree’ or ‘disagree’) in relation to a series of statements about the possible effects of having directly witnessed terrible scenes.

**Experiencing intrusive memories and dreams**

Over half the survey respondents (51.2%) agreed or strongly agreed that they were still troubled by memories or upsetting dreams about terrible scenes that they had witnessed directly. Although the prevalence of intrusive memories was broadly similar for both groups (49.6% of republicans compared to 53.5% for loyalists), more loyalists (28.8%) than republicans (18.8%) strongly agreed that they were experiencing this symptom. Women were more likely (61.6%) to report intrusive memories and upsetting dreams than men (49.3%) were. However, it is should also be noted that that a third (34.2%) of loyalists and 12.8 % of republicans surveyed gave neutral, ‘neither agree nor disagree’ responses to this item, perhaps suggesting a degree of ambivalence or reluctance to engage with the issue. Alternatively, they thought this was the appropriate response because they had not directly witnessed terrible scenes. See Tables 14 and 15 below.

**Table 14. Experience of intrusive memories and dreams**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
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<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Not known</th>
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<tr>
<td>Republican</td>
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<tr>
<td>(% within designation)</td>
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<td>14.6</td>
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<td>5.8</td>
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<td>21.1</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 15. Experience of intrusive memories and dreams, by sex**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
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<td>13.4</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>4.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>(% within designation)</td>
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<td>11.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>(% within designation)</td>
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<td>22.1</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

92 This item reads, ‘I directly witnessed terrible scenes during the conflict that I do not want to think about, but I am still bothered by memories and upsetting dreams about them.’
The participants in both the focus groups and interviews we conducted agreed that many former politically motivated prisoners were still experiencing significant problems dealing with the past. One loyalist former prisoner talked about how nightmares about the past make it difficult for him to sleep, and of how hard it is to admit even to his partner how frightening these dreams are:

I know for a fact from talking to people from the Republicans they have big problems and people are tortured at night. Tortured at night. [...] A lot do. And that’s maybe why I... I spend so many nights on my own. I prefer that. Um, only last weekend my partner was with me and I woke up absolutely swimming last weekend, swimming, swimming, and she said that I was shouting out... I was shouting a name out. And obviously I don’t remember. [...] I struggle, I watch the hours going by, it is... it’s scary at times. It scares me but I... I’ve learned to work with it and I think everybody does because nobody wants to say, ‘Oh f..., I’m scared.’, or ‘That was terrible.’, but I do say, ‘Oh f..., that was an awful dream.’

One republican former prisoner who has been diagnosed as suffering from PTSD and depression echoed the previous loyalist interviewee’s experience and describes how memories of past traumas intrude on both his waking thoughts and his dreams:

...Flashbacks, nightmares, thinking of people who lost their lives, especially friends and comrades. And at times I've broke down and cried like ... because it's hurtful. Sad aspect of [the conflict], probably a necessary aspect, but sad nonetheless. You have your good days and your bad days as well. Sleep time - I'm the world's worst sleeper. But when I do go to sleep invariably there's a cop running after me, he's trying to shoot. Or there's ... I'm in a prison cell ... and I actually believe in the dream that I'm in the ... [gaol] and it's only when I wake up with the sweat flying out of me that I realise I'm not and I'm glad that I woke because I'm not in gaol ... Plus you're gunmen calling to the door, you’ve all these things and you, you're trying to get away, you're running in slow motion and it's, you know, you're jumping and they're shooting you..., that type of thing. Very, very vivid ... but not even that. There's times I'd be sitting reading the paper, I enjoy reading, and I'll be sitting reading the paper and things will come into my head about such and such who's gone, who's dead and I'm saying to myself, ‘What put that into my head? Not even reading about him. What's put that into my head, you know?’ and then I'll start to dwell on the good memories I had with people like that. So that type of thing there. I can't explain it like. If it’s never going to go away, I'm sort of stuck with it. [...] I had to get prescription drugs off the doctor to help me sleep.

Avoidance of reminders of terrible scenes witnessed

Over half the survey respondents (55.3%) agreed or strongly agreed that they tried to avoid reminders of terrible scenes they had witnessed,\(^\text{93}\) and a far higher proportion of loyalists (65.8%) than republicans (48.8%) reported this form of coping behaviour. That said, it is

\(\text{\textsuperscript{93}}\text{This item reads, ‘I directly witnessed terrible scenes during the conflict that I do not want to think about, and I try to avoid situations that remind me of them.’} \)
again notable that a quarter (24.7%) of loyalists and 16.2% of republicans surveyed gave neutral, ‘neither agree nor disagree’ responses to this item. See Table 16 below.

Table 16. Avoidance of reminders of terrible scenes witnessed, by designation

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
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<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Not known</th>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(% within designation)</td>
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<td>(n=117)</td>
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<td>16.2</td>
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<td>8.5</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>(% within designation)</td>
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<td>(n=73)</td>
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<td><strong>All (% whole sample)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>(n=190)</td>
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<td>19.5</td>
<td>10.5</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The prevalence of reported avoidance among women was also higher (65.4%) than amongst men (53.6%). Although fewer women (7.7%) than men (21.3%) gave a neutral response to this item, twice as many women (11.5% compared to 5.5%) declined to answer the question. See Table 17 below.

Table 17. Avoidance of reminders of terrible scenes witnessed, by sex

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
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<tr>
<td>(n=164)</td>
<td>20.7</td>
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<td>(% within designation)</td>
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<td>(n=26)</td>
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<td>(n=190)</td>
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<td>19.5</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Anxiety and panic attacks

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with the statement, ‘I directly witnessed terrible scenes during the conflict that I do not want to think about, and if something reminds me of them I feel anxious and panicky.’ Overall 42.7% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. The rates were similar for loyalists (43.8%) and republicans (41.9%), but more women (57.7%) than men (40.4%) reported experiencing this. However, as notes with regard to the previous two questions, nearly 1 in 5 of all respondents (21.1%) neither agreed nor disagreed that they feel anxious/panicky when
reminded about terrible scenes witnessed. This may suggest either some ambivalence about the issue or a reluctance to answer this particular item. See Table 18 below.

Table 18. Anxiety and panic attacks\(^{94}\) by designation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Republican</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>(% within designation) (n=117)</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>29.1</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Loyalist</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(% within designation) (n=73)</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>38.4</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>All (% whole sample) (n=190)</strong></td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As was the case with the item on avoidance of reminders, fewer women (3.8%) than men (23.8%) gave a neutral response to this item, but twice as many women (11.5%) as men (5.5%) declined to answer. See Table 19 below.

Table 19. Anxiety and panic attacks – by sex

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Not known</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Male</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(% within designation) (n=164)</td>
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<td>23.8</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>8.5</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Female</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(% within designation) (n=26)</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>All (% whole sample) (n=190)</strong></td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Women were more likely than men to agree or strongly agree that they experienced panic attacks. It is possible that some respondents may have recorded agreement because they suffered from anxiety attacks that were not specifically associated with the reminders of witnessed terrible events. For example, one woman dated the onset of her anxiety attacks from the time of her release from prison:

I get panic attacks all the time... Probably from right after I got out of prison, I would say right after I had been to prison, I would be … actually I could relate it right to getting out of prison because it would be some things such as crossing the road. Really silly things, standing in a queue, you know at the shopping centre. My heart would pound; I would start feeling sick, the sweat would lash off me.

\(^{94}\) This item reads, ‘I directly witnessed terrible scenes during the conflict that I do not want to think about, and if something reminds me of them I feel anxious and panicky.’
Her account illustrates how the return to the community from prison, however much longed for, can itself be a stressful and frightening experience. As one interviewee observed, after the ‘hats and trumpets’ of the hero’s welcome home, ‘you’re just another number on the roll’ and that is often when problems begin.

Given the frequency and degree of psychological distress reported by former politically motivated prisoners and the adverse circumstances in which many currently live, it would not be surprising if they sometimes resort to ‘self-medication’ with drink or drugs as a means of coping with anxiety and/or low mood, especially when they find it difficult to approach or access the mental health services they need. In this regard the health behaviour and symptomatology of these former politically motivated prisoners is very similar to that of analogous groups such as army veterans, or police or emergency service personnel, who have been required to deal with violent scenes in the course of their work.\(^95\) Former politically motivated prisoners’ mental health problems are also similar to those of other detainees suffering more long term forms of chronic trauma, such as prisoners of war. While self-medication through excessive alcohol use may provide short term relief from distressing feelings, this behaviour is likely to have damaging long term effects on their mental and physical health, their personal, familial and social relationships and their capacity to work.\(^96\)

\textit{Alcohol}

I wouldn’t go out and have these mad binges, although there is some prisoners I do know who are alcoholics and probably drug abusers as well. I know that for a fact.

We asked survey respondents to complete two short standardised screening tests (the FAST and CAGE) for problem alcohol use.\(^97\) The results of these screening tests are summarised in Table 20 below. Four respondents (1 man, 3 women) did not complete the CAGE test, and two men did not complete the FAST test.

The FAST (NHS Health Development Agency & University of Wales College of Medicine 2002) is a four-item screening test in which respondents are asked to rate how much they agree with four statements about their recent drinking (i.e. over the past year).\(^98\) The answer to each question is rated 0-4. A total FAST score of 3 or more indicates hazardous drinking behaviour. A substantial majority of all respondents (71.6\% of republicans and 64.4\% of loyalists) had FAST scores above the threshold for hazardous drinking. This is four times higher than the 2008 National Audit Office estimate of the hazardous drinking rate of 18\%.


\(^96\) Although the survey did not include any questions on illegal drug use, the issue of polysubstance misuse (misusing both drugs, including prescription drugs and alcohol) did come up in focus groups and interviews.

\(^97\) The scores for these two screening tests (CAGE and FAST) are likely to be an underestimate because people tend to underreport their alcohol consumption when answering self-completion surveys like the one we conducted.

\(^98\) The four FAST questions are: ‘How often do you have eight or more on one occasion?’; ‘How often during the last year have you been unable to remember what happened the night before because you have been drinking?’; ‘How often during the last year have you failed to do what was normally expected of you because of your drinking?’ and ‘Has a relative or friend, a doctor or other health worker been concerned about your drinking or suggested you cut down?’.
for England. Although both groups had high prevalence rates for hazardous drinking, there were differences between them. A larger proportion of republicans had scores above the FAST hazardous drinking threshold, but more loyalists (32.8%) than republicans (27.7%) had scores at the high end of the scale (10 or more). There were also differences in the drinking behaviour of the men and women in the republican subsample. A greater proportion of republican women (73.9%) than republican men (67.4%) had scores above the FAST threshold for hazardous drinking, but more republican men (31.1%) than republican women (21.7%) had scores at the high end of the scale (scores of 10 or more). This is consistent with the 2008 Adult Drinking Patterns Survey in Northern Ireland finding that men are more likely to binge drink than women are.

The CAGE (Mayfield et al 1974; Ewing 1984) is a four-item screening test designed to test alcohol dependence over a life time. Respondents are asked to agree/disagree with four statements about their drinking. Answering yes to two or more ‘Have you ever ...?’ items (a score of 2 or more) indicates that a history of clinically significant alcohol dependence (alcoholism) is likely to be present. Over half of both republican (52.5%) and loyalist (54.2%) respondents had CAGE scores above the alcohol dependence threshold. However, more loyalists (30.6%) than republicans (22%) had the maximum score of 4. To put this in a broader context, the former politically motivated prisoners we surveyed were more than twice as likely (35.1%) as others (15.8% of men and 5.7% of women) in Northern Ireland to have CAGE scores in the ‘problem drinker’ (3 or more) range.

### Table 20. FAST and CAGE scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>FAST (Hazardous drinking)</th>
<th>UK Comparator</th>
<th>CAGE (Alcohol dependency)</th>
<th>NI Comparator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Republicans</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=116)</td>
<td>71.6</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>52.5</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Loyalists</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>54.2</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=72)</td>
<td>64.4</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Men</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>54.3</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=162)</td>
<td>66.9</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Women</strong></td>
<td>73.9</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>46.1</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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100 See (CSU)/NISRA (December 2008) Adult Drinking Patterns in Northern Ireland 2008 Belfast: NISRA.


102 The four CAGE statements are: 'Have you ever felt you should cut down on your drinking?'; 'Have people annoyed you by criticizing your drinking?'; 'Have you ever felt bad or guilty about your drinking?' and 'Have you ever had a drink first thing in the morning to steady your nerves or get rid of a hangover?'.

There were also gender differences in the alcohol dependency scores of the former politically motivated prisoners with a greater proportion of men (54.3%) than women (46.1%) having CAGE scores above the threshold for alcohol dependence. Although women were less likely than their male counterparts to have maximum CAGE scores, they were still at two and half times more likely to have alcohol dependency than other women in Northern Ireland.  

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), ‘the strongest drinking-related predictor of many chronic illnesses is the cumulated amount of alcohol consumed over a period of years’.  

These FAST and CAGE scores point to a very high prevalence of drink problems among both male and female former politically motivated prisoners in Northern Ireland. If these levels of hazardous alcohol behaviour are projected over the longer term, we can expect this group to suffer disproportionately from alcohol-related disease and early mortality. Moreover, in addition to the association with physical disease, alcohol misuse is also strongly related to mental health problems (e.g. particularly depression). A study of suicide in Northern Ireland found that 43% of those who committed suicide also had a history of problem alcohol use and that the risk of suicide was eight times greater for people who had current alcohol misuse/dependence problems than for those who did not.

*What interviewees said about their alcohol behaviour*

The former politically motivated prisoners’ comments on alcohol misuse in both the interviews and focus groups were consistent with the survey findings and with the findings on research done on military veterans. One interviewee said that it was the anniversary dates of past events or news items about them that triggered his anxiety and that:

... My escape is alcohol.

Another acknowledged the conjunction of insight and denial that can be associated with alcohol problems:

104 Ibid.
To me, it has been in my own head, am I an alcoholic? Or am I dependent on alcohol? Or was I? Well, it's not to say was in the past tense because it's not a disease that was in the past tense. But, I probably do need help with it. At the very least I need help with it. I have, yeah; I have accepted that I do have a problem. And I need to accept that I have a problem. [...] A lot of it would be quiet drinking and even [my partner] wouldn't have been aware ... she knew that I drank, but she wouldn't have been aware ... You know, for instance, if I bought six or eight cans, I'd bring two of them into the house, put them on the bench and open one. And all the time she would only see two cans on the bench. I'd be taking the other ones in from the car as I needed. And well, in my own drinking state I probably thought I was being clever, you know. And it did the trick because she didn't know. But then she's too ill to know. And in my own way I was probably too ill ... The children would know that dad's fond of a can, he's fond of a drink. But fair play to them, they've done a lot of growing up on their own and they're shrewd; and what effect it's had on them, I'd be afraid to think. I hope, touch wood, it hasn't, but, you know, we'll see.

Several interviewees commented that part of the problem was that pubs, clubs and drinking with friends provided an important focus of social life in the community, but that this positive social connection also coincided with a culture of drinking to excess. One loyalist interviewee noted the relationship between hazardous alcohol behaviour and cultural norms around masculinity and drink in Northern Ireland:

Well, my father died with alcohol. ...I don’t want to end up ... to die of an alcohol-related disease, you know. And I believe through my own endeavours that I’ve got through that [...] It, it was quite easy to just get into a group of ex-prisoners get together and go for a drink at any time of day. [...] I think it’s, it’s … an Ulsterman, it’s traditionally an Ulsterman’s thing anyways, a hard drinking working man’s […] It’s part of social life. […] Something’s not going well for me, so I go and have a drink and I’ll forget about it. And then it manifests itself the next day and the next day and the next day, and before you know it, it [the problem] is not that size; it’s that size [much bigger].

Another also identified ‘drink culture’ as a factor influencing his own alcohol behaviour:

Unfortunately in the last six, well possibly twelve months not a nice thing to admit but I do think I’ve ... alcohol is now a problem. [...] However I don’t take a lot of pride in that. [...] I’m what’s called a ‘binge drinker’. I’ve never made excuses. No, I think dying of drink is a silly way of dying. [...] If I'm harming myself, which I am, well I think that’s f...ing stupid you know! But I can't, at the moment; I just don’t seem to be able to find an alternative … to find a way out of this. But I think the little thing that holds us together, maybe I'm being unkind here, perhaps I am being unkind. It's a drink culture in Ireland and on The Pass [area of Belfast].

A number of interviewees attributed their own hazardous drinking behaviour, at least in part, to an attempt to ‘self-medicate’ as a means of coping with personal tragedy and loss:

Yes, I’ve hit the bottle a few times alright and … I think a lot of prisoners have sort of hit the … hit the bottle, because when you get out … when they get out of the goal they’re … they’re sort of getting the feel of that … so it’s the culture that … that’s in the areas at the time they get out and … I used to hit the bottle, drink a lot as I say but … not as much lately … well sort of … you go by fli and flows type of thing because … because all your mates are doing it, all your … a couple at a club or the couple up the local … local pub there you get a load of ex-prisoners sitting … sitting there you know and you … you join them … I wouldn’t say I’m a compulsive drinker but, aye, I’ve hit … I’ve hit the bottle … drink hard say over those years when … I found my mate hanging and my sister’s dying and … about then I was getting depressed sort of the … sort of trying to block it out, and I wasn’t
Others said that they were aware they had a problem with alcohol and were at risk of alcohol-related health problems, but found it hard to moderate their drinking. One related his drinking to his need to ‘de-stress’ his worries about his health and becoming alcohol dependent. It is worth quoting at length to convey some sense of the complex, lived experience of the problem:

I don’t think the last ten years I’ve been settled at all, I think I just go to work to keep busy and because I like what I’m doing, I’m getting paid to do … and then … I feel … I don’t know, I would kind of like to … I would like to retire now and go down to the gym and be in the gym all day and get my health back and get my mind … I know my mind’s away … I know … I know I’m at break-up point, I know I’m kind of … I’m waiting on the doctor saying we’ve just got the results of your liver and your liver’s f…ing destroyed or … because of alcohol, or your mind’s going … You know I feel that … I feel I’m on the edge but I’m not on the edge, and I feel … and I keep … keep convincing myself, well hey, hold on here, you’re up at seven o’clock in the morning, you’ve never missed a day’s work It’s very, very, very rare that … that I would phone in and say I feel … the odd time I phone in, I’ve a total hangover on a Monday … because I go out on Sunday night, there’s a football match and I get carried away with all the mates, and I just phone in on Monday morning and say I’ve got the cold. I’m lying … although they know I’m lying. […] …Something I’ve got there … I have to … the thing that’s the killer, and I know it’s a killer to me and I shouldn’t do it, is if I leave here in the day at five o’clock, I would have to … when I walk through the town I just can’t walk by a bar, I have to go in and … at the start … at the start it used to be just one pint and move on, and then it went to two and then it went to three and now it’s up to eight.

I would want to maybe stay off the drink a wee bit more, because I am drinking … overly drinking. […] I feel overweight, I feel … I’m feeling tired in the morning and I feel tired coming up the stairs […]when I first came out I was training, I was training for the first year or two, I actually ran the marathon, but once I got more … the more I was out the more I felt stress, the more I fell into the routine of drinking, just … basically coming out at five o’clock and get into a bar and have … sat there for … Even last night, I went in for two hours, I shouldn’t have gone in. Why … why would I want to go in on a Tuesday night? But I felt I wanted to go in because I like going in and de-stressing like, sitting there and relaxing in the bar, I couldn’t see myself going straight home. Now tonight I’ll go straight home, so say me … every other day I feel I just need to get out and … it’s relaxing and I listen to people talking and music in the background … […] It’s just a chill out drink. No I mean … I mean I wouldn’t … I wouldn’t drink in the house, I wouldn’t … I couldn’t see me bringing … carry outs back or drinking a bottle of wine or … or … I wouldn’t do that, I just like getting out and I like to sit and … having a pint and … you know, the whole atmosphere of the bar is just relaxing to me, and it shouldn’t be, and I … I know I’m doing wrong, I know I’m doing wrong.

The contradiction for him was that his need to seek relaxation in congenial company entailed excessive drinking that was harming his health.

Because so much of the focus of writing on former politically motivated prisoners is on the effects of the conflict and imprisonment, it is easy to forget that, like everyone else, they also may suffer personal tragedies, misfortune and other serious life problems, and resort to alcohol in response. One republican former prisoner talked about coping with domestic violence and a very ill family member:
So the pressure of him [abusive partner] and then the double pressure of knowing your [family member was seriously ill], I just started buying myself drink. I had never done that before. I was somebody who maybe would have given you a wee drink as a present and you would have drank it but I would have been one waited until I was going out for a night, I would never have gone out much. Maybe once in six months, maybe once in a year, but that was the first time that I started. And then I got rid of him, and then I continued buying myself the drink, and every time I looked at my [ill family member] I couldn’t bear the pain of ... I couldn’t bear it ... so I started buying vodka and just knocking them back until I couldn’t think. It was great escapism at the time. It was great, the oblivion it was brilliant and again after [family member] had had [treatment] I was still drinking because I couldn’t cope. I couldn’t cope with the fact that [the family member was so ill] at the time. I was a wreck, it basically had all built up into me being a total wreck, and I was going into work with drink; and to be honest at that time, co-workers were really nice and they would have laughed about it and I would have at that time I was just acting the joker. Again it wasn’t something you showed emotion over. And I would have hardly got any sleep. I would have just drunk myself into a tizzy and been up half the night. But again after [family member’s treatment] I thought my drinking was creating a wee bit of fun for [name]. I would say that is how perverse I became: any excuse to get a drink and escape reality.

The same interviewee thought that misusing alcohol also could be bound up with guilt:

I didn’t want to do anything, I didn’t want to face anything and, yes, I would say at that point I had a definite drink problem. I was drinking every day. I also had the guilt from my family on my head saying what I had done to my mother. I also had nothing to do with the Republican movement. By that stage probably for a few years, and that killed me with guilt because I felt that I was a Republican, it was in my heart, it was in my blood, it was part of me and that is where the drinking came from. And I think with a lot of ex-prisoners that is where the drinking problem comes from because you no longer have the strength to do anything and have other responsibilities and you end up not coping with any of it really, you know.

Former politically motivated prisoners who are clearly struggling to cope may find that attitudes towards them in their own community are embarrassment or distancing. Where that is the case, it makes it harder for the former prisoner who is in difficulty to get the help they need to overcome alcohol misuse. One interviewee felt strongly that the former politically motivated prisoner community had a role to play in helping their own with alcohol dependency:

We ourselves. I think we ourselves because the stronger we are working together, right, the more the community will accept us together, and the ex-prisoners. I mean you look sometimes at some of the ex-prisoners, like for example I’m not mentioning the person’s name, but his [family member] had died, committed suicide, and one day I was walking along the street and I saw him and he was like a river rat with the alcohol. And you look at him and he was a brilliant person, and still probably is, but I think that ex-prisoners shouldn’t, shouldn’t walk passed a person like that ... they should always make time for them, and let them see that and maybe that will bring them back to where they were. They need to be loved, they need to be sort of like, people say we care about you because we’re family, we’re friends, we’re comrades. Sometimes people don’t feel like they want to ... they look at people who are doing well, or who’s working for Sinn Fein and they’re getting on with their lives and they’re doing things and they’re working hard, and because you haven’t done anything for a couple of years maybe, and even though you support them and you’ve waved to them but you think, they don’t want to know me because I’m not doing nothing. It’s just the way some people think [name], but I think that people should always make time
for them, and in the end give them confidence to move in and do things for the community and for our people.

The point was reinforced by another interviewee who said that although he felt able to admit his alcohol problem to another former politically prisoner, he did not think he would feel comfortable discussing it in a forum like an AA ‘therapy group’.

Well I need help, but what help I need, I don't know. I'm not the type that would go to ... I don't think I'm the type, even knowing my problem, to go to talk to somebody I don't know or somebody I don't have a bond with. But it's ironic that I can sit and talk to you about something that ... I would never talk to you about. But I can, I feel I have no problem. But you put me in front of AA, I don't know how it works whether it's group therapy or whether it's one person, I wouldn't feel comfortable. I just wouldn't feel comfortable.

There was a high degree of acceptance among the former politically motivated prisoners we interviewed that more should be done to address the problem of hazardous drinking and alcohol dependency. Although many expressed a preference for such services to be delivered through former prisoner groups or community groups, others thought that statutory agencies should do this. As Dandeker et al (2003) argue, although most of the literature on the post-combat mental health problems of service personnel focuses on PTSD, ‘it is likely that the true burden of veterans’ mental health problems lies in the more common and mundane diagnoses of depressive illness, and alcohol dependence.’109 We will return to the issue of getting help with alcohol problems in our concluding comments in Sections 7 and 8 below.

109 Dandeker et al. (2003) Op.cit., paragraph 5.4.3.2
5. Findings - impact of the conflict on self & others

Both the survey and the interviews were designed to explore the impact of the conflict and imprisonment on the course of individual participant’s lives. Therefore, in addition to the GHQ-12, FAST and CAGE standardised screening tests discussed above, the survey also included specific items relating to past exposure to traumatic events, changes in personal and social relationships, and experiences of being a former politically motivated prisoner. The survey asked respondents to report the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements about changes in themselves and their relationships to others (18 items) and their thoughts about the future (6 items).

Both loyalists and republicans reported being adversely affected by their experiences across several domains of personal life, especially in respect of psychological well-being and employment. One loyalist singled out his experience of imprisonment as having a particularly negative effect on him:

… I look back and I think of some of the things that I thought years ago, and I look back now and … it horrifies me, some of the things that I thought, but … I explained that to myself that I was put in those situations, that I was put in situations where that … that … that created me to think like that … For instance, one of things I tell people is that I went to prison, the first time that I went to prison, I went to prison for fighting the Provisional IRA, and I thought I hated the Provisional IRA … I didn’t know what hate was till the day I went to prison. I learnt hate in prison … and I hated the staff and I hated the Government … for the treatment that was … that was doled out to me in that prison. So I came out of there very twisted.

But many also reported some positive impacts in terms of the quality of group relationships, personal and political development and educational attainment. One loyalist described his sense of never being alone:

It’s back to the same thing again, you’re prisoners and you’re comrades - so there’s always somebody out there, plus the family... There’s always somebody beside you.

One former republican prisoner said,

No, I never felt I lost those years; they were very … they were maybe the most meaningful years of my life. I met people there that I have never met people like them again in my life, like working fifteen years I have never met people in the workplace that match the prisoners that I met, such genuine real people, grounded, well balanced people and I have never, ever met people like them again and there is a cause there. There is an ideology, there was a reason.

Costs the conflict and imprisonment to self and others

Survey respondents were asked to evaluate the personal costs of what they went though as a result of the conflict and their imprisonment in relation to important aspects of physical and emotional well-being: physical harm; psychological harm; ability to form a close relationship with a partner; ability to express emotions; ability to express affection; ability to express
worry and unhappiness; ability to confide about personal problems; getting help with psychological problems and capacity to talk about past traumatic experiences. Respondents were asked to rate whether in each of these domains they considered they had experienced ‘no harm’, ‘mild harm’, ‘moderate harm’ or ‘severe harm’.

**Physical injury**

Although 30.5% of the former politically motivated prisoners surveyed reported they had sustained no lasting physical harm, nearly half (45.3%) reported sustaining moderate or severe physical injuries. Over all, republicans reported sustaining physical injuries more frequently than loyalists: 47% of republicans reported moderate or severe physical harm, compared with 42.5% of loyalists; and fewer republicans (43.6%) than loyalists (53.4%) reported sustaining no harm or only mild physical harm. See Table 21 below.

**Table 21. Reported physical injury**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No harm</th>
<th>Mild harm</th>
<th>Moderate harm</th>
<th>Severe harm</th>
<th>Not known</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>29.1</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(% within designation)</td>
<td>(n=117)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loyalist</td>
<td>37.0</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(% within designation)</td>
<td>(n=73)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>30.5</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(% whole sample)</td>
<td>(n=190)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Broadly similar proportions of men and women reported no physical harm or mild physical harm. Similar proportions of women and men (26.9% and 30.5% respectively) reported moderate harm, but more women reported severe harm (23.1% compared to 14.0%). However the weight that can be put on this difference is limited by the small size of the sample of women (n=26).

**Psychological harm**

I learned to ration empathy in a way... [in prison] you’re more economical with it ... I would still bottle things up.

More respondents reported being harmed psychologically (53.1%) than reported physical harm (45.3%). Just under two thirds (63.0%) of loyalists reported suffering moderate or severe psychological harm compared to less than half (47.0%) of republicans. Only 14.2% of all those surveyed (16.2% of republicans and 11.0% of loyalists) reported no psychological harm. See Table 22 below. There were also differences in the degree of psychological harm reported by men and women with slightly more women (57.7%) than men (52.4%) reporting moderate to severe harm and fewer women (3.8%) than men (15.9%) reporting suffering no psychological harm.
Table 22. Reported psychological harm, by designation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No harm</th>
<th>Mild harm</th>
<th>Moderate harm</th>
<th>Severe harm</th>
<th>Not known</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Republican</strong></td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>27.4</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>24.8</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(% within designation)</td>
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<tr>
<td>(n=117)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Loyalist</strong></td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>34.2</td>
<td>28.8</td>
<td>2.7</td>
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<td>(% within designation)</td>
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<tr>
<td>(n=73)</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>All</strong></td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>26.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>(% whole sample)</td>
<td>(n=190)</td>
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Psychological harm appeared to be related to other well-being variables. For example, when analysing the proportions of former politically motivated prisoners reporting severe psychological harm by economic status category, we found an association between the reporting of severe psychological harm and being unemployed or on DLA. So while about 1 in 5 (22%) of those in full time employment reported severe psychological harm, well over half (56%) of those who were either unemployed or on DLA reported severe psychological harm. Suffering severe psychological harm appeared to be associated with impaired capacity to work.

In addition to asking respondents to evaluate the degree of physical and psychological harms they may have sustained, the survey explored specific dimensions of emotional and social functioning.

*Ability to form a successful, close relationship with a partner*

I don’t know how to love.

Emotional well-being is related to one’s ability to form and sustain intimate relationships. It encompasses the ability to express or accept affection and to trust a partner sufficiently to
confide in them about worries or difficulties. Although 30% of respondents reported no harm to their capacity to form a close relationship, nearly half – 45.3% – reported moderate or severe harm in their ability to form a close relationship with a partner. Moderate or severe harm was reported more frequently among loyalists (53.5%) than republicans (39.9%) and also by more men (46.4%) than women (38.8%). Sometimes the bond between former politically motivated prisoners was stronger than the bond formed in the new relationship with a partner.

You know, people would say, ‘Well, I give 110% [to my relationship].’ I know I don’t. I give 110% to what I believe in and still believe in, and still would give 110%. But, in relationships, I know I don’t. […] [A friend asked me] ‘If the boot was on the other foot, would you be there [for your partner]?’ and I say, ‘No.’ I don’t know how nobody puts up with us, but it’s a special person that does.

There was a strong association between reporting psychological harm and reporting impaired ability to form a close relationship: 23 of the 27 (85.2%) who reported suffering no psychological harm also reported no harm in forming intimate relationships. For example, one loyalist former prisoner remarked on how important his marriage was to his well-being:

My, my wife is my anchor in life. She keeps me right. If I, if I go overboard with something, she would reel me in. […] But you see I find that being without a partner, I was having a terrible lot of friends of mine … without a partner in life, they’ve nothing in life, you know.

On the other hand, 42 of the 50 (84%) who reported severe psychological harm also reported severe harm to their close relationships. Having a successful intimate relationship depends on trust and the ability to express what one is feeling. One interviewee described the emotional barrier between himself and others as being a ‘big wall’ around him that had been the cause of his relationship breakdown:

I feel I always have to cut myself off … That’s one of the things that actually broke … that broke my partnership up, because my partner, although she loved me, she says, ‘I … I can’t get through to you, you never … you never talk to me about things, you’re always shutting me off and … it’s like you have this big wall around your emotions and you’re afraid to come out of it in case you break down and cry or you’re afraid to express your emotions, you’re never honest about that, and that does become dishonesty. You just never … you never become … every time I try to talk to you, you can’t look me in the eyes.’ And that’s actually why we finished. […] Because if I talked about … because I’m afraid of what’s behind it … I’m afraid. … And sometimes I have let myself, I’ve cried. […] I remember getting out in [year] after the escape - because in the Crumlin Road, we were locked up all the time and the all the stresses and strains - and I was sitting in a bar with four or five other fellas, we were all having a good laugh, and I just felt this big cloud of depression … and I went up [home] and my sisters were there, and I cried for about an hour … just f…ing like a water tap. […] What I said to somebody [was that] it was like an elastic band, it just tightens and tightens … You’re kind of … you’re always kind of, you know, trying to take care of emotions in prison because you’re in prison, it’s not natural to be locked away and … your family coming in for half an hour, and then all of a sudden I got out and all of a sudden the elastic band went ‘boom’.

**Expressing emotions**

The survey questions concerning the personal costs of what respondents went through as a result of the conflict asked respondents about changes in their capacity to express affection or
confide about worries and unhappiness or personal problems. Most respondents reported some degree of harm to their emotional functioning/well-being, and this was more commonly reported amongst the loyalists.

One interviewee, for example, said he could not explain why did not want to talk about his past with his wife:

I don't know why. And it’s not as if I've something horrific to hide from her. It's just I don't want to go there.

Another said he had made a conscious decision not to ‘revisit’ his prison experience:

Although [my partner] would say to me that I haven't really opened up about prison; that I haven't talked about what I went through in the past. And I think, to be honest, she reads more into that than what there actually is ... you know. I mean prison was prison. We did what we had to do. I mean I’ve no regrets ... about anything I did in prison. So I mean I don't feel this big or this great need to sit down and, 'Oh, I done this,' and, 'I done this,' and, 'I'm sorry I done this,' or, 'I'm glad I done that,' or whatever. [...] I've been there, I've seen it, I've done it and I've put it behind me. It's like I've said before. I'm in a Sinn Fein commune in West Belfast and I have had a couple of trips down to the Blocks. I made a conscious decision that the day I left I says, 'Well, I'll never be back.' Actually turned round and looked out the car and says, 'I'll never be back,' and I haven't been back.

Ability to express affection

Over half (53.7%) the survey respondents thought that they had sustained ‘moderate’ or ‘severe’ harm or mild harm to their ability to express affection, and this was reported more frequently amongst loyalists (58%) than republicans (41.9%).

Women (57.7%) were more likely than men (44.5%) to report no harm or mild harm with regard to expressing affection. Men (22.0%) were twice as likely as women (11.5%) to report a severe degree of harm with regard to expressing affection.

Table 24. Ability to express affection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Republican (% within designation) (n=117)</th>
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<th>Moderate harm</th>
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<td>23.3</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>All (% whole sample) (n=190)</td>
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<td>28.4</td>
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<td>20.5</td>
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Ability to express worry and unhappiness
Over half of those surveyed (55.8%) reported moderate or severe harm with regard to expressing worry and or unhappiness, and this was again more common amongst loyalists (64.4%) than republicans (49.4%). Interestingly, many fewer respondents – around one in five – noted no harm to their ability to express worry or unhappiness compared to the 46.3% who noted no harm regarding the capacity to express affection.

Overall, there were few significant differences between men and women in the degree of harm to their ability to express worry or unhappiness that they reported. However, women (26.9%) were more likely than men (20.7%) to report severe harm to their ability to express worry or unhappiness and men (35.4%) were more likely than women (26.9%) to report moderate harm.

**Table 25. Ability to express worry and unhappiness**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Loyalist</td>
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**Ability to confide about personal problems**

Most (60.3%) respondents reported moderate or severe harm to their ability to confide in others about personal problems: 64.4% of loyalists compared with 57.8% of republicans reported this.

**Table 26. Ability to confide about personal problems**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th>Mild harm</th>
<th>Moderate harm</th>
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<td>Loyalist</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(% within designation)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(% whole sample)</td>
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<td>16.9</td>
<td>30.7</td>
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<td>4.2</td>
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<tr>
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</table>
Men (61.0%) were more likely than women (53.8%) to report moderate or severe harm to their ability to confide with others about personal difficulties.

Living alone

Any individual’s health, relationships and sense of personal and social well-being are influenced by many related and interacting factors. One useful way of exploring this interrelatedness is to examine the factors associated with living alone. Our findings suggest that former politically motivated prisoners who were living alone or who reported a lack of social support tended to have worse mental health than those who did not. This association is consistent with the findings of Ferry et al. (2008: 36) who reported that individuals who have experienced a traumatic event were more likely to be older, male, divorced. One explanation for this may be that being in an emotionally supportive relationship can serve to bolster an older person’s psychological resilience and ability to deal with complex emotional problems and past trauma. So, while those living alone were no more or less likely to positively state that they were ‘as [physically] healthy as anybody’, there did appear to be an association between living alone and emotional well-being for those citing moderate or severe psychological harm: 70% of those living alone cited moderate or severe harm compared to an average among all respondents of 53.1%. Differences were also evident in reported psychological difficulties: 70% of those living alone expressing moderate or severe harm to their ability to express emotion, compared to an average of 48.4% for all other respondents. Similarly, two thirds (67.5%) of those living alone reported moderate or severe harm to their ability to express to others feelings of worry/unhappiness, compared to 46.8% of respondents who lived with a partner. There may also be differences in reported psychological harm. There were also differences between those who were in relationships and those who were not in respect of the extent to which they reported being troubled by the memories of past traumatic experiences. Over three quarters (77.5%) of those who were living alone strongly agreed/agreed that they were ‘still bothered by memories/dreams of terrible scenes witnessed’ compared to 45.8% of those living with a partner. This is consistent with Krause’s (2005) finding that older people in close positive relationships act are better able to deal with past traumas and find meaning in life. Being in a relationship also appeared to be associated with both a more positive evaluation of the past and having a sense of purpose for the future: 37.5% of those living alone did not think they would ‘look back on life with achievement’, compared to 14.% of former politically motivated prisoners who were in relationships. Our findings also suggest that hazardous drinking behaviour and alcohol dependency are associated with poorer physical and mental health, and with being single and living alone.

Further statistical analyses need to be conducted in order to examine and validate these possible associations.

Getting help with psychological problems

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111 Krause (2005) op. cit.
112 The finding that heavy drinkers were more likely to be single was supported by Iversen et al (2007) ‘Factors Associated with Heavy Alcohol Consumption in the U.K. Armed Forces: Data from a Health Survey of Gulf, Bosnia and Era Veterans’, Military Medicine, 172: 956-61.
We wanted to know if former politically motivated prisoners were getting help for any psychological problems they were experiencing. Survey respondents were therefore asked whether or not they agreed with the statement, ‘I have problems for which I need psychological help but I am not getting it.’ Nearly a third of those surveyed (30.8% republicans and 28.8% loyalists) agreed or strongly agreed that they were not getting the help they needed with their psychological difficulties, about 1 in 5 gave a neutral, ‘neither agreed not disagree’ answer to this question. Loyalists gave a neutral response twice as often as republicans did (30.1% as compared to 14.5%). This may suggest a higher level of respondent ambivalence or reluctance to answer among loyalists. There was overall little difference between men and women in the responses to this question.

There was a strong agreement among those surveyed (80.8% of women and 67.1% of men) that there was a general lack of support for older former politically motivated prisoners. Slightly more loyalists (69.9%) than republicans (66.9%) and thought this was the case. One loyalist identified lack of services, stoicism and lack of willingness to admit to having problems as obstacles to getting help with psychological difficulties:

Well this, the Troubles generation, are down and out. Some of them maybe saying this or that, because of what we went through. But there is no mechanism set up to deal with or help ex-prisoners, be it in a financial capacity or be it on an emotional capacity. There is absolutely nothing there for people to turn to. And it’s a hard thing to set these things up, because what way do you go about it? Because we come from a generation of people who believe you take the knocks and you don’t complain about them, so what kind of a system can be set up to help people of that ilk?

A republican woman also noted a tendency for others to assume that just because a person had coped well with imprisonment she/he also should be able to cope with problems on the outside,

... I know for a fact that there's very, very little help for ex-prisoners through health, counselling. I mean it just seems to be a case of, ‘Ah, he was in the republican movement, he was in jail, he should be able to cope with anything after that.’ You see, at the end of a day you’re a human being. There’s loads and loads of problems out there, with zero help.

A host of factors may determine not only willingness to seek help with psychological problems, but also the efficacy of the helping/therapeutic relationship itself. Therefore it is important to try to understand why, if so many former paramilitary prisoners are experiencing problems, so few seek help.

Seeking Help

As we suggested earlier, there are many similarities between former politically motivated prisoners and analogous groups in respect of the psychological effects of their experience of violence and encounters with death. Dandeker et al (2003) argue that amongst war veterans with PTSD both the symptoms themselves (e.g. avoidance, numbing) and the typical course of the condition may act as barriers to help-seeking, and lead to erratic engagement with

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113 This is consistent with the Ferry et al (2008: 36) finding that just 50% of the individuals who had reported PTSD symptoms to a medical doctor or other health professional said they had received help that they considered to be helpful.
psychological services. In their study of trauma, health and the conflict in Northern Ireland, Ferry et al (2008) also found that avoidance and numbing were associated with reluctance to seek help. Dandeker et al. (2003) observations about veterans with PTSD may also hold for former politically motivated prisoners. In addition, organisational cultures may inhibit admitting to problems and asking for help. Help seeking is mediated through both the nature the psychological difficulties experienced and social factors like class, age and prevailing organisational values about masculinity, coping and disclosing vulnerability. Many of the former politically motivated prisoners we spoke to thought that shame about having psychological problems prevented many of their peers from seeking help. For example, one man said, he could sit and laugh and joke with people but,

You can’t really tell another person how you really feel you know... Well, it’s not a manly thing.

And another suggested that a ‘machismo’ attitude and the view that receiving help with psychological problems showed weakness were reasons why many former politically motivated prisoners were reluctant to admit to having problems or to seek counselling:

I mean my head was basically jazzered up for a while [...] I mean that [getting counselling] caused a bit of a thing because there’s this whole macho thing with ex-prisoners. And I mean while … certainly … The only person that ever … outside of my wife, the only person that knows that I ever went to a counsellor was my best friend, and my best friend’s an ex-prisoner as well … and he said to me, ‘Great’, he said, ‘If you think that’s helping … you need that help then great, go for it … but don’t tell anybody because you know what’s going to happen’ … because it’s a macho world that we live in and I would be seen to be weak to do it.

The same interviewee saw a need to de-stigmatise admitting to psychological problems:

My argument, I mean what I’m telling [...] I’m trying to introduce this gradually into people’s minds and people’s thinking, and I’ve been talking about this a lot over the last couple of years … because I reckon it’s … I’ve lost friends here through suicide, ex-combatants who … who … if you give me a list of a hundred people who had committed suicide … a friend of mine committed suicide who would be number one hundred if he … if he … if I drew up a list of a hundred people he would be … he would have been one hundred, and that sort of brought it home to me. I mean this guy was the life and soul of the party. and if he can do it then what’s the rest of them … what’s the other ninety-nine there, because I would have put him one hundred, what’s the other ninety-nine like? So I’ve been trying to create this in people’s minds, and what I’m saying to people is we … there’s a good example there, well [name] did that, I mean he’s an example, he was the last one you expected. If … if you broke your leg you would go and get it seen to; why if [it’s] your head … that’s broke, why don’t they go and get it seen to? What is that with us? We need … we need to start changing that whole thought … So I’ve started trying to … trying to …
As Langston et al (2007) argue, organisational culture – in this case military culture – provides the ‘unwritten rules that inform and shape expected behaviours’. One of these unwritten rules is that having psychological problems is a sign of weakness and it is stigmatised as a result. Exclusivity or ‘closedness’ to outsiders and heavy reliance on ‘buddy’ support is another aspect of military and paramilitary organisation that acts as an obstacle to help seeking. Current western military strategy for delivering psychological services to service personnel (both serving and veterans) recognises not only the importance of destigmatising mental health problems, but also the utility of ‘anchoring’ psychological support in the military unit. Trust and understanding between members of the unit are harnessed through programmes such as ‘Trauma Risk Management’ [TRiM] used by the Royal Marines. We would suggest that the de-stigmatisation of psychological distress is equally important in the case of former paramilitaries. One loyalist suggested that former politically motivated prisoner groups were well placed to encourage individuals who were struggling with psychological problems to seek help:

The opportunities [to get help] can be there I believe, but they can be there through the help of ex-prisoners saying ‘Listen, I’ve talked to people here … and they feel so much better today.’ You need that gentle push and say, ‘Listen, this is okay’. ‘This is okay, don’t feel bad about it, this is okay’.

However, seeking and receiving help does not necessarily mean that problems are solved. One former politically motivated prisoner who had sought help for drug addiction and problems relating to the physical abuse he had experienced as a child, found that counselling did not work for him because it was too easy to ‘hide away’ his feelings from the counsellor. He lacked confidence in the counsellor’s capacity to understand how he felt about what he had done because the counsellor did not have experience that was in any way similar to his own. Starkly put, he felt the issue of understanding came down to one question:

Have you ever killed someone?

Yet despite the seriousness and complexity of the issues he struggled with and despite wanting help, he continued to deal with his problems by reverting to the prison coping strategy of retreating into himself:

I just go to my own room.

His situation exemplified the need for more specialised, accessible and flexible mental health provision for former politically motivated prisoners.

Who can understand – who would be a valid interlocutor

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Although there was some divergence of views on the question of who could or should provide effective help to former politically motivated prisoners suffering psychological difficulties, many thought that peer counselling would be the most appropriate model on the grounds that their shared experience and class background would provide a sound basis of trust and understanding in a counselling relationship. For example, one loyalist thought that former politically motivated prisoners who were having psychological difficulties would find it easier to accept help from someone more like them, that is, from another man who had the same kind of experience:

Well, I’d say half of these sort of trauma groups and stuff like that, they’re you know, I, I don’t believe it actually works. They don’t actually work in the community I come from or the class of people that I come from - the men, the men who think they’re men. […] They need something that they can relate to better, be it somebody who’s been through the same kind of … systems that they’ve come through, seen the kind of troubles they’ve been through.

Another interviewee said that although he has not done so yet, he thought he might be able to talk about his psychological difficulties with a friend who was also a former politically motivated prisoner, but

I wouldn’t say it to a partner, the girlfriend, the wife or Joe Public. I wouldn’t. [Not] even the doctor. ..

Another interviewee thought that such help should also be available to ex-combatants who did not go to prison because they struggle with similar problems:

We can work and make it better and I think it’s important that it’s not the do goodies that claim that they can make it better. I don’t think they can because they don’t understand. It has to be from us, from the Republican and Loyalist combatants, ex-prisoners and those [ex-combatants] who never went to prison. And I remember ruffling feathers years ago. At those times you used to have dos and there were the big statements spoken out, and I would have said, ‘I’m not reading that statement out’ because basically it was all about the prisoners and things, and I’m a prisoner but we’ve had loads of people who have the same problems, and bigger problems than me, who never spent a day in goal and nobody’s doing nothing for them. Nobody, only us within ourselves.

... I know what they’re going through; and many of their families. … Because they didn’t go to prison people don’t know what they were.... what they were involved in. But they have still the burden. And they have the burden even worse than what we had because... because at least we can to an extent talk about so much, because I can talk openly about the day I was caught, why I was caught, what I was caught at and that gets a release, but I won’t talk about anything else. I just won’t because it could put other people at risk and other things at risk so we don’t do that. So at least I can get an opening; but these people who never went to prison don’t have any one to help them. They have to build it up and build it up and build it up and they’re going to be a problem. To me they’re like a volcano just waiting to go whoosh until somebody sits down and listens.

Disclosure and the counselling relationship

There’s things don’t be spoken about.

You knew that they didn’t want you going down certain roads ... I don’t know whether it was legal issues or whatever.
When counselling is provided outside their peer-group, there are issues, for former politically motivated prisoners, of whether the counselling relationship is privileged and what can be disclosed to a counsellor. What one has done, or witnessed others doing, in violent action may lie behind the psychological difficulties for which the former politically motivated prisoner seeks aid. One man who was struggling to get help with his alcoholism identified the issue of disclosure as an insurmountable obstacle to getting the counselling he needed. He believed that his feelings of guilt over past actions were the underlying cause of his drink problem. But, because the events that troubled him were not those for which he was convicted, his counsellor made it clear that he was not willing to discuss them as a part of the counselling process:

No, many, many times I’ve wanted to talk [about things I did in the past], but … well obviously for legal reasons there was no way…you know? Just several weeks ago my doctor referred me to an organisation called [name] which deals with drug and alcohol abuse. And the moment you walk into his office, nice guy, but he spells out the rules to you, ‘Och, no. Och, no. You cannot say anything to me.’ which kind of undermines the whole bloody point of the thing you know. [...] Oh legally speaking he’s obliged to divulge that [ ]. So yeah, you cannot say anything to him or … whether he would [disclose this] or not in practice I don’t know, but legally speaking, he would be supposed to tell the police... I was referring... I’m talking about the things I wasn’t caught for.

I think there should be a more open, you know, people will allow you... those facilities are available. But what they have done, ex-political... err, politically motivated ex-prisoners just cannot go in and open their... open their heads to every Tom, Dick and Harry because there’s a lots of things locked away there that have to remain locked away.

I probably wasn’t honest with them [NHS counsellors] so it would have been hard for them to help me – you know what I mean? Because I can’t really trust. [...] I have tried and I suppose the system was probably alright, but I couldn’t open up and tell people. Maybe [I could tell] someone who I know.

We discuss this issue further below.

**Pros and cons of the peer counselling model**

Although there would be clear advantages to providing counselling through a peer support model - not least because it its acceptability to former politically motivated prisoners - it is also important to recognise that there are real limits to what can be achieved through self help where there is not a good fit between the seriousness and complexity of the mental health problem, and the case worker’s skills and training. We will return to this issue in our concluding remarks.

Some problems may also be too intractable for either short-term psychological treatment or peer support to be effective. One former politically motivated prisoner who was working as a counsellor said that in his experience there were some people who cannot be helped through a peer support model:

It’s very complicated because you could draw a line - I mean I could go out of this room and bring your ... you would get a 110% different answers than what you’re getting from me, from the same sort of person as me. We found that on the outside, there’s some people who
get on with it, won’t have that bother and maybe shouldn’t bother. But there’s other people just cannot get out of it, who are traumatised, traumatised to the extent they’re f...ing pissed at everybody. You know, you see them coming and you think, ‘Oh Christ, not them again.’ You have to go over. I mean I meet people who are saying the same thing to me when I meet them tomorrow who said the same thing to me in 1980... 1996, 1997. The same line [on a] day and daily basis. Now I’ve got their stance, how much more time can I spend with those? I might never get them rectified, but I need to keep working with the people who I am getting right.

Another was of the view that someone from ‘outside the box’ might provide more useful advice to the former politically motivated prisoners who needed it:

An ex-prisoner can’t tell another ex-prisoner how to cope, I don’t think anyway. I’m an ex-prisoner but it doesn’t give me the right to say if somebody came in here who’s an ex-lifer, ‘Tell you what you need to do here’, because maybe I don’t know that I’ve got problems, I probably don’t know. I could have psychological problems but I don’t know what they are, so I … don’t think I would have the know-how or the right to tell another ex-prisoner how to go about his life. I think it takes somebody from outside the box looking in at the two of us and turning around saying, ‘Hold on, this is what you need to do,’ or ‘This is the way you need to be, why don’t you go here and speak to this person?’ I think that’s what it needs.

He thought there was over-reliance on former politically motivated prisoners providing support for each other, and there needed to be recognition that the psychological legacy of the conflict extended to families and was intergenerational: 119

The government are dependent too much on ex-prisoners to look after … ex-combatants looking after ex-combatants. It will never work, and they’re not going to die away. Okay, we’re all going to go at some stage in our lives, but at the end of the day, that legacy is going to filter into families, into the younger generations, and that’s never going to be eradicated. So, it takes people with the mindset and their genuine concerns about bringing ex-prisoners in, into play and making them part of society. How to do it I don’t know, but there is methods there I’m sure.

As the interviews illustrate, there are attitudinal obstacles to seeking help on the part of former politically motivated prisoners. Pride and ‘machismo’ as well as group attitudes may stigmatise admitting to psychological problems and deter people from asking for help. There are also the issues of trust, understanding and disclosure in the therapeutic relationship. All of these considerations point to the importance of peer counselling as an integral part of any strategy for providing psychological support and/or treatment to former politically motivated prisoners who need it. But peer counselling alone may be insufficient. It follows that a number of policy decisions ought to be made in relation to how former politically motivated prisoners might be encouraged to overcome their reluctance to seek help; what would constitute the most appropriate setting for providing such help; who might constitute a valid interlocutor for them (i.e. who has the necessary shared experience, understanding, trust and expertise); how the dilemmas of disclosure might be handled. We will return to these issues in our conclusions.

119 This has in fact been recognised in the recent DHSSPS (2010) Strategy for the Development of Psychological Therapy Services Belfast: DHSSPS. The report is further discussed in our ‘Conclusions’ below.
6. **Evaluation of the past and looking to the future**

I would have been an ordinary Joe.

I am a good guy, but I was a bad guy, even though I was a good guy.

I made a fool of my life obviously. I’ve made a fool of my life, but if I try to analyse it too much it becomes too serious for me... I can’t handle it you know... so I just block it out.

Questions in both the survey and interviews were designed to gain an understanding of how the conflict and imprisonment had affected individual lives, and also how older former politically motivated prisoners evaluated their past.

**Life course trajectories and turning points**

Many of those who joined paramilitary organisations were recruited when they were still teenagers. Some reported that particular events were turning points in their decisions to become involved:

It happened so quick, yeah it really did, but this influence [people in open- backed lorries with batons and bars] came from outside and into our small housing estate of 300 houses, and it changed overnight. The next day people were walking about with camouflage jackets on and sticks and we were just sort of drawn into that. It just happened and then...

We were fighting a war. [...] We were doing our duty and our job. ... I was leaving school when I was 16. And then you maybe had two options. One was to join the UDR. And the other one was to join Loyalists. And at that time my uncle had just been shot dead by the IRA, and I thought to myself if I join the UDR I’m not really going to get any satisfaction. So I picked the other way. [...] to me they [RUC] were, well, people called them ‘authority’, and I call, I called them, I called them mercenaries because...their comrades were getting killed left, right and centre...and they were in a job doing nothing about it...and getting paid for it. While people like me...had to jump in motors and go out and avenge their deaths, and then when you were doing that you were getting arrested for it. So, mercenaries...

.. We walked down from Queen’s one day and we got stoned in the city centre from windows - didn’t fancy that at all. So I was party to stuff going on and, but I didn’t associate it with revolution or anything. It just sort of... I don’t know, I find it hard to... but I was aware that things were wrong and things had to change, but probably it wasn’t from a republican or a militarist perspective. It was more just wanting reform; and then, I think Bloody Sunday it was, threw the switch.

Another interviewee said,

Yes I have regrets in the general sense that we could have resolved all this here without resorting to all the 30 years of mayhem... Do I have regrets in that sense? Yes! But then when you break that down - at that moment in time I had a decision to make and you make choices don’t you? Nobody forced me to do what I did but I made that decision and I killed him. It’s that simple.
Weighing up the costs

There was much individual variation in how the costs of involvement in the conflict were personally evaluated. We were aware that it was a difficult question to ask. One interviewee said simply:

The question of costs leads to questions of rightness, loss and regret, so I don’t go there.

Another interviewee explained how he weighed up the personal costs of his involvement in the conflict:

So was it worth it? Yeah it was worth it. I am just sort... sort of sorry that it was me went to prison, but then again there’s another side - well at least I wasn’t shot dead or blown up. ... No, no. I’ve always held that definitely the armed struggle had to happen and I felt like the armed struggle had to happen. It would be quite remiss of me not to be party to it then. [...] it was why we are where we are today because nothing would have been given. And they may sound like trite phrases, but I really do believe that. Nothing was going to be given. Yeah, it was worth it. Although I didn’t want to pay the price, I would have been prepared to pay the price and I did. But there’s others that paid bigger prices.

In contrast, another former politically motivated prisoner said,

Looking back on my life? It was a waste of my time and talent.

Another said that although he has lost part of his youth through his involvement in the conflict, he thought his parents had suffered more:

I would say some of my youth has been lost, part of my youth was lost with my time being prison, but ... through the conflict as well, because we were also in a way … because even though we were outside we were still sort of imprisoned in our areas, we couldn’t go outside of certain streets, we couldn’t go in certain roads, we were still in prison. I think we lost a big part of our lives then, you know, and not only me, my parents as well suffered. When I was getting lifted by the army and the police and taken away and being beaten by other people and stuff like that, I believe my parents were affected psychologically, not so much me.

But others were adamant that they had no regrets:

.. If you want me to give you a yes or no answer, it would be, no, I don’t have regrets in terms of the path that I chose these past thirty eight years... Faced with the situation that I encountered as a young sixteen, seventeen year old, I have absolutely no doubt and instinctively, if that situation was presented to me today, I would react and deal with it that exact same way.

For another former politically motivated prisoner, group solidarity served as a buffer against regret:

Yes. There was a lot of suffering and there was a lot of whatever, but we came through it together, just. The thing that makes you go on is because you know that you’re not on your own, there’s a lot of people that has suffered the same way, and I think that yeah, I would never regret a thing in my life. [...] No real regrets to be honest. No real regrets.
One woman reflected on whether having conflict-related conviction had prevented her from reaching her potential:

No, I feel I never reached my potential. Part of me believed well if I was going to be police checked there was nowhere for me to go with that sort of educational background. I could say that I could never have afforded to be educated financially so I tend to get very frustrated. [...] I think some brothers and sisters might be slightly resentful of it you know, ‘Oh she could have done so well’ and I would be like ‘No, I couldn’t have done so well I couldn’t have done any better than what I have done.’ I am very proud of myself and don’t want to be these other two people because I would think, ‘Okay they have big houses and they are set and secure and maybe they will have their pension, but how did they live with their conscience in the seventies when the British government sent their puppets in to ensure that the six counties would not be freed?’ [...] I would be more inclined to think where is their conscience? Where are them people’s conscience?

Another was positive about the outcome of the conflict and optimistic about the future:

Yes. [We have gained from the peace] ... I would say that we have done very well and if I was to die in the morning, we’re all at the age group now where people are dying young, right, and if I was to die in the morning, I would have no qualms about my children because I know that there is ... my grandchildren are grown up as well, and we know that there’s going to be good vibes there. There’s going to be a wee bit more equality for them, different things that we were denied …

For many the issue of costs was inseparable from the question of what they thought had been lost or gained politically through the conflict. One loyalist said he would not attempt to weigh up the costs because

... Everything before, I’d lost. Let me put it this way. I’m not biased against Catholics, but everything what we fought for over the past 30 odd years, while we were sitting drinking, the Catholics were sitting thinking, and they came out better than us after the ceasefire, that’s my belief. [...] You see the time I done in goal was 10 years wasted of my life for nothing. [...] We’ve been let down by our own people or by the British government or whatever. I don’t know.

Another said,

I’m not sure if anything is ever worth it if other people get hurt ... for me personally it was worth it. Has it changed anything? No. Will it change anything? No. Because we’ll have a united Ireland and hopefully I’ll be dead before that.

What the conflict taught me about life

Interviewees were asked to reflect on what the conflict had taught them about life. Themes of disillusion were prominent but not universal.

... That people are capable of anything basically.

... That people can suffer and come out the other end.

I suppose … it’s politicised me a lot in the sense of maybe getting involved in the thing would have been … more of a gut reaction rather than … politically having sat down and analysed
… what went wrong in our country, about it being partitioned and all. You know, I think it was just a reaction to what was going on your streets like and happening … the daily, constant abuse and … But then when you get in [goal] and have the time to look at it, the whole politics of it you know and then you fully understood, going back in history, why it … it happened and … I think it gave you a better outlook of the world like … of things happening elsewhere.

That’s a hard one. It has taught me that life can be so … I’m trying to find the words … cheap. Life can be so cheap, and short you know. And when these countries can get themselves into a mode where the death of a person doesn’t matter, and it has taught me that life in this country had become so cheap, you know. To me, that’s a dreadful indictment on society, that things like that can get to that stage, that people don’t care anymore, that people can go out and plant bombs and kill all around them and kill and maim men, women and children. How did our country ever get to that stage?

It’s taught me the value of life and maybe in relation to looking back on the amount of people who did suffer, it taught me the value … of life in general, my own life and the things that are important in life. It’s also taught me where those of us who got through it are bloody lucky to have got through it too. Really, really lucky. Intact and alive.

… When you look back at the conflict I think… had people like me been given the opportunity to lead the way rather than politicians it could have been resolved a lot quicker, so it could have. I don’t… one thing that I do [know]… we could have had this resolved… there was opportunities in the seventies, there was opportunities in the eighties to get this resolved. It was the wrong people at the helm and again it [an agreement] was off and probably didn’t want it resolved because it would have done away with their power.

Not to trust people. We were used by Unionist politicians.

About life? Life is very cheap. You know life can be taken, given … it shaped my life into corners that I don’t want to be in.

What the conflict taught me about myself

Politically motivated former prisoners were asked about what the conflict had taught them about themselves. A prominent theme in their reflective answers was the discovery of previously unrecognised personal strengths.

It’s taught me that I was a person who did, at that time, believe that life was so cheap but realising now and through the likes of the birth of my grandchildren, you know, it’s turned it right round for me. And it’s made me realise that … it’s changed me totally from the person I was. It’s changed me totally. That is the benefit that I have got from it [peace], and so many people have not been able [to have that benefit].

… I’m just a pretty normal guy I think, although maybe people would think not. I have the same feelings as everyone else, same hopes as everyone else, same fears as everyone else. I might deal with it differently, but it’s still there.

[I am an] emotional wreck. (laughs) No, I think it taught me that I would have been stronger than what I’d have thought, for a lot of years… I underestimated myself in lots of ways, but when you’ve looked back on the things that’s happened, I would say that I’m a very strong person. […] and dealing with it [bereavement and trauma] I found that for years I kept it all bottled up inside me, and even with your family and all different things. And there was a lot of paranoia and there was a lot of this, and a lot of that.
I never really reflected on what I was doing at the time. I was doing it. I didn’t even bother to watch the news. […] I murdered people and was indifferent to their deaths. In fact I gloated about it. […] I am a different person to the person who did those things.

I didn’t think about it [violence] while I was caught up in it. Only afterwards in prison.

Maybe there’s things that I don’t really like about myself. Or how a human being can be inhuman to other people.

It’s taught me that some things I’ve done I didn’t think it was possible I could do...and no to put your trust in too many people. I feel betrayed, I’ve been betrayed, and I don’t know why on occasions by informers to security forces...personal mates ended up being informers, and I just can’t see how they can sit with their people while they’re, they’re doing that on them.

Time and dealing with the past

The survey also included a set of questions designed to explore former politically motivated prisoners’ views on themselves in relation to others as time had passed. Locating themselves in terms of the passage of time and their life course was an important aspect of their self-perceptions and their perceptions of changes in their relations to others. In addition, comparing themselves to their age peers and to their fellow former politically motivated prisoners served as useful measure and foil in their evaluation of how they were doing now and how the future might unfold for them.

Some said they made conscious decisions not to look back or dwell on past:

... I made a conscious decision when that time I left prison I wouldn't be back to it and people can read it into that what they like, but that was just me. So my partner’s asked me to go out on visits many times and men at the Sinn Fein commune have visited the prison a couple of times, but I just didn't go. I don't know why. I just don't have no reason to go back.

... When I came out I just wanted to shut the door behind me, and it's not as though I want to forget about it or whatever, but psychologically I just want to, just get on with the rest of my life. And that's not ... I don't mean that in the negative sense. I just mean ... sort of moving on. I just left prison behind me. It's done.

There were differences between republicans and loyalists on the issue of whether the burdens of past lessen as time goes on. Republicans were more likely (35.1% compared to 28.8%) than loyalists to strongly agree or agree with the statement, ‘As I get older dealing with the past gets easier.’ Over a third of respondents (37.4%) indicated that dealing with the past was not getting easier as they get older, and loyalists were more likely (41.1%) to say this than republicans (35.0%).

Family tragedies could add to the burden of guilt: one interviewee, for example, talked of feeling that the death of his child was punishment for his actions during the conflict:

I blamed God, you know...and then I blamed myself ...and the things I’d done in the past. Was he repaying me? ... Poetic, poetic justice or whatever.
Others described positive alterations in their perceptions of others. One former republican prisoner, for example, noted important changes both in himself and in his understanding of others as a consequence of his engagement with other ex-combatants in conflict transformation work:

… At work I’ve actually met ex-cops and ex-Brits and people’s whose family members were killed by … by my group, the IRA, so that’s kind of … opened me up to reflect on my life as an IRA man. And you’re … sitting talking to a person who’s Dad was a cop and then you find out that he liked fishing or … you know, he was a good Daddy and … such and such, such and such, and then you realise that he was more than just a guy in an armoured car, that he … there was a person, and he used to take us to Donegal and … And then you realise well this is … this was a person, as much as I think he was a … a member of the occupational forces or a repressive police regime. At the end of the day he was a Da and … […] it makes me feel good to talk to them because … they’re looking at me as … not as a terrorist, but they see me as human being there They say well I’m understanding what you went through, why you joined the IRA, so that makes me feel good, so there … and then it makes me look at the conflict too. Was the conflict worth it? Was it justified? […] That doesn’t make me any less a Republican. … It has changed me like … my personality’s changed that way, I’m not err … I’m not as hate … hateful of the people that I fought against as … as I was maybe twenty years ago.

Another older republican former prisoner said that his child’s illness had given him a new perspective on the value of life:

.. Because it actually … whenever I look back years ago at the seventies and eighties and nineties, life was so cheap you know. We were fighting a struggle, there was all types of … shenanigans going on … there was injustices and … all this carry on, and then I’d have … I’d have turned around and said it … it’s just right here to be here, you know to be fighting at that … that struggle. But see it gives you a different perspective, I … I’m still a strong Republican, I’d still be a strong here advocate of whatever thing … what we believe. I just believe here in different tactics I would believe here with the present day new policy. I would advocate it. I would say here for the f...ing kids here, for the young lads in the street they’re … at the minute everything’s not hunky-dory, but I’ll tell you what, there’s no alternatives and f...ing going back to armed struggle here. It’s … it’s just going to bring misery on people’s doors and all that carry on, and we don’t want the goals here f...ing filled here to go through the same thing as we’ve been f...ing through here … in the seventies, eighties and nineties. But seeing … seeing that, that was the first time I had witnessed seeing how life was so precious and it was because of them circumstances and even them … the last four … four weeks of [child’s name] life like, seeing your f...ing kids there, I mean this [name], and they rigged up the life support machines, getting to know their families, getting to know … families we got to know they were different denominations … there was Protestants and Catholics and nonbelievers … there was people there here with different colours of skin, but … see the whole common denominator here, when we spent that four weeks in that intensive care is, we’d all sons and daughters lying in there trying to fight for life and everybody here was f...ing willing everybody else’s kid on, and like we seen. It brought it home to me how f...ing life … it’s not that cheap [Mm] or it shouldn’t be that cheap, where years ago it actually seemed to be because of the whole upheavals and … You heard about people dying and here, you know, and it was so matter of factly, everybody was fatalistic, you know it’s … well, I’m sure life’s life, you know what I mean, you’re dead, you’re dead, you know, and that … That’s the way you used to look on … and I used to look on life. But see now, it’s probably because you’re older and you’re mature … mature … and plus our personal circumstances […] it wouldn’t have cared one iota to me and [partner], even with my Republican beliefs and everything right? My whole background with … inside and outside and … and whatever, right?… See, if that had have been a soldier’s
child, a cop’s child, an IRA man’s child or a UVF man’s child that was … lying there in that … in that intensive care, we were all in the same boat. See emotionally, we were all hurting … it was breaking everybody’s hearts. And see, when the person here passed on, we were all here grieving the same way, you know. And … it actually … it … it broke down barriers if you know what I mean … we’re all the same.

Easier to talk now about what I went through

Similar proportions of loyalists (43.8%) and republicans (46.7%) agreed or strongly agreed that they now found it ‘easier to talk about what they went though during the conflict and imprisonment than they did 10 years ago’, and loyalists also were twice as likely to give neutral ‘neither agree not disagree’ responses to this item (31.5% compared to 14.4%). Likewise, similar proportions of men (46.3%) and women (42.3%) agreed or strongly agreed that they now found it easier to talk about what they went though during the conflict and imprisonment than they did 10 years ago; however, women were more likely than men (38.5% and 15.4%) to feel that talking about their conflict experience was not getting easier.

Feeling more settled

The survey also asked respondents whether they had become more settled over the last decade. Similar proportions of loyalists (46.6%) and republicans (43.6%) agreed or strongly agreed that they felt ‘more settled in myself than 10 years ago’, and about 1 in 5 respondents (26% of loyalists and 17.9% of republicans) gave a neutral, ‘neither agree nor disagree’ response. Women were more likely than men (53.8% compared to 43.2%) to report feeling more settled now than 10 years ago, but men were three times more likely than women (23.2% compared to 7.7%) to give a neutral answer.

One woman said that now that ‘the drop bars are off’ she felt less fearful:

... There’s not as much fear about, I’m not as frightened as, well frightened meaning the loyalists kicking your door in and shooting you in your bed, that’s the real, that was a real threat, you know. Seriously, they were serious worries. But not now, I go to bed at night and ... sleep. Yeah and, if I hear a noise, I know it’s not somebody coming to get me. The drop bars are off.

One former politically motivated prisoner said that on his release, he was ‘all over the shop’ but that having a family and his work had given him a focus:

I think there was a period when I was just released, them initial couple of years from say ..[date] .. to probably .. [date] .. I was all over the shop. Just to give you an example, in them three years I probably was in ten different houses - and I was in the markets, I was in the Antrim Road, I was in Short Strand, I was in the Falls Road. I was in the Grosvenor Road. I was back to the New Lodge. Up the Orient Gardens. I think I just couldn't settle for whatever reason. Yeah, but now, three kids later, stuff like that, working for the party ... I've got a focus.

Several pointed out that coming to terms with the political situation post cessation had been difficult. For example, one republican interviewee described the stresses of seeking a sense of normality:
... It has been very strange because it [normality] could become stressful because other people would suggest that prisoners wasted their time, and people that are dead from the movement wasted their time because there is a cessation. You know that may have bought up some questions, but then my own family home and we would have had very open discussions about that so from time to time it may have caused a wee bit of stress or maybe a bit of insult. Then again we have moved into a more settled phase of normalisation. How do you go from absolute conflict from your ten years old of ranting and shooting and all this stuff going on and being involved in it, and normality? So basically you have to fight, and every individual has to fight, for their own sense of normality. I think we have been successful with that you know.

Some people have expectations of the ex-prisoner and other people feel the ex-prisoner has something they didn’t have and that … I don’t know. I feel we are treated unjustly. Since the cessation the difference there is maybe the lack of anything to do and the lack of ... I don’t know. It is a whole different layout; it is a whole different type of struggle.

A loyalist interviewee said that although he did feel more settled now, immediately after the ceasefires it had been hard to negotiate the ambiguity of the new political situation:

No, it’s hard to explain. I think… when we were involved in paramilitary stuff, as I said our world was black and white so it was pretty … it was pretty clear … what our world was … Since the ceasefires our world became this whole big grey area and that has been hard at times to … even see where you fitted at times, as I said earlier sometimes I felt like neither fish nor fowl but … it was finding your niche in there … and, as I say, when we were losing friends and that it … you were always questioning yourself, Are we doing the right thing here? Is this the right way to go? Are we doing the right thing? ... or, Why does he think different from me? I mean … we went through the same stuff together, and I … am I right in my thinking? But my confidence has grew that this is the right path that we’re on so yeah, the … I think I’m back to where I was when I was younger … things are sort of black and white for me now.

Another former politically motivated prisoner thought that the ten years since the cessation had offered a space for sober reflection on the conflict and the situation of other former politically motivated prisoners:

I think they have changed a lot in the last ten years because of the cessation and afterwards; there seemed to become time and room for reflection, for thinking, for remembering the dead, for thinking of the ex-prisoners who took illnesses and died since then. I have maybe become a wee bit more melancholy, a wee bit more serious, a wee bit more respectful of the ex-prisoners and their situation. I have probably in the last ten years become more proud and more respectful of the ex-prisoners’ situation.

Others had not experienced such change. On the question of feeling more settled one simply said,

No, I still have the same bitterness in me.

**Comparing self to others**

The survey asked former politically motivated prisoners about their relationships with other people in the same age group in their communities. Although a sizable minority (29.3%) of those surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that *There is not a distance between me and those...*
in my age group who did not go to prison, about half (50.3%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement and thought that there was a distance between them and their community age peers. Loyalists (56.2%) were more likely than republicans (46.6%) to report a distance between themselves and others of their age in the community, and men (51.2%) were more likely than women (46.2%) to do so.

One loyalist was unambiguous in his disdain for others in his age group who had not been actively involved in paramilitary activity, but now wanted to claim they had supported the cause:

We have a saying, we have a saying the organisation – ‘They’ll wait till the war is over and then they’ll come out of the woodwork.’ and they’re cowards and they’re yellow.. I don’t respect them, no ... We do, oh we respect them alright, but a terrible slagging if they are in the bar, and ‘What did you ever do?’ ‘Oh, I’m in this and I’m in that’, and ‘Aye, when did you join up? After the ceasefire? You haven’t got the...’ and then you start giving them’uns a slagging and they walk out.

… a lot of those people wouldn’t want to be associated with ... with us because of what we were involved in then. We kept ourselves to ourselves ... so we moved in the circles of the whole paramilitary ... it was just a big circle ... we kind of found that our ... all our wives socialised together, we socialised together, our families socialised together, we had that ... we had that sort of clique ... and outsiders very rarely came into that, unless they were maybe family members, etc.

Views on other former politically motivated prisoners

Other former paramilitary prisoners often serve as both a benchmark and mirror to the self. We asked respondents a series of questions on how they thought other former politically motivated prisoners were doing in terms of their emotional well-being and whether they were good at hiding their problems.

Having more emotional problems than others

Almost two thirds (61.7%) of former politically motivated prisoners agreed or strongly agreed that ‘My fellow former prisoners have more physical/emotional problems than others of their age’. However, the women respondents tended to disagree with this perception: Fewer than half the women (46.2% compared with 65.3% of men) agreed or strongly agreed that fellow former prisoners have more physical/emotional problems than others their age, and 26.9% of women (compared with 12.2% of men) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement.

Masking problems

Respondents were asked whether or not they agreed that ‘My fellow former prisoners are good at hiding the problems that they face.’ Over half the respondents (59.3%) believed this to be the case compared to 21.6% who disagreed or strongly disagreed. There were no clear

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120 - The statement is in double negative form. It reads: ‘There is not a distance between me and those in my age group who did not go to prison’.
differences by designation or by sex on this item. One interviewee described his own tendency to mask distress:

... At the gaol a wee bit I’d have been a laughy, jokey type of person. As soon as the door would get closed then I'd have my moments and I didn’t want anybody to invade them. And you cried, you done everything human but you're unable to say that. [You’d say] I’m alright. But you're not alright you know. So I think you have to develop a shield sometimes ... even if you're not happy you make it happy if you understand, so you build a wee circle around yourself. So if you're talking to people and you don’t talk about certain things and I mean you might make a laugh and joke of a particular situation.

The impact of the peace process

Only a quarter (25.9%) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that ‘The peace process has made it easier for former politically motivated prisoners to cope financially, emotionally and socially.’ Nearly half (47.1%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. Again loyalists (54.1%) were more likely than republicans (42.3%) to say that the peace process had not made it easier to cope with financial, emotional or social problems. There were no differences in the views of men and women in this regard. Those who were living alone were less likely to agree with the statement.

Self and family

Survey respondents were asked whether their role in the conflict and their imprisonment had resulted in detrimental impact of on their relationships to their families. They were asked to rate whether they thought there had been ‘no harm’, ‘mild harm’, ‘moderate harm’ or ‘severe harm’. Three quarters of loyalists (75.3%) reported some degree of harm to relationships with their families compared to 56.4% of republicans. A higher proportion of loyalists (31.5%) reported severe harm/estrangement from family members than did republicans (20.5%). More republicans (35.0%) than loyalists (24.7%) reported no harm to family relationships. Women were more likely to report ‘no harm’ to their relationships with their families than were men (38.5% compared to 30.4%), and this difference may reflect the fact that all the women survey respondents were republicans.

The subject of relationships with their families was also explored in the interviews. One interviewee said that his relationship with his family had ‘just muddled on’. Another talked about his estrangement from his children:

I felt I was always trying to make up time for them you know. I never had them every, every day because I was then separated from my previous partners and what I found that when I tried to have them for the weekend or bring them up to the house, I felt that they resented me, you know. And so (sighs) I couldn’t understand. I said to myself, what, what have I ever done to them? you know. And then I realised you just weren’t with them. You weren’t there for them at the time when they needed you.

Suffering caused to family
Many former politically motivated prisoners identified missing out on family life and harm to their families as the most significant price paid for their involvement in the conflict:

Not seeing my family getting reared ... I hated the paramilitaries over that, but when I got out I started mellowing a wee bit, saying like it was my own fault, I shouldn’t have got involved. If I hadn’t got myself involved I’d have still been in the Army, I’d have had a lovely family, but I was only myself to blame …

The conflict destroyed my family.

I feel a lot of guilt about what the family went through.

I think it had a major effect on my mother. She sort of aged very quick. From when I knew her when I went into prison my mother was very, very bright and outgoing and she loved socialising, but when I returned out of jail she was just a changed woman. She was not the same person that I knew before I went in and even her appearance … well her appearance obviously would have changed, but it changed drastically and she didn’t go out, she didn’t want to go out. She used to socialise on a regular basis …

On the other hand, when the family supported paramilitary activity, or when fathers and sons or brothers were involved in it themselves, the negative effects on the family may have been less overt:

Everyone in our family was involved in some form of defence.

However, such past shared involvement could be double-edged when a former politically motivated prisoner was currently engaged in interface or cross community work to which members the family or the community were opposed:

There’s a certain element within my community, would see me, us [interface workers], sympathising with Catholics, but it’s a small minority now. There’s also the people who have got the wit and the sense to see I am doing the right thing, so my community is divided on what I’m doing … the minority is thinking I’m away sympathising with the enemy sort of thing, but it’s a very small minority. Unfortunately, they can cause a bit of trouble within our community, but to me, it’s just harder for me to climb.

A related problem for former paramilitary prisoners who now eschew violence as a solution to political tensions, arises when their sons or younger men in their community feel they have missed out on something heroic or exciting:

... They don’t see the aspects of what the conflict was about. They looked upon it, especially one of my sons would have, for some unknown reason would have loved to have been in that generation of the conflict. They think they missed a part, a great time of this conflict and they seem to have missed out on it. One of my other sons would say, ‘That was wrong’ and he would never want to be part of that, you know, but it just shows you, even with the young people in East Belfast now, there is some young people who think they’ve missed stuff there and would have loved to have been part of the conflict, but I think it’s peer intervention there that does it. They listen to … they’re in certain circles and people talk about, ‘I done time here in 1972 or 1977, we done this, we done that, it was brilliant, we had a great time.’ I think that happens, but there is also the other aspect of it as well, there are people like myself that would turn around and say, ‘Hold on a minute, I went through a bad time, I was in jail. I missed my life and I went to jail for nothing.’ There are certain young people that take that on board, but there are also certain young people that don’t want to hear
that, they want to hear the other part of it, about the great times people had, about how they all went to jail and how they had this great time in jail. … I never had a good time in jail, but unfortunately that happens and … that very small minority has that influence on a very small minority of young people, you know. Unfortunately, it’s just one of those things.

When asked about the degree of suffering caused to family members as a result of their part in the conflict and their imprisonment, a substantial majority (85.8%) of former politically motivated prisoners reported some degree of suffering (mild, moderate or severe) in their families, and most (40%) estimated that the degree of suffering experienced by their families was severe. More loyalists (49.3%) rated the suffering in their families as ‘moderate’ or ‘severe’ than republicans (34.2%), and 80.8% of women compared with 69.5% of men made this rating. Republicans (18.8%) were more likely than loyalists (8.25%) to rate harm to their families as ‘mild’.

**Understanding of former politically motivated prisoners’ experience**

Nearly half (48.1%) of the former politically motivated prisoners surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that ‘My family and friends have a good understanding of what I went through during the conflict and in prison’. Republicans (16.9%) were twice as likely as loyalists (8.2%) to strongly disagree, but loyalists were twice as likely to neither agree nor disagree (24.7% compared to 11.9%). Women were three times as likely as men to strongly disagree (34.6% compared to 10.4%) that their family and friends had a good understanding of their experience.

**Improvement in family and friends’ understanding**

Nearly half (43.6%) of the former politically motivated prisoners surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that their ‘My family and friends have a better understanding now of what I went through during the conflict and in prison than they did 10 years ago’ and more loyalists than republicans reported an improvement in this level of understanding (47.2% compared to 42.6%). More men (45.4%) than women (34.6%) reported an improvement in family and friends’ understanding of their conflict and prison experience.

**Relationship to the community**

As noted earlier, three broad domains of emotional functioning (expressing affection, and receiving affection, and trusting another person enough to disclose personal worries and problems) are important factors in determining contributors to the quality of intimate relationships and the emotional support they such relationships can provide. As research on ageing has shown, ‘older adults who are embedded in strong social support networks tend to cope more effectively with the pernicious effects of stress than older people who do not maintain close relationships with others’. So it is not surprising that those who reported experiencing the greatest difficulties in emotional functioning were those who reported problems in forming and sustaining close attachments and lived alone. Positive and supportive intimate relationships may serve not only as a buffer against current stress, but

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also may provide important emotional support to an older person in dealing with past traumatic events and in finding meaning, order and direction in life.\textsuperscript{122}

Developing a sense of meaning in life is ‘an inherently social process’ that involves a dialogue between the individual and his or her community and social-network members’.\textsuperscript{123} It is more difficult for people to form and maintain strong social bonds if they are not in work, or are marginalised or stigmatised in their communities because of their history of imprisonment or their political beliefs. Consequently we asked former politically motivated prisoners to consider the extent to which they felt isolated within their communities.

Nearly a quarter (23.2\%) of respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the statement, ‘\textit{I feel isolated within my community due to imprisonment’}. Loyalists (17.8\%) were twice as likely as republicans (7.7\%) to feel this isolation.\textsuperscript{124} Conversely a higher proportion of republicans (62.4\%) than loyalists (43.8\%) reported they were not feeling socially isolated in their own communities.

For example, one republican former prisoner felt she was respected in her own community:

\begin{quote}
And I think in my street where I live, I don't want to say, but I have a wee bit of respect. I get a wee bit of respect from the others ... I do, I think I do because I’d be first out to help any of them if they have a problem. I sound like Joan of Ark.
\end{quote}

Similarly, a loyalist former prisoner who works in conflict resolution said he did not feel stigmatised by his past:

\begin{quote}
It wasn’t a stigma, no. My current job that I’m doing now, the .. [name] .. being an ex-combat and ex-prisoner I would say has helped me to do this job. Somebody who comes into .. [name] .. who wasn’t an ex-prisoner or an ex-combat couldn’t probably do it, they couldn’t do this job I’m doing. But I think being an ex-prisoner has helped me in this job, but it’s also helped me, you know, in bringing into hindsight not what to do to be in my position that I can come in and relate to people who are like minded, who are like me, ex-prisoners, because at the end of the day it’s not right that I should feel at ease about coming in and talking to the ex-prisoners, ex-victims and ex-combatants, that’s how I feel. I would rather be integrated and doing some job working in a bank or working in some, um, great job or something, a building firm, high up in a building firm. I would probably be more at ease with that, but unfortunately with the current situation of what’s happening in this country I’m doing the job I’m doing, is going around trying to build relationships and partnerships, which is a good thing. I understand it, it is a good thing, but it’s a pity I’m in that position to do that, and I’d rather live in a normal society that doesn’t have to go around and build partners, partnerships and relationships. It’s about building community cohesion again, it should already be in there. I felt that I was cheated out of that, but hopefully the young people coming through now, when they come to my age, I hope that in years to come … there’s no call for [a conflict resolution organisation] … I hope that’s going to be eradicated because if it’s not eradicated I’m not doing my job right, you know, so hopefully when people, when my sons come to my age, that there will be no need for [the organisation].
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{122} Ibid. p.502.
\textsuperscript{124} Loyalists were also much more likely to give a neutral, ‘neither agree not disagree’ response (24.7\% compared to 9.4\%) to this item.
But others, particularly loyalist former prisoners, said that they still felt isolated and stigmatised in their own communities:

So I would, yeah [feel isolated]. People still go, ‘Ah he went to prison’, but me, I would... I have changed and people that I’m in close contact with now would question themselves to say, ‘How long do you have this stigma of being a ‘politically motivated ex-prisoner’?

Another said he still feels the burden of ‘the label. Another talked about his problems dealing with the negative stereotyping of loyalist former prisoners:

See I think, people has a very stereotype of a loyalist...of running about with gold chains, houses, cars...loaded...drug dealers...which, maybe some, yeah. But the majority I know, no, it’s not...that’s not the case, no. And actually I, it angers me when I see these films and, about loyalists and...sniffing cocaine and taking [drugs] ... because that’s not me and not the people I know.

**Blame and responsibility**

One loyalist former prisoner commented that although the Good Friday Agreement recognised that ex-prisoners had an important role in the peace process, they still were made to carry the blame for the conflict while others, who had either openly or tacitly encouraged paramilitary activity were not required to accept any responsibility for keeping the conflict going. Another added that many loyalist former prisoners felt that both the British Government and the Assembly had failed them:

Ex-prisoners were never fully integrated back in - in fact we were kept out. For middle class Protestants and politicians it’s very convenient to let ex-prisoners carry the burden of guilt. What were they thinking when Michael Stone killed those people at the IRA funeral? What was going through their minds? Were they secretly cheering? – If they were, they’re part of the problem. Or, were they thinking, ‘That’s terrible’. A lot would have been cheering.

He went on to say,

As I get older and more mature I can see now that we were used. I was naïve. [...] We were used by Ian Paisley. The UVF and UDA marched in step with Paisley in the 70s. We got the clear message we should take up arms... the men of 1912 and all that there…

Another loyalist interviewee said that he felt betrayed and forgotten by those in government:

I don’t feel really let down by, a wee bit by the Government and things like that, and I feel more let down by my own ... my DUP shall I say? I feel let down more by them’ uns than I do by anybody. [...] It was, it was them’ uns got us to fight this war, and they can say all they want about we fought it in 69 and we fought it in 70; we fought in 1991 to 1994, some of the worst atrocities that happened in Northern Ireland. [...] And they sort of forget about us; we’re sort of forgot about, but what’s the reason, I don’t know. Know what I mean? It wasn’t uncommon, it wasn’t uncommon be out two or three times in one day doing whatever. It wasn’t uncommon. So I feel betrayed ... by my leadership ... that we were going to do whatever they wanted ... and now we’re pushed to the side. Because I have my own views...I have my own mindset. I don’t agree with what every ... I won’t sit down like. I don’t know if you’ve ever heard the term a ‘yes man’. That’s what the leadership agrees with, they agree with it just to keep everything steady. Well, I don’t ... I have my own [views], I don’t care what they think, I have my own views ... and my own, my own
opinions on situations ... and that’s why maybe I have been pushed to the side, and I don’t, and I don’t like it, but ... I’m not going to change for them’ uns. They made me the man, or whatever you want to call it I am and they created the monster.

The former politically motivated prisoner’s social identity is influenced by a cluster of mediating factors not least of which is the degree of stigma that is attached to that status either by other members of their own communities or the larger Northern Irish society. Like the interviewee quoted above, those who are cast as ‘men of violence’ were candid about the degree of bitterness they felt about the hypocrisy of those other parties to the conflict who had tacitly urged them on. But, significantly, even those who felt that had been used accepted responsibility for their own actions.

Looking to the future

I believe in God. I worry about eternity. I murdered people.

Well I don’t see beyond tomorrow really. As I said, I didn’t expect to live to this age.

[My grandchild] is my second chance at life.

The survey respondents were asked questions about their sense of future purpose and direction, and whether they felt their life course had been dislocated or foreshortened because of time spent in prison. More than half reported feeling that they ‘ought to have more years ahead of me than I probably have’, and only a minority of all respondents (15.8%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with this sentiment. Loyalists were more likely than republicans to agree or strongly agree with the statement. (60.3% and 51.2% respectively), and the responses of men and women were similar.

One interviewee said,

I think I am old bones.

Another observed that,

I’d say … as you get older you think of death more than you did when you were … You know, when you were twenty somebody of fifty was old like, you know what I’m saying? So now that you’re fifty and you’re thinking Jesus, it’s not that old [laughter] so yeah I do … I probably think of … of death and … such like and I … even though sometimes you try not to, but I think as you … as you get older it does come in more to you … more to your thinking and more to your err … and probably … probably makes you aware of what you have and ... you only have it for so long.

Dislocation in time and the life course

Every person’s life course from infancy to old age has its own trajectory in relation to social equality, health, social status and well-being, but that trajectory can be altered by pivotal events and decisions. One woman summarised how her life course shifted irrevocably as follows:

I stepped out of my life the day I joined the IRA.
‘Stepping out of her life’ entailed change in both of the direction and flow of her life; in consequence important milestones such as leaving education, starting a job and having children were missed or changed in sequence. It is understandable therefore, that former politically motivated prisoners can get ‘lost in catching up’ and feel they are at an earlier point in their life course than they really are. One interviewee talked about his inconsistent orientation to time in the way he lived. On the one hand he spent much of his youth and early adulthood living one day at a time, but then finds himself suddenly thinking about his retirement and his funeral:

I think you have to go by the day, I really don’t know where … I mean I kind of live day by day and I’m … I mean it’s ridiculous that looking towards my pension years, why am I doing this … you know, all of a sudden my life’s in prison and all of a sudden I’m here … all of a sudden I’m thinking about … I mean when it came out last year that the pension … the … the free pass thing for travel has gone down to sixty and I’m going ‘Great that’s only another seven years’ … or six years or whatever, it’s getting err … to the point that I’m talking to my family about the bungalow, ‘Thank God I’ve got the bungalow because I’m going to be a pensioner soon’. I’m talking in relation to being a pensioner and I shouldn’t be doing that … I still think I’m pretty young, things like that there. As I say, I’ve already got my flag … as I said before, I put money on the side for … my grave and stuff...

Expectations about receiving support/ care in old age

We asked the survey respondents about whether they thought there would be someone close who would look after them in their old age. Almost half (46.5% of loyalists and 47.5% of republicans) thought they would have someone close who would care for them. However, slightly more loyalists (30.1%) than republicans (27.2%) thought they would not. These differences may reflect the fact that more loyalists than republicans were living alone. There were also gender differences: women were more likely than men (38.4% compared to 24.4%) to say they did not expect there would be someone close to look after them when they were older.

As people age they are more likely to re-examine what they have accomplished in their lives and how they will be remembered. Survey respondents were asked to say how much they agreed or disagreed with the statement, ‘I think in old age I will look back on my life with a sense of achievement.’ More republicans (44.1%) than loyalists (26.0%) agreed or strongly agreed that they would look back in life with a sense of achievement. Loyalists were more likely than republicans to strongly disagree with the statement. (21.9% and 16.1% respectively). Loyalists were also much more likely to give a neutral, (neither agree not disagree) answer (31.5% compared to 17.8%) and this may suggest ambivalence or reluctance to respond to the question as worded. Half of the women (50%) agreed or strongly agreed that they would look back in life with a sense of achievement compared to 35.4% of men, but the women who disagreed were far more likely to strongly disagree than men were (30.8% compared to 16.5%).

Finding a sense of purpose for the future

125 The statement reads, ‘I have no-one close to me who is likely to look after me in old age’.
Having a sense of direction in life is an important element of well-being. We therefore asked respondents to what extent they had found a sense of purpose for the future from both a personal and political point of view. Over a third of respondents (36.4%) agreed or strongly agreed that they had found a sense of purpose for the future in their personal lives since their release with more republicans (39.0%) than loyalists (31.5%) agreeing or strongly agreeing with this. Loyalists were more likely than republicans (30.1% compared to 17.8%) to give a neutral ‘neither agree not disagree’ responses to this item and were also more likely to say that they had not been able to find a personal sense of purpose since their release.

Women were less likely than men (26.9% compared to 37.8%) to agree that they had found a personal sense of purpose for the future. Almost half the women (42.3%), compared with 32.9% of the men, disagreed or strongly disagreed that they had a personal sense of purpose. Community work could play a role in finding a personal purpose for the future:

I want to put back what I took away and by doing that there [community work], is what I do.

Conversely, a lack of personal purpose could be difficult to face:

I try to keep away from newspapers because I don’t want to hear bad news ... and having people say to me, ‘Did you read this here?’, or ‘Did you see this in the paper?’ and I say, ‘No I don’t... I don’t read it. No I don’t watch that there.’ Maybe they think I’m strange and that but that’s my way of getting... I just don’t want to get bad news. I would love everything to be rosy and gleaming again and it’s not going to be. I understand that, but we can work and make it better.

Republicans were much more likely to report having found a sense of political purpose since their release than were loyalists (43.2% compared to 28.7%) and loyalists were three times as likely to give a neutral ‘neither agree not disagree’ response to this item (30.1% compared to 10.2%). Over a third (37.7 %) of all respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they had found a sense of purpose for the future from a political point of view, and the rates amongst men and women were similar

One former republican prisoner described his continuing political project:

I was... along with many, many others in the political ex-prisoner community I had assumed the Good Friday Agreement would have resolved the issue of us and our prisoner records and stuff. I just made big assumptions that with the, Good Friday Agreement they’d take the subsequent release of the prisoners, political prisoners, the goals were emptied, they were just emptied of political prisoners, I just assumed things would come on stream and they’d do away with the prisoner records and stuff like that so to a degree there are those things which are unfinished business and I... I have them between my teeth as a... as a target, that’s... that’s where my focus is.

A loyalist former prisoner noted there had been an improvement in the way former politically motivated prisoners were perceived by the church and statutory agencies over time:

At the first strand of the ceasefire, you know, I would say the church and the senior statutory agencies would have held back and didn’t really want to know ex-combatants and ex-prisoners because they were demonised and criminalised, they were just criminals and they shouldn’t be talked to, you know. But the thing is, as time has went on, the realisation within statutory bodies, especially within the PSNI ... they realise they need to bring everybody on
board, that there’s a realisation that everybody was affected, with prisoners and those who suffered physically through the conflict, that everybody has a part to play. Within modern society as it is now I find that people are accepting the word of ex-prisoners and ex-combatants as a process of bringing peace and reconciliation.

**Expectations about the future**

We're not - I know it’s an old saying, but we’re not at the back of the bus now. We’re driving the bus.

I believe the government should get more respect now the conflict has come to this stage now; we need to talk less about the conflict for the goodness of all society ... for social well-being and learn about social issues.

Respondents were asked a series of questions that explored levels of optimism and their sense of agency for the future.

Overall, loyalists expressed less optimism about the future than republicans, and men were less positive than women about the future. Over a third (38.2%) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they thought they would be happy in the future and women (46.1%) were more likely than men (37.2%) to anticipate this. Similarly republicans (44.1%) were more likely than loyalists (28.8%) to anticipate being happy in the future. Loyalists were more likely than republicans to give a neutral ‘neither agree not disagree’ response to this item (38.4% compared to 26.3%) again suggesting they may have felt a greater degree of ambivalence or uncertainty about prospects of future happiness.

In short, former politically motivated prisoners’ orientation to the future was influenced by their current circumstances and experiences of criminalisation, stigmatisation and loss. As might be expected, those who are currently the most excluded were also the least optimistic about the future.
Conclusions

Older people deserve to have barriers of isolation, poverty and neglect dismantled to enable them to exercise their full potential as citizens.\textsuperscript{126}

As we noted earlier former politically motivated prisoners make up a sizable and distinct subgroup of Northern Ireland’s conflict generation. We estimate that they constitute up to 30\% of men in the 50-59 age band and 12\% of those aged 60-64. There is insufficient information to estimate the proportion of former politically motivated women prisoners in the over fifty population. The evidence of health and welfare problems, and the fact that former politically motivated prisoners comprise a significant proportion of older people (around 1 in 5 older men) suggest to us an urgent need to recognise former politically motivated prisoners as an at risk group in both the development of policy and service provision. Older people as a group are vulnerable to isolation and neglect, and the former politically motivated prisoners within this group are additionally vulnerable to social exclusion.

Like others in their generation former politically motivated prisoners have been affected in both positive and negative ways by the conflict and imprisonment. We found high levels of resilience and reflectiveness among former politically motivated prisoners, but also areas of significant psychological harm, material disadvantage and impending lack of provision for old age for which many were not getting effective help. The final question of our survey asked whether there were any forms of support that were lacking and ought to be put in place for former politically motivated prisoners. One loyalist former prisoner answered,

\begin{quote}
While I accept responsibility for my actions it is important to remember I did not evolve in a vacuum. Society and circumstances created me. It should be possible for the government, paramilitaries, psychologists, and social services to co-operate in providing a confidential service specifically geared to the needs of ex-political prisoners. Whatever the cliché, I am also a victim of the past. I would certainly appreciate the right to discuss my experiences without fear of legal repercussions. All in all, a pretty vague answer. Would you believe in all the years I have been out of prison, you are the first to ask what seems to me a pretty obvious question? Thank you.
\end{quote}

We have argued that the life course perspective is the most appropriate framework for investigating the well-being and inclusion of older former politically motivated prisoners. This is because the life course perspective takes a longer view of people’s lives and acknowledges that ‘human experience is often shaped by earlier conditions and events and by the unique social and historical contexts in which they occur’.\textsuperscript{127} It demands a recognition that the course of people’s lives (here former politically motivated prisoners’ lives) have been shaped, not only by their own actions and but also by multiple and intersecting social inequalities (social class and community background and age) as well as by processes of direct and indirect exclusion (such as criminalisation and stigmatisation). Those who directly

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{126} Age Sector Platform, Help the Aged and Age Concern Northern Ireland (February 2009) A Commissioner for Older People in Northern Ireland, A Report and Recommendations from the Age Sector, Belfast: Age Sector Platform, Help the Aged and Age Concern Northern Ireland, p.5
\end{flushleft}
engaged in the conflict were predominantly young, working class men and the majority of came from some of the most disadvantaged communities in Northern Ireland.

**Employment**

Over a decade ago the Good Friday Agreement acknowledged that politically motivated prisoners would need a range of support in resettling in the community:

‘The Governments 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, re-training and/or re-skilling, and further education.’

(Annex A, para.5.)

Many former politically motivated prisoners in this study had been out of prison for almost 20 years and consequently might have been expected to be more settled in employment than we found them to be. About half the former politically motivated prisoners we surveyed were not in work and half of these reported that they had been refused employment because of having a conflict related conviction. A number of factors contribute to their high levels of unemployment relative to their age peers in Northern Ireland. One former politically motivated prisoner summed up what many had told us,

Getting meaningful employment is virtually impossible if one declares their past imprisonment. Inevitably, as we age, we are less likely to be able to do physically demanding work and personally the IT age has passed me by, which again limits job opportunities.

Having a conflict related conviction is probably the single most important factor in their social and economic exclusion, but former politically motivated prisoners may also lack relevant skills or qualifications for available employment in the contemporary labour market, and, discouragement, fatalism, and a higher prevalence than others in Northern Ireland of physical and mental ill-health. There is also the issue of security concerns, a variable but never entirely absent consideration. The problem of finding and keeping meaningful work continues to be a major detrimental factor in the lives of former politically motivated prisoners and this has important implications for both their current and future well-being and financial security. Until the recent economic downturn there had a growth in jobs in Northern Ireland and the problem of unemployment among former politically motivated prisoners might have been expected to ease over time. But that has not been the case. Progress on the issue of employment discrimination based on having a conflict related conviction has been negligible and as yet there is no statutory basis for preventing this form of discrimination.

As previously described, one of the obstacles to the employment of former politically motivated prisoners, which the voluntary code (OFM/DFM 2007) was intended to remove, is the operation of the Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order, 1998 (FETO) which in effect can permit employment discrimination against former politically motivated prisoners. In issuing Guidance to Employers in 2007 the OFM/DFM recognised that the application of the Fair Employment and Treatment Order was inconsistent with the reality of present post-conflict environment in Northern Ireland where former politically

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128 See note 54 above.
motivated prisoners no longer hold pro-violence views. The Guidance advised potential employers that,

‘... conflict-related convictions of ‘politically motivated’ ex-prisoners, or their membership of any organisation, should not generally be taken into account provided that the act to which the conviction relates, or the membership, predates the Agreement. Only if the conviction, or membership, is materially relevant to the employment, facility, goods or service applied for, should this general rule not apply.’

The 2007 Guidance had the status of a voluntary code only and was predicated on the good will of potential employers. Glennon and Dickson (2009) argue in respect of ageism that voluntary standards alone are not enough to tackle discrimination and that legislation is required. We suggest that the same is true regarding the elimination of discrimination against people with conflict-related convictions. Our finding that half of the former politically motivated prisoners reported being refused employment because of having a conflict-related conviction suggests that the voluntary code is not working and that in order to be effective it needs to be put on a statutory basis.

An example of the inconsistency of the present position is that former politically motivated prisoners work routinely with members of the PSNI and vulnerable members of their own communities but are legally barred from the same work in the public sector. For example, one former politically motivated prisoner who has demonstrated his capacity to care for the elderly would not be permitted to do so under current legislation:

I’m not a full time carer but there’s been times when I’ve been needed just because the people are so old they can’t fend for themselves and I would go round and that’s probably basically about my partner’s parents and they’re both in their late eighties and they need help now and again. I’ve no difficulty whatsoever just going around and I feel a great sense that I can do that.

The public, especially vulnerable people need to be protected from dangerous or predatory offenders and few would question the need to for legislation and other measures to ensure this. However we would argue that in Northern Ireland there should be a distinction between former prisoners convicted of politically-motivated as opposed to other criminal offences. Not making this distinction ignores the positive role former politically motivated prisoners have played, and continue to play, in their own communities. For example, one interviewee pointed out that former politically motivated prisoners were well equipped to contribute to work with young people:

[We] should be able to contribute to society, especially in relation to youth, anti-social behaviour, as at some point we wore that t-shirt. We have a lot of experience (both positive and negative) to provide to the young people and could help guide them from our mistakes/experiences. Experience is not a valuable resource that is availed of.
This point is demonstrated by the sizeable number of former politically motivated prisoners who work in paid employment in community-led projects and other forms of employment that are attached to youth provision, youth service and involve working with disabled, older people etc.

Another factor in the continuing exclusion of former politically motivated prisoners from employment is the increasingly routine use of background ‘record’ checks on workers by employers. As a result of ‘failing’ a background check those who are now in work doing an effective job may lose their employment in spite of the existence of the voluntary code. One former politically motivated prisoner said,

On a personal note, I am presently working in the security industry and have been for eight years. As from next year, I will need a government licence to carry on doing the job I do now. I’m told because I have been in prison I will not be eligible for a licence. Do the government really care? I don’t think so.

Former politically motivated prisoners’ economic marginalization as a result of restricted access to work has clear implications for both their current and later lives. Economic marginalisation at pre-pension age is a potential predictor of poverty in later life and poverty is one of the biggest predictors of social exclusion and ill-health.

**Training**

Although the Good Friday Agreement recognised the importance of providing former politically motivated prisoners with opportunities for ‘re-training and/or re-skilling, and further education’, many of those we spoke to reported that they had not been given such opportunities. For example, one said,

Most ex-prisoners in my time were not able to finish their trade and came out of prison unskilled, getting low paid work on building sites and clubs etc. These people should have been given the opportunity to continue with their trade. The Government agencies had no interest in helping ex-prisoners into meaningful work. Ex-prisoners did not ask for special treatment on release, just equality, yet their post prison records became a barrier to certain areas of work and benefits. Government agencies do not understand the emotional stress put upon prisoners on release. Community or other ex-prisoner groups would have a better understanding of the needs.

Many former politically motivated prisoners who are in work find themselves trapped in low paid employment due to their lack of skills. One identified the need for

... Job opportunities, training for a trade like plumber, electrician and things like that. I noticed that other ex-prisoners like me end up doing crap jobs like doormen and taxi drivers. I myself am a part time taxi driver and I hate the job but I have to do it because I need the money.

Some felt that the types of training available were too restricted:

Ex-prisoners based groups should be giving out more info on help and training. Not enough is done by these groups to help the individual. Not all ex-prisoners want to learn how to use computers.
Others said that they had been told they were too old to receive training for employment and suffered the double disadvantage of ageism and having a conflict related conviction. Some former politically motivated prisoners appeared to accept themselves that it is ‘too late’ for them to get training:

As far as I am concerned it is too late for me, but for younger people who have been in jail I would suggest Government bodies provide them with job skills training.

Former politically motivated prisoners need better access to a greater range of training opportunities and age should not be accepted as a reason for the denial of training or further education.\textsuperscript{133} The Bamford Review of Mental Health and Learning Disability in Northern Ireland recognised that the value of work and training is not solely economic: ‘Occupation is a basic human need, which is directly related to the meaning and quality of one’s life and important for both physical and mental well-being.’\textsuperscript{134}

\textit{Mental health}

I guess I’m not alone in feeling bitterness and discontent. I don’t know what the solution to that is, but I do feel that the period since my release in 1990 was totally wasted and I have serious regrets and anger as a result. I would never countenance counselling but I’m sure others would benefit from it. I’d imagine a lot of ex-prisoners are stoical and get on with what deprivations they face, but clearly alcohol abuse is a major problem within the ex-prisoner community and that needs addressing.

The lives of the former politically motivated prisoners who participated in this study continued to be shaped by the effects of the conflict and their prison experience. We found a high degree of resilience among former politically motivated prisoners given what they had been through. However, we also found that a significant number were suffering from psychological difficulties and many were getting no help with their problems beyond prescriptions for tranquillisers or anti-depressants. It was not surprising therefore to find that some former politically motivated prisoners were ‘self-medicating’ with alcohol or other substances as a means of dealing with their psychological difficulties.

The rate of prescribing of antidepressants is twice as high in Northern Ireland as it is in England and perhaps this is to be expected given that Northern Ireland is a society emerging from over 30 years of violent conflict. While this rate of prescribing is a fairly unambiguous indication of the level of psychological difficulties Northern Irish people are experiencing, it also points to a lack of alternative available psychological treatments. As a spokesperson for the Royal College of Psychiatrists argued recently, there is a correlation between the prescribing of antidepressants and the absence of psychological therapies.\textsuperscript{135} One survey respondent noted that

\textsuperscript{133} The United Nations Principles on Older Persons adopted by the UN General Assembly in December 1991 (Resolution 46/91) stipulate that older people should have access to appropriate education and training programmes.


We were all scarred by the conflict but no mechanism is in place to help us to return to normality. We have had to deal with our emotional and psychological problems in isolation.

Access to appropriate psychological treatment is additionally important because mental health influences other areas of health and social well-being. Our study findings suggest a clear need for improved access to such help amongst former politically motivated prisoners.

The current Northern Ireland context is one where there is enormous pressure on psychological and psychiatric services. The Bamford Review, which set out an ambitious vision for mental health services, noted that rates of mental health problems in Northern Ireland may be about 20% higher than in England and Wales\textsuperscript{136}, but psychological treatment services were relatively under-developed, including for trauma related conditions\textsuperscript{137} The Review report noted:

‘.. it is well established that avoidance of any reminders of the traumatic experience (including the prospect of seeking treatment) is a key component of trauma related conditions. These features (and the additional sensitivities required by the context of the Troubles) point to the need for specific response to needs and potential needs. Particular groups of those affected by violence, whose ability to access services is adversely affected by the context of the Troubles and who have multiple psychological, mental health and social needs, would benefit from a multi-agency and multi-professional approach.’ (para 6.33).

Services to meet these needs should have effective avenues of access and,

‘… a clear emphasis on creating a safe and confidential treatment environment.’ (para 6.35).

In addition, the Review Report recognised that,

‘Over and above actual treatment, additional resources should be provided for day to day support and training of those who help people in the community affected by the conflict, and to help enhance social capital.’\textsuperscript{138}

The Northern Ireland Executive’s Action Plan in response to the Bamford Review included establishing a Health and Social Care (HSC) Mental Health and Learning Disability Task Force, jointly lead by the HSC Board and the Public Health Agency, to promote implementation of the future mental health service developments, and cross-sector collaboration.\textsuperscript{139} In June 2010 a specific strategy for the development of psychological therapy services was published,\textsuperscript{140} and a Regional Psychological Therapies Group will take forward its recommendations, under the auspices of the HSC Bamford Taskforce.

The Bamford Review reports made no specific reference to former politically motivated prisoners. There was also disappointment that the allocated funding for developing psychological treatment services was substantially less than recommended. No doubt the forthcoming reductions in public spending will add further constraints. Nonetheless, the initiatives resulting from the Bamford Review represent an opportunity to ensure that the treatment needs of former politically motivated prisoners are represented to, and explicitly recognised by, the Mental Health and Learning Disability Task Force and the Regional Psychological Therapies Group. These bodies could also consider how best to address the obstacles to former politically motivated prisoners obtaining the treatment they need. These include reluctance to seek help, the problem of disclosing past actions, and lack of familiarity amongst some primary and secondary care clinicians of the nature of the paramilitary or prison experience.

Help seeking

We found that the stigma attached to admitting to having psychological difficulties prevented many former politically motivated prisoners from seeking help with their mental health and related problems. The desire to save face and avoid being seen as weak is an attitude former politically motivated prisoners shared with army veterans who also are inculcated with idea of the paramount need for emotional toughness and stoicism. One interviewee argued that there needs to be ‘more openness about what we went through and easier access to counselling for alcohol and depression’ and talked about his own experience of getting help for these problems:

In my own case I sought out help for my alcoholism and anxiety/depression and I am still being treated for it. I have also been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder. Like other ex-prisoners and people involved in the conflict, a few years ago I would have been too ashamed to admit I had a drink problem, let alone see a counsellor. These taboos need to be broken down and, as I said above, more openness about it and more facilities to cope with it.

There needs to be concerted action by former politically motivated prisoner groups themselves to break down the negative stereotypes and stigmatising attitudes to help seeking for psychological problems.

The issue of disclosure

We noted above that we found that a significant proportion of the former politically motivated prisoners in the study were experiencing psychological problems and some were in considerable distress. Many expressed concern about the legal implications of talking about the past actions (their own or those involving others). Often their most troubling memories were precisely those that posed the biggest difficulty in relation to disclosure. The nature and extent of what remains confidential to the counsellor/client relationship needs to be clarified. Clients /patients need to have confidence in the Health Service as a confidential system, and

judgments by mental health practitioners need to be appropriate and consistent in relation to the restricted and exceptional circumstances that justify breaches of confidentiality.\textsuperscript{143}

\textit{Peer support and counselling}

The advantage of giving former politically motivated prisoners a role in counselling others is that there is already a high degree of trust, shared experience and understanding between them. We found significant support for the idea of former politically motivated prisoner groups providing counselling. However, many interviewees were also adamant that the anonymity of anyone using a counselling service must be safeguarded. Most of those we spoke to indicated a preference for dealing with someone from outside their acquaintance if they were to seek help. For example, one said,

\begin{quote}
I generally here feel … especially if someone’s going to open up here to people, I feel … my personal opinion would be I would prefer to talk to a stranger. But someone … if there’s … if there’s an ex-prisoners group, if Coiste was going to do counselling, I would trust them that no-one there would see that the counselling was going to take place. It’s going to be sound people whether it be a he or a she … it’s people there, there’s trust and confidentiality there right. Obviously, I would feel more comfortable dealing with people there that I don’t know … than dealing with someone from my own area, or an area adjacent to me, who maybe here you would feel, ‘See, see if I say A, B … A, B or C, maybe they’ll tell my mates or maybe they’ll tell, you know, such and such.
\end{quote}

Another reiterated that point:

\begin{quote}
I would be reluctant [to have] the in-depth discussions in relation to counselling with someone who I knew. I would be more comfortable … I think, if, if it gets to the stage that Republicans do go down that line and do set up a counselling programme, I think it's paramount, it's paramount that confidentiality is engrained in that system. ...The reason I would prefer a stranger is that I know that stranger can't go into a bar and talk about me. He can talk about ‘him, the such and such”, but ... whereas I wouldn't like Republicans to be going in and saying, 'F..., what do think about him? He's f...ing off his head. Remember f...ing him, he was in gaol with us,’ and all that. So that's why I'd be more comfortable with a stranger.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{143} Guidance on confidentiality has been published by the DHSSPS (Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (2009b) \textit{Code of Practice on Protecting the Confidentiality of Service User Information}). This guidance specifies (at para 3.19) that it is sometimes acceptable to disclose service user information for purposes including the “\textit{prevention of terrorism .. [and] .. detection and prosecution of a serious crime.” The guidance further notes (in Appendix 2) that under s.19 of the Terrorism Act 2000 “\textit{a professional person or employer commits a criminal offence if he or she does not disclose to the police – as soon as is reasonably practicable – his or her belief or suspicion, and the information on which it is based, that another person has committed an offence relating to the funding of terrorism or to the use of property for the purposes of terrorism. However it is a defence for a person charged under section 19 to prove that he or she had a reasonable excuse for not making the disclosure. The Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 extends the disclosure requirements so that they apply even to terrorist investigations and proceedings being conducted outside the United Kingdom.” On the face of it, the obligations under s.19 of the Terrorism Act 2000 are limited to categories of financial crime and would not apply, for example, to past violence. However, there is a need for clear guidance, understanding, and consistency of practice. Former prisoners need to be confident about the confidentiality provided by statutory services, and there is a need a clear guidance to professionals about the issues that might arise in disclosures by former prisoners.
Anecdotal accounts indicate that some people are seeking and receiving counselling outside their own communities and sometimes across community lines.

Although there are clear advantages to providing counselling through a peer support model, not least because it is acceptable to former politically motivated prisoners, it is also important to recognise that there are real limits to what can be achieved through self help when there is not a good fit between the seriousness and complexity of the mental health problem and the case worker’s skills and training. Some former politically motivated prisoners’ psychological problems are of such a complex and enduring nature that the only appropriate assessment and treatment will be in specialist mental health services. This suggests the need to establish an assessment procedure as part of all community-based counselling provision so that these more complex cases can be recognised and referred on to the appropriate services.

**Alcohol**

Prisoners gave a lot, suffered in various forms when released with £16. They feel lost to certain people in the community for all the wee MPs put them down after egging them on. Prisoners die from loneliness because of what they have done. I am only 51 but have the lungs of someone who is 100 plus, that is according to studies done by the COPD [chronic obstructive lung disease] clinic. My nerves are broke. I am a severe alcoholic, although I drink maybe 2-3 times per year. Every day I struggle.

We used the FAST and CAGE screening tests to estimate levels of hazardous drinking and alcohol dependency and found that both male and female former politically motivated prisoners were at greater risk of alcohol misuse and dependency than their comparator groups in the Northern Ireland population. We also found an association between hazardous drinking and alcoholism and mental ill health. Former politically motivated prisoners are not unique in this regard. Alcohol related problems are also prevalent among war veterans and members of other high stress occupational groups. This issue was discussed at some length in focus groups, interviews and workshops where many participants talked about their need to ‘de-stress’. One described the pub as being like a ‘cocoon’ that provided ease, security and the affirming company of other former politically motivated prisoners.

Although we found that hazardous drinking behaviour was common among our survey respondents, we did not find much tolerance for alcoholism. As one interviewee pointed out, there is a real stigma associated being an alcoholic and many regarded alcoholics as people who had somehow ‘failed’ through drink:

See there’s still a big stigma about, particularly with being an ‘alie’; people see it as a failure. There’s judges out there, there’s doctors out there, there’s ordinary builders out there and labourers out there, it... it covers everybody. It just hits every walk of life and I think as a Republican you feel you shouldn’t have failed through drink. Failure through drink is a weakness really. I mean we’re all weak at the end of the day and we have... we all know our limitations because and there’s a programme of recovery there for people and people should use it. They just don’t know about it.
Another said that he had been able to deal with his own alcohol abuse problem with the help of Alcoholics Anonymous and that he thought that part of the reason it worked for him was that it had some of the same features as an ex-politically motivated prisoners group:

I have... without a doubt, it’s [AA] the best organisation for me personally, I don’t know about everybody else but just for me at that moment in time in my life I got more identification with the people in AA than I got from those psychiatrists, because I didn’t really talk to other Republicans because I wouldn’t have been in daily contact at that time with Republicans. But Alcoholics Anonymous, I could identify with an awful lot of them people who were... who just turned to alcohol as I did. [...] The organisation Alcoholics Anonymous to me was a bit like a prisoner’s group. [Why is that?] Because prisoners were able to share a very similar experience and had constant battles. Within the AA you’ve similar people, they’re battling daily and most of us have all of the same identification and there’s a bond there within the AA which... it mirrors it [the goal] only to an extent on that particular issue, that they’re alcoholics, but there’s an affinity there with AA members. [...] In AA we all have a similar plight of wanting to be normal people again ... not dogs or down and outs, and that for me is a great feeling of comradeship.

It is important to convey to former politically motivated prisoners who have alcohol related problems that although recovery from alcoholism takes grit and self discipline it is possible with the support of others who understand. One interviewee suggested help could be offered through peer support and counselling by people like himself who were in recovery from alcoholism:

I’d have absolutely no difficulty in talking [to former comrades who are alcoholics] because a lot of my experience now I could use that for the benefit of other people. It’s the same way that, you know, I went in to prison and met people who had been in prison for five years and they taught me how to deal with the issues on the wings and how to associate with screws and all the different things that we had to do in prison and I think I could offer something. I think ex-prisoners who have recovered from alcohol or who are recovering from it or any other mental illness that people recover from can contribute but it’s not organised and there’s no structure or base out there at the minute so it’s a big problem.

Another endorsed the idea of support groups for alcohol misuse problems and argued that trained former politically motivated prisoners were in a good position do this because they already had a good rapport with other former politically motivated prisoners and were accessible because they were already in the community:

I believe support groups are vital within local communities. I feel that it would be helpful if ex-prisoners were trained in regards ways of helping others through psychological and dependency problems, if only, at least, in knowing how to approach and talk to individuals who have problems. Many ex-prisoners do not like to travel outside of their comfort zones of their own communities and see approaching statutory agencies, i.e. social workers, psychiatrists etc as a sign of weakness.

Alcohol can play a positive role in social bonding, but there needs to be greater acknowledgement of the extent of the alcohol problem in both communities in terms of prevailing drinking patterns, alcohol dependency and the destructive impact of alcoholism on children and on family life. Former politically motivated prisoner groups could make a more concerted effort to educate their members about safe alcohol behaviour and also need work to de-stigmatise help seeking for mental health or alcohol related problems.
The evidence emerging from this study seems to indicate that older former politically motivated prisoners are an especially at risk group for conflict related mental ill health and alcohol dependency. Dandeker et al (2003) argue that evidence suggests that veterans are a ‘particularly treatment resistant population’ and that it is not clear whether this is due to the nature of the symptoms veterans suffer or the confounding effects of those symptoms (e.g. numbing, avoidance) and worries about the stigma of admitting to having mental health problems. Our findings suggest that these factors may also influence the help-seeking behaviour of former politically motivated prisoners who have alcohol and mental health problems. Another contributing factor for some of the former politically motivated prisoners we spoke to was that they felt demoralised after decades of post-release stigmatisation and exclusion. They talked about a lack of agency and a pervasive sense they had lost control, meaning and direction in their lives. The Bamford Review of Mental Health Services emphasised that treatments should be about recovery not simply the alleviation of psychological symptoms.

**Social isolation**

There is a good comradeship between ex-prisoners, but they do not fit into the new society or feel isolated.

A significant number of former politically motivated prisoners, particularly loyalist former prisoners said that they feel isolated in their own communities. They described feeling stigmatised for having joined a paramilitary group, being out of step with current post-conflict environment, being unable to afford to socialise, and avoiding social contact because of ill health or embarrassment about mental health or alcohol problems. Former politically motivated prisoners are uniquely placed to support one another due to their shared experience and the high degree of affinity, trust and mutual understanding, but individuals cannot carry all of the responsibility for fostering the social engagement of those who find themselves on the margins of their own communities.

**Advice and assistance**

Many voluntary sector and ex-combatants groups already provide a range of relevant and accessible information to their members about physical and mental health problems, family issues, alcohol dependency, eligibility for benefits and so on. However, one interviewee saw the need for more need for information and advice:

I also know here that there’s hundreds of ex-prisoners in North Belfast [...] there’s people there who … they’re clueless, they’re absolutely clueless, and focussing in on ex-prisoners, there’s ex-prisoners here that need counselling, there’s ex-prisoners they need here f…ing signposted about things or about what they’re entitled to and they just … they haven’t got … they haven’t got the tools to go out there and look for it …

There is scope for enhancing the provision of welfare information and health education via the Internet. There are a number of excellent websites that provide these sorts of ‘digital inclusion’, online resources for veterans provide an example.

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144 Para 11.8.4
Similar resources could be developed for older former politically motivated prisoners. That said, it must be recognised that the provision of information may not be enough. Several survey respondents identified the need for more active out-reach to those who are in difficulty. For example, one respondent said,

I have little or no understanding of the benefits system, so having a dedicated welfare rights team who had empathy for ex-POWs would be beneficial. Facing bureaucracy at any level presents problems because one feels that the person one is dealing with retains all the bigotry and prejudices of old and has no interest in rendering assistance.

Some people need individual guidance and hands-on assistance with filling in forms, or support in meeting with service providers. Such needs are likely to become more prominent as former politically motivated prisoners grow older. It will be important for community groups and former politically motivated prisoner support groups to work in partnership with other agencies, providing advice and sharing information about best practice.\(^{148}\)

A final note

As we noted in our introductory comments, one of the primary aims of this research was to begin a conversation with policy makers and service providers in Northern Ireland’s statutory, community and voluntary sectors about the hidden and unmet needs of former politically motivated prisoners as older people. Generally the participants we encountered were realistic but not defeatist in their views on what could be done to assist them. One of the more pessimistic said,

Prisoners getting out of goal should be helped to fit into the community. They are usually left to their own devices and depend on family and friends. They have a reluctance to ask for help as they could be construed as ‘failures’ or as not being able to cope on the outside. As for older ex-prisoners, they have made their way in life since prison and it could possibly be too late in lost cases to do anything that would benefit them.

We think it is not too late to intervene and we outline below some suggested ways forward concerning what can and should be done now as a matter of urgency. These suggestions are not exhaustive and there will be other possible measures that could be taken to ameliorate the situation of older former politically motivated prisoners in Northern Ireland. Moreover, it is not for us to determine: former politically motivated prisoners themselves are best placed to define, in dialogue with other agencies, how the help needed should be designed; and it is for


\(^{147}\) See: Veterans Affairs, Canada at http://www.vac-acc.gc.ca/clients/sub.cfm?source=mental-health

United States Department of Veterans Affairs at http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/featurearticle_may2010v2.asp


policy makers to recognise the pivotal importance for the well-being of older former politically motivated prisoners, their children and the rising generation of young people in Northern Ireland’s most deprived communities, of having hope, dignity and a positive purpose. One loyalist made this point pretty unambiguously when he observed:

These young lads down the Pass - You would maybe think, ‘Oh they're just sectarian bigots’. But they’ve no job, they’ll never have a job and they’ve no education. And they're looking for a reason for getting out of bed in the morning. So they revert to the lowest common denominator, yeah, ‘Kill all Taigs.’ Which gives you a reason I suppose. But it’s not very progressive is it?

Young people construct their ideas about social justice and the fairness of the state in many ways not least of which is the history of how justice has played out in the biographies of their parents and grandparents. They can learn from the insight and life experience of older prisoners. They also need to see that the needs of this ageing generation are being met and not neglected. There is still an opportunity to make difference, not only to the lives of older former politically motivated prisoners, but to the young people who need to see fairness in Northern Ireland’s society.
8. Ways forward

We hope this report will be relevant to several audiences including former politically motivated prisoners and their families, the age sector, policymakers, health and social care agencies and the broader Northern Ireland community. We think the following suggestions, arising from our findings, should be considered.

Employment

- Former politically motivated prisoners who are refused employment under the Rehabilitation of Offenders (Exceptions) Order (Northern Ireland) 1979, Part V of the Police Act 1997 and the Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults (Northern Ireland) Order 2003 should be (i) informed that they have been refused employment because of their conflict-related conviction, (ii) provided with a commentary on why their conflict-related conviction debars them from employment and notified of their the right to appeal any such decision.

- Our findings suggest that the Guidance issued to employers in Northern Ireland by OFM/DFM in 2007 has not been effective in removing the barrier to employment that having a conflict-related conviction poses. Therefore we recommend that consideration should be given to putting the provisions of the voluntary code on to a statutory basis.

- A number of participants reported that their children had been refused employment due to his or her parent having a conflict-related conviction. A parent’s conflict-related conviction should not be used to debar his/her child from employment.

Mental health

- Policy makers should explicitly recognise that older former politically motivated prisoners constitute at ‘at risk’ group of older people in Northern Ireland for both social exclusion and mental ill health.

- There should be dialogue between the former politically motivated prisoners Consortium and the relevant bodies taking forward the Bamford Review developments, including the Mental Health and Learning Disability Task Force and the Regional Psychological Therapies Group. The Consortium should develop briefing materials on the particular needs of former politically motivated prisoners for health and social care practitioners and commissioners.

- In keeping with the Bamford remit of taking into account ‘evidence - based best practice developments in assessment, treatment and care regionally, nationally and internationally’\textsuperscript{149} we recommend that they give consideration to adopting a model of mental health care for former politically motivated prisoners similar to the

\textsuperscript{149} Bamford, D (2005) op.cit. Annex 2.
Community Veterans Mental Health Service scheme established by Veterans UK and the Personnel and Veterans Agency of the Ministry of Defence, currently being piloted in the UK.150

- A component of Veterans-UK scheme includes activities to disseminate information to primary care practitioners about the specific needs of veterans. We suggest there is a similar need to inform primary care practitioners about the specific needs of former politically motivated prisoners.

- Community-based groups providing counselling and support should include assessment to identify complex clinical needs as a routine part of their activities, (e.g. as Cúnamh currently does.)

- Community-based groups providing counselling and support should recognise that the kind of casework they are engaged in involves the risk of secondary traumatisation and/or ‘burn out’ of staff. Therefore such groups must make provision for the supervision and support of their staff.

- There is a need for greater representation of former politically motivated prisoners as service users on relevant advisory or advocacy bodies, for example, regarding age discrimination and mental health and addiction services.

Alcohol education

- Former politically motivated prisoners and community groups should address attitudes of acquiescence towards hazardous alcohol behaviour among former politically motivated prisoners by incorporating alcohol education in health and well-being activities, de-stigmatising help-seeking, and supporting the dignity of recovering alcoholics through awareness activities.

- 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.151

Advice and information

- There is a need for mental health education that reflects former politically motivated prisoners’ experience and changes attitudes to help seeking. Former politically motivated prisoner and community groups should develop strategies (including internet resources) for enhancing outreach programmes to complement the drop-in services and activities they already provide.

150 See the MOD website, ‘Veterans-UK’ (formerly ‘Services to Veterans’) on the Community Veterans Mental Health Service, at http://www.veterans-uk.info/mental_health/faq.html [Accessed 16 August 2010].

151 For example, Tar Anall’s “Still Imprisoned” programme which addresses the needs of republicans with addiction problems through a peer support model might usefully be applied in other communities. See: http://taranall.ie/cms/ [Accessed 10 September 2010].
To that end funding should be made available to the Consortium of former politically motivated prisoner groups to buy in assistance to develop its own website signposting sources of help and advice for former politically motivated prisoners and their families. The website should provide a range of accessible information and evidence-based advice on understanding and managing psychological problems, alcohol and drug misuse behaviour, and financial issues including debt, social security benefits and pensions. Hardcopies of these materials should also be made available. The Consortium website should be advertised widely.
References


Ferry, F., Bolton, D., Bunting, B., Devine, B., McCann, S. and Murphy, S. (2008) *Trauma, Health and Conflict in Northern Ireland, A study of the epidemiology of trauma related disorders and qualitative investigation of the impact of trauma on the individual*. Omagh and Belfast: The Northern Ireland Centre for Trauma and Transformation and the Psychology Research Institute, University of Ulster.


Glennon, L. And Dickson, B. (2009) *Making Older People Equal: Reforming the law on access to services in Northern Ireland*, Belfast: CAP.


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Appendix 1. The former politically motivated prisoner population in Northern Ireland


Estimating the size of the former prisoner population

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

There are two relatively simple ways of approaching estimating former prisoner numbers. The first is to start with the available figures on the Northern Ireland annual prison population and then to calculate the number of politically-motivated prisoners based on existing estimates of the proportion of prison population reported to have been sentenced for scheduled or ‘terrorist-type’ offences. This approach produces an estimate of a minimum of 39,804 political ex-prisoners which is higher than the Quigley estimate of 30,000. The

152 See respectively McEvoy, K. (2001) and OFM/DFM (1 May 2007) Recruiting People with Conflict-Related Convictions, Employers’ Guidance at http://www.ofmddfni.gov.uk/1.05.07_exprisoners_final_guidance
153 The principal statistical sources are: (i) Annual statistics on the number of people arrested and subsequently charged with terrorism and serious public order offences (published by the RUC/PSNI); (ii) ‘Statistics on Security’ produced by the Northern Ireland Office and placed in the House of Commons Library which were quoted from time to time in responses to Parliamentary questions in the Official Report; (iii) Annual NI prison population statistics; (iv) Commentaries on NI Crime Statistics (published by the NIO); (v) Judicial Statistics, and (vi) Home Office Criminal Statistics.
154 The NIO was anxious to present a positive picture of ‘security successes’ and in the course of a discussion of how to do so, one civil servant rejected one means of reporting security statistics on the grounds that “In effect it amounts to an admission that we do not know how many people are being convicted, which, short of embarking on a special exercise, is true, but not the sort of thing we want to publicise.” CJ4/1238.
155 The term ‘terrorist-type offences’ is used interchangeably with scheduled offences in the ‘Statistics on Security’ prepared for the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland by the Northern Ireland Office. The term ‘scheduled offence’ refers to those offences deemed suitable for trial by judge alone and are defined in the schedules of successive Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Acts. They comprise offences most likely to be associated with terrorism and range from common law offences like murder and kidnapping to offences relating to explosive substances or inchoate offences like aiding and abetting.
second approach is to start with the official numbers of people charged with scheduled or ‘terrorist-type offences’ and to use the prevailing conviction rates by mode of trial and offence type to calculate paramilitary prisoner numbers. This second method yields an estimate of about 17,560. Both methods are flawed but do yield a rough idea of the minimum and maximum numbers of former paramilitary prisoners in Northern Ireland.

Official statistics on the Northern Ireland prison population

Our interest is in determining the number of people who were imprisoned for politically-motivated offences relating to the conflict in Northern Ireland. Statistics on the annual total Northern Ireland prison population must be adjusted to take account of the proportion of prisoners who were incarcerated for ‘ordinary’ criminal offences. In addition, any estimate of the former politically-motivated prisoner population must include not only those who were imprisoned within Northern Ireland, but also those imprisoned in other jurisdictions as well as those who were interned.

Proportion of ‘ordinary’ versus politically-motivated prisoners

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

Prisons outside Northern Ireland

There are a number of sources of information on the number of people who served sentences in prisons outside Northern Ireland: the Home Office Statistical Bulletin, ‘Statistics on the Operation of the Prevention of Terrorism Legislation’, Written Answers in Hansard provide data for the mainland UK, and the Judicial Statistics provide data for the Republic of Ireland. According to figures supplied to Hogan and Walker by the Irish Department of Justice, 1390 persons were convicted before the Special Criminal Court between 13 June 1972 and the end of 1986. Written answers in the Dáil Éireann on the operation of the Special Criminal Court’ provide numbers for most but not all years from 1987-1998.

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156 See HC Deb. 30 June 1981 vol 17 c358w and HC Deb. 1 July 1983 vol 44 c161w and HC Deb. 11 May 1977 vol 392 c37w.

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

Internment

There are two estimates of the number of people interned between 1971 and 1975. In a written answer to Parliament in May 1977, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland reported that a total of 2257 people had been interned between the introduction of internment on 9 August 1971 and its ending on 31 December 1975. Hogan and Walker (1989: 94), who put the total at 2169, also provide a breakdown of numbers by putative political affiliation. See Table A1 below.

Table A1. Number of persons interned, 1971-1975

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number Internees</th>
<th>HC Deb 16 May 1977 vol 932 c37W</th>
<th>Hogan &amp; Walker (1989: 94)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Suspected Republicans</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>2,060</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suspected Loyalists</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2,257</td>
<td>2,169</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Estimate based on annual prison populations, Northern Ireland

One fairly simple and transparent method of doing this to start with the available figures on the Northern Ireland prison population and calculate the number of politically motivated prisoners using the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland’s own estimate\(^{159}\) that during the conflict 75% of the NI prison population was serving sentences for scheduled or ‘terrorist-type’ offences.\(^{160}\) On that basis we have taken 75% of the total Northern Ireland prison population (1971-1998), made a 20% adjustment (downwards) to account for the double-counting of those who served more than one prison sentence,\(^{161}\) and added the reported numbers of those who were interned and those who served sentences in the rest of the UK or the Republic of Ireland for conflict-related offences. Thus, using prison population figures

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\(^{159}\) We know from several written answers by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to Parliamentary questions that during the conflict that about three quarters of the sentenced prisoners in the NI prison population were serving sentences for terrorist-type offences. See HC Deb. 30 June 1981 vol 17 c358w and HC Deb. 1 July 1983 vol 44 c161w and HC Deb. 11 May 1977 vol 392 c37w.

\(^{160}\) The term ‘terrorist-type offences’ is used interchangeably with scheduled offences in the `Statistics on Security` prepared for the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland by the Northern Ireland Office. The term ‘scheduled offence’ refers to those offences deemed suitable for trial by judge alone and are defined in the schedules of successive Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Acts. They comprise offences most likely to be associated with terrorism and range from common law offences like murder and kidnapping to offences relating to explosive substances or inchoate offences like aiding and abetting.

\(^{161}\) The reconviction rate (for scheduled offences) of people who had been released in 1984 after having served a prison sentence for terrorist-type offences was reported to be 20%. See HC Deb 4 July 1995 vol 263 cc157-8w. This coincides with the proportion of men in our sample who had served more than one sentence.
provided by the NIO\textsuperscript{162}, our conservative estimate is that currently there may be almost 40,000 (39,804) former politically motivated prisoners in Northern Ireland.

Table A2. Estimated number of politically-motivated prisoners, 1971-1998

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>59,470</td>
<td>44,602.5</td>
<td>35,682</td>
<td>2,257</td>
<td>1560+</td>
<td>39,804+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Taken together these different estimates indicate that almost 40,000 people were received into prison for politically motivated offences or were detained on suspicion of them between 1971 and 1998. This total figure includes, however, those remanded in custody in Northern Ireland before trial or sentence, and will therefore be greater than the number who ultimately received custodial sentences there. On the other hand, this method omits people imprisoned outside the 1971-1998 period is therefore arguably an underestimate.

Statistics on the number of persons arrested and subsequently charged

A second approach to estimating the size of the former political prisoner population takes the number of persons arrested and subsequently charged with terrorist-type offences as the starting point. Here the number of paramilitary prisoners is calculated by starting with the number of people charged and then estimating the numbers convicted in the light of what is known about the prevailing sentencing outcomes (custodial or non-custodial) over this period. The RUC’s yearly statistics on the number of people arrested and subsequently

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\textsuperscript{162} The prison population figures used here were those provided under FOI request, reference 09 -191 (dated 28 August 2009).


charged with terrorism and serious public order offences from 1972 onwards provide a reasonable indication of the volume of people who were processed through the criminal justice system during the conflict for those types of offences. Police statistics for the period August 1972 to December 1998, record the number of people arrested and subsequently charged as 18,258. However, not all those charged were convicted and not all those convicted received custodial sentences. Therefore, charge rates on their own cannot tell us prison numbers. Nevertheless the police statistics on the number of people charged can be interpreted on the basis of what is known about the operation of the criminal system during the conflict, for example, the conviction rates for different modes of trial at different points in time.

Conviction rates

According to Hogan and Walker the conviction rates for persons proceeded against for scheduled offences in ‘Diplock’ courts between 1973 and 1986 averaged over 92% (The lowest rate was 83% in 1973 and the highest was 96% in 1979 and 1980). These figures are consistent with the Boyle et al finding that during 1979 the Diplock Courts dispensed custodial sentences at a rate of 91%. Moreover, both of these estimates tally with the conviction rate of 92.2% derived from figures on prosecutions and convictions for scheduled offences (1978-1999) provided by the NIO. If the Hogan and Walker average estimate (92%) reflects the prevailing conviction rates for the whole period from August 1972 to the end of 1998 then approximately 16,800 people were imprisoned for scheduled offences in Northern Ireland.

Table A3. Numbers charged and convicted of scheduled offences, 1972-1998

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number Arrested &amp; Subsequently Charged, 31 July 1972-1998</th>
<th>Conviction Rate 92%</th>
<th>Less 20% Adjustment for Double-counting</th>
<th>Plus Number Interned</th>
<th>Plus Number Imprisoned Outside NI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ROI(^{170})</td>
<td>England &amp; other</td>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{165}\) The PSNI have continued reporting this. See PSNI – Table NI-SEC-09: ‘Number of people Arrested and Subsequently charged with Terrorist and other Serious Public Order Offences, [31/07/] 1972-30/09/2007’ at [http://psni.police.uk/index/departments/statistics_branch.htm](http://psni.police.uk/index/departments/statistics_branch.htm). Apart from the number of persons charged reported for 1973 [1,414], the quarterly ‘Statistics on Security’ (which were based on a collation of RUC charge sheets) tally with the PSNI figures. See Part II p.5. PRO (Kew) file, CJ4/1238.

\(^{166}\) Police statistics tally with data on the number of persons proceeded against and convicted provide by the Northern Ireland Office under FOI request ref. 08/126.

\(^{167}\) See Hogan and Walker (1989) op. cit., Table 4.2, ‘Persons proceeded against in the Crown Court for scheduled offences, 1973-1986’). Note also that these conviction rates for Northern Ireland are higher than the 73% average conviction rate reported by Hogan and Walker (1989: 243, n62) for the Irish Special Criminal Court for roughly the same period 1972-1986. The DPP for Northern Ireland put the conviction rate c. 1975 at 90% for scheduled offences tried on indictment. CJ4/1238.


\(^{169}\) Number of persons proceeded against and convicted for the years 1978 - 1999 were supplied by the NIO under FOI Request ref. 08/126.

As with estimates of former prisoner numbers based on receptions into prison, the estimate based on charges and convictions inevitably reflects up to 20% double counting because some people served more than one prison sentence in one or more jurisdictions. Thus the most conservative estimate, based on numbers charged and adjusted for possible double counting, is about 13,400 rising to about 17,600 if internees and people imprisoned outside Northern Ireland are included. The number of internees can be added to numbers convicted since the NIO regarded conviction and detention as “a combined process”. Like the estimate above based on the recorded prison population, this method does not count people receiving custodial sentences before 1972 and after 1998. Nor does it capture the numbers remanded in custody but later acquitted or given a noncustodial sentence. Therefore it too must be regarded as a significant underestimate.

Geographical distribution of former politically motivated prisoners

Just as there are problems estimating the total numbers of former prisoners and their current ages, so too there is little or no precise information in the public domain about where former prisoners currently live, or about the numbers of former prisoners who were displaced or who relocated away from their communities of origin after release. Although it is safe to assume that a significant number live in or around Belfast and Derry/Londonderry, many live in small towns and rural areas in Northern Ireland, the Border region and Dublin. Table A4 below, which is based on the NIO analysis of protesting PIRA prisoners in the Maze on 25 July 1977, shows their communities of origin. If this sample is representative of all Republican prisoners, then approximately 68% were from urban communities (Belfast 54%, Derry 14%) and the remainder (32%) from the NI counties or county towns.

Table A4. Communities of origin, PIRA prisoners in NI

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

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

Harvey et al (2005) estimate that about 3500 former politically motivated prisoners were born in the Republic, some 2000 of whom probably live in border counties of Louth, Cavan, Monaghan, Leitrim, Sligo, and Donegal. By contrast Loyalist former prisoners tend to be

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172 Harvey et al (2005) : 68
concentrated in Belfast, Lisburn, North Armagh, and pockets of Derry and East and North Antrim. As might be expected, former political prisoner projects are based in places near the people they serve. Loyalist ex-prisoner groups are located in Belfast, Derry, Lisburn, Carrickfergus, Ballymena, Armagh and Portadown. Republican ex-prisoner groups are based in Belfast, Derry, Magherafelt, Strabane, Letterkenny, Lifford, Sligo, Ballinamore, Monaghan, Clones, Dundalk and elsewhere. 173

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

Gender

Although there are no detailed figures on the gender distribution of paramilitary prisoners, we know that their numbers were heavily skewed towards males. Corcoran estimates the gender ratio amongst Republican prisoners as roughly 20:1 men to women. 174 The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland provided statistics on the Northern Ireland prison population broken down by age, sex, ‘terrorist type offences’ and paramilitary affiliation in parliamentary written answers on several occasions. A useful snapshot of the age and sex of prisoners was provided in one such answer on 1 July 1983. 175 Although an estimate of the number of politically-motivated prisoners in custody could not be made, the total number of prisoners (convicted and on remand) was provided, broken down by sex and age, and it was noted that about 75% of the total prison population were serving sentences for terrorist-type offences. These figures are reproduced in Table A5 below.

Table A5. NI prison population including those persons detained in young offender centres, by age and sex as at 19 June 1983

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>Per cent (all prisoners)</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Convicted</th>
<th>Unconvicted</th>
<th>Convicted</th>
<th>Unconvicted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 18</td>
<td>(3.0%)</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 but under 25</td>
<td>(38 %)</td>
<td>733</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 but under 30</td>
<td>(33 %)</td>
<td>722</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 but under 40</td>
<td>(19 %)</td>
<td>419</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 but under 50</td>
<td>(5 %)</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 but under 60</td>
<td>(1 %)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 and over</td>
<td>(.04%)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2,044</td>
<td>439</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

175 HC Deb 01 July 1983 Vol. 44, c161W.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total All Prisoners</th>
<th>All males</th>
<th>All females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2530</td>
<td>2483</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


As can be seen in the table above, the gender ratio of prisoners in June 1983 was 53:1 men to women. This figure of about 2% is lower than Corcoran’s (2006) estimate that 5% of politically-motivated prisoners were women.

**Age**

Few officially published statistics report the ages of those imprisoned for politically motivated offences. Nevertheless, there are one or two statistical snapshots of the age profile of the 1970s cohort of politically-motivated prisoners. This was the period with the highest incarceration rate for scheduled offences. If the age profile of this 1970s group is representative of all politically-motivated prisoners over the whole period of the conflict, then it seems likely that the majority of former prisoners would now be well into their fifties, and this is supported by the findings of contemporary research on the Diplock courts. Boyle et al (1980) analysed the age profile of Diplock defendants in 1975 and 1979 and found that, overall, defendants tended to cluster in the 17-21 years age group, but that Loyalist defendants tended to be slightly older than Republicans. In 1979, for example, 56% of Loyalist defendants were 25 years or older as compared to 28% of Republicans. Ninety per cent of the Boyle et al. 1975 sample of Diplock defendants was over 17 years of age at the time of conviction, and more half of these were in the 17-21 age band. Therefore the youngest members of the 1975 cohort would be 50 or over now. The twenty per cent of those convicted who were 25 years or older in 1975 now would be in their late 50s or early 60’s. (See Table A6 below)

### Table A6. Age of Diplock defendants, 1975 and 1979

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Loyalist 1975</th>
<th>Loyalist 1979</th>
<th>Republican 1975</th>
<th>Republican 1979</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14-17</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17-21</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-25</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-40</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 40</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age not known</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

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

An analysis by the NIO of the characteristics of PIRA prisoners protesting and conforming to prison rules provides another age snapshot of politically-motivated prisoners. The NIO findings, summarised in Table A7 below, indicated that 90% of PIRA prisoners were aged 19 or above in July 1977. If the age profile of this particular IRA cohort was typical of all politically-motivated prisoners, the data provide additional support for the conclusion that most former prisoners would be in their fifties or older now.

Table A7. Age distribution of PIRA prisoners at 25 July 1977

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age on Committal Under Sentence</th>
<th>N = 235</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
<th>Current Age 2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17 years</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-30</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>59-63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>64-73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 40 (nil)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.08 %</td>
<td>73+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

The above age distribution is broadly consistent with the age profile of our survey respondents whose average age was around 52 years. If this considered in the context of the August 2009 OFM/DFM Profile of Older People in Northern Ireland then it is apparent that a very significant proportion of Northern Irish men of that generation now in midlife were imprisoned as a result of the conflict. The OFM/DFM Profile of Older People includes population estimates by gender and by 5 year age bands. According to the OFM/DFM 2007 estimates there were a total of 90,000 men in the 50-54 and 55-59 age bands. As shown in Table 8, if we take an average of the Quigley estimate (30,000) and our own (39,804), then roughly 35,000 people were imprisoned for political offences during the conflict.

Assuming that about three quarters are in the 50 and 59 years age band, then between 13.5% and 30.7% of Northern Irish men of that generation carry criminal convictions for politically motivated offences. Similarly, some 5.4% to 10.7% of men aged 60-69 years also are likely to have been imprisoned for political offences. See Table A8 below.

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178 The average age of the republicans surveyed was 51 years and loyalists 53.8 years.
Table A8. Demographic profile of former politically motivated prisoners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Estimate Total FPMP population</th>
<th>95% of FPMPs male</th>
<th>73% of FPMP males estimated to be 50-59 yrs</th>
<th>NI male population 50-59 yrs N = 90,000</th>
<th>25% of FPMP males estimated to be 60-69 yrs</th>
<th>NI male population 60-69 yrs N = 77,600</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lowest estimate</strong> (based on conviction rates for scheduled offences)</td>
<td>17,560</td>
<td>16,682</td>
<td>12,178</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
<td>4171</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quigley</strong></td>
<td>30,000</td>
<td>28,500</td>
<td>20,805</td>
<td>23.1%</td>
<td>7125</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jamieson &amp; Grounds</strong></td>
<td>39,804</td>
<td>37,814</td>
<td>27,604</td>
<td>30.7%</td>
<td>9454</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average All estimates</strong></td>
<td>30,591</td>
<td>29,061</td>
<td>21,215</td>
<td>23.6%</td>
<td>5304</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These estimates of the older former politically motivated prisoner population are based on what we know about their age distribution at particular points in time (1975, 1977, 1979 and 1983) and it is very likely that it varied over time. The limitations in available information mean that these are only very rough estimates. Nevertheless, there can be little doubt that former politically motivated prisoners constitute a significant proportion of men over fifty in Northern Ireland and this should be taken into account by those responsible for health and social well-being policy and programmes.