



It's a balancing act: working with trauma in probation practice.

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List of Abbreviations

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)
American Psychiatric Association (APA)
Criminal Justice System (CJS)
Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC)
Extended Custody Supervised Licence (ECSL)
Good Lives Model (GLM)
His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP)
His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS)
Institute for Scientific Treatment of Delinquency (ISTD)
National Offender Management Service (NOMS)
National Probation Service (NPS)
National Research Committee (NRC)
Personal, Cultural, Structural (PCS)
Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
Probation Officer (PO)
Probation Qualification in Probation (PQiP)
Probation Services Officer (PSO)
Practice Tutor Assessor (PTA)
Risk, Need Responsivity (RNR)
Senior Probation Officer (SPO)
Serious Further Offence (SFO)
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA)
Trainee Probation Officer (TPO)
Transforming Rehabilitation (TR)
Trauma informed approach (TIA)
Trauma informed care (TIC)
Trauma informed practice (TIP)
Trauma informed probation practice (TIPP)
United Kingdom (UK)

Abstract

The lived experiences of people on probation and the practitioners working with them shape the way in which individuals perceive the world and how they behave (Bradley, 2021). These lived experiences can include exposure to trauma (Zelechowski, 2016, Komarovskaya et al. 2011). In recent years there has been a growing acknowledgment of the relationship between trauma and offending behaviour, with attention being drawn to the lack of research into how such knowledge has been translated into probation practice (Senker et al, 2023). This thesis aims to address some of these knowledge gaps by examining the views of probation practitioners regarding trauma and the use of trauma informed approaches within sentence management functions of probation. The study uses data generated from a mixed method approach consisting of thirty-three completed online surveys and fourteen semi-structured individual interviews producing qualitative data.

First, the findings indicate that the Probation Service is in the early stages of its journey to becoming a trauma responsive organisation. It is proposed that trauma informed practice offers the probation service an opportunity to reduce the discord between the personal values that motivate many practitioners to choose probation as a career and the neoliberalist agenda that has focused on performance and targets, rather than people on probation (Whitehead, 2007). The findings emphasise that whilst there is some evidence of trauma informed methods being used, these have not been applied authentically, and in many instances, are little more than a 'tick box' activity. Furthermore, there is clear evidence from the findings that the application of trauma informed approaches in probation thus far has resulted in a genderised approach to trauma rather than achieving the gender responsiveness that trauma informed practice aims to achieve (Bloom, Owen and Covington, 2003). The findings provide

overwhelming evidence that men's experiences of trauma are largely overlooked by the probation service.

The findings indicate that the responsibilisation of crime, from collective to individual responsibility (Phillips et al, 2022), has been transferred to practitioners. Despite operating under an increasingly managerialist agenda that has reduced practitioner autonomy, practitioners are becoming increasingly responsibilised for their own learning and development and for working in a trauma informed manner. In addition, there was clear evidence that the impact of working with trauma on practitioners has been largely neglected.

Lastly, the findings highlight the difficulties encountered by practitioners in balancing the victim-offender dichotomy and this is exemplified by the lack of adequate training, support and guidance provided by the organisation.

The thesis is underpinned by the view that trauma informed practice should be considered an extension of anti-oppressive practice (Thompson, 2014) and emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983, Westaby, Fowler and Phillips, 2019) and that in doing so, both people on probations and practitioners experiences can be improved through the development of a framework of Trauma Informed Probation Practice (TIPP).

Chapter 1 - Introduction

1.1 Setting the context

In recent years there has been increasing pressure on public services, including organisations such as the probation service, to adopt the principles of trauma informed practice (Bear, Durcan and Southgate, 2019). Yet, little research has been undertaken regarding the extent to which trauma informed approaches have been translated into probation practice thus far (Ezell et al, 2018, Senker et al, 2023). This gap in knowledge and understanding was summarised by one of the participants from this study:

What does [it] mean? What does it look like? Why should we take [it] into consideration? What use is it to a probation officer to be mindful of? (Ethan¹, Probation Officer with over 11 years' experience)

These reflections by Ethan¹ encapsulate the questions that sparked the origin of this thesis; what is trauma informed practice; how does it translate into probation practice; why should it matter to probation practitioners and what benefits could trauma informed approaches bring to probation? This thesis will answer some of these questions and provide a meaningful contribution to the development of trauma informed probation practice (TIPP).

Within the Criminal Justice System (CJS) there is a disproportionate overrepresentation of people who have experienced trauma (Wainwright, Burke and Collett, 2024). For some of these individuals their lived experiences, including previous exposure to trauma, may have had a substantial impact on their route into offending (Bride 2007, Zelechowski, 2016, Komarovskaya et al. 2011, Dermody et al, 2018). Such earlier experiences may affect a person on probation's engagement with services and

¹ All participants have been provided with pseudonyms to protect their anonymity.

interventions (Vaswani and Paul, 2019), risk management approaches and desistance from crime (McCartan, 2020). In addition, there is compelling evidence from other relevant professions, such as social work, substance misuse services, prisons and youth justice, that recognition of prior trauma experiences is significant to being able to work effectively with people (see Covington, 2008, Skuse and Matthew, 2015, Tseris, 2018, Jewkes et al. 2019, Bradley, 2021). In the context of the CJS, some have argued that prior experiences of trauma have been ‘weaponised’ to defend restrictive and control-based measures on the basis that they are necessary for the protection of the public and the individual themselves due to their vulnerability (Carlton and Russell, 2023).

Nevertheless, over recent years there has been an increasing body of literature that presents trauma as a “*contextual and correlational factor*” in understanding offending behaviour (Senker et al. 2023, p9) while strongly arguing that as a result, probation practice should be trauma informed (McCartan, 2020, Petrillo and Bradely, 2022). But it is important from the outset of this project to emphasise that whilst there is a clear correlation between trauma and offending, this should not be misinterpreted and oversimplified as trauma being the causation of crime (Senker et al. 2023, Rowles and McCartan, 2019).

The misunderstanding surrounding trauma and trauma informed approaches derives from the ambiguity surrounding the terms (explored further in Chapter Three). This extends to trying to make sense of the role of trauma within current probation practice which is hindered in several ways. Firstly, there has only been a small amount of research undertaken to date with probation practitioners that focuses specifically on their views around the significance of trauma, how this underpins their conceptualisation of offending behaviour and how this translates into practice.

Secondly, there is an absence of research that explores the extent to which (if at all) trauma informed approaches have been applied to working with men on probation. Thirdly, there is scant literature generated about the issue of understanding the extent to which the probation service as an organisation² is committed to achieving a trauma informed service (see Petrillo and Bradley, 2022, Senker et al, 2023).

This thesis addresses some of these knowledge gaps by examining probation practitioner views of trauma and the use of trauma informed approaches within sentence management functions of probation. The study uses data generated from a mixed method approach consisting of thirty-three completed online surveys gathering quantitative and qualitative data and fourteen semi-structured individual interviews producing qualitative data.

1.2 Research aims and objectives

The overarching research question of this project was:

- To what extent is existing probation practice underpinned by trauma and trauma informed approaches?

To explore trauma and trauma informed approaches within probation, the aims of this project are:

- To embed understanding of trauma and trauma informed approaches across sentence management functions of Probation.
- To use existing theories concerning the role of emotions within probation practice as a means of conceptualising trauma and trauma informed practice in probation as an extension of emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983, Westaby, Fowler and Phillips, 2019).

² The term 'organisation' is used throughout the thesis to signify the Probation Service

- To employ the use of Thompson's (2014) 'PCS Analysis' as a foundational theory to consider to what extent trauma informed practice in probation is situated at a personal, cultural, or structural level.
- To understand the factors that contribute towards practitioners' attitudes to working with trauma at both an individual and organisational level.
- To produce and disseminate recommendations that inform and contribute to practitioner and policy maker's understandings of trauma informed approaches and how these can be implemented effectively across probation settings.

The objectives of the project are:

- To determine the current extent of knowledge and understanding of trauma and trauma informed approaches and how these have been implemented within probation practice to date.
- To undertake a survey that examines practitioner attitudes towards trauma and trauma informed probation practice.
- To undertake qualitative semi-structured interviews that expand on the data gathered from practitioner survey responses and access a greater insight into the extent to which trauma informed practice has been adopted at both practitioner and organisational levels.
- To analyse survey data and interview responses that explore practitioner attitudes towards trauma and critically examine the extent to which an offenders' level of risk and harm influences whether the principles of trauma informed approaches are adopted.

- To produce and disseminate recommendations that emerge from the research findings to improve knowledge and understanding of trauma informed approaches and the most effective ways of incorporating this into practice.

1.3 Dual Status – being an ‘insider’

The origins of this project arose from my own personal experiences as a probation practitioner within several different roles; Probation Services Officer (PSO), Probation Officer (PO), Practice Tutor Assessor (PTA) and Senior Probation Officer (SPO). Within these roles, I have had the privilege of working with some of society’s most vulnerable and traumatised individuals as a front-line practitioner, whilst also gaining first-hand experience of the impact that working with trauma can have on practitioners.

At the start of my career one of my early managers often told me that I would have been better suited to being a probation officer when the original purpose of the role was to “*advise, assist and befriend*” rather than the remit the probation service was operating under at the time I joined the organisation, which was a focus on “*enforcement, rehabilitation and public protection*” (Burrell, 2022, p436). This is something I have reflected on many times during my career. This early feedback was delivered as a criticism; its underlying meaning was that I did not ‘fit’ in an organisation that had fervently attempted to move away from its humanitarian origins which had largely underpinned my motivations for joining the probation service. My motivations were not dissimilar to many of my colleagues; the opportunity to work with people (Deering, 2011, Mawby and Worrall, 2013, Burrell, 2022, HMIP, 2025) in the hope of inspiring and nurturing positive change (Mullen, Dick and Williams, 2022). But more recent priorities to “*assess, protect and change*” (Burrell, 2022, p436) can sometimes make this difficult to actualise (Mullen, Dick and Williams, 2022) as does the tumultuous context within which probation practitioners are asked to operate.

Duality is a theme that runs throughout this thesis. But firstly, I situate myself as an '*insider researcher*' due to my shared status with participants of the project as a probation practitioner (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). Whether this impedes or improves my ability to conduct this research (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009) is discussed further in Chapter Four, but it is important to acknowledge that the motivation for this thesis derives from my personal experience as a PO. Having recognised that most individuals I have worked with over the years have experienced some form of trauma, I began to research the relevance of trauma to offending behaviour and the principles of working in a trauma informed manner. Through this, it became apparent that the Probation Service has, thus far, failed to provide operational guidance on working with people who have experienced trauma (Petrillo and Bradley, 2022). Where there has been a recognition of the impact of trauma for people on probation this has been almost exclusively focussed on women (Sanders, 2023). Subsequently, the intention of this project has always been to develop and improve existing practice for both people on probation and practitioners.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

The thesis consists of nine chapters each focussed on contributing to developing an understanding of working with trauma in probation. Following on from this introduction, is Chapter Two which is the first part of the literature review, which is split across two chapters. The first of these literature review chapters provides a historical overview of the probation service and the many challenges it has encountered along the way which have contributed to the heterogenous nature of probation values and culture. This includes exploring the themes of neoliberalism, managerialism and feminisation of the organisation. The role of emotions and the concept of emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983, Westaby, Fowler and Phillips, 2019) are considered as the foundation for

introducing trauma informed practice to the probation service, along with considering the impact that this type of work has on probation practitioners. The second part of the literature review, Chapter Three, presents an analysis of the difficulties surrounding defining trauma, trauma responses and trauma informed practice before exploring some of the key themes of working with trauma. This includes exploring gender differences and the relationship between power, oppression and trauma that leads to some groups in society being at an increased likelihood of having experienced trauma. The chapter proposes that given the interconnectivity between inequality and trauma; trauma informed practice should be considered an extension of anti-discriminatory practice. The chapter introduces and considers the personal, cultural and structural influences that are examined through Thompson's (2014) 'PCS Analysis' model. This model provides a framework for understanding how oppression and discrimination operate on different levels (Thompson, 2014).

The fourth chapter contains a comprehensive overview of the research strategy, delivery and analysis of the project. It discusses the reason for the project being designed as an exploratory sequential mixed method approach, before explaining the reasons for the project being carried out as a convergent parallel method. The rationale underpinning non-probability sampling and the difficulties encountered with participant recruitment is considered. The chapter explores the strengths and limitations of insider research given the researcher's professional role. Ethical considerations are discussed along with the obstacles that the project encountered during the research journey.

The fifth chapter is the first of the data chapter findings. It utilises Petrillo and Bradley's (2022) *Stages of the Trauma Journey* to explore the varying stages with which trauma informed practice operates at, *knowing (trauma aware)*, *doing (trauma-informed)* or

being (trauma responsive). The stages are used to examine existing levels of practitioner knowledge concerning trauma and trauma informed practice, the extent of training offered to practitioners by the organisation, the level of guidance provided at an operational level, how practitioners record knowledge of trauma and practitioner perspectives around the extent to which current probation practice is trauma informed. The sixth chapter begins by considering the influence of the victim-offender dichotomy on trauma informed approaches and the resulting challenge this creates for practitioners. Attention is then given to the themes identified as influential in attitudes towards trauma informed methods being implemented in probation, including blame, minimisation and denial of offending behaviour, levels of risk presented by people on probation, the types of offences committed, and the different types of traumas experienced.

The focus of Chapter Seven is the gendered concept of trauma. Gender was a reoccurring theme identified by participants and the chapter explores the relationship between gender, trauma and stereotypes. It considers the implementation of trauma informed practice with women on probation which includes considering the supervision of women by women and the use of single gender environments. Lastly the chapter considers the impact that the predominant focus on women has on men with trauma histories who are supervised by the probation service.

The eighth chapter presents the final findings from the data and focuses on exploring some of the barriers to adopting and developing trauma informed practice. The chapter explores the variations in the adoption of trauma informed approaches, termed the 'practitioner lottery'. The notion of 'ticking the box' is introduced that reflects the wider organisational culture of prioritising processes over working with people on probation. The chapter concludes with considering the role of partnership agencies in delivering

trauma informed practice and the impact on practitioners of working with trauma and the way in which this is recognised and addressed by the organisation.

The ninth and final chapter provides a reflection and conclusion for the thesis. Firstly, a reflection of the strengths and weaknesses of the overall thesis are provided along with a discussion regarding how the study could be done differently in the future. The chapter then summarises the main findings from each data chapter and the contribution that these provide to the subject of trauma informed probation practice. The chapter closes with suggestions for future research and practice recommendations offered to support the organisation in addressing the areas identified by practitioners as barriers to delivering a trauma informed service.

1.5 Main Arguments

This thesis contributes to the expansion of knowledge surrounding the extent to which existing probation practice is underpinned by trauma and trauma informed approaches through the following four main arguments:

1. **Trauma informed practice in probation can be utilised as a tool for helping overcome the discord between practitioner's personal values and those of the organisation (Petrillo and Bradley, 2022).** As outlined in Chapter Two, the determined attempts at a macro-level to move the probation service away from its welfare origins in favour of a neoliberal agenda, has led to a cultural dissonance where the focus on people on probation has been replaced by bureaucracy and targets (Whitehead, 2007, HMIP, 2025). This is reflected in my research findings (Chapter Eight) that despite clear evidence of the relevance and benefits of utilising trauma informed approaches with people on probation, such methods have not been authentically embedded across the organisation and have instead been applied as a 'tick box' exercise.

My research participants illustrate that practitioners identify with the principles of trauma informed practice (Chapters Five to Eight), which in turn align with the values associated with the early origins of probation (Whitehead, 2007, Gard, 2014). These values remain a significant motivator for practitioners choosing to join the organisation (HMIP, 2025) and therefore trauma informed practice offers practitioners a form of legitimacy to carry out their work with people on probation.

2. **Gender responsive practice can improve outcomes for both men and women (Bloom, Owen and Covington, 2003). A significant number of men and women on probation have experienced trauma and failure to recognise the distinct needs of both genders can result in practice that is gender biased rather than gender responsive.** There is a negligible difference between men and women's experiences of trauma frequency and duration (Søegaard et al, 2021), albeit gender can influence the types of traumas experienced, the way in which trauma symptoms manifest themselves, and how trauma is identified (Søegaard et al, 2021). This is reflected in my research findings in Chapter Seven that demonstrates whilst there has been some evidence of a commitment to applying trauma informed practice to work with women, men have been largely overlooked. Given the connection between inequality and trauma, this thesis proposes that trauma informed practice should be conceptualised as an extension of anti-oppressive practice (Thompson, 2014).
3. **The transference of responsabilisation from collective to individual responsibility for criminality that occurred due to neoliberalist influences on probation practice (Burke and Collet, 2016), has also led to**

practitioners being increasingly responsabilised, despite such changes constricting their autonomy. Existing literature has focussed on people who commit crimes being held increasingly accountable for their actions, irrespective of wider structural inequalities (Chapter Two). The findings from this thesis demonstrate how this process of responsabilisation has also been transferred to practitioners, despite operating within an increasingly target driven, punitive and risk focused organisation (Whitehead, 2007, Phillips, 2011, Tangen and Briah, 2018). Chapter Five identifies how practitioners feel they have become increasingly responsible for their own learning and development. In addition, the lack of guidance provided to practitioners for adopting a trauma informed approach is also highlighted. Chapter Eight emphasises that the responsibility to operate in a trauma informed manner with people on probation has been placed on practitioners along with making practitioners responsible for their own well-being, particularly in relation to the effects of '*emotionally dirty work*' (Phillips et al, 2021).

4. **The significance of emotions within probation practice is not a new phenomenon (Knight, 2014, Knight, Phillips and Chapman, 2016, Phillips et al. 2020). Practitioners are exposed to a range of emotions; both those expressed by the people on probation that they work with, and their own emotional responses to the work they undertake (Knight, 2014, Knight, Phillips and Chapman, 2016, Phillips et al, 2020, Phillips, Westaby and Fowler, 2020).** Hochschild's (1983) concept 'emotional labour' provides a framework for understanding the need for practitioners to manage their emotions in line with organisational expectations. When there is conflict between what practitioners feel and what they can demonstrate, 'display rules'

(Hochschild, 1983) dictate appropriate use of emotions and practitioners use acting to regulate emotions (Phillips, Westaby and Fowler, 2020). For practitioners there can be a personal cost to undertaking emotional work (Hochschild, 1983) and there can be a range of adverse impacts on people on probation whose emotions are misunderstood, particularly when these arise from previous experiences of trauma (Miller and Najavits, 2012, Harris and Fallot, 2001, Edleman, 2023).

The literature review (Chapter's Two and Three) emphasises the impact that working with trauma can have on practitioners. The findings from this research indicate that practitioners worry about being able to support people on probation who have experienced trauma (Chapter Five). Practitioners recognised that their own attitudes and emotions around blame, minimisation and denial, risks posed, offending types and different forms of trauma affect the application of trauma informed methods with people on probation (explored in Chapter Six). The impact on working with trauma for practitioners is considered in Chapter Eight, with practitioners identifying that their well-being is not an organisational priority. This thesis proposes that trauma informed practice provides a framework that can support the organisation's understanding and appropriate response to both practitioners and people on probation's emotional well-being.

Chapter 2

Literature Review – The Probation Service

2.1 Introduction

The focus of this thesis is centred around probation practitioner's views of current probation practice. Their attitudes cannot be effectively explored without understanding the context within which practitioners operate. In particular, the impact of repeated institutional reforms that have been imposed on probation services (Tangen and Briah, 2018), the increasing speed at which changes are implemented (Burke and Collet, 2016) and that such changes are cascaded down from respective Governments and the organisation to practitioners rather than because of collaborative decision-making (Robinson et al, 2014). Although the restructuring of the probation service has been a consistent feature throughout its history, this thesis has been conducted during a period of seismic change (the impact of such changes on severely hampering data collection is examined further in Chapter Four). The project commenced under the Transforming Rehabilitation (TR) agenda³, introduced in 2014-2015, which saw probation services divided into two parts. The state-run National Probation Service (NPS) was responsible for high-risk offenders and the private run Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) were responsible for low and medium risk offenders and contracted services (Johal and Davies, 2022). Following significant criticism regarding the separation of services, the Government embarked on a process of reunification to take control of the management of all

³ TR resulted in a publicly owned National Probation Service (NPS) and 21 privately owned Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) (Tidmarsh, 2020). This colossal restructuring of probation services was shortly followed by further upheaval with probations reunification as a public service in 2021 following the 'ultimate failure' of TR (Robinson, 2021, p151).

offenders, and in 2021 created the Probation Service as it currently exists (Johal and Davies, 2022). As this project draws to a close, the probation service is experiencing yet further substantial challenges, with practice described as having “*got worse, not better*” since reunification (Russell, 2023, p6). As Carr (2024a, p211) compellingly argues, responding to repeated pressures and crises is insufficient and “*a wider systemic rethink is required*”. This thesis is aptly timed to inform anticipated forthcoming changes as the new Labour Government begins to consider the role and purpose of the probation service in the coming years (Hoddinott et al. 2024).

The literature review is divided into two parts; this reflects the relative separation, thus far, between probation and trauma informed practice. The first of the two literature review chapters explores probation and the context within which practitioners operate, followed by Chapter Three which examines trauma informed practice and its relevance to the role of probation practice.

This Chapter starts by providing an overview of the process and methods employed to conduct a review of the relevant literature and provides an explanation for how information was sourced and utilised. Next, a historical overview of the development of the probation service is offered, with a focus on the wider context within which the organisation operates. The Chapter then moves on to explore the culture of probation, considering the values that draw people into working in probation and the extent to which these align with the wider purpose of the organisation, particularly as it has been subjected to repeated changes. Attention is then given to the feminisation of the probation service and the impact this has on the organisation’s culture, with gender being a theme that runs throughout this thesis. Next, the role of emotions in practice is examined before introducing the concept of ‘emotional labour’ (Hochschild, 1983), which has paved the way for trauma informed approaches being introduced to

probation services. Next, the ‘*dirty work*’ of probation, often hidden from the wider public, and conducted with the most stigmatised and marginalised communities is considered (Worral and Mawby, 2013). Lastly, the chapter considers the impact of undertaking ‘*emotionally dirty work*’ (Phillips et al, 2021) on probation practitioners. This includes exploring the effects on practitioners of being exposed to, and experiencing, the emotions associated with this type of work.

2.2 Sourcing Literature

Before beginning to analyse or act on research data gathered through this thesis, it was essential to establish a solid understanding and knowledge base of the history and culture of probation, trauma and trauma informed approaches so that probation practice situations could be made sense of, through the application of frameworks and concepts (Thompson, 2014). The literature review applied the two main methods for identifying existing studies and relevant literature; a database search and snowballing (Wohlin et al. 2022). The database search involved identifying the appropriate keywords and search terms (see Table 1) to be utilised (Aveyard, Payne and Preston, 2021). Searches were conducted using variations of combinations of the keywords and search terms on the university’s online library, using search engines such as Academia.edu, Research Gate and Google Scholar, e-journal publications and Open Access Theses and Dissertations.

Keywords and search terms	
Probation History	Emotional Labour
Probation culture, ethics and morals	Emotional labour and probation practice
Probation and Neoliberalism	Trauma and probation practice
Probation and Managerialism	Trauma in the criminal justice system
Probation and Risk paradigm	Probation practitioner attitudes

Trauma experiences	Gender and Trauma
Trauma histories	Vicarious/Secondary Trauma
Trauma responses	Victims and Offenders
Trauma and offending behaviour	Co-existence of harm and vulnerability
Trauma and criminality	Social Workers and Trauma
Trauma informed practice	Prison and trauma informed care
Trauma informed care	
Trauma informed approaches	
Adverse childhood experiences	

Table 1 – Keywords and Search terms

Once the database searches had been concluded, the snowballing approach using the reference lists from the database literature to examine further relevant sources was applied. Literature was included from a variety of organisations (both government publications and non-governmental organisations), academic researchers and authors to provide a broad spectrum of knowledge. Rabinaski's (2003, p43) seven principles were applied to each source to ensure that literature utilised was: current, relevant, reliable, accurate, appropriate, unbiased and conceptually correct.

Because the notion of trauma informed probation practice is a relatively recent concept, the literature was explored, at times, in isolation to one another around the wider themes of probation and trauma more generally. Care has been taken to draw from literature based on environments that share similarities with probation, such as social work and prisons, but where the use of trauma informed practice is more established.

2.3 Setting the scene – The History of Probation

The probation service has a long established and complex history characterised by persistent reform (Robinson et al, 2014, Tangen and Briah, 2018) because of changing economic, social, political and moral influences (Canton and Dominey, 2018). Whilst the *1886 Probation of First Orders Bill* legislated the idea of a probation service, it was not until the *1907 Probation of Offenders Act* that the probation service came into existence (Phillips, 2010). Established on humanitarian values (Gale, 2012), the Act introduced the role of Probation Officers as a new profession that aimed to *Advise, Assist and Befriend*; a value base that remained closely aligned with probation for nearly 100 years (Whitehead, 2007, Gard, 2014). These early endeavours into helping those involved in crime were motivated by a moral compass underpinned by religious beliefs that punitive measures should not be imposed without support being offered (Canton and Dominey, 2018). The initial purpose of probation was intended to be an alternative to punishment, rather than an extension of it (Phillips, 2010, Canton and Dominey, 2018). Despite situating probation's origins as deriving from virtuous and well-intended beginnings that were centred around the notion of 'helping', a division was instantly drawn between those that needed to be helped, and those considered capable of offering such assistance. This generated an immediate power divide. This power divide reflected "*the rightness of a middle-class view of society*" and "*maintained its dominance*" (Vanstone, 2004, p37). The ideological view was that the person committing crime could be rescued and saved from their behaviour which derived "*more from godlessness than poor decision-making*" (Phillips, 2010, p8). When attempts to rescue were failed endeavours, these were considered "*moral failures*" on behalf of the offender, which reinforced the notion of individual failings (Vanstone, 2004, p37). Those deemed to be undeserving of forgiveness and compassion were excluded from society and imprisonment was justified as a suitable response

(Vanstone, 2004). Probation Officers were tasked with monitoring individual compliance for those believed to be deserving of an alternative punishment to prison (Vanstone, 2004), which reinforced their position of authority and responsibility to the Courts (Phillips, 2010, Deering and Feilzer, 2019). This shaped the duality of the probation officer role and a power imbalance within the relational dynamics on which much of the work of a Probation Officer was based; factors which remain firmly engrained in current practice. Vanstone (2004) proposes that many historical summaries of probation's history crudely divide its history into two phases, that which has been influenced by welfarism and that which has been influenced by neo-liberalism. He argues that this subsequently ignores the persistence during both eras of the exclusion of certain groups of society (offenders) and the preoccupation with the risk posed to society by these individuals, factors that continue to permeate current practice (Vanstone, 2004).

Shortly after, in the form of the Home Office, the State became involved in the provision of the new probation scheme, albeit initially within the London area (Gard, 2014). This marked the start of the service's relationship with the State that has influenced how frequently the vision and purpose of probation has changed over the proceeding years (Gard, 2014) in response to ever changing social and political agendas (Robinson et al. 2014). The *Criminal Justice Act of 1925* extended the organisation of probation from London to the whole country under the control of the Home Office (Gard, 2014).

During the 1920s and 1930s, probation practice began to be influenced by psychological theories of criminal behaviour, despite the dominant discourse that economic depression and subsequent unemployment and poverty rates were to blame for increased crime rates (Gard, 2014). The narrative that individuals were to blame for crime was gaining traction despite the recognition of structural problems. The

Institute for Scientific Treatment of Delinquency (ISTD) (formerly the Association for the Scientific Treatment of Criminals and later the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies) founded in the early 1930s sought to bring together research, policy and practice (Bowling and Ross, 2006). It was “*strongly orientated to psychoanalytical approaches*” that attributed criminal behaviour as arising from internal difficulties rather than external factors (Bowling and Ross, 2006, p12). The notion of helping was reimagined under the guise of ‘treating’ (Annison, 1998). Although arguably synonymous with one another, it was a stark reminder of the powerlessness held by the individual who could be referred by “*magistrates, probation officers, charitable societies, relatives of offenders, doctors and others*” to be examined for physical and psychological causes to explain their behaviour (The British Journal of Nursing, 1936, p218). Underpinned by psychological theories, the probation practitioner’s role became one of “*effecting change*” by “*investigation, diagnosis and treatment*” (Canton and Dominey, 2018, p27), epitomising the notion of ‘doing to’ rather than ‘doing with’. Whilst the ISTD was founded by volunteers and said to run independently of state funding, that it was utilised by criminal courts is indicative that the state was at least receptive to its ideology. Crime was considered a consequence of “*personal shortcomings*” which diverted attention from social injustice and meant that individuals were held accountable for their crimes, rather than crimes being attributed to their circumstances (Annison, 1998, Canton and Dominey, 2018, p27). Such an approach allows for social structures, such as societal deprivation, poverty and inequality, to be overlooked (Hillyard and Tombs, 2008). From a Marxist perspective, this is a deliberate and a determined effort to ensure that the capitalist society prevails, and wealth, power and control is retained by the minority (Macionis and Plumber, 2012).

The late 1930s saw the Home Office focus on centralising and expanding a nationalised system (Gard, 2014). The *Criminal Justice Act 1948* introduced 'case committees', appointed by the Secretary of State, to oversee the work of probation officers (Gard, 2014). This was a significant period for Probation with the Secretary of State and Home Office having "*taken over some major powers in respect of probation, in terms of local arrangements and nationally for practice, recruitment and training*" (Gard, 2014, pg198). This meant that practitioners began to experience more directly the impact of changing political, economic and penal ideology surrounding the causes of crime and the responses to such; something which persists in current practice (Skinner and Goldhill, 2013).

During the 1950s and early 1960s, probation was to all intents and purposes functioning as an extension of social work because "*it was abundantly clear to many that crime was bound up with disadvantage and deprivation*" (Canton, 2024, p215). Like probation, social work clients predominantly arise from the most vulnerable and disadvantaged sections of society (Thompson, 2018). The alignment with social work, dominated by psychodynamic theory, was something of a natural progression from probation's earlier psychoanalytical influences, where psychodynamic theories originated from (Payne, 2018). Crucially for probation practice, alongside holding the individual to account, psychodynamic approaches also encourage recognition of external factors that influence behaviour (Payne, 2018). While the notion of trauma informed practice is a relatively new phenomenon in the CJS, psychodynamic theories opened the door to understanding how previous experiences, particularly those that occur during childhood, influence later behaviours (Payne, 2018). Social work's identity as a 'helping profession' was akin to probation's earliest foundations which further drew the organisations together. Within such professions, the relationship

between the practitioner and the client is often argued to be the most crucial aspect (Čopková, 2022). The role of relationships within probation, particularly their significance, has been subject to continued scrutiny (see for example Trotter, 1999, Burnett and McNeill, 2005, Annison, Eadie and Knight, 2008, Ansbro, 2008).

The expansion of the probation service in the late 1960s led to new management structures being implemented (Gard, 2014). In part, because political interest in the 1960s and 1970s was focused primarily on the organisation of the service, rather than its intentions or ethos (Canton, 2024). During this period, Probation Officers retained their autonomy and were able to decide whether they followed social work and/or psychological based methods with their clients, but more widely the role of the organisation continued to be regarded as welfare based (Gard, 2014, Canton, 2024).

The political discourse during the 1970s saw probation deemed fundamentally futile, which was swiftly followed by the conclusion that 'nothing works' both of which resulted in political support for probation diminishing (Gard, 2014). Probation was left needing a new purpose, one that required probation to abdicate its association with welfarism and the caring profession of social work (Canton, 2024). Since the late 1970s, probation reforms have been underpinned by a New Public Management framework, also referred to as 'managerialism' (Deering, 2008) which has been driven by a focus on cost efficiency and rehabilitation effectiveness (Whitehead, 2007, Phillips, 2011, Tangen and Briah, 2018). These changes marked the beginnings of a move away from welfarism (Deering, 2008, Tangen and Birah, 2018, Canton 2024), replaced by a neoliberalist agenda increasingly focussed on an individual in a vacuum, where their environment and circumstances are not considered as influencing their actions (Burke and Collet, 2016). A central part of neoliberalist influences was the notion of 'responsibilisation' which focused on reducing individual dependence on the state and

instead “*empowered’ [the individual] to make ‘informed choices’ about risk and its management in their own lives*” (Robinson, 2016, p12).

The neoliberalist agenda has subsequently been pursued by successive Governments; Labour during 1997-2010, Coalition from 2010-2015 and Conservatives between 2010-2024 (Kirton and Guillaume, 2019). This has seen collective responsibility for crime diminish (Phillips et al. 2022) and the overarching state and structural conditions within which crime occurs become less prominent in debates surrounding probation and responses to crime. The welfare of individuals was replaced by theories of punishment and control (Canton, 2024) in the wake of “*a more rampant politicisation of crime, disorder, and anti-social behaviour*” (Burke and Collett, 2008, p9). Moving away from “*the traditional essence and value base of probation*” (Anniston, 1998, p28) was symbolic in contributing to tension between practitioners and the organisation; a contentious issue that remains apparent in current practice, particularly concerning working with trauma (Petrillo and Bradley, 2022). The imposition of national targets, through invasive bureaucracy, led to a reduction in innovation and localised approaches (Whitehead, 2007).

Crime associated with socio-economic circumstances (Kemshall, 2003) was replaced by a system focussed on managing crime rather than addressing its causes (Nash, 2000). The systemisation of probation through managerialist reforms reinforced that there was less concern for the individual and more interest in what the organisation offers other parts of the system (Robinson, McNeill and Maruna, 2012) for example, reducing prison populations. This was achieved through being rebranded as an alternative to custody (Canton and Dominey, 2018, Raynor, 2018). The use of probation as a means for managing prison populations is currently underway again to manage the current prison population crisis (Carr, 2024a), symptomatic of its purpose

and ethos being of lesser significance to a government seeking to manage responses to crime, rather than crimes underlying causes. As Whitehead (2007) argues, political and organisational construction of targets focused on public expenditure, taxation and accountability are particularly arbitrary in people-based organisations, such as probation, that entails aspects of work that are immeasurable.

Following the conclusion in 1974 that ‘nothing works’ to rehabilitate individuals, albeit not strictly a true summarisation of research results (Raynor, 2018), the 1980s saw a progressively tougher political agenda towards crime and order. In a political era determined to take a harsh stance on crime, probation was rebranded as “*punishment in the community...so long as community penalties were demanding and rigorously enforced*” through the *Criminal Justice Act 1991* (Canton and Dominey, 2018, p29). This reflects a less understanding and forgiving approach to crime that had characterised the earlier history of probation underpinned by humanitarian values. Having created a narrative of individual responsibility for the harms caused through offending and determined that ‘nothing works’ then the obvious answer seemed to be to instead, punish people for their crimes (Bonta, 2023). To imprison increasing numbers of people would have substantial financial consequences, not in keeping with macroeconomic policy and the managerialist agenda, and therefore cheaper alternatives were required (Raynor, 2018).

Reductive justifications of punishment consider it necessary to reduce the incidence of criminal behaviour, either through deterrence, incapacitation or rehabilitation (Canton, 2018). Retributive justifications of punishment are based on the belief that offenders *deserve* to be punished, proportionately to their crimes (Canton, 2018), colloquially referred to as the ‘*just deserts*’ approach. While reductive and retributive justifications appear to have very different motivations and intentions, fundamentally

they both require censure, which involves “*expressing disapproval of the act or omission and declaring someone responsible for it*” (Canton, 2018, p253). Failure to do so could be construed as the “*ignoring, condoning or rewarding*” of criminal behaviour (Canton, 2018, p256). Both approaches reinforce the power division between those who disapprove, and those who are disapproved of. This was boosted by a political agenda focussed on being perceived as ‘*tough on crime*’ to such an extent that it condemned the use of the term ‘*client*’ to describe those under probation supervision and demanded the use of ‘*offender*’ instead to strengthen the idea that punishment was a necessary response to crime (Canton, 2024).

The early 1990s became known as the ‘What Works’ movement focused on developing evidenced-based practice (Phillips, 2010). Andrews, Bonta and Hoge (1990) proposed to have identified the components required for intervention effectiveness; this later became known as the Risk, Need, Responsivity (RNR) (cited by Raynor, 2018, Bonta, 2023). The basic premise of the RNR model is that level of risk should be matched to intervention intensity, interventions should be matched to the criminogenic needs of the individual and interventions should be responsive to individual learning style and abilities (Bonta, 2023). The quest for effective practice was translated into cognitive-behavioural method structured group programmes and the skills required by individual practitioners (Raynor, 2018), but in the context of enforcement and accountability (Deering and Feizler, 2019). The emergence of the risk paradigm saw the probation service’s identity shift to one of public protection (Deering and Feizler, 2019), concerned with calculating, predicting and managing risk (Robinson, 2016).

In 2001, the National Probation Service (NPS) was created, following concern that probation services were inadequate and in need of more centralised government

control (Deering, 2011, Guilfoyle, 2013). This increased level of micro-management was, according to Phillips (2011, p108), reflected in the managerialist introduction of:

“Technological solutions to risk assessment and offender control; the pervasive use of targets to manage workload and practice; and the extensive use of rules to standardise practice”.

Attempts at standardising practice is not a new phenomenon, it has been prominent throughout probation's existence through legislative measures and a collective purpose, however managerialism saw a reduction in practitioner autonomy and the use of targets to monitor performance considered to be linked to effectiveness. The very people that probation had once set out to advise, assist and befriend, became less of a priority than adhering to managerialist processes and targets (Phillips, 2011, Petrillo and Bradley, 2022), reinforcing their powerless status. The fixation on targets became a significant focus of probation practice, despite the inability of such targets to consider the nuanced differences that every person on probation presents (Phillips, 2011). The reorientation of probation as part of the structure of the wider CJS was further strengthened by more joined up working with Police for high-risk individuals and through the creation of the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) (Annison, 2007) which brought probation and prisons under the same umbrella (Guilfoyle, 2013). The motivation for establishing NOMS was underpinned by a desire to control the use of prison sentences and the need to address high reconviction rates through '*offender management*' (Guilfoyle, 2013). This language reinforced the extent of probation's separation from its welfarist origins, by an organisation "*too bruised and cowed by political interference and bullying*" to oppose (Guilfoyle, 2013, p38). Shortly after, the 2005 manifesto from the Labour Party, referred to privatisation of probation services, under the guise of contestability (Guilfoyle, 2013), as part of the continuing neoliberalist agenda.

Transforming Rehabilitation (TR) in 2014 represents perhaps one of the most significant and dramatic changes to probation's structure, purpose and practice (Deering and Feizler, 2019). Furthermore, Deering and Feizler (2019) argue that whilst it has often been claimed that the main motivator for such change was austerity, this only increased its urgency; the wheels had already been set in motion. This was apparent through existing neo-liberalistic structures which utilised private and voluntary sector organisations to deliver a range of services through localised partnerships (Guilfoyle, 2013). Subsequently the introduction of a "*commissioning environment*" (Guilfoyle, 2013, p38) was something of an obvious next step once offender management became centralised. Despite considerable opposition that TR was a "*very high-risk strategy when dealing with many of society's most difficult, damaged and dangerous individuals*" that was "*cost driven, poorly evidenced, wanton ideological vandalism*" (Guilfoyle, 2013, p39) the major structural reform went ahead. Fairly swiftly. after the implementation of TR, probation faced further scrutiny for not delivering its intended results. The House of Commons Justice Committee in 2018 identified significant concerns with the Government's ability to arrange adequate contracts with the private sector. This was along with identifying issues around; poor performance, substantial barriers to the public and private sector working together cohesively, effectively removing voluntary sector involvement, low staff morale and unmanageable workloads and reduced sentencer confidence in short custodial sentences underpinned by a "*one-size fits all approach [which] lacks the flexibility to meet the varying needs of offenders*" (House of Commons Justice Committee, 2018, p6). They further highlighted inadequate support for those leaving prison, insufficient supervision of people on probation and failure to meet the specific needs of individuals subject to probation (House of Commons Justice Committee, 2018). But as Tidmarsh

(2020) highlights, much of these so-called failings, were purely exacerbated versions of existing issues.

Following such disparaging results, it was of little surprise that probation would face yet another momentous change in the form of Reunification, which saw the Government seek to amalgamate probation back into one service in 2021. Whilst some have proposed that reunification is still in its infancy (London Assembly, 2023), the speed at which reforms have impacted probation in the last few decades, renders the current organisation the equivalent to a young adult, having undergone transition but still malleable to change and development. There is a sense of fear within probation that its recent status as a newly formed organisation heightens its vulnerability to further political intrusion (Millings et al.2023).

Whilst reunification is yet to translate into further proposed substantial structural reforms, the existing probation service remains, both in a structural and practical sense, fragmented (Millings et al.2023). Further challenges have come at a considerable pace at which extra changes to practice are being implemented. The Government's introduction of the Extended Custody Supervised Licence (ECSL) has brought forward release dates for those serving custodial sentences by 18 days, subsequently expanded to 35 and 70 days respectively, and the temporary reduction of some custodial sentences to address the prison capacity crisis. These measures have placed increasing pressure on a probation service (Ainslie et al. 2024) already described as having *"unmanageable caseloads, high vacancy rates and inadequate risk assessment processes"* (Hoddinott et al. 2024, p65). In 2024, the Government introduced 'Probation Reset' claiming, unconvincingly, that it would reduce the demand on probation. But as Cracknell (2024) and Tidmarsh (2024) argue, the implication of Probation Reset is that it jeopardises further reinforcing probation's

purpose, as one focussed principally on public protection, risk management and enforcement. A focus that Goodman (2024) reasons, serves to act as a disguise for addressing other issues connected to crime and reducing probation's capacity to deliver effective and anti-oppressive practice.

2.4 The culture of Probation

The culture of an organisation is made up of the *"the values, norms, and beliefs that make up [an] agency's character and behaviours"* (Brackin, 2007, p16) which manifest themselves within the practices of an organisation (Mawby and Worrall, 2011). For the probation service, the values which underpin the organisation have been subject to much attention as it has attempted, often in vain, to resolve its welfare orientated origins alongside its more recent role as a provider and enforcer of punishment in the community, which Canton (2024) refers to as the 'care and control' nexus. Canton (2024, p219) persuasively argues that probation practice incorporates both. He describes how care is achieved through *"a conscientious and sensitive attention to the rights, interests and views of everyone involved...to practice in these ways is to be care-full, to fail to do so [is] care-less"*. Control should be achieved by seeking to *"replace external controls with self-direction"* and through *"consultation and explanation - the care-full involvement of individuals in decisions that affect them"* (Canton, 2024, p220). Where these are not achieved, the authority held by practitioners becomes based solely on power (Canton, 2024).

The probation service priorities as set by the Government are *"to protect the public by effective rehabilitation of offenders, by reducing the causes which contribute to offending and enabling offenders to turn their lives around"* (Probation Service, n.d.). Research has shown that probation practitioners tend to identify with at least one of these objectives which they deem to legitimise the purpose of the organisation

(Robinson and McNeill, 2004) and their individual role within the organisation. Robinson, Burke and Millings' (2017, p25) research, albeit focussed on the legitimacy of privatised probation services during the Transforming Rehabilitation agenda, reinforced that practitioner "*buy-in is key*" is key to establishing an organisation considered to hold legitimate authority by its practitioners. This thesis proposes that trauma informed practice could offer a form of legitimacy to probation stakeholders through its harm reductive capabilities (McCartan 2020, Senker et al. 2023).

For many practitioners, the value of 'making a difference' is of higher importance than their role as a public servant (Robinson, Burke and Millings, 2017). This indicates that practitioner values align with the principles of trauma informed practice (see Chapter Three). Yet Deering and Feilzer (2019, p11) argue that the changing purpose of probation has meant "*that these values are often framed or overshadowed by instrumental concerns such as public protection, reducing reoffending, and punishment*". This conflict may provide some explanation as to why the probation service has more recently been described as experiencing an identity crisis (Justice and Home Affairs Committee, 2023) and lacking "*a clear sense of its purpose and role within the justice system*" (Hoddinott et al. 2024, p66). This is reinforced by HMIP's (2025, p46) latest findings that an "*incongruence between values*" held by individuals and those of the organisation is a primary driving force for staff leaving the organisation.

Mawby and Worrall's (2011, pg7) research examining probation cultures and occupational identities concluded that there is a set of shared core values, such as "*recognising the human worth of offenders and believing in the ability of people to change*", reflecting the persistence of the humanitarian values often associated with the foundations of the organisation. Similarly, Butter and Hermanns' (2011) research

with Probation Officers based in the Netherlands found humanistic values to be the most important determining factor in practitioner job satisfaction. Moreover, they found that while ethical values were both vital to increasing individual performance and an important attribute of organisational culture, humanistic values were considered somewhat lacking within the wider culture of the organisation. This disparity arises despite the Netherlands being an advanced welfare state, often referred to as the ‘*caring state*’, albeit one that has become less generous over time (Vis, Van Kersbergen and Becker, 2008). It is therefore unsurprising that Mawby and Worrall’s (2011) research with probation practitioners across England, where there has been a determined separation from welfarism and embracement of neo-liberalist ideology, identified that newer recruits were also influenced into the organisation through the appeal of job security and status. Although, Deering (2008) argued that the values held by practitioners, generally, appear to have been relatively unaffected by macrolevel transformation agendas of the organisation.

However, probation practitioners are subjected to continuing tumultuous economic, political and social influences and changing demands from governments, management and media discourses (Worrall and Mawby, 2013). Despite this, the desire to work with people to affect positive changes has remained a persistent motivation for many probation practitioners (Tidmarsh, 2021, Burrell, 2022, HMIP, 2025). Whilst the language used to convey the intentions of probation practitioners has changed with time, arguably, the concepts of rescuing, saving, helping, treating and caring, share similarities in that they are predominantly associated with “*affective qualities...for instance empathy, warmth and kindness*” (Canton, 2024, p219). Indeed, the research project by Mullen, Dick and Williams (2022) which explored the views of those with lived experience of probation found that positive interactions with

practitioners were characterised by empathy and compassion, advocacy, trust, genuine interest, time and effort invested. Trauma informed practice embraces these values that are identified as creating a positive relationship between practitioners and people on probation, suggesting that there may be benefits to be gained in probation from adopting this approach. But conversely, Mullen, Dick and Williams (2022, p12) also identified concerns around a culture where “*individual probation practitioners had too much power to take life-changing action against them [the person on probation]*”. Furthermore, they found a culture focused on risk management (control) outweighed the provision of support to address causal factors of crimes (care) (Mullen, Dick and Williams, 2022), reinforcing the notion of crime being the responsibility of the individual rather than connected to structural inequalities. This is indicative of neoliberalist and managerialist ideologies underpinned by the risk paradigm (see Robinson, 2016) and the obstinate disinclination of successive governments to acknowledge that practice which incorporates care for those on probation does not undermine its punitive purposes (Canton, 2024). Such disparity between practitioner’s personal values and the approaches of the organisation have resulted in a cultural discord (Whitehead, 2007, Petrillo and Bradley, 2022).

More recently, research undertaken by Millings et al (2023) identified in the wake of a reunified probation service, what they termed the ‘two tribes’, with many having contextualised reunification as a ‘takeover’ by NPS that sought to absorb legacy CRC practitioners into legacy NPS structures and practices. Their research found a culture comprising a hierarchical practitioner aspect, with legacy NPS practitioners deemed ‘good’ and their legacy CRC practitioners in contrast, viewed as ‘bad’ or ‘poor’ (Millings et al. 2023). This is reminiscent of the discussion earlier in this Chapter whereby similar binary language was used to describe people involved in offending and the inherent

power ascribed to those at the top of the hierarchy. For an organisation that prides itself on being inclusive, it appears to be characterised by its ability to create division and power imbalances, whether that be with its own staff or with those which it serves.

Additionally, Millings et al. (2023) found that the general culture of the reunified probation service was one that should be a cause for concern for the organisation, not just through the presence of unhealthy behaviours, such as working late at night and during weekends and an inadequate work/life balance, but the torrent of evidence from practitioners of the emotional impact of their roles. Practitioners described feeling unsettled, overwhelmed, lacking in confidence, overworked, stressed and anxious; the role of emotions in practice is explored in more depth later in this chapter (see sections 2.6 – 2.9).

Significant to the barriers in implementing of trauma informed approaches, is what Whitehead (2007) describes as a move away from being concerned with ‘why’ someone has offended, which dissipated with the move from a welfare to neo-liberal state and instead replaced with a culture focused on achieving targets. Whitehead (2007, p92) further asserts that a target driven culture has created a cultural dissonance across the public sector, from a “*people-based culture into [a] managerial and bureaucratic culture*”. Trauma informed approaches are, by their very nature, difficult to measure, as is much of the work undertaken in people-based organisations which may be one of the reasons why there appears to have been little appetite to implement these methods to date.

2.5 Feminisation of the probation service

The feminisation of probation cultures is arguably one of the most significant changes that has occurred in the organisation, with far-reaching, but often subtle consequences, especially in terms of the relationship between the probation service and other, male dominated, criminal justice agencies.

(Worral and Mawby, 2011, p14)

Probation has been a female dominated workforce since the early 1990s (Annison, 2007, Worrall and Mawby, 2011). Annison (2007) describes the organisation attempting to address the feminisation of its workforce initially through focussing its recruitment on (male) armed forces personnel and ex-police. Presumably recruitment of men from these positions was considered advantageous in the Government's desire to present a tough approach to crime, with such occupations bringing with them connotations of authority and discipline, often deemed necessary to impose punitive measures. While women have remained the dominant workforce "*varying between 75 and 79 per cent since 2016*" (HMIP, 2025, p25), Worrall and Mawby (2011, p14) describe "*a new breed*" of female practitioners who are "*highly organised, computer-literate and focused on public protection*". The inference here, is that women have adopted attributes more commonly associated with men. The adoption of male characteristics or the 'dilution' of feminine traits is relatively common in male dominated workplaces (Martin and Barnard, 2013). Whilst the feminisation of probation has been of much interest since its occurrence, less attention has been paid to arguments that male dominance is maintained through factors such as policy development (Martin and Barnard, 2013), and subsequently feminised caring professions are subjected to greater external control and lesser autonomy (Tidmarsh, 2024). Additionally, little appears to be understood as to why, significantly less men apply to work in probation or why the proportion of male applicants drops during the application process (HMIP, 2025). A further under explored area of the feminisation of probation is the effect this gender imbalance has on people on probation, who are predominantly men, and who will most likely be supervised by female practitioners (Tidmarsh, 2024). This is explored further in Chapter Seven.

The probation service's alignment with organisations such as the Police, Courts and Prisons, traditionally considered to display a masculine ethos (Annison, 1998), has meant that assumptions of a feminised workforce returning the organisation back to its welfare orientated roots and alignment to social work has not been actualised (Worral and Mawby, 2011). In fact, Tidmarsh (2024) observes that during the period of probation practice underpinned by welfarism, it was a male dominated organisation, while the opposite is true since its neo-liberalist underpinnings. Despite evidence to the contrary, there remain concerns that feminisation and welfarism are synonymous with one another. Tidmarsh (2020, 2022, 2024) has written extensively on the professionalisation of probation, including the cultural dynamics of the feminisation of probation. He argues that female dominant workforces such as probation and those associated with the 'caring professions' are subject to greater external controls and authority, compared to the type of roles typically held by men, who Tidmarsh (2024) claims possess greater social and economic resources.

Annison (2007) proposes that earlier male dominance may have been reflective of perceptions at the time, around the gender appropriateness of supervisory relationships; with a predominantly male caseload, a male workforce was likely to have been encouraged and celebrated. Similar observations around gender appropriateness remain a contentious issue, albeit it would appear only in respect of the gender of practitioners supervising women (see Chapter Seven for further discussion). While Worral and Mawby's (2011) research highlighted changes in wider societal attitudes regarding women and the workplace led to an insurgence of women choosing probation as an occupation. Although Tidmarsh's (2024, p240) research found there to be no apparent differences between the motivation for men and women choosing probation as an occupation, the theme of care was prominent and regarded

as “*essential to probation identity and practice*”. Similarly, Worral and Mawby (2011) found there to be no discernible difference in the way in which male or female respondents described their work as probation practitioners.

Yet, Annison’s (1998) early research on the feminisation of the organisation found that women with familial responsibilities experienced continued emotional dilemmas arising from balancing work and home life, and some women shared a desire to avoid emotions (and presumably the expression of emotions) because of a wider dominant masculine environment. Although these concerns are not specific to probation and can affect women within the workplace generally (Martin and Barnard, 2013), it may help explain why emotions in probation practice appears to have received little attention in recent years as the organisation has become increasingly feminised. Additionally, women are more likely than men to internalise negative emotions (McNeish and Scott, 2014, Chaplin, 2015, Miller and Najavits, 2012) which has likely meant that it has been easier to overlook the emotional aspect of probation practice.

2.6 Emotions in Practice

“A view of human nature that ignores the power of emotions is sadly shortsighted...as we all know from experience, when it comes to shaping our decisions and our actions, feeling counts every bit as much—and often more—than thought”.

(Goleman, 1995, no pagination)

The role of emotions within probation practice is substantial (Knight, 2014, Knight, Phillips and Chapman, 2016, Phillips et al. 2020). So, it is puzzling that the policies and processes which underpin probation practice have become progressively emotionless (Knight, Phillips and Chapman, 2016). Still this omission of emotions from probation practice may, in part, provide an explanation as to why trauma, given its relationship to emotions, has also been largely neglected.

Although the varying aims of probation may have changed over the years from *advising, assisting and befriending*, replaced with *enforcement, rehabilitation and public protection* and latterly to *assess, protect and change* (Burrell, 2022), its consistency has been its work with people and the emotions this brings with it (Knight, Phillips and Chapman, 2016). For some scholars, the concept of trauma informed practice is reminiscent of the former mantra of '*advising, assisting and befriending*' (McCartan, 2020, Senker et al, 2023). Given the considerable efforts to separate probation from being perceived as a soft option (Deering and Feilzer, 2019), it is possible that this affiliation may have reduced the appeal of adopting a trauma informed approach within probation settings at a structural level.

It may also explain the lack of acknowledgement of the importance of emotions within existing probation practices and policies. Albeit perplexing, this lack of recognition does not detract from the fact that a large proportion of a probation practitioner's role is experiencing and managing their own emotions and those of the individuals they supervise (Knight, 2014, Knight, Phillips and Chapman, 2016, Phillips et al, 2020, Phillips, Westaby and Fowler, 2020). The significance of emotions in the work of probation is captured in the following description:

"Practitioners working in [the criminal justice system] will encounter people in highly emotional states associated with, or as a result of, their offending behaviour, and further aroused by being processed through a system that is designed to punish and control them, for this behaviour. Workers in the system have to manage and respond to these emotions, and the emotions engendered in themselves, on a daily basis".

(Knight, 2014, p2)

This explanation does not directly refer to the relationship between emotions and trauma, but it is implied through the acknowledgement of heightened emotional states, the potential for further emotional arousal and the impact of such emotion on practitioners; are all factors associated with trauma. Bradley (2021, p7) offers similar

observations regarding prison officers, whom she describes as working in “*emotionally charged and traumatising environments*” with prisoners, that react in ways that they believe are self-protective influenced by prior trauma experiences, but to others are perceived as hostile or guarded. Probation practitioners encounter similar situations on a regular basis, not least because probation and prison staff typically work with the same individuals. Bradley describes the challenge of working with behaviour underpinned by trauma responses as:

“Metaphorical icebergs. They appear to be one thing, yet underneath the surface, there is a plethora of unseen need. What one practitioner may see as ‘volatile’ or ‘aggressive’, a trauma-informed practitioner will see as a presenting behaviour, masking other emotions and experiences” (Bradley (2021, p5).

This encapsulates the significance for probation practitioners of not just managing the presenting emotions but ensuring that these are conceptualised correctly to enable an appropriate response. As McMurray and Ward (2014) emphasise, behaviours and emotions that can sometimes seem out of place can result in exclusion and being emotionally outsourced by service providers, arguably further marginalising these individuals. These outsourced emotions fall on statutory agencies, such as a probation, already ‘*tainted*’ (Worrall and Mawby, 2013) and unable to opt out of working with someone with challenging behaviour, and so the role of practitioners becomes in part about “*the containment of emotional dirt*” (McMurray and Ward, 2014, p1123). Drawing parallels with the field of social work, some of this so called ‘*dirt*’ involves practitioners repeated exposure to the life experiences of those they work with, often a consequence of oppressive societal structures (Herland, 2021). This requires practitioners to manage not just the emotions of others, but the emotions that they experience as a response to their work (Herland, 2021).

2.7 Emotional Labour

Hochschild's (1983) influential concept of '*emotional labour*' was initially introduced to understand the role of emotions within the private sector, but there has been an increasing interest in understanding the ways in which emotions affect professionals working within the public sector (Phillips, Westaby and Fowler, 2020). Hochschild (1983, p7, f.n.) defines '*emotional labour*' as the "*management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display; emotional labour is sold for a wage and therefore has exchange value*". For probation practitioners, emotional labour involves presenting an image to others that is different to how they feel with the intention of aligning themselves with organisational objectives (McMurray and Ward, 2014, Phillips et al. 2020, Phillips, Westaby and Fowler, 2020). This implies an element of manipulation and control over practitioners' emotions for the benefit of the organisation (Knight, Phillips and Chapman, 2016). Following the splitting of the probation service across both the public and private sectors as part of the 2014 TR agenda, the interest in the role of emotional labour within probation practice spanned both types of organisations with research having been undertaken with practitioners operating in both the NPS and CRC. Tidmarsh (2020) conducted an ethnographic study of practitioners in a CRC office that demonstrated the operationalisation of probation values was achieved through the performance of emotional labour, namely the management and manipulation of practitioner's emotions. The study further highlighted the balancing act required to meet targets and state expectations whilst attempting to take a whole person-centred approach (Tidmarsh, 2020). Significantly, Tidmarsh's (2020) research also made the connection between emotional labour and trauma, acknowledging the impact of secondary trauma for practitioners. Less obvious in the study's analysis, was the indicators of practitioners working with trauma histories or trauma symptoms, but this was evident throughout practitioner's accounts of their

work. Comparatively, Westaby, Fowler and Phillips' (2019) study with NPS practitioners using semi-structured interviews emphasised the extent to which emotional labour is present within probation work but made no reference to the impact of trauma on working with emotions. Albeit there were undertones of the connection between emotion and trauma in some of the practitioner accounts provided. This appears to reflect the apparent inevitability that working with trauma induces powerful emotions for practitioners (Petrillo and Bradley, 2022).

Expanding on the concept of emotional labour, Hochschild (1983) highlighted occasions when professionals experience discrepancies between what is felt and what is displayed to others. The management of these discrepancies were termed by Hochschild (1983) as '*display rules*' which shape what emotions are appropriate to demonstrate and when (Phillips, Westaby and Fowler, 2020). The performance of emotional labour, guided by display rules is explained by Phillips, Westaby and Fowler (2020) as consisting of three types (see Figure 1). This includes '*surface acting*' which involves displaying a different emotion to the one being felt. While '*deep acting*' involves feeling an emotion through imagination or prior experience to align with expectation. Lastly, '*genuine emotional response*' whereby the emotion felt aligns with expectations, albeit the display of the emotion still requires regulating to ensure it is appropriate, as determined by the organisation (see figure 3).

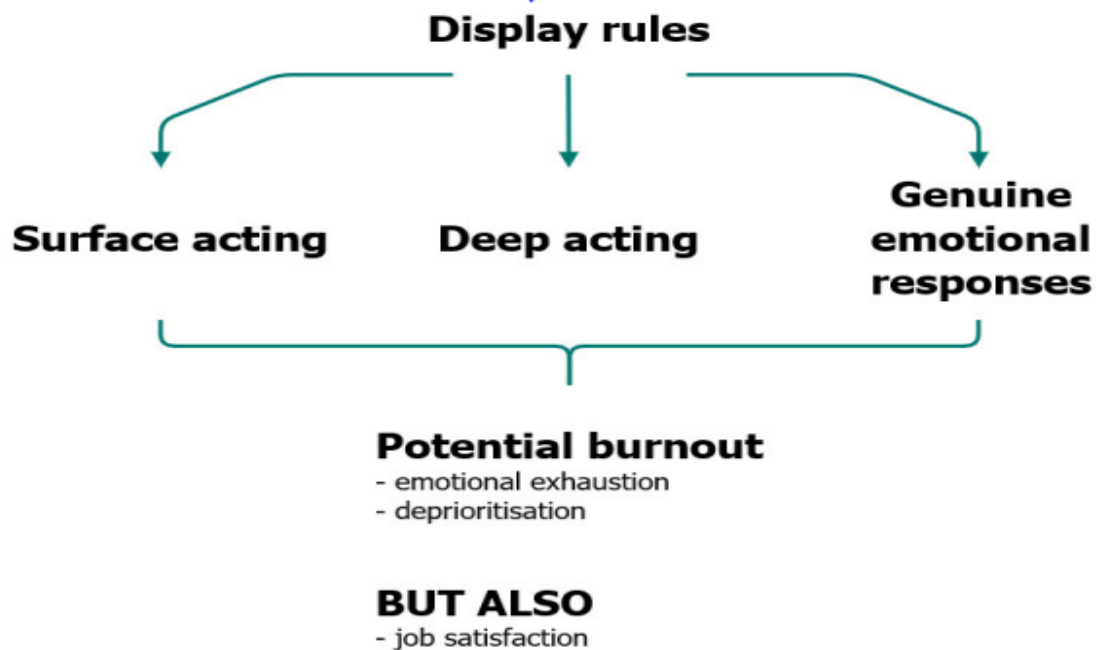


Figure 1 - Model of display rules (Phillips, Westaby and Fowler, 2020)

Significant to the future implementation of trauma informed probation practice is that the consequence of emotion work for practitioners is already recognised (Phillips, Westaby and Fowler, 2020). This is demonstrated in Figure 1 as ‘burn-out’. In early writings on emotional labour, Hochschild (1983) emphasised the cost of emotional work, explaining that inducing, suppressing and disguising of feelings can lead to the capacity to feel emotions which can result in becoming estranged or alienated from emotions. The impact of working with emotions for practitioners is explored further in section 2.9.

2.8 Its Dirty Work

The nature of probation work is often invisible (Worrall and Mawby, 2013), operating in a “*largely private and hidden sphere*” (Robinson et al 2014, pg124) overshadowed by the Police, Courts and Prisons (Brown et al. 2024). The apparent secrecy of probation work may be one reason why the organisation has been subjected to persistent reform from external influences (Robinson et al, 2014, Tangen and Briah,

2018, Ainslie et al, 2022). It could be argued that this lack of knowledge and understanding of the probation service has left it vulnerable to change from those who do not fully appreciate the complexities and intricacies of the work it undertakes. Such changes have been influenced by shifting theoretical perspectives on causes of crime, the most effective interventions to address criminality (Gard, 2014), increased centralised government control (Deering, 2011) and continued fluctuating social and political agendas, economic conditions and pressure from the media (Robinson et al. 2014, Worrall and Mawby, 2013). But what is often absent when such changes are dictated, is the involvement of those working within the organisation and those with lived experience of the services provided by the organisation.

Irrespective of the never-ending changes probation practitioners endure, consistency arises in the work probation has undertaken which has unswervingly been with some of societies' most stigmatised and marginalised communities (Worrall and Mawby, 2013, Ainslie et al. 2022). Subsequently, probation has been described as '*socially tainted*' because of its association by the public and the media as undertaking "*society's dirty work*" with the "*undeserving*" (Worrall and Mawby, 2013, p105). Tidmarsh (2024) asserts that this perception has sought to diminish the status and reputation of probation services which has left the organisation powerless to external influences. Probation can also be considered what Worrall and Mawby (2013, p105) term as "*morally tainted*", because of its work with people that have caused harm (Phillips et al. 2021) whose behaviour can invoke feelings of repulsion from outsiders (McMurray and Ward, 2014). The morality of probation is closely associated with debates surrounding the victim-offender dichotomy, and the notion of holding people who cause harm to account, whilst not wanting to be perceived as collusive (Knight, 2014), explored further in Chapter Six. Yet it is these same groups of people who are

most likely to have been disproportionately affected by trauma (Bellis et al, 2015, Couper and Mackie, 2016, Wilton and Williams, 2019, Ford et al. 2019, Vaswani and Paul, 2019, Hetherington, 2020).

It has been suggested that the work of probation may be better understood as '*emotionally dirty work*' (Phillips et al, 2021) because practitioners are tasked with managing the "*burdensome and disruptive emotions of others*" (McMurray and Ward, 2014, p140). This subtle but significant shift in language seeks to reposition the role of emotions as central to probation's work. The extent of this emotionally dirty work was highlighted by McMurray and Ward's (2014) study with the Samaritans and Probation. They explored the necessity of both organisations to work with the emotions and feelings of groups of people that society often perceives to be dirty, sinful or in some way problematic. Subsequently, practitioners are expected to establish and maintain a boundary between the "*clean and dirty*" (McMurray and Ward, 2014, p1134), a further example of practitioner dualism. These conceptual dichotomies appear to echo the religious origins of probation's history, underpinned by the notions of evil and good and the deserving and undeserving. The impact of working in these environments can result in short-term negative effects, such as emotional responses, (and the necessity for emotional labour), but there can also be long-term negative effects on physical and mental health difficulties (Vaswani and Paul, 2019).

The desire by previous scholars to draw attention to the role of emotions in probation work is essential to the field of trauma informed practice in probation. This thesis adopts the view that advocates of emotional work in probation practice (Knight, 2014, Knight, Phillips and Chapman, 2016, Westaby et al. 2020) have laid the foundations for discussions, albeit in the primitive stages, to begin considering what working with trauma looks like for probation practitioners.

2.9 The impact of emotionally dirty work

There is an abundance of existing literature that recognises the adverse impacts of the work undertaken by probation practitioners, which if not adequately addressed can culminate in professionals experiencing 'burnout' (Simmons, Cochran and Blout, 1997, Lewis, Lewis and Garby, 2013, Phillips et al. 2021, Ainslie, 2022). Burnout does not occur overnight, it is "*a process that occurs over time*" and stems from wider workplace dynamics (such as structural and cultural factors), rather than individual characteristics (Lambert et al, 2011, p5). Significantly, this situates burnout as an organisational responsibility which should be a priority in professional fields, such as probation, where burnout is often associated with high levels of stress attributed to high workloads and conflicting responsibilities and priorities (Simmons, Cochran and Blout, 1997). But as Phillips, Westaby and Fowlers' (2020) model of display rules (Figure 1) emphasises, burnout can also be a consequence of emotional labour. The notion of occupational burnout also incorporates the concept of '*emotional exhaustion*' (Simmons, Cochran and Blout, 1997) which is said to describe feeling "*emotionally drained and fatigued*" from work (Lambert et al, 2011, p5). Emotions such as *compassion* (Lewis, Lewis and Garby, 2013) and *empathy* were considered significant in their impact on practitioners, with the later described as "*draining, difficult, stressful and anxiety-increasing*" (Knight, Phillips and Chapman, 2016. p50). It may be that the inclusion within existing literature on probation refers to the emotional impact on practitioners because contemporary probation practice has been feminised, bringing with its connotations of caring or emotional intelligence skills often assigned to women (Tidmarsh, 2024) and comprising of the "*soft work*" that men may seek to avoid (Knight, 2007, p58).

While the term burn-out is used within trauma informed literature, it is used synonymously with '*vicarious trauma*', '*secondary trauma*', and '*compassion fatigue*' (Newell and MacNeil 2010 cited by Wilton and Williams, 2019). As Dekel and Baum (2010, p1928) highlight, despite the variation in terms utilised, the implication is that the trauma experienced by an individual can be "*vicariously transmitted*" to the individual working with them which they suggest may be more appropriately understood as 'shared trauma'.

Interested primarily with the impact of stress on police, McCreary et al (2017) differentiated types of stress into two categories. Firstly, *organisational stress* which arises from factors such as excessive workloads, time pressures, conflict and ambiguity over role responsibilities and lack of adequate resources or equipment, which Ricciardelli (2018) terms the '*job context*'. Secondly, *operational stress* is that which derives from the nature of the role, such as exposure to harmful behaviours, which Ricciardelli (2018) terms the '*job content*'. For probation practitioners, *the job context* and *organisational stress* that arises from a service acknowledged as struggling in terms of pressure and excessive workloads (Hoddinott et al, 2024, Ainslie et al. 2024) provides a concerning backdrop for practitioners who are also being exposed to *job content* and *operational stress* much of which is likely to be underpinned by trauma. Research has also suggested that involvement with the CJS may heighten the likelihood of experiencing trauma, for example exposure or experience of violence within the custodial environment (Vaswani and Paul, 2019). This may explain why research by Lambert et al (2011), conducted with 272 prison staff, in a midwestern high security level state prison in America found that the more contact staff had with prisoners, the higher the rate of burnout they experienced.

Lewis, Lewis and Garby's (2013) study of American Probation Officers in three states (Arizona, California and Texas) found that those exposed to violent/sexual recidivism, suicide, threatening behaviour and physical assault demonstrated higher levels of traumatic stress and burnout. Their study highlighted that practitioner's exposure to traumatic information can arise from many sources, such as official reports (which could include detailed victim/witness accounts, victim impact statements, photographs of injuries and video evidence) and from direct work with people on probation (either through sharing details of their histories or the behaviour they demonstrate) (Lewis, Lewis and Garby, 2013). Given such exposure, it is not surprising that working with trauma can result in practitioner's experiencing powerful emotional responses (Petrillo and Bradley, 2022).

Existing research has identified that managing entire caseloads of people on probation with shared complexities, such as women (Ellis-Devitt, 2020b) or high-risk individuals (Phillips, Westaby and Fowler, 2016) requires a high level of emotional labour which can impact on the well-being of practitioners. This is an important finding when considering the impact of working with individuals who have experienced trauma, which is arguably a complexity shared by most individuals on probation. The inference is that for probation practitioners working with trauma is likely to require a significant amount of emotional labour. Ellis-Devitt (2020b) identified evidence that probation practitioners' continuous exposure to traumatic events is leading to vicarious trauma, compounded for those practitioners with trauma histories themselves. Worryingly, Campbell and McCrystal's (2005) research with social workers in Northern Ireland found that over half of practitioners did not report their concerns or difficulties.

The existing literature indicates that practitioners who experience some form of negative emotional response because of their occupation may find it difficult to recover

without support (Lambert et al. 2012, Petrillo and Bradley, 2022) which arguably suggests that this should be an organisational priority. The study of burnout rates with Brazilian correctional staff conducted by Oliveira et al (2016) which found that female professionals presented with higher rates of emotional exhaustion should also be considered in terms of organisational impact given that the majority of the probation workforce is female (Petrillo and Bradley, 2022, Tidmarsh, 2024).

Importantly, unlike much of the literature on secondary trauma which tends to focus on the negative consequences of such work, Dekel and Baum's (2010) review of existing studies exploring professional experiences of working with trauma within the helping professions identified a range of positive effects. This included increased empathy, renewed commitment to their work, personal growth, rewarding, connection to others, improved confidence, increased perspective and understanding of an individual's healing capacities.

Encouragingly, there are indicators of an "*increased recognition*" of the impact of emotional work within probation and the subsequent need for appropriate support for practitioners (Ainslie et al, 2022, p528). This could be further strengthened through the adoption of trauma informed approaches, which also advocate for appropriate resources to support practitioners (Wilton and Williams, 2019, Bradley 2021, Petrillo and Bradley, 2022).

2.10 Concluding Remarks

This chapter has provided a historical overview of the probation service, beginning with an exploration of its early origins. It then provided a chronological summarisation of the numerous changes the organisation has encountered in its lifetime. That the probation service continues to be plagued by further reforms, introduced at pace, because of conflicting priorities is acknowledged, along with highlighting the effect that

this is likely to have on further defining the organisation's purpose as one of risk management, public protection and enforcement. The culture of probation was examined, particularly the values which draw practitioners into the organisation, whilst considering the extent to which these have been influenced by wider macrolevel changes. It has been found that, generally, practitioners continue to be motivated by a desire to work with people, irrespective of the changing context of the role. The Chapter has investigated the feminisation of the organisation, which despite some early attempts to resist during its first insurgence in the early 1990s, has prevailed. The assumption that a female dominant workforce would lead to a return to the organisation's welfare origins has been challenged, along with the supposition that feminisation would lead to a keener focus on emotions which has also been shown to be untrue. The general negligence of emotions in practice has been recognised, along with a review of the literature which emphasises the significance for practitioners of both managing their own and others' emotions. The Chapter introduced Hochschild's (1983) 'emotional labour' as a mechanism for understanding the role of emotions. Lastly, the impact of emotionally dirty work on probation practitioners was considered, along with emphasising that the consequences of this can be significant and far reaching and has typically been acknowledged within probation literature as burnout, exhaustion or compassion fatigue. The overarching theme of the Chapter is that the role of culture and role of emotions in probation practice are significant and should be understood as having laid the early foundations for trauma and trauma informed probation practice.

Chapter 3

Literature Review – Trauma and Trauma Informed Practice

3.1 Introduction

The interest in developing an understanding of trauma has grown substantially over recent years (Wilton and Williams, 2019) following increasing recognition that “*trauma can affect how people interact, engage and experience services*” (Vaswani and Paul, 2019, p514). This has brought with it a need to explore how organisations can support individuals with trauma histories who are accessing their services and the ways in which organisations can become trauma informed environments. This is not a straightforward task. Firstly, the individualisation of trauma makes it difficult to define, secondly the ways in which trauma may manifest and present itself is varied, and thirdly, the ways in which trauma informed responses are applied and adapted can differ between organisations (Wilton and Williams, 2019). This thesis is focused on the extent to which probation practice has been underpinned by knowledge and understanding of trauma and trauma informed approaches.

This chapter provides a review of the relevant literature surrounding trauma. It begins with offering a critical overview of the complexities surrounding defining trauma before providing the definition of trauma adopted by this thesis. This is followed by an explanation of the ways in which trauma can manifest itself and the types of trauma responses that probation practitioners may be exposed to working with. A review of the literature highlights the gendered differences inherent in experiences of trauma and emphasises the relationship between power, oppression and trauma that lead to some groups in society being more likely to experience trauma. This thesis takes the view that the relationship between inequality and trauma should be considered as a form of discrimination and therefore, the probation service should take measures as

an organisation to be trauma responsive, an extension of anti-discriminatory practice. This chapter introduces Neil Thompson's (2014) model of anti-discriminatory practice, known as the 'PCS analysis' model to examine in further detail the personal, cultural and structural influences that exist within practice settings, such as probation.

3.2 The ambiguity of trauma

There is no universally agreed definition of trauma (Mersky, Topitzes and Britz, 2018, Tseris, 2018, Petrillo and Bradley, 2022, Senker et al. 2023) which makes it difficult to accurately measure and quantify the impact of trauma (Zelechowski, 2016). This is despite trauma first being explored as far back as the late nineteenth Century (Ringel and Brandell, 2012). The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) produced by the American Psychiatric Association (APA) and used to diagnose mental disorders, defines trauma in the context of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as "*exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence* (APA, 2013, p271), albeit it is important to acknowledge that trauma and PTSD are not synonymous (Busch and McNamara, 2020). The APA (2013) describes how trauma can occur directly to an individual, witnessing something happening to another, hearing of close family or friends' experiences or repeated/extreme exposure to details of such events. Critics of this definition argue that it is restrictive (Petrillo and Bradley, 2022) because it fails to consider an individual's own perspective of their experiences (Mersky, Topitzes and Britz, 2018) and that specification of certain types of traumas are narrow and subjective (Willmot and Jones, 2022). The United States of America's Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA) acknowledge that there are several different definitions of trauma being utilised and offer their own definition of individual trauma as that which:

"Results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life

threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being"

(SAMSHA, 2014, p7)

This definition has also been criticised for its emphasis on the longevity of the effects of trauma, with some arguing that events resulting in a temporary impact should also be recognised (Mersky, Topitzes and Britz, 2018), as should the different stages of the trauma journey (Senker et al. 2023). Additionally, SAMHSA's explanation of *lasting adverse impact* does not acknowledge that the effects of trauma can arise both immediately after an event, or much later (McCartan, 2020) and the impact of trauma may not be recognised as such by the individual who experiences it (Senker et al. 2023). Subsequently, some scholars have refrained from becoming embroiled in specifying timescales and simply acknowledge instead that the reasons and effects of trauma should be understood as individualised (McCartan, 2020, Senker et al. 2023).

Within the CJS in England and Wales there is a lack of a shared definition of trauma across the agencies which form the system which creates complications for joint working (Senker et al. 2023) and fails to provide consistency and continuity throughout a person's journey through the CJS. Generally, within the CJS the dialogue around trauma has predominantly focused on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) (Petrillo and Bradley, 2022). These are described as:

"Traumatic or stressful experiences occurring before the age of 18 years, such as suffering physical, emotional or sexual abuse, or living in a household affected by domestic violence or drug misuse"

(Ford et al, 2019, p4)

This definition is problematic because it concentrates on only those negative experiences which occur during childhood, despite the effects of ACEs being able to emerge at any time beyond childhood and not just immediately after an event

(McCartan, 2020). In addition, the use of the term ACEs excludes some forms of adversity less commonly measured (Hetherington, 2020) and raises the same issues around subjectivity that trauma definitions have been critiqued for (Willmot and Jones, 2022).

Alongside there being clear definitional difficulties around defining trauma (and ACEs) is that the term is “*often used, semantically overstretched, [to describe] any form of painful or frustrating experience*” (Busch and McNamara, 2020, p342). It is frequently used to describe the impact of ACEs (Ford et al, 2019) and interchangeably used to describe the impact of abusive behaviours which increases the ubiquity surrounding the term (Tseris, 2018), which it has been argued, may result in the term becoming less meaningful (Bradley, 2021).

Having reviewed several key pieces of literature concerning the ambiguity of trauma, this thesis adopts the view that understandings of trauma should not be restricted to specific events or categories (Willmot and Jones, 2022) nor to only the most commonly measured types of traumas (Hetherington, 2020). This project provides its own original contribution to the debates surrounding defining trauma, by providing its own definition, which is deliberately broad in recognition that not everyone will experience trauma in the same way. For the purposes of this study, trauma is defined as: *lived experiences that have occurred at any time, either directly or indirectly, and have had a negative impact either on a short or long-term basis as determined by the person affected.*

3.3 Trauma Responses

Similar to the complexities with defining trauma, is the debate surrounding the impact of trauma on those who have experienced it. While it is generally accepted that trauma responses are individualised (SAMSHA, 2014, Wilton and Williams, 2019, McCartan, 2020, Senker et al. 2023) and can result in both immediate and delayed reactions (see Appendix A), there is a lack of consistency concerning whether the frequency and severity of the trauma experience impacts an individual's response. Some have argued that the effects of trauma are cumulative: the more experiences of trauma someone has, the greater the impact this will have (Sweeney et al, 2018), whilst others refute these claims (McCartan, 2020). It has been suggested that trauma responses may differ based on the type of trauma experienced (Van Der Kolk, 2005), while others have claimed this to be untrue (McCartan, 2020). With such uncertainty embedded within the literature concerning trauma it is unsurprising that research has shown that behavioural manifestations of trauma can be misinterpreted, whilst emphasising the benefits of practitioners being able to implement a trauma informed lens to understand behaviours displayed (Dermody et al, 2018).

Despite the variations surrounding how the effects of trauma may manifest themselves, it is important to consider the potential impact that trauma can have, whilst remaining mindful that everyone may be impacted differently. As Vaswani and Paul (2019) asserts when considering the impact of trauma in the custodial environment:

“Prior traumatic experiences can affect presentation, in the way that people implement coping strategies...and in their ability to trust, engage and benefit from services and interventions”

(Vaswani and Paul, 2019, p57)

In his early writings on the subject of trauma, Van Der Kolk (1989) identified a range of trauma responses including (but not limited to): harm to others (this could be evidenced through offending behaviour, or aggressive, abusive or violent behaviour

towards staff), self-destructiveness (this may be evidenced through self-harming, substance misuse, eating disorders), revictimization (which can be linked to numbing either through substances or emotional withdrawal, inactivity, depression, self-blame and feeling helpless). Van Der Kolk (1989) identified connections between trauma experiences and behaviours displayed, which can be applied to probation settings to support practitioner's understanding. First, the level of responsibility a person may take for the trauma they have experienced is closely linked to emotions such as helplessness and control, which can impact whether they conceptualise the locus of control as internal or external (Van Der Kolk, 1989). This may be relevant when considering acceptance of responsibility for offending, levels of engagement and commitment to change. Second, preoccupation with prior experiences of trauma may result in the recreation of traumatic incidents for themselves and others, behaviour which is often unconscious but perpetuates negative emotions (Van Der Kolk, 1989). This may assist practitioners in understanding why some individuals may repeat the same behaviours and find it difficult to break the cycle.

Furthermore, Van Der Kolk (2005, p402) explains that isolated traumatic events tend to lead to "*discrete conditioned behaviour and biological responses*" that are triggered by reminders of the event which produce PTSD type responses. For practitioners, this may be evidenced by arousal and reactivity, symptoms such as being on guard/on edge, difficulty concentrating, irritability, angry or aggressive outbursts or engaging in risky, reckless or destructive behaviours and cognition and mood symptoms that include negative thoughts about self or others, exaggerated feelings of blame and social isolation (National Institute of Mental Health, n.d.). Next, Van Der Kolk (2005, p402) suggests that repeated traumatising and chronic maltreatment can have "*pervasive effects on the development of the mind and brain*" which leads to

neurological reactions. Such survival responses are often referred to as '*fight, flight and freeze*' (Sweeney et al. 2018 p320, McCartan, 2020). For practitioners this may be displayed through excessively reactive responses to seemingly minor issues and what may be perceived as inadequate or inappropriate coping mechanisms which can be linked to substance misuse, offending and mental health difficulties (Van Der Kolk, 2005). These significant connections between trauma and behaviour are important for practitioners, who by virtue of their role, will be exposed to working with individuals who have experienced trauma and subsequent behavioural responses.

3.4 Working with trauma

As with the definitional issues surrounding trauma, there is an absence of an agreed definition of what trauma informed responses entail (Senker et al, 2023). Subsequently, working mindfully with those who have experienced trauma is interchangeably referred to within the existing literature as *trauma informed practice*, *trauma informed care* or *trauma informed approaches*.

Originating in America, the concept of working in a trauma informed manner arose initially following an emerging interest in combat related PTSD (Wilson et al, 2013). Following the feminist movement, this was later applied to other traumatic incidents such as rape or serious violence (Wilson et al, 2013, Tseris, 2018). But while trauma informed practice has been gathering pace in America, it remains a comparatively new concept in the United Kingdom (UK) with low adoption rates to date (Wilton and Williams, 2019). The consequence of this is that public services, such as probation, are not consistently recognising or being responsive to experiences of trauma (Bear, Durcan and Southgate, 2019) which means that some organisations are working with "*individuals without even being aware of the trauma that occurred*" (Harris and Fallot, 2001, p3). In part, this may be because of the lack of universal understanding around

what trauma informed practice is. The capacity to retraumatise is greatest for organisations, such as the Probation Service, where there is a power imbalance and mistrust which can ultimately impact the likelihood of positive outcomes being achieved (Sweeney et al. 2018). Some have considered whether such a power imbalance in CJS settings is too significant a barrier for trauma informed practice to be realised (Vaswani and Paul, 2009, Carlton and Russell, 2023). Encouragingly, research undertaken by Petrillo (2021) which evaluated the trauma informed group programme 'Healing Trauma' delivered in women's prisons, suggested that within the group settings, emotional and psychological safety was achieved. Although it was noted that this did not extend to the wider prison environment where trauma informed approaches had not been consistently implemented (Petrillo, 2021). However, Petrillo's (2021) research did indicate that there can be real benefits from adopting trauma informed approaches within criminal justice settings.

In its broadest sense, and probably most relatable to the context of probation practice, trauma informed approaches should be conceptualised as a harm reduction approach (McCartan 2020, Senker et al. 2023). The intention of such a method is to ensure that experiences of trauma and trauma related symptoms are accurately identified, staff are trained to understand the impact of trauma, seek to reduce re-traumatisation and to recognise the potential for organisations to reenact traumatic relationship dynamics, all underpinned by the desire to avoid causing further harm (Miller and Najavits, 2012, Harris and Fallot, 2001, Edleman, 2023). There is an increasing body of literature that argues that it is vital that probation practice is influenced by trauma informed approaches (McCartan 2020, Petrillo and Bradley, 2022, Senker et al, 2023) given the connection between trauma and offending and the high number of people in the CJS with trauma histories (Miller and Najavits, 2012).

But being trauma informed in the CJS is not as straightforward as it may be in some other public sector's settings, such as health care (Miller and Najavits, 2012, Senker et al. 2023). CJS settings are inherently characterised by a power imbalance and must negotiate the physical environment within which services are delivered that are often not naturally aligned to trauma informed approaches (Miller and Najavits, 2012), as explored further in Chapter Seven. These settings can often be responsible for heightening trauma related responses and behaviours which can be difficult for practitioners to manage (Covington, 2008, Miller and Najavits, 2012). Practitioners must also navigate not only the duality of their role, given the often-contradictory responsibilities they are expected to carry out (Knight, 2014), but also the duality of those who they work with, as people that have both been harmed and have caused harm to others (Senker et al. 2023).

A significant barrier identified in establishing trauma informed practice in probation settings revolves around whether it can be reconciled within a punitive based CJS (Petrillo and Bradley, 2022). To achieve a trauma informed probation environment, it is necessary that there is support at a macro level to develop a system that both considers the harm a person has experienced, while addressing the harm a person has caused. The literature recognises that there is an underlying misconception, and fear, that acknowledging previous experiences of trauma may perpetuate "*abuse excuse*" (Dermody et al. 2018, p175, Miller and Najavits, 2012, Senker et al, 2013, Marshall, 2023). This notion represents the concern that recognising someone as a victim allows the harmful behaviour they have committed to be overlooked, justified, minimised or treated less seriously (Lamb, 1996), particularly pertinent politically, when there is a desire to be seen by the public as 'tough on crime'. Canton and Dominey (2020) propose that these worries may arise from the belief that victims and

perpetrators rights and needs cannot be addressed simultaneously, and as such there is a need to 'choose' between one or the other. Whilst others have argued that a more useful approach to recognising the co-existence of victimisation and criminal behaviour, and one that is more open to the prospect of trauma informed practice, is to consider the person on probation as a whole and not defined by the criminal act that has been committed (Calabrese and Berman, 2019, p141). The complexities of the victim-offender dichotomy are examined further in Chapter Six.

Taking a whole person approach encourages understanding that those accessing public services such as probation often present with immediate needs requiring support, opposed to seeking support for factors that may underpin their difficulties, such as prior experiences of trauma (Harris and Fallot, 2001). Failure to understand and support individuals in these circumstances can result in behaviour that is displayed by emotional outbursts that may have led to people on probation being excluded from other services (McMurray and Ward, 2014). McAnallen and McGinnis (2021, p110) explain trauma informed practice "*as a person-centred and whole-system approach,*" opposed to "*trauma-focused interventions that target underlying trauma*". This is an important distinction that separates trauma informed practice from treatment of "*symptoms or syndromes*" related to trauma (Harris and Fallot, 2001, p5) as misconceptions surrounding responsivity and treatment can affect willingness to implement trauma informed practice, as examined further in the data chapters. It is therefore important to understand in more detail what a trauma informed environment may look like in practice.

3.5 Trauma informed systems

Trauma informed organisations are enshrined by the principles of creating a structure, ethos and framework that emphasises “*physical, psychological and emotional safety*” (Jervis, 2019, p20). SAMHSA (2014) produced guidelines to help implement a trauma-informed approach, which incorporates six basic principles: the creation of a physically and emotionally safe environment, trustworthiness and transparency, peer support, collaboration and mutual respect, empowerment, voice and choice and responsivity to cultural, historical and gender issues. Although the language used differs slightly, the principles proposed by Petrillo and Bradley (2022) are largely the same: safety, trustworthiness, collaboration, empowerment, choice and inclusivity. The only significant difference being the absence of peer support within Petrillo and Bradleys’ (2022) explanation, perhaps surprising given the increasing interest in, and commitment to, the use of peer mentors and those with lived experience of the CJS (Buck, 2021).

Trauma informed practice represents a strengths-based approach. It encourages identification of the strategies that a person already possesses to have survived traumatic experiences and reconceptualises how these methods can be applied in alternative situations whilst encouraging the development of new skills (Harris and Fallot, 2001). The strengths-based nature of trauma informed practices aligns with existing probation practice that draws upon the Good Lives Model (GLM) and desistance theories⁴ which encourage a whole person approach (McCartan, 2020).

Trauma informed approaches and probation practice have similarities. They both seek to formulate a plan for managing, or best case preventing, problematic behaviour

⁴ Good Lives Model is a strengths-based model of rehabilitation (see Ward and Maruna, 2007). Desistance theory relates to the process of abstaining from offending (see Rocque, 2017)

occurring in the future (Harris and Fallot, 2001). Both approaches are based on the premise that supporting individuals to understand and control their behaviour leads to the need for involvement from agencies reducing (Harris and Fallot, 2001). But there are also stark differences; trauma informed care promotes autonomy, which probation practice can only offer to an extent because of its role in delivering court-imposed sentences and its ever-increasing focus on public protection (Deering and Feizler, 2019, Cracknell, 2024, Tidmarsh, 2024). Trauma informed systems take a collaborative approach to balancing risks to the individual and risks to the organisation, whilst it has been argued that probation prioritises risk, sometimes at the expense of everything else (Mullen, Dick and Williams, 2022).

Becoming a trauma informed organisation takes time and commitment (Wilton and Williams, 2019) and the presence of conditions that are conducive to establishing trauma informed care (Harris and Fallot, 2001). These conditions are identified as; administrative commitment to change, universal screening of trauma, training and education of staff, hiring of ‘trauma champions’⁵ and reviewing of policies and procedures (Harris and Fallot, 2001). Nurturing these conditions is a process. Petrillo and Bradley (2022) have constructed this process as the *Stages of the Trauma Journey* to explain how achieving trauma informed practice consists of three distinct stages (as demonstrated in Figure 2). These are the stages of *knowing (trauma aware)*, *doing (trauma-informed)* or *being (trauma responsive)*. First, *knowing* is concerned with the opening discussions that occur within an organisation, and which initiate plans to launch staff training to develop knowledge and understanding of,

⁵ Trauma champions are practitioners with an understanding of the impact of trauma for those accessing services who think “trauma first”. They seek to understand behaviour by asking trauma informed questions such as “is this related to experience of trauma?” and will reflect on their own behaviours (Harris and Fallot, 2001, p8)

trauma, whilst beginning to consider how trauma informed practice can be implemented (Petrillo and Bradley, 2022). This stage is important because it signifies an organisational commitment to trauma informed practice, as it begins to consider developing knowledge of trauma through the implementation of a training programme (Harris and Fallot, 2001). It is also significant because it represents the acknowledgement of trauma as important and recognises a responsibility on the organisation to be mindful of this in the future. Second, *doing* involves beginning to insert the knowledge gained from the previous stage into policies and practice consistently, while being proactive in reducing the exacerbation of trauma (Petrillo and Bradley, 2022). The *doing* stage also involves reviewing existing policies and procedures through a trauma informed lens to eliminate, where possible, processes that are retraumatising (Harris and Fallot, 2001). Lastly, the stage of *being* entails the automatic approach to working as one that is underpinned by trauma informed methods, and embedded at all levels, individual, cultural and organisational (Petrillo and Bradley, 2022).

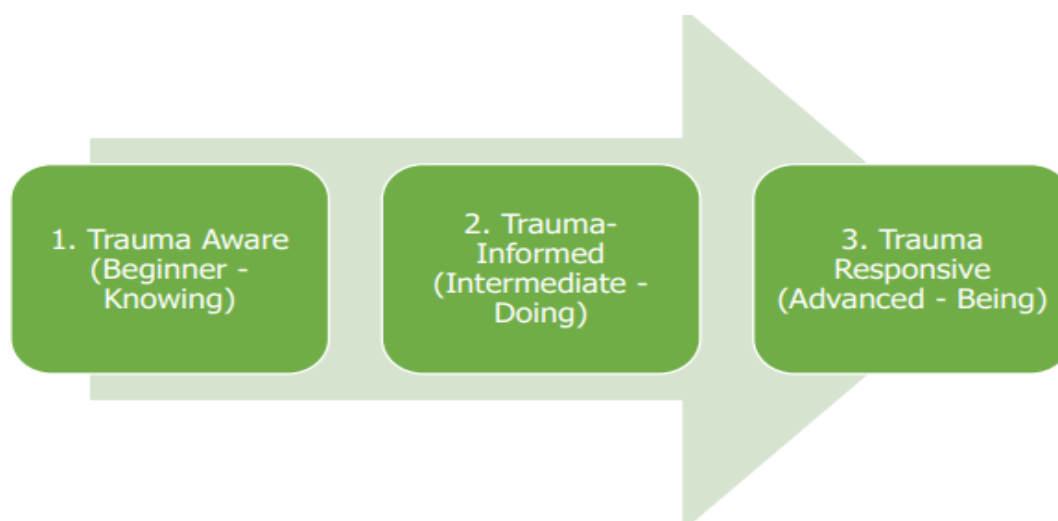


Figure 2 Stages of the trauma journey (Petrillo and Bradely, 2022)

This model becomes useful in providing a framework with which to measure an organisation's existing practice, through explaining what types of activities and

behaviours can be expected to be seen at each stage of the journey. It also provides those operating at either the beginner or intermediate levels, with an aspirational value in understanding what is required to move towards the next stage of the trauma journey. Whilst not explicit in their explanation of the model, Petrillo and Bradley's (2022) conceptualisation of organisational responses to trauma being a journey also serves as a reminder that individual responses to trauma should be understood as a process and a journey in their own right.

3.6 Gender and Trauma

In the context of trauma and trauma informed practice, the role of gender differences is important for several reasons.

Firstly, the literature highlights that women and men are more likely to experience different types of traumas (Søegaard et al, 2021, Miller and Najavits, 2012) and trauma symptoms and responses may differ as a result of gender (McNeish and Scott, 2014, Chaplin, 2015). It is proposed that these differences may account for the reasons why the prevalence of certain crime types such as violence can differ between men and women (Yakeley, 2010). Secondly,

Females and Trauma	Males and Trauma
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Typical trauma: childhood sexual abuse ● More likely to develop PTSD when exposed to violence ● Repeated exposure to sexual and violent victimization from intimates beginning in childhood ● Internalizing: self-harm, eating disorders, addiction, avoidance ● Likely to get mental health treatment rather than substance abuse treatment ● Treatment needs to emphasize empowerment, emotion regulation and safety 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Typical trauma: witnessing violence ● More likely to be exposed to violence, but less likely to develop PTSD ● Exposure to violence from strangers and adversaries; sexual abuse and coercion outside family ● Externalizing: violence, substance abuse, crime and hyper-arousal ● Likely to get substance abuse treatment rather than mental health treatment ● Treatment needs to emphasize feelings, relationships and empathy

Figure 3 Gender and trauma (Miller and Najavits, 2012).

gender can influence how trauma is identified and the subsequent intervention responses offered (Søegaard et al, 2021). These gendered differences are summarised by Miller and Najavits (2012) and are depicted in Figure 3. Thirdly, gender has been a focal point for understanding the relationship between trauma and crime, as existing literature regarding the connection between the two has been focussed almost exclusively on women (Matheson, 2012). This is partially a consequence of early literature indicating that trauma is more prevalent in women (Matheson, 2012, Tam and Derkzen, 2016), despite more recent research suggesting that men experience trauma at a similar rate (Søegaard et al, 2021) and partially because trauma informed care within criminal justice settings arose in response to the lack of gender responsive practice (Bloom, Owen and Covington, 2003, Bradley and Petrillo, 2022). The result is that the presiding interest in women and trauma has culminated in practice that is more likely to address women's trauma (Miller and Najavits, 2012).

There is a growing body of evidence that (predominantly) female prison establishments are embedding the principles of trauma informed practice (Bradley, 2021, Petrillo, 2021, Auty et al. 2022). Similar encouraging findings have been noted in female Approved Premise hostels⁶ albeit the lack of adequate resources to be truly trauma informed is identified as problematic (Criminal Justice Joint Inspection, 2024). But there is a much smaller evidence base concerning the use of trauma informed practice in probation with women, even more scant, is literature which focuses on the use of trauma informed practice with men on probation. A small-scale study by Dermody et al in 2018 based in Limerick, Ireland examined the experiences of women accessing drug, homeless and criminal justice services. They found that the “*least*

⁶ Approved Premises hostels (often referred to as APs) provide accommodation to individuals identified by the Probation Service as requiring an enhanced level of support, restriction and monitoring. Residency at APs is an instruction issued to an individual under supervision and failure to comply often leads to enforcement action.

well-regarded services were offending-related/criminal justice services, with scores ranging from poor to average” in their approach to providing a trauma informed service when compared to drug treatment and accommodation services (Dermody et al 2018, p171). There was a noticeable difference between practitioner’s estimation of their ability to provide trauma informed services, compared to participant’s assessments of whether they felt the services they received were trauma informed (Dermody et al,2018). This thesis focuses solely on practitioners’ views of trauma informed probation practice, and future research would benefit from including perspectives from people on probation, particularly those held by men, to ascertain whether this apparent difference is consistent within UK probation settings.

Whilst Wilton and Williams’ (2019, p17) review of trauma-informed care with women in different sectors found that approaches had been best adopted in mental health and criminal justice services, they conceded “*even in these sectors its adoption is fragmentary*”. It is not clear whether Wilton and Williams (2019) review of services included probation settings, nor does it provide any measurable context as to whether this means such settings have been effective in adopting trauma informed approaches, or if other sectors have been particularly poor. More recently Petrillo and Bradley’s (2022) research into trauma informed approaches in probation highlighted that attempts have been made to implement trauma informed practice with women, influenced somewhat by organisational accountability for women at all levels. But as this thesis findings outline in Chapter Seven, commitment to trauma informed practice does not appear to have been adopted to the same extent within men’s service provision.

However, critiques of the application of trauma informed practice to Australian Women’s prison policy argue that the focus on women’s trauma has been on individual

responsibility, rather than being understood because of structural and state violence (Carlton and Russell, 2023). It is argued that trauma has been weaponised as a criminogenic need and therefore used to justify the use of punitive responses that legitimise the use of prison for women (Carlton and Russell, 2023). There are elements of Carlton and Russell's (2023) arguments that are persuasive; the potential for trauma to be misinterpreted as a cause of offending behaviour and for trauma to be understood only at the individual level and thereby obscuring societal and structural inequalities must be acknowledged. Alternatively, Carlton and Russell's (2023) approach could be perceived as weaponizing trauma informed practice through the implication that adopting the principles of trauma informed care in a criminal justice setting is collusive with penal policy surrounding punishment and incarceration. Notably, Carlton and Russell (2023) make these observations through an abolitionist feminist lens and therefore show no regard to men who have experienced trauma, or indeed whether they consider those who may be responsible for causing trauma to women, should also be spared incarceration.

The plight for gender responsive trauma informed practice has so far been focused almost entirely on women. Whilst this has had important benefits for women who are supervised, there remains other significant gaps in practice, both in relation to gender and other protected characteristics. Under the Public Sector Equality Duty, as a public authority, the Probation Service has a duty to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, advance equality of opportunity between people who share and people who do not share a relevant protected characteristic and foster good relations between those people with and those people without a relevant protected characteristic (Government Equalities Office, n.d.). The exclusion of men from trauma

informed approaches could be perceived as a form of discrimination as it creates unfair and less favourable provision for men being supervised by probation.

3.7 Anti-oppressive practice and trauma

There is an undeniable body of existing literature that draws attention to the correlation between trauma and inequality (Couper and Mackie, 2016, McDaid and Kousoulis, 2020). Marginalised communities are disproportionately affected by trauma because of systems of power and oppression (Wilton and Williams, 2019, McDaid and Kousoulis, 2020) that have resulted in systemic discrimination (Bennett et al. 2021). Those in lower socio-economic positions are more likely to be exposed to ACEs (Hetherington, 2020, McDaid and Kousoulis, 2020) and individuals from deprived communities are more likely to experience multiple ACEs (Bellis et al, 2015, Couper and Mackie, 2016, Ford et al. 2019). Young people from black and minority ethnic families are likely to experience disparate levels of socio-economic and psychosocial difficulties (Bennett et al. 2021). It is these same communities that are disproportionately represented within the criminal justice system (Wainwright, Burke and Collett, 2024) and likely to experience multiple disadvantages (Mullen, Dick and Williams, 2022). People on probation who have experienced trauma are likely to be at greater risk of having been discriminated against. The probation service has a responsibility to address this. It is no wonder then that critics such as Goodman (2023) implore the probation service to ensure that anti-oppressive practice is, at its core by:

“Adopt[ing] a holistic approach, [which] demands that the practitioner is trained to understand the world that the offender is part of: race, class, childhood experiences and other factors need to be understood and respected” (Goodman, 2023, p10).

Given the interconnectivity between inequality and trauma, this thesis proposes, as an original contribution, that trauma informed practice should be conceptualised as an extension of anti-oppressive practice. Embracing this perspective encourages trauma

informed practice to be given the prominence necessary to both acknowledge the complex nexus between power, inequality, oppression and experiences of trauma and to garner support at all levels of the organisation to enable trauma informed practice to be effectively implemented within practice. However, there are lessons to be learned from the race equality agenda which although further forward in its trajectory (see Goodman, 2023), has had limited success in establishing anti-oppressive practice (HMIP, 2021, 2023, Wainwright, Burke and Collett, 2024).

Society is described as having “*moved on [in] its attitudes to race and difference*” while in comparison, probation practice hindered by a dominating neoliberalist ideology, continues to perpetuate racial inequality (Wainwright, Burke and Collett, 2024, p117). Neoliberalism portrays those who commit crime as individually responsible, rather than considering the wider social and economic structures surrounding them (Teague, 2016). Similarities can be drawn between racial inequality and the organisations response, or lack of, to trauma informed practice. Trauma was initially attributed to hysteria that was said to derive from the uterus and was consequently treated with a hysterectomy (Ringel and Brandell, 2012), thus placing responsibility with the individual. This was until neurologist Jean Martin Charcot identified, in the late nineteenth Century, that the origins of trauma symptoms were psychological rather than physiological (see Ringel and Brandell, 2012). Like race, this exemplifies the exponential changes to attitudes towards trauma over time, albeit trauma remains a relatively gendered concept (see Chapter Seven) and one that organisations such as probation continue to be ill-equipped to address (Bear, Durcan and Southgate, 2019). Like anti-oppressive practice, the lack of attention to trauma informed practice can be attributed at least in part, to a managerialist culture that has prioritised other issues (Wainwright, Burke and Collett, 2024, p117). Factors identified as impacting

probation's failure to deliver anti-oppressive practice in respect of racial equality are identified as; inadequate training and effective supervision of practitioners, the lack of attention paid to developing anti-oppressive practice within practitioner supervision and a focus on risk management and performance priorities (HMIP, 2021, Wainwright, Burke and Collett, 2024). Practitioners further described a lack of confidence in exploring experiences of discrimination and social deprivation (HMIP, 2021). These factors bear a striking resemblance to the areas of practice that this thesis identified as significant barriers for implementing trauma informed practice (see findings Chapters Five to Eight). Critics of probation's approach to racial equality suggest that the magnitude of inequalities reflect "*systemic failures at operational, management and strategic levels*" because of neoliberalist ideology (Wainwright, Burke and Collett, 2024, p117). They further contend that the responsibility for the failure to achieve anti-oppressive practice should not be attributed solely to individual practitioners and should instead challenge government organisations to tackle structural issues that contribute to discrimination (Wainwright, Burke and Collett, 2024). Whilst not as explicit in their appraisal of probation's approach to trauma informed practice, Bradley and Petrillo (2022) highlight the discord between individual practitioners' attitudes to working with trauma and the lack of attention paid to trauma at an organisational level. But to ask individual practitioners to challenge existing policies, practice and cultures would require them to enter "*into conflict at some level with the 'powers that be', the dominant social arrangements that help to maintain existing power relations*" (Thompson, 2011, p56). As Ball, Singh and Worsford (2023) assert, while individual practitioners cannot address wider systemic discrimination, they propose that adopting a procedural justice approach provides greater awareness and understanding as to how marginalised communities experience the CJS and how services can be improved



Figure 4 – Procedural Justice (HMIP, 2021). This model provides a visual representation of the central ideals.

for these groups. Although arguably such a perspective appears not to have been applied to trauma. Procedural justice assumes that if people on probation perceive they have been treated fairly and justly, this legitimises authority and thereby increases engagement and compliance (Ball, Singh and Worsford, 2023). This reinforces the benefits of applying the basic principles of trauma informed

care, which incorporate the ideals of procedural justice that HMIP (2021) define as voice, neutrality, respect and trustworthy motives, as illustrated above in Figure 4. Whilst Goodman (2023), concerned with the development of anti-oppressive practice touches on the connection between trauma and disadvantage, albeit briefly, recent research (see Moore, 2020, McCartan, 2020) increasingly emphasises the relationship between trauma and inequality. Goodman (2023) acknowledges the interconnectivity whilst highlighting the importance of ‘*cultural competence*’ which has become a prominent dialogue within the social work profession (Harrison and Turner, 2011). In principle, cultural competence involves practitioners moving away from their own culture and cultural knowledge (Goodman, 2023) to deliver a culturally responsive service. Although it has been said that the term cultural competence has over time begun to incorporate “*all groups at risk of social exclusion*” (Harrison and Turner, 2011,

p334) which perhaps suggests it could be extended to incorporate those who have experienced trauma.

In the field of social work practice, cultural competence is said to require practitioners to understand their responsibility at a personal, structural and societal level to tackle discrimination, reduce oppression and minimise barriers that impede access to services (Bell and Magil, 2023). However, others have suggested that the focus of cultural competence has been understood at an individual level, perhaps owing to it having originated in clinical fields concerned with the relationship between professionals and their clients, but this has begun to be extended to organisational contexts (Foldy and Buckley, 2017). Within probation there has been much focus on the relationship between practitioner and individual being supervised (see for example Trotter, 1999, Burnett and McNeill, 2005, Annison, Eadie and Knight, 2008, Ansbro, 2008), which it could be argued maintains responsibility at an individual level, rather than organisational and societal levels. Further exploration of the differing levels is provided later in this chapter (see section 3.9).

This thesis introduces the concept of *trauma informed competence* as an original contribution. This involves incorporating both the principles of trauma informed care and cultural competence. Such an approach may help resist the temptation to single out specific forms of discrimination and therefore avoid the creation of a discrimination hierarchy, where some forms of discrimination are perceived to be more serious or worthy of attention than others (Illingworth, 2009) and may invalidate people's previous experiences, leading to re-traumatisation. Foldy and Buckley (2017, p267) explain that cultural competence "*requires practitioners to consider how, not if, racial and cultural backgrounds affect service provision*" (Foldy and Buckley, 2017, p267). A similar approach should be taken to trauma; practitioners should be encouraged to consider

how someone's previous experience of trauma, including their own, impacts on the service provided and the way in which someone engages. The notion of *trauma informed competence* embraces focussing on the *impact* of adverse circumstances and events that have affected a person's sense of self and feeling of safety, rather than the *events* that have led to this (Edelman, 2023). The principles of trauma informed care incorporate cultural, historical and gender acknowledgements (SAMHSA, 2014, Edleman, 2023) and should be considered to preserve the notion of anti-oppressive practice that is often attributed as a more overt commitment to challenging discrimination.

Whilst much expectation and accountability are placed on practitioners to champion anti-oppressive practice, and certainly this is an important aspect, oppression does not just derive from individuals, it comes from powerlessness that is exhibited at all levels of practice (Illingworth, 2009, Bell and Magil, 2023). As Foldy and Buckley (2017, p266) assert, “[*al*]though often overlooked, enhancing individual-level competence requires attention to group and organisational levels as well”. They recognise that asking an entire organisation to embark on change can be perceived as a threat to the status quo and those in positions of power (Foldy and Buckley, 2017) and this can be a barrier.

3.8 Power and Oppression

The existing literature concerning trauma informed practice emphasises the role of power. This is particularly significant within “*the people professions*” such as probation, as it entails working with individuals who are often in relatively powerless positions (Thompson, 2011), sometimes because of wider societal inequalities and because of probation supervision being something that is imposed on a person. The inability to exercise autonomy immediately creates an uneven distribution of power and

establishes a hierarchy (Harris and Fallot, 2001, Tseris, 2018, Phillips and Bower, 2023). Subsequently, the nature of the probation practitioner's role is one that carries with it a level of authority and control. This creates the power to make decisions that affect people on probation, which can include (but is not limited to), influencing the allocation of resources such as referrals to other providers, deciding when to use statutory powers such as enforcement action and professional discourse and legitimisation such as risk assessment decisions (Thompson, 2011). For practitioners, this tension exemplified when neoliberalism centralised state power, with its focus on efficiency instead of welfare, meant that decisions were often at the cost of individuals needs being met (Liebenbeg, Ungar and Ikeda, 2015). Research by Mullen, Dick and Williams (2022) identified that people on probation may choose not to seek support when they need it, including that arising from traumatic experiences, because they are fearful that being honest may result in being recalled to prison or returned to Court for breach of their requirements. In the context of trauma informed practice, when this power imbalance is not managed appropriately it can become "*tragically reminiscent of the abuse dynamic*" in which trauma has occurred; a repetition that can be damaging (Harris and Fallot, 2001, p18). This is a particular risk when people on probation who express aggression and non-adaptive emotions, are not viewed through a trauma lens, and are instead dealt with punitively, for example through the imposition of custodial penalties opposed to alternative sentencing disposals. Probation practitioners, as with those in similar roles such as social workers, have the capacity to do good, but they also risk causing further harm (Bell and Magil, 2023, Edelman, 2023). Practitioners taking part in this study were acutely aware of this responsibility, as examined further in Chapter Five.

Practitioners can also experience powerlessness. They too, can be excluded from decision making, a consequence of the neoliberalist agenda, to increase effectiveness of limited resources by “*directing resources to where they produce the greatest benefit...rather than always giving priority to those with the greatest needs*” (Bell and Magil, 2023, p26). This means that practitioner’s powers are limited in their influence over what resources are provided to the individuals that they supervise. Probation operates a ‘top-down’ structure, that seldom allows or encourages its practitioners, or those using its service, to influence policies and practice (Robinson et al, 2014, p124) and therefore to embed trauma informed practice effectively, systemic reform is necessary. It was therefore imperative that this thesis adopted a framework that would aide in examining the intricacies of the role of power in creating and maintaining oppression and discrimination at the structural and societal levels.

3.9 PCS Analysis – a theoretical model

As this chapter has highlighted, closely intertwined with trauma and practice are issues surrounding power, oppression and inequality and therefore it was necessary to consider a theoretical concept that could be applied to examine the data derived from this study’s findings. The most widely recognised model of anti-discriminatory practice is Neil Thompson’s PCS analysis (an abbreviation of personal, cultural and structural) framework (Cocker and Hafford-Letchfield, 2014) (see Thompson, 2014). This model describes oppression and discrimination as operating on three levels; personal, cultural and structural ,which reinforce and are reinforced by each other, as illustrated in Figure 5.

Thompson (2014) describes the **personal** level as encompassing an individual's

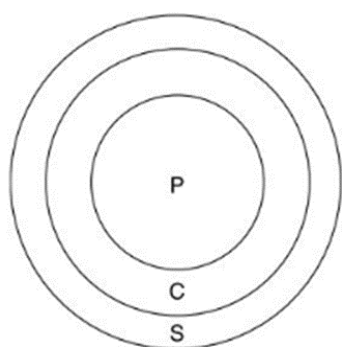


Figure 5 – 'PCS' Analysis (Thompson, 2011) This model provides a visual representation of the ways in which each level influences one another.

thoughts, feelings, actions and working practices. As explored further in Chapter Two, the role of emotions and feelings is particularly significant in probation practice because of the type of work being undertaken

(Knight, 2014, Knight, Phillips and Chapman, 2016, Phillips et al. 2020). That emotions and

feelings have the capacity to influence actions and decisions (Goleman, 1995) is increasingly relevant where a position of power is assumed (Thompson, 2014), like probation. It is at the personal level that individual prejudice and stereotypes, whether “*open and explicit or covert and implicit*” manifest (Thompson, 2014, p25) and can lead to discriminatory or oppressive practice. However, Thompson (2014) argues that it is imperative that personal attitudes and behaviours are understood within the wider context within which they occur, as visually represented in figure 5.

The **cultural** level is concerned with the shared sense of ‘doing’, where attitudes and behaviours are normalised to the extent that they have become entrenched and are no longer questioned (Thompson, 2014). Cultural *incompetence* can prevent inclusion and equality because it enables discrimination, stereotyping and both explicit and implicit bias (Foldy and Buckley, 2017). As with all organisation's, probation consists of its own jargon and acronyms, which form part of its cultural landscape and distinguish it from other criminal justice agencies (Mawby and Worrall, 2011). For Thompson (2014, p14) the role of language is significant because of its ability to “*act [as] a vehicle for transmitting discriminatory ideas and values*” that is reflective of cultural norms and assumptions, whilst reinforcing the power imbalance that comes

by virtue of having been subjected to probation supervision (Phillips and Bower, 2023). Concerned with the language used to refer those individuals supervised by probation, Phillips and Bower's (2023) reflections on the issues arising from this debate have important implications for the embedding of trauma informed practice within probation. They note the propensity of language to assign labels that hold negative connotations, assume a neutrality that is almost indifferent in its passivity and can disguise the involuntary nature of probation which is indicative of the inherent power imbalances that are present (Phillips and Bower, 2023). While Teague and Oliver (2023) highlight that language and labels that reduce individuals to the 'harmed' and the 'causer of the harm' can have significant negative consequences, particularly in the context of trauma informed practice.

Utilising Thompson's (2014) PCS analysis model to examine the discrimination and oppression of those experiencing mental distress, Williams (2018) draws attention to the role of media representations in creating cultural attitudes towards mental health, such as mental health often being attributed as the cause of violence (Graham et al. 2023). There has been much written on the topic of media representations and crime and its relationship with discriminatory criminal justice practices. For example, the paper *'(Re) thinking 'gangs''* argues that the term 'gang' has been *"mis-conceptualised and misused by the media, politicians and policy makers"* as associated with young black and minority ethnics groups which has resulted in an over-representation of these groups in the CJS (Alexander, 2008). Whilst others have drawn attention to the worsening social and economic polarization of young black and minority ethnic communities that may explain increased levels of gang involvement (Pitts, 2020). However, largely missing from these discussions is the role that prior experiences of trauma can have in increasing a person's vulnerability to mental health difficulties and

gangs, and the subsequent trauma that can result from exposure to incidents that result in trauma (Frisby-Osman and Wood, 2020). While the cultural level is crucial to understanding the context within which the personal level operates, it needs to be considered within the wider structural context, as both levels are inadequate explanations of discrimination and oppression when considered in isolation (Thompson, 2014).

Lastly, the **structural** level comprises of the macro-level influences and restraints of social, economic, and political factors that are embedded into society (Thompson, 2014). These factors are all underpinned by existing power relations which are maintained and reinforced by ideologies that have become internalized (Thompson, 2014). Concerned with the field of social work practice, Cocker and Hafford-Letchfield (2014) reflect that its move away from social justice, social reform and tackling inequalities has been controversial; similar concerns have also been associated with the neoliberalist ideology that has influenced recent probation reforms (Cracknell, 2024). Such changes appear to try and position public sector organisation's as separate to the wider structural inequalities affecting practice, which critiques such as Dominelli (2002) suggest that Thompson's (2014) PCS analysis model fails to adequately recognise. While others have suggested that the PCS analysis model does at least highlight the role of structural and societal inequality and oppression (Illingworth, 2009).

Karim (2023, p1068) argues that Thompson's PCS model fails to "*capture the limiting and productive modes of power...simultaneously*" and proposes a *power-informed practice framework* that focuses on the way in which power manifests itself and results in action (to do) and inaction (not to do) at different levels is more beneficial. For Karim (2023) the personal level of practice should give adequate consideration as to how

individuals are able to exercise choice on a micro level. Arguably PCS analysis incorporates the essence of personal power through its recognition that this both influences the wider cultural level while also recognising individual thoughts, feelings, actions and practice have the power to direct whether anti-discriminatory practice is performed, or not. Using the term professional/institutional, Karim (2023) refers to acknowledging the mezzo level of power exhibited by practitioners and institutions such as probation, that it could be argued, occurs at the cultural level identified by Thompson (2014). Lastly, Karim (2023) believes that the structural/societal macro level should examine the application of power that is informed by the wider sociopolitical environment.

Trauma and probation are intrinsically connected to issues surrounding power, discrimination and oppression. Thompson's (2014) PCS analysis was chosen as the theoretical concept with which to explore the extent to which trauma informed practice has been embedded in probation practice because of the model's transferability to different forms of oppression and the contexts within which this can be present (Pellow-Firth, 2018). The personal level lends itself to exploring practitioner attitudes towards trauma, the cultural level allows for team and organisational culture to be considered, and the structural level encourages attention to be given to the wider structural dynamic of the organisation and the societal influences that impact its service delivery.

3.10 Concluding Remarks

This chapter has given an overview of the concepts of trauma and trauma informed practice and highlighted the complexities in trying to define both. The literature suggests that irrespective of the growing body of research showing the prevalence of trauma, particularly within the criminal justice population, the application of trauma

informed approaches within public services such as probation is yet to be adequately established. This chapter has shown that when organisations do adopt trauma informed approaches, whilst they should seek to adhere to the overarching principles of trauma informed care, responses should be individualised and responsive to the way which in trauma has manifested itself for the individual. Practitioners should recognise and seek to understand the wide range of behaviour that may be displayed by individuals within probation settings who have experienced trauma. The ideas of trauma informed competency and trauma champions were also discussed in the context of trauma informed probation practice.

Both academic and practice interest in trauma has, to date, been overwhelmingly concentrated on women. This is despite the CJS being predominantly populated by men. While the role of gender may be influential in understanding the types of traumas experienced and the way in which responses to trauma may be demonstrated, a review of the literature highlights that men's experience of trauma has been overlooked. Attention is drawn to the relationship between trauma and inequality and the role of power and argues that trauma informed practice should be considered an extension of anti-oppressive practice which public services, such as probation, have a responsibility to uphold. Petrillo and Bradley's (2022) journey to trauma informed practice introduces the different stages of knowing, doing and being, which are used later in Chapter Five to consider where probation is at in its journey to trauma informed practice. The chapter concluded by providing an overview of Thompson's (2014) 'PCS analysis' as the model used to understand the different levels at which oppression and discrimination can occur, and the factors that can influence each practice at each level, to assist in understanding trauma informed probation practice. The next chapter explains the methodology employed to undertake the data collection for this project.

Chapter 4

Methodology

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapters have demonstrated the existence of a connection between criminal behaviour and trauma and have emphasised that knowledge and awareness of trauma should underpin probation practice (McCartan, 2020, Baldwin, 2022). It was also highlighted that public services, such as probation, have so far, failed in their attempts to acknowledge and respond to the trauma histories of those accessing their services (Bear, Durcan and Southgate, 2019). This project sought to explore the extent to which existing probation practice considers trauma and whether this has translated into the effective implementation of trauma informed approaches with people on probation.

The fieldwork for this project has been undertaken during yet another period of significant change in probation, with the reunification of public and private probation providers into 12 probation regions occurring in June 2021 (Tidmarsh, 2023). Since reunification, probation practice has been surmised as “*disappointing*” (HMIP 2023, p16), suggesting that there is both a need and capacity for development. The timeliness of this study means that any recommendations for practice can support the organisation to “*redefine itself as a trauma informed organisation*” (Petrillo and Bradley, 2022, p30) at a time when it is already seeking to develop future policies, processes and practice as part of the wider reunification landscape. The impact of reunification on research design and data collection are discussed later in the chapter, along with the challenges of conducting research during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns. First the chapter opens with an outline of the research question and the aims and objectives of the project. Next, a narrative of the research journey is

provided, by exploring the strategy, delivery and analysis of the project. The chapter then considers the strengths and limitations of insider research given the researcher's professional role as a Probation Officer. It explains the decision to apply a mixed method approach that sought to produce data that explained not just *what* existing practice is, but *why* it is that way, by exploring probation practitioner attitudes towards trauma (Chamberlain, 2013) and discusses the difficulties with this design.

The decisions surrounding sampling and recruitment are explored, along with the procedures and challenges of doing fieldwork and the analytical approaches used for the analysis of the findings before a critical reflection on the projects limitations is provided. Ethical considerations are discussed, whilst obstacles and barriers that the project encountered are interwoven throughout the chapter and examined at the stage at which they arose during the research journey.

4.2 Research Question, Aims and Objectives

Having reviewed the literature and established a connection between offending and trauma, the project originally set out to examine the impact that working with those who have experienced trauma, had on probation practitioners. However, it was quickly established that before it was possible to consider the impact of working with trauma, it was necessary to establish whether a knowledge base existed (Jackson, 2019) that even acknowledged the significance of trauma in the work of probation. Given the gap in existing literature surrounding the use of trauma informed approaches in probation it became clear that without establishing this first, it was not possible to fully examine the impact of working with trauma. The project therefore evolved to focus on understanding the extent to which probation practice has been influenced by trauma and trauma informed practice, with a particular interest in practitioner attitudes towards this.

The publication of Petrillo and Bradley's (2022) study into working with trauma in probation since this project commenced has made a valuable contribution to the literature surrounding the use of trauma informed methods in probation practice. Their research also serves to develop trustworthiness and credibility for this project by addressing comparable issues (Lincoln and Guba, 1986, Shenton, 2004).

Research Question

- To what extent is existing probation practice underpinned by trauma and trauma informed approaches?

Research Aims

To explore trauma and trauma informed approaches within probation, the aims of this project are:

- To embed understanding of trauma and trauma informed approaches across sentence management functions of Probation.
- To use existing theories concerning the role of emotions within probation practice as a means of conceptualising trauma and trauma informed practice in probation as an extension of emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983, Westaby, Fowler and Phillips, 2019).
- To employ the use of Thompson's (2011) 'PCS Analysis' as a foundational theory to consider to what extent trauma informed practice in probation is situated at a personal, cultural, or structural level.
- To understand the factors that contribute towards practitioners' attitudes to working with trauma at both an individual and organisational level.

- To produce and disseminate recommendations that inform and contribute to practitioner and policy maker's understandings of trauma informed approaches and how these can be implemented effectively across probation settings.

Research Objectives

The objectives of the project are:

- To determine the current extent of knowledge and understanding of trauma and trauma informed approaches and how these have been implemented within probation practice to date.
- To undertake a survey that examines practitioner attitudes towards trauma and trauma informed probation practice.
- To undertake qualitative semi-structured interviews that expand on the data gathered from practitioner survey responses and access a greater insight into the extent to which trauma informed practice has been adopted at both practitioner and organisational levels.
- To analyse survey data and interview responses that explore practitioner attitudes towards trauma and critically examine the extent to which an offenders' level of risk and harm influences whether the principles of trauma informed approaches are adopted.
- To produce and disseminate recommendations that emerge from the research findings to improve knowledge and understanding of trauma informed approaches and the most effective ways of incorporating this into practice.

4.3 Research Strategy

The purpose of research is to either expand existing knowledge or identify previously unknown information (Hine, 2007), but the pursuit of such knowledge is underpinned by beliefs about how this knowledge should be generated (Treadwell, 2013). An interpretivist epistemological orientation underpins the project having adopted the stance that people are not objects and subsequently knowledge should be gained through interpretation primarily “*what meaning do people attach to their experiences?*” (Treadwell, 2013, p32, Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The significance of understanding lived experiences was central to this project because of its focus on topics including trauma, emotional labour and inequality and importantly how these are experienced by people on probation and practitioners. Chapter Two highlighted Goleman’s (1995) argument that ignoring the influence of feelings, which in the context of this project can arise from experiences of trauma and inequality and from working with people who have experienced such, on thinking and actions is inadequate in attempting to understand behaviour. The knowledge generated from practitioner attitudes informed the research findings and provided data on what factors influence the adoption of trauma informed methods. A critical realist epistemology was considered because of its willingness to consider the structure of society (Treadwell, 2013). Moreover, society has been influential in shaping probation services, inequalities and attitudes towards crime and trauma, however, this was dismissed in favour of the interpretivist approach, which was felt to be more suitable for examining practitioner thoughts and feelings and being able to generate key themes and recommendations.

My dual status as an ‘insider’ researcher (see section 4.6) meant that this study was not conducted from a “*value-neutral*” perspective (Treadwell, 2013, p31). This research arose from my own critical reflection of professional practice that ascended

from my knowledge of trauma and probation (Emmel, 2013) leading to the formation of the research question (Noaks and Wincup, 2004). Being an insider can be advantageous because it can increase credibility through the researcher being familiar “*with the culture of participating organisations*” (Lincoln and Guba, 1986, Shenton, 2004, p65). Additionally, practitioner led research can develop credibility with other practitioners because it reduces the perception of knowledge generated by researchers being applied to them, by those who may be uninformed about practice (Noaks and Wincup, 2004, Shaw and Gould, 2001a). However, there is a risk that immersion in the organisational culture can also influence researcher judgments (Lincoln and Guba, 1986, Shenton, 2004). This risk has not materialised and has been minimised through regular critical conversations with the thesis supervisor. These conversations offered an alternative perspective and frequent opportunities to explore researcher bias and prejudice (Shenton, 2004).

It was essential that the research strategy employed was able to answer the research question if the study is to inform future practice undertaken by practitioners and decision making by policy makers (Chamberlain, 2013). Within contemporary criminology, existing studies have frequently adopted a mixed methods approach of combining both quantitative and qualitative strategies (Chamberlain, 2013). The purpose of the project was understanding the extent to which probation practice is underpinned by trauma and trauma informed approaches and to explore the factors that have influenced this. A mixed method approach was chosen with the intention of not just quantifying the extent of any issues impacting the use of trauma informed practice in probation, but also to examine any underpinning reasons for these (Chamberlain, 2013, Heap and Waters, 2019) by capturing practitioner attitudes and perspectives. A mixed method approach was considered advantageous, as the

strengths of one method can help balance the weaknesses from the other method (Heap and Waters, 2019). Mixed methods were chosen with the intention that the use of quantitative surveys would provide a larger sample of responses, whilst qualitative interviews would facilitate a deeper understanding of practitioner attitudes (Heap and Waters, 2019). However, the disadvantage of adopting a mixed methods approach, was it became intensive and more time consuming than if a single method approach had been utilised. It also required knowledge and skills in gathering data via both methods (Heap and Waters, 2019).

The project was designed as an explanatory sequential mixed method design, whereby the intention was to begin data collection with online surveys, generating quantitative data. To then be followed up with semi-structured interviews, collecting qualitative data and then interpreting interviewee's data (Noaks and Wincup, 2004, Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011). However, owing to significant time delays which impacted the data collection process (see section 4.7) this sequential approach to generating data did not happen as planned. Instead, the project was executed as a convergent parallel method, whereby quantitative and qualitative data were collected simultaneously, a design approach often utilised where there are time limits on data collection (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011).

The project was required to adhere to set timescales as part of the permissions provided by the organisation and university (see section 4.7) and the overall researchers' registration with the university to complete the study. Adhering to these timescales was crucial to enabling the project to successfully conclude. Utilising a mixed method approach under time-constraints proved to be a significant disadvantage due to the time-consuming nature of recruitment, generation and analysing two data sets (Heap and Waters, 2019). Whilst the time constraints meant

that one data set did not inform the other, like originally intended, the themes that emerged across both data sets were complimentary and similar, indicating that a shift to parallel data collection did not impede the overall purpose of the project.

4.4 Online Survey

Quantitative data was gathered utilising an online survey (also commonly referred to as self-administered or self-completion questionnaires) which asked participants a series of questions regarding their knowledge, experience and their views and attitudes around trauma and trauma informed methods (see Appendix B for a copy of the survey). Whilst surveys are typically associated with quantitative approaches, the inclusion of open-ended questions provided some qualitative data (Wincup, 2017). The survey questions were derived by firstly identifying the set of topics of interest that would seek to address the research aims and objectives along with gathering some basic demographic information (Czaja and Blair, 2005). To support the writing of the survey questions, a variety of existing surveys were reviewed, and training undertaken of Qualtrics Software, which was used to design, publish and extract data from the survey responses.

The recommendation that closed questions are used wherever possible within survey design to assist with analysis (Czaja and Blair, 2005) was implemented where appropriate. For example, closed questions were used to collect participant's demographic information and to establish respondent's baseline knowledge (Jackson, 2019) such as whether formal training about trauma and trauma informed practice had been provided by the organisation. 'Closed' questions were also employed to maximise respondents' attention and motivation to complete all the survey questions, thus minimising participant fatigue and risk of their disengagement from the latter part of the survey (Ben-Nun, 2008). Considerable consideration was given to minimising

participant withdrawal from the survey, for example thought was given to how the questions may be perceived by participants (Czaja and Blair, 2005).

To elicit further information that could be gathered from closed questions, the use of summary judgements (Czaja and Blair, 2005) and an answer scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree, with the inclusion of the neutral category, were included. To avoid participant confusion, the same answer scale for each attitude question was used to make the survey as uncomplicated as possible (Czaja and Blair, 2005).

To ensure the survey design was robust, I piloted it and gathered feedback (Czaja and Blair, 2005). Piloting the survey allowed me to identify if instructions were clear, that appropriate language had been used and that the survey questions followed a logical structure (Bryman, 2012). The survey was piloted with a Probation Service colleague and feedback sought from both the pilot respondent and from the project supervisor. This “*fresh perspective*” was an opportunity to challenge assumptions made due to the researcher’s closeness to the project that can make detachment difficult (Lincoln and Guba, 1986, Shenton, 2004, p67). The pilot was valuable for identifying that the initial draft version of the survey included leading attitude questions such as ‘do you think’, revealing the researcher’s underpinning assumptions. Including leading questions risked influencing participant’s answers and it was recommended (and subsequently actioned) that the ‘do you think’ questions should be (and were) replaced with the more neutral phrases such as “to what extent” (see Appendix B). As part of the reflective process of designing the survey, it was necessary to review whether bias had been introduced so that bias could be removed before data collection commenced (Czaja and Blair, 2005) to ensure the credibility of the project (Lincoln and Guba, 1986, Shenton, 2004, p67).

Another advantage to being an ‘insider’ when designing the research instruments was my awareness of practitioner workloads and capacity to take part in this study (HMIP, 2023). The issue of practitioner capacity was what encouraged me to use a survey to reach probation practitioners. I thought that busy professionals were more likely to agree to complete a survey because it could be completed at a time and place convenient to the practitioner and should take up to 15 minutes to complete. The fact that it could be completed relatively quickly, meant I thought I would accomplish good participation rates in comparison to time-consuming in-person interviews. The use of surveys was thought to be an inclusive way of capturing a range of responses from time poor practitioners juggling the demands of increased pressure in an “*overburdened probation system*” (Carr, 2024b, p113).

Having said this, it is well recognised that surveys typically have lower response rates than other research methods which can affect the representativeness of the results (Bryman, 2012). To try and encourage response rates, an accompanying information sheet was provided to participants explaining the purpose of the research and the reason for advertising the study to these professionals and inviting them to take part (Bryman, 2012) (see Appendix C). In addition, follow-up communications were sent to try and encourage response rates, however response rates remained low (see section 4.9).

Overall, forty-five respondents responded to the online survey. Of these forty-five respondents, twelve participants failed to complete the entire survey. I observed that these respondents disconnected from the survey after completing the demographics section. As these were anonymous respondents it is not possible to know the reason for their withdrawal, perhaps they became fatigued, or they were less comfortable responding to questions that required more focus and attention (e.g. scale questions).

4.5 Semi-Structured Interviews

Qualitative interviews are generally used in studies, like this one, that seek to understand participant perspectives and enable them to tell their story (Arksey and Knight 1999, cited in Wincup, 2017). Qualitative data was collected from semi-structured one-to-one interviews with practitioners with experience of working within sentence management functions of probation. An interview schedule (see appendix D) was developed to broadly follow the survey format having identified key themes from the literature review. The idea being that the interview process would be able to supplement the brief answers given in the survey. As highlighted above, this sequence did not happen due to delays to the project (see section 4.3). The interview schedule opened by gathering data around participant's current employment status and experience. It then moved onto exploring knowledge and understanding of the key concepts of trauma informed practice. It then progressed to consider practitioner attitudes towards trauma and trauma informed practice. Open questions were implemented to encourage open dialogue and encouraging respondents to provide examples from their practice. The use of qualitative interviews was chosen because of their ability to explore "*sensitive or personal issues*" and "*to elicit privileged information*" (Wincup, 2017, p99) such as practitioner attitudes. Interviews provided the opportunity to delve into issues in detail and to obtain thoughts, feelings, beliefs and experiences in a way that the survey could not achieve (Wincup, 2017). The use of qualitative interviews with probation practitioners was considered to be appropriate, given their professional experiences of interviewing people on probation meaning they are familiar with interview processes and likely to perceive that talking is a helpful way of conveying knowledge (Scourfield, 2001).

When the project commenced it was intended that interviews would be conducted in-person, an assumption often made by qualitative researchers (Johnson, Scheitle and Howard Ecklund, 2019). However, by the time data collection commenced, the global Covid-19 pandemic had occurred and subsequently it was necessary to conduct interviews remotely. The use of remote interviewing has been criticised by some as undermining the quality of data collected, albeit much of this criticism has been directed at the more established approach of telephone interviewing compared to the newer methods of using remote video interviewing (Johnson, Scheitle and Howard Ecklund, 2019). Whilst the literature suggests that in-person interviews are the preferred method, remote interviews are still a valuable way of gathering data (Johnson, Scheitle and Howard Ecklund, 2019).

Interviews were conducted using Microsoft Teams to ensure the research carried out was in accordance with the Government guidance '*Working Safely During Coronavirus (Covid-19)*' which recommended that remote working should be undertaken wherever possible. During the data collection phase of the project, the probation service was promoting working from home when practitioners were not conducting direct face-to-face work with people on probation. As a result, participants were familiar with taking part in online meetings using the Microsoft Teams software. The use of remote interviewing became an advantage as it meant that it was possible to offer a higher level of flexibility to participants because it reduced the need to factor in traveling to and from interview locations. This was particularly helpful in balancing the time required for interview transcription (Wincup, 2017).

Participants wanting to take part in an interview were advised to contact the researcher by email. On receipt of the email, participants were provided with a copy of the consent form for completion (see appendix E) and asked to provide a day and time they would

be available to take part in the interview; flexibility was offered to try and maximise participation.

At the beginning of each interview, participants were asked to confirm that they had completed and returned the consent forms, were taking part voluntarily and consented for the interview to be recorded. There were no issues raised by any participants to these initial questions. There was a risk that audio recording the interviews may have discouraged participants to be open (Wincup, 2017), however it was necessary to audio-record to facilitate the transcription of the interviews and enable me not to become distracted by making notes (Wincup, 2017). Using Microsoft Teams meant that the software provided a transcript of each interview, however much of the content of these transcripts were inaccurate and therefore it was necessary to listen to the recording of each interview and produce a manual transcription from the recording. A laborious but useful process, that allowed for the thorough examination of participant responses (Bryman, 2012). During the process of transcription, all participant's identifiable information was removed, and participants were assigned a letter substituting their name (later replaced with a pseudonym) to maintain confidentiality to everyone other than the researcher. The use of qualitative interviewing allowed participants to provide detailed responses to reflect their perspectives and attitudes. It also provided the researcher the opportunity to follow up answers and a greater degree of flexibility for participants to express what is relevant and important to them as practitioners (Bryman, 2012). This form of interviewing was significant in both developing an understanding of practitioner attitudes towards trauma and understanding what factors influence these attitudes. Once transcribed, copies of the interview were sent to the participant. They were informed that they had 14 days on receipt of the transcription to review, omit sections of their answers or withdraw their

participation from the project. Including this process, provided another opportunity for participants to give informed consent. None of the participants chose to withdraw from the study either immediately after the interview or following receipt of their transcript.

4.6 Being an insider

My professional role as a Probation Officer constitutes what Kanuha (2000) terms *insider research* because of my shared membership with participants as a probation practitioner (cited by Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). The dualism of insider research has attracted criticism due to concerns that it affects the ability of the researcher to be independent which can lead to the researcher's "*credibility and personal integrity*" being interrogated (Patenaude, 2004, p72). My position as an 'insider' researcher was identified as potentially problematic by both the University's Ethics panel and early-stage review examiners because it did not allow for objective distance from the project. Both required additional reassurances that my dual status was not necessarily a barrier to participation. In some instances, 'insider' status may encourage cooperation, disclosure, confidence and credibility (Coar and Sim, 2006). While being an outside researcher does not necessarily guarantee subjectivity or immunity from personal influence (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). Although it was the researcher's professional role that was raised as a source of concern, Dwyer and Buckle (2009) highlight that any shared membership between researcher and participants, such as gender or ethnicity, or lack of commonality should be considered in terms of its potential impact. Curiously these other forms of shared membership with participants were not raised by the ethics reviewers or internal examiners as affecting the viability of the project. Patenaude (2004) pertinently notes that the process of being granted approval by universities to undertake research can have considerable influence over research topics, aims and objectives and research design, which includes an institution's preference around the

credibility of insider research. Nevertheless, it was useful during the design stages to consider the consequences of being an insider researcher and the impact of this, on the project.

Shaw and Gould (2001b), whilst focussed on the social work profession, argue convincingly for the need for *practitioner research* which is conducted by practitioners seeking to develop and improve practice. They suggest that not only do research and practice share similar skills and abilities but to achieve best practice they should draw knowledge from one another (Shaw and Gould, 2001b). The expectation that practitioners apply the results of research unquestioningly should be reframed as practitioners instead having something meaningful to contribute to the research agenda which affects their roles (Shaw and Gould, 2001a).

Dwyer and Buckle (2009) advise that a more useful conceptualisation of insider research, is that it is different, rather than categorising it as better or worse. For this project, insider research was considered advantageous during the data gathering stages, as it was more likely to encourage participants to be open and trusting (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009), easier to establish a rapport between interview participant and researcher (Patenaude, 2004) and less likely that participants would question the researcher's ability to fully appreciate their experiences (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). Conversely, Bryman (2012) highlights that because of my shared membership with participants, this may have encouraged participants to provide socially desirable answers, particularly those being interviewed where anonymity to the researcher was not practical. But being an 'insider' researcher provided understanding and knowledge of internal processes, details of who to contact to navigate getting permission to advertise the project to practitioners (see section 4.7). As already highlighted earlier in the chapter, a disadvantage of being an 'insider' is that familiarity with the

organisation and its culture can affect researcher judgments (Lincoln and Guba, 1986, Shenton, 2004). This was noticeable in some of the structuring of the questions which affected the data analysis, for example in the online survey participants were asked to state their current role which created a varied range of answers (see section 4.10). In hindsight, familiarity with the organisation meant that the question was underpinned by assumption as to how participants would interpret this, based on my own views as a probation practitioner regarding the use of different terms to convey job roles.

4.7 Gaining Permissions

As Patenaude (2004, p69) asserts one of the biggest challenges for researchers can be getting permission for the research project and navigating the varying “*procedural hoops*” to gain access to participants. Originally the project was designed in 2020/2021 whilst probation services were being delivered by both the public and private sectors prior to the reunification in June 2021. During the research design phase, permission was sought and granted by the researcher’s then employer, BeNCH Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC), a privately run probation provider and the National Probation Service (NPS), East of England region for their practitioners to be invited to take part in the project. But as Waters et al. (2020) warn, gaining permission is rarely a neat or predictable process, as was the situation with this study. There was a significant time delay of several months in the project being reviewed by the University’s Ethics Committee due to internal issues and a further small delay following the identification of minor amendments being actioned before ethics approval was granted. These delays resulted in the project being unable to commence prior to the reunification of probation services on the 26th June 2021 which led to the research requiring additional permission before data collection could begin. The new Probation Service required all research to be approved via the National Research Committee

(NRC) of HMPPS. This involved the submission of a detailed application that provided information regarding the projects aims and objectives, proposed methodology, access to frontline staff, data protection, research ethics, dissemination of findings and declaration to abide by all relevant legislation and guidelines. In addition, due to the Covid-19 pandemic a risk assessment form outlining how the project would maintain safety with consideration of the virus was also required; there were minimal risks associated with the spread of Covid-19 due to the remote nature of the research format. A Covid-19 screening form for external applicants was also requested, despite the researcher being an employee and in all other contexts of the project considered an '*insider*'. This somewhat arduous process of gaining permission to conduct research means that the power to decide on what topics are important, how these are researched and how the data is used, lies with the supervising university and organisations such as probation (Paternaude, 2004).

The HMPPS NRC application gave a four-month window in which to recruit and undertake all project data collection. By the time all necessary permissions were obtained to recruit and invite participants to take part in the study, it was the festive period in 2021. This was an unfortunate time to have access to participants because many practitioners were on annual leave, their colleagues had their own workloads plus responsibilities to cover colleagues on leave. Alongside the reunification of the probation service, the timing of the data collection undoubtedly affected participant response rates. It was subsequently necessary to submit a request to extend the recruitment period by one additional month, which was granted, but unfortunately did not massively increase participant response rates.

4.8 Sampling Strategy

At the time of the research being carried out, the East of England Probation region where the data collection was carried out, consisted of 1,800 staff, across eight regional Probation Delivery Units: Essex North, Essex South, Hertfordshire, Norfolk, Cambridgeshire, Bedfordshire, Northamptonshire and Suffolk (HMPPS, 2021). Site triangulation, through conducting research across different locations, and the emergence of similar findings across these, was implemented to enhance the credibility of the data gathered (Lincoln and Guba, 1986, Shenton, 2004).

To meet the project aims, non-probability sampling was necessary to ensure that the data collected and used to generate ideas was underpinned by authentic experiences derived from the study population; specifically, probation practitioners (Henry, 2009). Initially the project was intended to focus on embedding an understanding of trauma and trauma informed approaches across all areas of probation practice. Ethical reviewers stated that this was too ambitious for the scale of the project, and it was decided that the study would focus specifically on sentence management delivery as the core area of risk assessment and risk management (HMPPS, 2023). This resulted in the need for the sample to reflect this specific practice area and the decision was made that a prerequisite for participation in both the survey and interviews was that participants had sentence management knowledge. It was envisaged that recruiting participants with *knowledge* of sentence management practice, rather than specifying a need to be actively working within that practice area currently, may help to keep a broader participant sample. However, the data gathered regarding participant job roles illustrates that this approach did not encourage participants from other areas such as intervention teams to participate, as had been hoped.

An endeavour of qualitative research is to produce data that is rich in detail and depth. Consequently, it necessitates utilising non-probability sampling to ensure participants can draw upon their knowledge and experience (Emmel, 2013). Utilising this sampling strategy immediately meant that the project emphasis was less on a numerical sample size, and instead on capturing the intricacies, nuances and dynamics of practitioner experience (Emmel, 2013). That is not to say that the question of sample size adequacy did not arise. As predicted by Emmel (2013), the small sample size was considered by early-stage review examiners as potentially insufficient to address the research question and late-stage review examiners recommended that the quantitative data was removed (see Section 4.15 for further explanation). It is proposed by Emmel (2013, p146) that such concerns are bred from a “dominant ideology” that larger sample sizes produce more reliable and dependable results despite an absence of guidelines and tests of sufficiency, regarding sample size adequacy.

To appease examiner concerns, the initial sampling strategy design was one of quota sampling (another form of non-probability sampling), on the basis that it would enable the production of a sample, reflective of probation practitioners through the use of subgroups (known as quotas) by seeking to ensure a diverse range of knowledge and experience, representation of different geographical regions and participant genders. It was recognised early on, that a limitation of this approach was that it would allow researcher choice over participant inclusion or exclusion in an attempt to ensure all quotas were met (Bryman, 2012). A potential danger of which, is that data collection becomes distracted by a desire to meet quotas rather than gathering sufficient data, that will answer the research question.

Conversely, during the ethics application process, it was proposed by the ethical reviewers that the sampling strategy should be one of theoretical saturation. That is, data should continue to be gathered until the presence and significance of emerging concepts were identified and new data was no longer being generated (Bryman, 2012). Emmel (2013, p146) argues that once this “*informational redundancy*” is achieved, sample adequacy is met. However, he does caution that this can only ever be considered as temporary redundancy due to the fluidity of the world around us (Emmel, 2013). Theoretical saturation is considered an appropriate strategy for open-ended interview questions, as used within this study, that sought to explore themes (Weller et al, 2018). Taking this approach also prevented wasting time and resources carrying out unnecessary interviews purely to meet a pre-determined numerical target (Bryman, 2012). Given the significant upheaval occurring because of the Probation Service’s reunification, this approach was deemed advantageous to reduce disruption to practitioners. It was also conducive to ensuring that the researcher was able to manage the amount of data gathered (Emmel, 2013).

In reality however, theoretical saturation was not used, due to slow response rates to both the survey and interviews which meant that all responses were included. However, as the interviews were conducted, it became evident that similar themes were being uncovered, and a point of saturation had been reached. Subsequently interviews would have been concluded, even in the event of further participants being identified.

4.9 Recruitment Strategy

The main method of recruitment consisted of advertising the project, both the survey and interview, to practitioners within the East of England Probation region to ensure that the sample participants were reached. The principles of research advertisement

as outlined by Collins and Gray (2015) were implemented; a short description of the research was provided along with an outline of who the target participants were, what taking part in the project consisted of, how the information gathered will be used and how to get in touch with the lead researcher. A brief outline of the project was provided within the initial advertisement (see Appendix F) including clarifying that practitioners with sentence management experience were sought and the participant information sheets for the survey and interviews were attached that provided the additional required information. This was one of the advantages of being able to advertise the project electronically as it meant that the participant information sheets could be shared as part of the advertisement, giving participants ample opportunity to read through this information, prior to deciding whether to take part.

The probation service's main method of mass communication to all staff across the East of England Region is through a weekly bulletin, called "The Weekly". As Collins and Gray (2015) highlight, an important factor when choosing the method of advertisement, consideration needs to be given to who may be excluded through using a particular method of advertising. This was another occasion whereby being an insider researcher provided useful awareness, that not all staff access this communication regularly and in the wake of Reunification, were still getting to grips with new information technology systems and methods of communications. Consequently, other avenues for advertising needed to be undertaken to ensure the study advert reached the widest possible audience. Therefore, the project was also advertised via the organisation's Microsoft Teams, Quality and Performance channel which is used to communicate with practitioners daily. In addition, the project was advertised via the training team to practitioners undertaking their probation officer qualifications. It is noted that because the data was collected over a period of four

months that some practitioners may have not received any communication and therefore had been excluded from participating. For example, those on maternity leave, those absent due to long-term illness or seconded outside of the East of England probation region. Thus, these groups of practitioners may not have seen the project advertisement within the allocated time frame for undertaking data collection.

The responses to both the survey and interviews were painfully slow. The reasons for this are not entirely clear. Some possible reasons for the slow response rate include increased workloads for practitioners at a time of significant change (Fox et al, 2022). In addition, the data collection taking place during the festive period meant higher than usual practitioners on annual leave and practitioners may not have seen the project advertised because of not accessing the newsletter where it was advertised. It may also suggest that some practitioners lacked motivation or interest in the topic and thus decided not to participate. A discussion with a local deputy head of service regarding the slow response rates led to an email being sent by that member of staff to all deputy heads of the eight delivery units requesting that the project advert was also circulated with practitioners via email in their areas. Sadly, the researcher was not advised whether this request was actioned.

Respondents to the interviews initially were typically from the researchers' own probation delivery unit. A total of eleven of the fourteen interview participants. It is hypothesized that this may have been due to the researcher's professional reputation and the project also being advertised within area and local team meetings. As a result, the researcher contacted individual Team Managers where none of their practitioners had expressed an interest in participating in an interview for the study. An email was sent to the relevant Team Manager with the project advertisement and participant information sheets. This did result in a further two participants from previously

unrepresented areas contacting the researcher asking to take part in the project. Whilst being an insider had its advantages, it was still necessary to be tenacious and persistent in attempts to encourage participant engagement with the project.

There were a further two participants who contacted the researcher asking to take part in the project whereby arranging an interview was more complicated. As with all prospective participants, consent forms were emailed to the participants along with a request to inform the researcher of their availability to complete the interview. One of these participants did not respond directly to the email, but an out of office email response indicated that the individual was away from work due to illness. A follow-up email was sent to the participant advising that an extension to the project had been agreed by HMPPS and asking if they still wished to take part. No response to this correspondence was received. With the other participant, an interview date and time was agreed, but on the arranged day, the participant reported that due to their workload they no longer had the capacity to participate in the project. This participant was also emailed following the data collection period extension advising that the deadline had been extended if they still wished to take part. This participant confirmed that they did still want to take part in an interview and a new date and time was arranged, with the interview being successfully completed.

Despite advertising the project to practitioners through different means, response rates were slow and overall were low. The original advert was used for consistency purposes across the alternative advertising routes; it is possible that the advert design may not have been appealing to participants. The nature of the advertising strategy was necessary to ensure that the participant sample had probation sentence management knowledge and experience to meet the project aims, but Collins and Gray (2015) warn this could result in similarity across the participant demographic.

This theory is particularly relevant when considering the potential for similarity between practitioners who chose to take part, and those who did not. It is possible that the practitioners who took part in the survey and/or the interview may share an interest. It may be that these participants have a positive opinion towards trauma awareness and trauma informed approaches which impacted their decision to actively participate in the project.

4.10 Sample Characteristics

As outlined, the East of England Probation Service covers eight geographic areas. Interview participants were based in Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire, Essex and Suffolk. All these areas were also represented within the survey, with the addition of participants from Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire. This leaves practitioners from Norfolk unrepresented within the study. On reflection, the survey design (appendix B) for gathering data regarding participants location was flawed. Participants were asked to state the geographical region within which they work, and an open text answer box provided; the intention being that it prevented a lengthy list of locations. Despite each local delivery unit being included as an example of the location of work being requested, this caused confusion, with 16 participants (approximately half of the overall sample) misunderstanding and instead answering 'East of England' and 'South East'. In hindsight, this question would have yielded more useful data if it had been a multiple-choice question. Practice may vary between geographical regions, particularly in the wake of the reunification of probation services; if the data collected had provided more reliable information concerning participant locations, variations in practice could have been explored more thoroughly.

The sampling strategy was successful in recruiting participants with a varied range of number of years' experience of Probation practice, as illustrated in Table 2 below. The

average number of years’ experience of Probation for interview participants was 3.5 years, whilst survey participants average number of years’ experience of Probation was 8.25 years. The least experienced participants were legacy NPS practitioners.

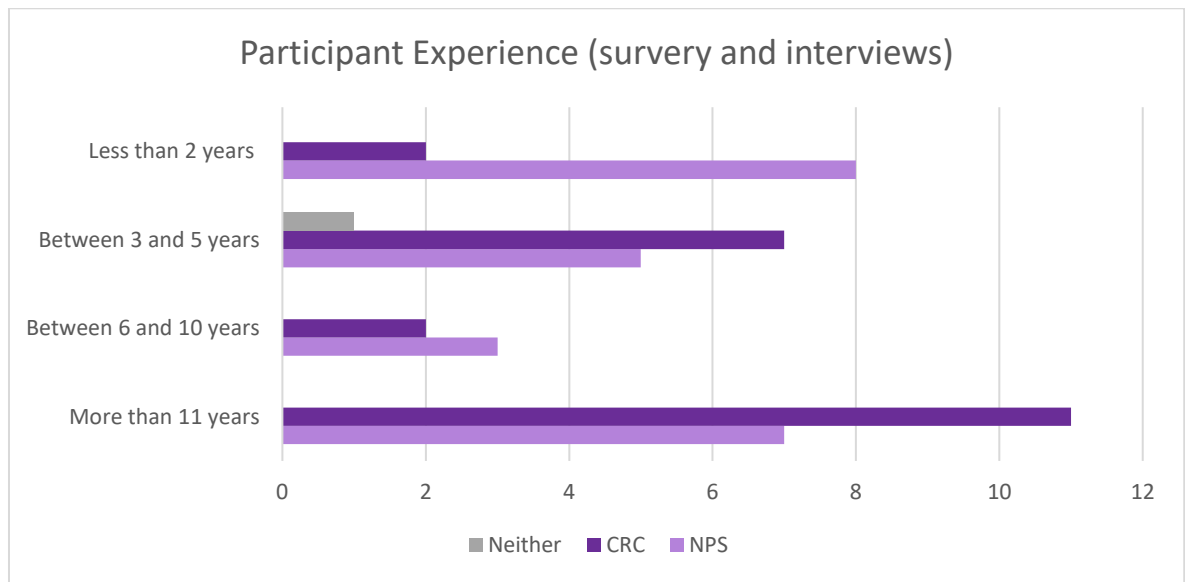


Table 2 Participant length of time in service

Participants were asked to provide their current role. This caused some confusion, possibly because of the varied use of names to describe job roles that have been subject to frequent change; the current preferred term of Probation Practitioner replaced Offender Manager, Responsible Officer and Officer as part of reunification and encompasses qualified Probation Officers (PO), Probation Service Officers (PSOs) and trainees (HMPPS, 2021). Similarly, trainees were referred to as Trainee Probation Officer’s (TPO) and are now known as PQiPs⁷ which refers to the Probation Qualification in Probation programme. It is clear from the data that all three variants of Probation Practitioners were represented, but the exact number for each role is unclear and it is not possible to reflect specific job roles within the findings without compromising anonymity. Overall, the data has been gathered from frontline probation

⁷ PQiP is the current model of Probation Officer training and this abbreviation of the term is used to refer to learners on the programme (Burrell, 2022).

practitioners, practice tutor assessors and those in middle management positions. It is notable that there was only one participant from the senior leadership team who chose to take part, which is perhaps reflective of the commitment to trauma informed practice at a senior level of the organisation (see Chapter Eight).

As the data was collected shortly after the reunification of Probation, it was important to ensure that there was representation across both former private and public sector probation services to allow for analysis as to whether the type of former employer had any bearing on practitioner views and attitudes towards trauma informed practice. Table 2 illustrates that there is a relatively even representation of practitioners with experience from both sectors. Whilst there are some limitations identified in the sample representation; it is considered that there is a varied enough sample characteristic to draw meaningful analysis from, as explained later in the chapter.

4.11 Informed Consent

The British Society of Criminology's Statement of Ethics (2015, pg7) outlines that *"researchers need to check that each participant is making a voluntary and informed decision to participate"*. Upholding this important ethical obligation, interview participants were provided with a participant information sheet and consent forms (see appendix D and E) prior to taking part in the study. For the survey, participants were asked at the beginning of the survey to provide their consent prior to proceeding with completion of the survey (see Appendix B). This was a mandatory field at the start of the survey that required an affirmative response; without this, participants could not move forward to the next stage of the survey which effectively removed their participation from the survey. Obtaining consent via this process enabled participant anonymity to be maintained.

Participant information sheets for both the survey and interviews were shared with participants when the research project was advertised to them, giving them ample opportunity to read these before deciding whether to take part in the study. To ensure that the participant information sheets provided adequate information about the project (British Society of Criminology, 2015) an overview of the project and the research aims were included (Bos, 2020). Participants were asked when providing their consent to participate, to confirm they had opportunity to read the study's information sheet and had the chance to ask questions and that any questions had been answered satisfactorily. The issue of consent is not confined to the beginning of a project, it is dynamic and subject to change (Israel and Hay, 2012) and participants who do participate may still choose to decline to answer specific questions or withdraw their consent at any time (Bos, 2020). There were no instances of withdrawal by interview participants. While there were twelve survey participants that disengaged, this occurred after providing demographic information only and they did not complete any of the questions designed to capture practitioner attitudes and therefore their responses were not included within the studies' findings.

Participant information sheets included the right to withdraw after the provision of initial consent, should a participant change their mind. However, to enable for data to be analysed and the project to be drawn to a conclusion, it was necessary to set a timescale for the right to withdraw.

4.12 Confidentiality

Participants of research projects provide information voluntarily and the nature of the information provided is often private and confidential (Israel and Hay, 2012). This is particularly pertinent when asking participants, as this study does, for their personal

views, attitudes and experiences. Therefore, it was important that the information was gathered, stored and used in a way that upheld participant confidentiality.

Care was taken during the survey design when questions were formulated to not include questions that could lead to individuals being identified. The initial draft survey ended by asking participants to provide their contact details if they wished to be approached to participate in a follow-up interview. Asking for this information and recruiting interview participants via this method would not preserve the confidentiality of survey participants. Instead, the conclusion of the published survey provided the researcher's contact details, so if participants wished to take part in interviews they could get in touch with the researcher.

Despite these measures to preserve confidentiality and respondents' anonymity, during analysis, I became aware of a small number of cases where I thought the responses provided by participants made them identifiable. Specifically, in cases where they had provided their specific job titles and geographic locations. I was able to identify who these survey respondents, were because of my 'insider' status. Despite this, extra care has been taken in the writing up of the findings to make sure that participant identities and answers are disguised to avoid participants becoming identifiable to others.

Research participants engaging in interviews were identifiable to the researcher; their involvement in the project was not discussed with other participants and they were informed that their responses would be anonymised at transcription stage, prior to inclusion within the research findings. However, Wiles (2013; pg59) highlights that *"despite anonymisation, people may be upset at how they are portrayed in research reports"*. To mitigate against potential offence, the information sheet and consent form

(see Appendix E and G) included a clear explanation of the purpose of the report and how findings would be used.

Data gathered was stored electronically on the researcher's university password protected account to protect the information from being accessed by unauthorised individuals. Audio recordings of interviews were transcribed by the researcher and deleted within 30 working days. Interview transcriptions were stored on the researcher's university password protected account once these had been anonymised. During the transcription process participants were assigned a letter of the alphabet. However, in the write up of the thesis findings, all participants were given a pseudonym (a false name) to maintain anonymity whilst avoiding de-personalising the data (Heaton, 2021). The decision to give respondents names rather than letters was considered to make the findings easier to read and engage with. As is commonplace, pseudonyms were chosen at random, with the use of an internet based random name generator, with the only participant characteristic represented that of gender (Heaton, 2021), as no other personal data such as ethnicity or age were collected.

4.13 Further Considerations

Conducting ethical research upholds integrity and accountability, whilst protecting the individuals and organisation that are participating in research (Israel and Hay, 2012). It is an impossibility to remove all risks involved in research (Shaw and Barrett, 2006), but ethical dilemmas and the ways in which these can be mitigated and minimised should be explored (Israel and Hay, 2012). The following potential difficulties are associated with this study:

- ***The insider status of the researcher may mean that there has been prior professional contact between the researcher and participants.***

My insider status may have encouraged participant's willingness to engage with the topic because the duality of my role meant that I have an informed understanding of the role of probation and therefore am more easily able to understand and relate to some of the responses provided by participants. In addition, organisations and participants may have been less likely to perceive the project as a threat or an attempt to exploit service inadequacies but rather as a development opportunity, as I am able to offer future recommendations that are feasible and realistic to improve practice. As Bos (2020: 41) highlights, "*researchers have an obligation to improve, promote and protect*". One of the limitations of being an insider researcher is that participants who were known to the researcher, prior to taking part may have sought to provide affirming or appeasing answers that they felt may align with my own personal views towards the topics discussed or they may have been reluctant to share their own views and attitudes, concerned that this may affect my professional view of them.

When the project was advertised, it was clear to potential participants that I was a practicing Probation Officer, and my name was included within advertisement material, thereby meaning if participants were uncomfortable with my insider status they were able to choose not to take part and it is possible that this may have been a barrier to recruitment. However, participants did have the option to take part in the project through the online surveys where there was increased capacity to retain their anonymity.

- ***Participants could experience an impact on their emotional or psychological well-being because of taking part (Wiles, 2013).***

It is possible that practitioners may have their own trauma histories or have experienced secondary trauma.

My career as a probation practitioner provides me with experience, knowledge, and skills in conducting interviews (Scourfield, 2001), including discussing sensitive and difficult topics and assessing the impact of such discussions on individuals and their well-being. Therefore, I felt sufficiently capable and able to conduct interviews of this nature as part of this study.

The literature highlights that some practitioners may be motivated to pursue a career in probation because of their own traumatic experiences (Burrell, 2022); asking them to discuss the topic of trauma could result in re-traumatisation. The project's debrief sheet included details of the probation services' employee assistance programme and signposts to the mental health charity, Mind. On reflection, as one of the themes identified by participants was the lack of support provided by the organisation for working with trauma (see Chapter Eight), referring to internal support mechanisms is unlikely to have been sufficient aftercare. The project would have benefited from a more robust approach in providing different external avenues of support to participants.

- ***Potential damage to professional reputation if attitudes or views are expressed that may be considered derogatory or unfavourable.***

Studies that ask for participants to comment on their employment can sometimes contain discrepancies between their self-reflective accounts and their actual behaviours (Scourfield, 2001). For example, participants may disclose not doing tasks that are expected of them. Upholding participant anonymity can help safeguard against this (see section 3.24), however my insider status may have acted as a barrier to participants being open and honest in their self-reflective accounts due to concerns that they were identifiable to the researcher.

Participants were advised within information sheets that they would retain anonymity. Interview participants were provided with a copy of the interview transcript and given fourteen days on receipt of their transcript to withdraw their consent; the transcripts clearly evidenced the removal of any identifying factors and the assignment of a letter of the alphabet. Participants were informed that all data would be anonymised before being included within any final write-up of the thesis to ensure participant confidentiality and that participants would not suffer any consequences for their involvement in the study (Bos, 2020). There were no participants who chose to withdraw from the project which may indicate participants were comfortable with the accuracy of the transcript. Additionally, participants may have considered their views to have been satisfactorily anonymised and reflected (Patenaude, 2004).

As an insider researcher, the potential adverse impact on individuals and the organisation from data not being handled sensitively by protecting confidentiality and ensuring data analysis was robustly undertaken was fully understood and considered, because of my training as a probation officer on areas such as data protection.

- ***Participants could accidentally provide client names or details if referring to case studies when providing responses.***

My status as an insider researcher meant that any instances of providing sensitive details did not constitute a data protection breach. There were no instances of identifying details being provided for people on probation; all examples given by participants maintained the confidentiality of the individual they were discussing. During interviews, there were occasions where individual colleagues were mentioned by name as part of participants providing explanations which may have occurred because of my insider status and familiarity with those being discussed. Names of specific individuals were redacted during the transcription process.

4.14 Analysis

An analytical strategy was required to ensure that the data analysis of both the survey and interview responses was both systematic and objective; both principles were essential in minimising the influence of the researcher's personal bias (Bryman, 2012). As discussed earlier in this chapter (see section 4.6) 'insider' research is more likely to be scrutinised for its ability to be subjective, making a clear analytical strategy vital. The researcher chose to conduct a thematic analysis of the data collected; the most applied method used to analyse qualitative data (Bryman, 2012, Brooks et al, 2015) to identify, examine and report themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006) and help interpret the data (Brooks et al, 2015). Interpretivist epistemology is often associated with the use of qualitative methods because of its ability to interpret information (Treadwell, 2013). As a result, a theoretical thematic analysis was implemented, whereby the data was analysed to answer the research question (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

To ensure that the thematic analysis was undertaken systematically and comprehensively, Braun and Clarke (2006) six phases of thematic analysis were followed, as outlined in the following sections.

4.15 Phase 1 – Familiarisation with the data

This first stage of analysis involved compiling the data and becoming acquainted with it. The interactive nature of conducting interviews and transcribing them meant that the researcher approached the analysis phase having already formed some views around the data that had been gathered by this method (Braun and Clarke, 2006). In contrast, the survey data had been gathered without direct involvement. Despite these differences in initial knowledge of the data sets, it was important for understanding both, that the researcher immersed herself in the data as the search for patterns, differences and meanings began. For interview data, this process commenced during

the transcription of the interviews, which required the researcher to listen to the audio recording of each interview several times whilst transcribing the content. Initial reflections following this process were noted by the researcher to ensure these were not lost in later stages of analysis. For surveys, the data was downloaded from the Qualtrics software and both the quantitative and qualitative data was reviewed, with notes being kept on any emergent trends and areas of interest.

The original draft of the data findings chapters included an analysis of the quantitative data obtained from the surveys, utilising numerical statistics to present the findings. At the late-stage review, recommendations were made that because the response rates to the survey were slow and had resulted in a much smaller sample size than anticipated, the analysis of the quantitative data should not be used. The sample was so small therefore would not yield sufficient meaningful data. Fortunately, as the survey had used open-text questions which produced qualitative data, recommendations were given to use the textual answers from the survey which were subsequently implemented. This data was included in the analysis and woven throughout the data chapters.

4.16 Phase 2 – Generating initial codes

This phase was completed manually and involved going through the data thoroughly to identify codes to distinguish themes from one another. With a large data set, manual coding would not have been the preferred choice, but due to the small sample size, manual coding was considered an advantage because it was less time consuming than learning to use a software programme. Each interview transcript was annotated, and colour coded to distinguish different themes of the data. This was also undertaken with qualitative survey responses. Once colour coded, the information for each colour was collated on a separate document so that there was a visual representation of the

data gathered (Braun and Clarke, 2006) and each theme could be examined individually, whilst also noting any overlap between themes.

4.17 Phase 3 – Searching for themes

Once an overall understanding of the data had been established, the process of beginning to look for patterns or differentiation commenced. A table was used to transfer the codes into themes and to examine which were sub themes and which were main themes. It was important to the researcher that the narrative of qualitative data did not get lost. To accomplish this, direct quotes from participants were included within the table. Those sub-themes that did not fit were added to the end of the document as ‘other’ so that they too were not lost.

4.18 Phase 4 – Reviewing themes

This stage involved refining the themes. The main obstacle was that there was overlap between themes and therefore re-coding was undertaken to ensure identifiable distinctions (Braun and Clarke, 2006). During this phase, discussions were undertaken with the thesis supervisor to explore the identified themes and to finalise the coding, in order to prevent the activity from being over repeated and information being overlooked (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

4.19 Phase Five – Defining and naming themes

Once coding of data was concluded, the themes to be presented within the findings of the project were identified which involved considering how they fit into addressing the research question. Different ways of presenting the findings, were explored, including using each project aim as a basis for structuring the project’s findings, however it was identified that such an approach could blur and merge themes into one another. The alternative option, and one that was adopted, was to gather the data into the main themes and produce the data chapters based on these. The first findings chapter

(Chapter Five) focused on knowing, being and doing, utilising the valuable contribution to the literature on trauma informed probation practice made by Petrillo and Bradley's (2022) *Stages of the Trauma Journey* as a framework to present existing knowledge of trauma and trauma informed approaches. This highlighted the responsabilisation of practitioners for their own learning and development. Along with clear evidence of practitioners considering the role of trauma in people on probation's lives to be important to the role of probation practitioners. The second data chapter (Chapter Six) presents practitioner attitudes to trauma. The main themes identified as affecting attitudes towards trauma include blame, minimisation and denial, levels of risk posed by the person on probation, types of offending behaviour and types of traumas experienced. The third data chapter (Chapter Seven) focuses on the theme of gender which was repeatedly identified in the data findings as a significant influence on the recognition of trauma and adoption of trauma informed approaches. The fourth and final data chapter (Chapter Eight) centres around the concept of 'ticking the box'. This proved to be a strong theme raised by participants expressing the lack of authenticity which they felt the organisation had demonstrated towards implementing trauma informed practice and the absence of care exhibited towards practitioners exposed to working with trauma.

4.20 Phase Six – Producing the report

The final stage involved writing up the final analysis and presenting the findings (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Both data from the project, primarily that presented through direct participant quotes, and existing literature were used to interpret the identified themes and evidence how this has met the research question.

4.21 Concluding Remarks

This chapter has provided a detailed examination of the methodology of this thesis and has identified both the strengths and limitations of the study. The project has encountered several difficulties which have been discussed, along with the impact of these challenges on the overall project. Despite these issues, the research design and strategy employed, provided data surrounding practitioner attitudes towards trauma and trauma informed practice from which it is possible to draw out significant themes to understand the current extent of probation practice being underpinned by trauma and trauma informed practice. The next chapter is the first of four data chapters that presents the projects' findings, starting with an exploration of existing knowledge levels of trauma and trauma informed practice.

Chapter 5

Trauma and Probation Practice: ‘Knowing, Being and Doing’

5.1 Introduction

This is the first of four data chapters that present the project’s overall research findings gathered from fourteen interview participants and thirty-three survey respondents. The literature review drew attention to how people on probation and the practitioners working within the organisation bring with them their own lived experiences (Willmott and Jones, 2022). This can include experiences which were traumatic. Such prior experiences can shape an individual’s perception of the world and influence how they interact with others. The influence of previous experiences on thinking and behaviour is not a new idea (Goleman, 1995), but considering these experiences through a trauma-informed lens is in its infancy across criminal justice settings in the UK (Bradley, 2021) particularly in probation settings (Petrillo and Bradley, 2022, Senker et al. 2023). This chapter is a new contribution to the literature on understanding the influence of probation practitioner’s previous knowledge and experiences of trauma on practice.

This chapter focuses on determining the current extent of knowledge and understanding of trauma and trauma informed approaches within sentence management functions of probation. The analysis of the research findings is presented through the application of Petrillo and Bradley’s (2022) *Stages of the Trauma Journey* (see Chapter Three) which consists of *knowing (trauma aware)*, *doing (trauma-informed)* or *being (trauma responsive)* to determine which stage of the trauma journey the Probation Service is operating. Conceptualising probation practice within this context helps differentiate “*between knowing about trauma, thinking about the impact and doing something about it*” (Silvester, 2022, p334).

Firstly, the chapter begins by exploring the *knowing* stage, through examining participant's experience of trauma training. For those participants who had attended training, this appears to have been delivered inconsistently and with varying results. Overall, participants presented as generally dissatisfied with what they perceive to be an insufficient level of training provided to equip them to work confidently with people on probation who have experienced trauma. Next, the application of knowledge to practice is considered by exploring current levels of probation practitioner's understanding of trauma and trauma informed practice and where such knowledge derives from.

Second, the chapter explores the *doing* stage to consider how knowledge is being used to inform practice through the application of trauma informed approaches. Participants highlighted their desire to recognise and work with trauma, despite the lack of support or guidance being provided by the organisation, with the implication that processes are prioritised over people.

Third, the chapter considers the *being* stage of trauma informed practice which examines the expectations placed on practitioners, despite the lack of training and guidance provided. Practitioners emphasise their underpinning fears that their lack of knowledge and understanding of trauma has the potential to cause more harm than good to the people they supervise.

5.2 'Knowing' – Being Trauma Aware

The focus on establishing the extent of existing trauma informed practice in probation was to identify a starting position to understanding how knowledge of trauma has been applied and implemented, to identify any gaps in practice and provide a base with which future changes can be measured (Jackson, 2019). The project began by considering the extent to which practitioners can be deemed to *know* (with full

awareness and consciousness) about trauma and trauma informed methods (Jackson, 2019). This stage of *knowing* captures the very first steps of introducing new knowledge to raise awareness and understanding, typically achieved through an organisations' provision of training (Petrillo and Bradley, 2022).

5.3 Training

Around two thirds of participants reported having received trauma training in their current role. There was no notable difference in the frequency of practitioners receiving trauma training, irrespective of whether they had previously been employed by a private CRC provider, or the public sector NPS, except for one participant. Jenny a PSO with over 11 years' experience considered that training had been more forthcoming in the private sector, as she explained *"in the CRC I did quite a bit of training with them. I haven't done anything since [reunification]"*. Jenny identified during her interview that she works solely with women on probation. Trauma informed practice in probation has so far focussed primarily on women (see Chapter Seven for further details). As most women on probation were supervised by the CRC prior to reunification, due to women often posing a lower risk of harm (HMIP, 2019), this may account for Jenny's experience of increased access to trauma training, comparative to other participants who mostly work with men. The conjecture that access to training since reunification has decreased, is an area that may benefit from future research.

It is a limitation, because of the design of this project, that practitioners were not asked to clarify the reason why they have not completed any trauma training. It is surmised that this gap may arise from one of the following reasons: practitioner absence when training was delivered; failure to provide workload relief that promotes and facilitates meaningful engagement with training and therefore provides time and space to commit to new ideas (Wilton and Williams, 2019, Shepherd, 2022). Additionally, further

contributing factors to a reluctance to participate in training may arise from offering training that is insufficient in equipping practitioners to work in a trauma informed manner (HMIP, 2023); or individual practitioner attitudes to, or experiences of, trauma (see Chapter Six).

A noticeable theme detected by practitioners that have attended trauma training was that they express concerns over the quality of the training provided. Many reflect that they do not feel the training was adequate in equipping them to work in a trauma informed manner, as the following four comments explain:

I feel there is minimal training considering the amount of individuals we work with who have experienced trauma. It felt very brief and minimal, despite the benefits of working in a trauma-informed way (Heidi, Probation Officer with more than 11 years' experience)

Not enough depth to training (Arthur, Probation Officer with 3-5 years' experience)

The training was more statistics based, [rather] than actually telling you how to deal with traumatised individuals (Hannah, Probation Officer with over 11 years' experience)

The training we had was one event, several years ago and was disjointed and poorly delivered, and left me with no real increased understanding or specific guidance as to what/how we were supposed to work within this approach (Tina, Probation Officer with over 11 years' experience)

These reflections reinforce recent criticisms that training being provided to practitioners is not supporting them to work with the level of complexity that people on probation can present with when they have experienced significant trauma (HMIP, 2023). The comments also emphasise that not only is the importance of knowledge of trauma and trauma informed methods recognised by many practitioners as Heidi notes, but that their own existing knowledge of the subject may exceed that being offered through work-based training. Tina's remarks highlight a more generalised issue around practitioners not feeling confident and empowered to work with people on probation in a trauma informed manner. This may be a consequence of the training not being specific to practitioner's roles, as Gwen, a PQiP with less than two years'

experience highlighted *“the training was general, [and] not necessarily specific to my role as a Probation Officer”* which leaves practitioners uncertain as to how they may apply the training provided to working with people on probation. Similar reflections were identified by participants in management positions, such as Katrina, a Senior Probation Officer (SPO) with over 11 years’ experience who noted that she has *“been in a management role since this training has been available and it is focused on practitioners”*. This highlights that even when trauma training may have been probation specific, it has not necessarily been role specific, leading to an uncertainty around how to apply knowledge and learning from training events to the participant’s individual role. Whilst Senior Manager Emma, also with over 11 years’ experience in Probation, described that she has *“not done any mandatory training or been recommended to do any training by my employer [regarding trauma]”*. The lack of attention paid to staff in management positions suggests a wider failure to understand the different structural levels within which trauma informed practice needs to be adopted. The impact of this is highlighted by Imogen, a Probation Officer with 3-5 years’ experience, who describes being supervised by managers who are *“not trained in that field, or that area...we’re being taught by people who also haven’t got it [relevant knowledge]”*. There are some discrepancies over whether participants perceived the training to have been designed specifically for probation practitioners, with preliminary indicators that this could be influenced by whether they had completed training via the NPS or CRC. Future trauma awareness training programmes should ensure they are specific to the probation service and are tailored to take account of different roles and responsibilities across the organisation.

Previous research has shown that practitioners respond more effectively to training delivered by those with expertise in the subject matter, and where experienced

practitioners are involved in the delivery it can make it more relatable (Miller and Najavits, 2012). Where training is delivered by facilitators who are unfamiliar with probation practice, this has the potential to undermine practitioner confidence in the training provided (HMIP, 2025). Similarly, participants in this study noted that the level of knowledge and experience of trainers can affect satisfaction rates, as Ada highlights:

The trainers were very knowledgeable and had a background in trauma informed work (Ada, PTA, with more than 11 years' experience)

Whilst not explicit, it is assumed that Gayle's reference to attending training with an external provider was also influenced by trainer expertise:

The training I received internally was satisfactory. However, I have attended external training also, which has been exceptional (Gayle, PSO with more than 11 years' experience).

These comments suggest that trainer knowledge and expertise is clearly relevant to the effectiveness of training which should be considered in the design of future training events. However, HMIP (2025) identified that external training events specialised in particular areas of practice are no longer readily available to practitioners, suggesting that access to training delivered by those with expertise in trauma informed practice may be less readily available in the future.

Those practitioners most dissatisfied with the quality of the training provided were legacy CRC employees. Interestingly legacy CRC employees were also the practitioners who considered themselves to be the most confident in their knowledge of trauma. This lends further support to the notion that practitioners require training to be more detailed and thorough than that which has been provided, as Arthur and Heidi outlined above. It also implies, as do the above practitioner quotes, to the existence of a baseline of knowledge. This not only demonstrates the need for training to expand on and develop practitioner's existing knowledge but raises the question as to where

practitioner's *knowing* originates from, which could be an area that may benefit from future research. The following three participants emphasised that in the absence of adequate training offered by probation, their knowledge of trauma derives from alternative sources such as people on probation themselves and from previous roles:

I've had [people on probation] that have completed courses in trauma in custody, and they found that extremely useful and if anything, I've been kind of educated by them rather than the [Probation] service (Fay, Probation Officer with over 11 years of experience)

No trauma training has been provided by current employer. My knowledge stems from previous roles (Catherine, Probation Officer with 3-5 years' experience)

A lot of the stuff that I take into the role I've learned through previous roles (Toby, PSO with less than 2 years' experience)

In addition, earlier research has indicated that practitioners may have also experienced trauma themselves, and therefore prior knowledge and understanding may derive from their own personal lived experiences (Burrell, 2022, McGuire, Carlisle and Clark, 2022). This is important for the organisation to consider in terms of its responsivity to practitioner's experiences of trauma and the level of support it currently provides.

Other alternative sources of *knowing* have arisen when participants have taken individual responsibility for increasing their knowledge and understanding, as illustrated by the following four excerpts:

This is something I feel I've had to learn independently (Niamh, Probation Officer with between 6 to 10 years' experience)

I don't recollect having trauma informed training but have undertaken self-directed learning to gain a superficial understanding (Derek, Senior Probation Officer with more than 11 years' experience)

I haven't received any formal training from my employer and have only acquired knowledge and understanding by proactively seeking out literature and seminars...I've gone out looking for information myself. I've dialled into a couple of different trauma informed practice seminars which have been really useful (Emma, Senior Leader with over 11 years' experience)

We are all self-learners in Probation. That's one of the good things about the job. You never stop learning. Practice is always developing and if you're self-

motivated you'll do the research yourself (Ethan, Probation Officer with over 11 years of experience)

These observations are indicative of the effects of neo-liberal theory promoting individualised responsibility and self-governance (Liebenberg, Ungar and Ikeda, 2015). Within CJS academia, this is often considered in the context of the person on probation being responsibilised (see Chapter Two), but this study's findings indicate that the process of displaced responsibility is also reflected in the organisation's attitude towards its practitioners. Placing the responsibility for learning and development on individual practitioners reduces responsibility at an organisational level. One consequence of this process of responsibilisation is reflected in Petrillo and Bradleys' (2022) findings, that practitioners perceived there to be a blame culture, where individuals are held to account with minimal recognition of organisational failings when things go wrong.

An approach to training based on "*efficient instruction*" which informs practitioners of the actions they must undertake, for example the completion of mandatory training, without due regard for the relevance or practicality, derives from under resourced State services operating within a neo-liberal system (Liebenberg, Ungar and Ikeda, 2015, p1009). The ineffectiveness of this approach is reflected in low training completion rates and lack of authentic engagement that reduces training to a 'tick-box' activity (HMIP, 2025). A limitation of this studies' data collection is the failure to capture data regarding whether practitioners had been instructed to attend trauma training as a mandated training event.

Ethan's assertion that practitioners are self-learners is reinforced by the other participant comments above, who describe seeking out their own learning. However, Ethan does also acknowledge that not all practitioners have a desire to learn and expand on existing training. This was reflected in HMIP's (2025) findings that few participants

from their research identified undertaking any learning or development aside from completing their mandatory training. Interestingly, this study's participants who describe engaging in self-learning were all experienced practitioners. Given the small sample included in this study, it might indicate that a culture of self-learning may have diminished over time, and is no longer promoted as it has been previously, but it is also likely impacted by an increase in unmanageable workloads and targets (Petrillo and Bradley, 2022), unclear expectations and regional discretion surrounding training (HMIP, 2025). An area for potential future research would be to explore experienced practitioner's attitudes to training compared to newer recruits to ascertain whether there is evidence of a cultural shift towards learning.

The comments above emphasise the absence of appropriate training, but that even without such training, practitioners recognise the benefits of working in a trauma informed manner. Commensurate with my findings, practitioner's recognition of the advantages of trauma informed practice are replicated in Petrillo and Bradleys' (2022, p14) research which also highlighted that trauma informed practice is effective where there is the presence of practitioners "*commitment, knowledge and dedication*". It is possible that practitioners with these characteristics chose to take part in this study, while those with less interest in trauma informed practice may have opted not to take part.

Whilst practitioners should be commended for being self-motivated and committed to their own continuous professional development, there are risks associated with this. As Dominey and Canton (2022) warn, good practice cannot be achieved solely on the commitment of individual practitioners. It may mean that knowledge is underpinned by inaccurate information, and if someone believes it, correct or not, it is likely to influence how they behave (Hunt, 2003). This exemplifies how at the personal level placing

responsibility on practitioners to train themselves, increases the opportunity for discriminatory and oppressive practice, because it enables prejudice and stereotypes to persist (Thompson, 2014). Failing, at an organisational level, to train groups of practitioners means that such attitudes and behaviours can become normalised, because there is a lack of knowledge and understanding available to challenge the prevailing culture (Thompson, 2014). This is not unique to trauma informed training. In 2021, Damien Bendell murdered Connie Gent and Lacey Bennett (both aged 11 years old), John Paul Bennett (aged 13 years old) and pregnant Terri Harris (aged 35 years old). He also raped Lacey. At the time the offences were committed, Mr Bendell was supervised by probation whilst on a Suspended Sentence Order. An independent review conducted into the serious further offences (SFO) concluded that there were indicators of an organisational “*trend towards self-reliant e-learning and development*” (HMIP, 2023, p13). Whilst individual practitioners should be held to account for their own development, this should be within the context of the organisation offering an inadequate programme of training and development.

There are some indicators that trauma training is receiving an increased focus, as the practitioners who reported the most positive experiences, tended to be new recruits.

The training I have received and taken part in throughout my 2 years of training to be a probation officer has educated me on trauma, trauma informed care, and approaching trauma informed interventions... the training has allowed me to become confident in my role, allowing me to support and help (Sasha, Trainee Probation Officer with less than 2 years' experience)

It is encouraging that trauma awareness appears to have been included within the national qualification framework for those undertaking the PQiP, inferring the organisations' acknowledgment of the significance of trauma. Recently recruited on to the PQiP programme, Kaitlyn observed that the inclusion of trauma training appears to have been “*set up as part of the PQiP as opposed to general staff training*”. This

may account for the gap in participants who have not received any trauma training as this implies it may not have been delivered to more established practitioners. Emma reflects that a similar approach had been taken within the privately run CRCs, commenting that *“if people came in new [to the organisation] we would say do this [trauma informed training], but it then didn’t apply retrospectively to all [the] people who hadn’t done it”*. The failure to train all staff retrospectively is not only indicative of a somewhat inauthentic approach to trying to embed trauma informed approaches but is also symbolic of a ‘tick box’ approach to learning (HMIP, 2025) (see Chapter Eight for further discussion). A lack of provision of training to all staff across all grades makes it difficult to consider probation as a truly trauma informed service (SAMHSA, 2014), but may also lead to significant discrepancies and variations in the quality of supervision provided to people on probation because it is a lottery as to whether the professional has received adequate training (see Chapter Eight, Section 8.2 for further discussion).

It is possible that less experienced practitioners have been more satisfied with the quality of training due to their lack of experience as probation practitioners, which may account for the difference in satisfaction levels based on length of time working in probation. For newer members of staff, they may have not yet had the opportunity to apply their learning, particularly with those whose trauma may present itself in particularly complex or challenging ways. This limits the ability to assess the effectiveness of the training undertaken with newer practitioners to work in a trauma informed manner. It is possible that once learning is applied to more complex cases, the training undertaken may prove to be superficial, as more experienced practitioners have indicated.

There was also little evidence that initial trauma training as part of the PQiP was developed or expanded any further, than providing a basic awareness as Nina, a PO with between 3-5 years' experience highlighted; *"It was very good, but I have done it some time ago and I cannot recall much information"*. Nina's comment implies that trauma training is being delivered as a singular event, rather than being viewed as the starting point of a long-term commitment where a series of training events are hosted to ensure practitioners really develop a rigorous understanding of the principles of trauma informed practice and have the opportunity to develop it into their practice, potentially indicative of part of a 'tick-box culture' (see Chapter Eight). The need for a continued commitment to trauma informed practice was noted by participants that identified that training should be refreshed to ensure knowledge is current and trauma remains a focus:

It was some time ago; interventions change and develop. Refreshers are required on a regular basis (Daisy, SPO with more than 11 years' experience)

I feel the trauma informed practice training needs to be regularly re-delivered (12/18months) to ensure it doesn't get "lost" in amongst the day-to-day practice (Yasmin, recently recruited on to the PQiP programme)

As illustrated, knowledge and understanding continuously evolves and should therefore be under constant review. Trauma informed practice is something that is continuously advancing and is reflective of the journey that Petrillo and Bradley (2022) emphasise, where training should be considered as the starting point. It is argued that to provide practitioners with an adequate level of knowledge, training should include child development and biopsychosocial models of attachment trauma (Silvester, 2022). That Yasmin believes trauma informed practice has the potential to be overlooked, is perhaps indicative of the perceived level of importance it has been given across the organisation so far, most likely because it does not serve the neoliberalist

narrative focussed on individual rather than collective responsibility (Phillips, et al. 2022) and on managing processes, rather than people.

5.4 So, what do practitioners know?

Encouragingly, most participants felt that they understand what is meant by the term trauma. No participants admitted to having “no understanding” of trauma, but several lacked confidence in their knowledge of the subject. For example, Rachel who is undertaking the PQiP programme commented that *“it’s hard to put into words, like, you know what it means”* and some chose not to provide any explanation of their understanding. Those who chose not to provide an explanation were all survey participants; this may have arisen because the researcher was not present to ask further probing questions to elicit additional information (Wincup, 2017). However, the presence of the researcher during interviews can also create a sense of pressure to provide a socially desirable answer (Bryman, 2012). This was exemplified in the comment made by Beth, an SPO with more than 11 years’ experience of *“you said it’s not a test”*. Whilst this comment was made in jest, it may have meant that Beth felt under pressure to recount knowledge that may not have been that memorable. This could also be interpreted as an example of ‘surface acting’ being performed (Phillips, Westaby and Fowler, 2020), with the use of humour potentially disguising uncertainty and lack of confidence. Several participants evidenced a lack of confidence in explaining the notion of trauma which may be a direct consequence of the organisation’s failure, at a structural level (Thompson, 2014) to provide adequate training to its practitioners and a further indicator of responsibilising practitioners for their own knowledge and development (Liebenberg, Ungar and Ikeda, 2015).

Some participants used examples of traumatic events in their explanations of trauma which appeared to be an attempt to convey their subject knowledge. The examples

provided by participants to illustrate awareness of trauma were of the most widely recognised forms of trauma such as neglect, physical and sexual abuse, and domestic abuse (Hetherington, 2020). The tendency to view trauma as singular events that result in expected reactions as individuals process their experiences is reflective of knowledge that is possessed at a basic level (Harris and Fallot, 2001). For practitioners, the danger of narrowing an understanding of trauma to a simplistic level potentially excludes other forms of trauma from being acknowledged and allows for the influence of personal bias over what traumas are acknowledged (Hetherington, 2020, Willmot and Jones, 2022, Thompson, 2014). The tendency to oversimplify the concept of trauma, as demonstrated by PQiP Dean's explanation of "*bad things that happen [to] someone*" suggests that practitioners have not been provided with a wider theoretical understanding. This may account for no participants evidencing an awareness of the complexities surrounding defining trauma (see Chapter Three). This basic understanding is as an example of how trauma is constructed at a structural level and how those with certain trauma histories or responses, particularly that which falls outside of the most common trauma typologies, can be oppressed through the failure at all levels (personal, cultural and structural) to acknowledge and be responsive to their trauma (Thompson, 2014, Wilton and Williams, 2019).

There were some indicators of difference between practitioners' self-assessment of knowledge levels dependent on whether they had been employed within the private (CRC) or public (NPS) sector. Those with the most confidence in their knowledge of trauma came from a CRC background, whilst participants who were less clear were former NPS practitioners. This implies a potential difference in how these former organisations approached working with trauma which may be a result of supervising women on probation, where trauma informed practice is more advanced (Ellis-Devitt,

2020a, Petrillo and Bradley, 2022), being predominately managed within CRCs previously (HMIP, 2019). Following the return of all probation services to a reunified public service, this may also present difficulties moving forward in establishing trauma informed probation practice as it suggests that there may be less recognition within the public sector of the significance of trauma for people on probation and practitioners (Bear, Durcan and Southgate, 2019).

However, participants were unanimous in their recognition that *knowing* about trauma is vital to their role as probation practitioners. This could be influenced by participant's own personal views around trauma and trauma informed practice that influenced their decision to take part in the project, as the following four comments indicate:

Maybe that person doesn't want to tell you in great detail what the trauma entailed, but I think you need to know they have suffered a trauma and how it's affected them. Because in turn, you need to know how to best support them...to have that knowledge gives you a better understanding of that person and a clearer way of how you're going to manage them (Amelie, Probation Services Officer with between 3-5 years' experience)

I think it's massively important that we're aware of it because it is likely to be linked to their offending in some way or if not their direct offences than their attitudes or their beliefs, their support network (Rochelle, Probation Services Officer with over 11 years' experience)

I think being able to have an understanding of trauma and being able to support is a really important thing. Trauma informs a lot of the work that we do (Toby, PSO with less than 2 years' experience)

I think it's essential for everybody up and down the organisation [to know], right to the top (Emma, Senior Leader, more than 11 years' experience)

These comments illustrate not only an awareness of the connection between experiences of trauma and offending behaviour, but also that the behaviour demonstrated by individuals on probation may be best conceptualised as connected to the trauma they have experienced (Kubiak, Covington and Hillier 2017). Individual practitioner understanding of the significance of trauma may derive from their own prior

experiences of trauma (Burrell, 2022, Sheppherd, 2022), from their experiences of working with people who have experienced trauma or from their motivations to become probation practitioners. While the literature review (see Chapter Two) highlighted that neo-liberalism reduced the interest in ‘why’ people offend at a macro level (Whitehead, 2007), there is compelling evidence that practitioner’s underlying values of making a difference to others (Robinson, Burke and Millings, 2017, HMIP, 2025) and belief in the capacity for change (Mawby and Worrall, 2011) remain prevalent (Burrell, 2022, HMIP, 2025). Despite consistent attempts by the neoliberal agenda to focus on individuals rather than their circumstances (Burke and Collet, 2016, Phillips et al. 2022), the practitioner quotes above illustrate that at the personal level at least (Thompson, 2014), participant’s value trauma informed practice as part of the wider contextual understanding for someone’s offending and the support they may require to desist in the future.

5.5 ‘Doing’ – Trauma informed

It is only once we *know* something, that we can begin *doing* something with that knowledge. Petrillo and Bradley (2022, p8) describe this stage of *doing* as the embedding of knowledge within “*policies, practices and approaches*” in a consistent manner. This sentiment is reinforced by Emma who argued that “*every decision that we make about policy, about process...we should be thinking about this [trauma]*”. This section explores the extent to which participants considered that they understand trauma informed practice and how this is being used to inform practice.

The research findings identified that overall, most participants believed that they understood what was meant by the term trauma informed practice. Similar to findings concerning knowledge of trauma discussed above, those who self-identified as having the clearest understanding were from a CRC background, and those with the least

clarity were from an NPS background. This disparity is indicative of different approaches taken by each organisation, potentially due to them having been responsible for working with different offence types, risk levels (see Chapter Six) and gender previously (see Chapter Seven). Despite a generally confident response from practitioners, there was no mention of an awareness of an overarching set of principles used to inform and guide trauma informed practice (SAMHSA, 2014). However, a small number of participants identified some of the qualities associated with the principles of trauma informed practice, such as creating a safe environment, empowerment and building relationships which requires trust and collaboration, as these two participants highlight:

We've got to try and get information quickly and what someone needs in those circumstances is a bit of time and a safe space and not to be rushed to tell their story (Emma, Senior Leader with more than 11 years' experience).

It's about building up that working relationship, establishing that psychological contract that they're safe, it's a safe place when they're with you (Ethan, PO with more than 11 years' experience).

It is encouraging that some participants were mindful of the need to create a sense of safety, but recent findings from research with people on probation suggests that in many instances the exact opposite is being achieved. Probation has been likened to a type of policing and described as an organisation where there is a significant level of mistrust (Mullen, Dick and Williams, 2022). This is in stark contrast to HMIP's (2023) recent claims that most people on probation considered they had a trusting relationship with their supervising practitioner. It is possible that the reason for such a disparity in research findings may be linked to the extent to which trauma informed practice is being implemented. Where there are "*pockets of practice*" adopting trauma informed principles (Petrillo and Bradley, 2022, p30) this may account for the development of positive supervisory relationships. While strengths-based approaches

synonymous with trauma informed methods, that appear to have been implemented inconsistently, may explain less favourable perceptions of supervisory relationships by people on probation (Mullen, Dick and Williams, 2022).

Other prominent themes that practitioners associated with working in a trauma informed approach included 'knowledge and understanding of trauma', 'avoiding re-traumatisation', 'recognising triggers', 'providing support' and 'being responsive to individual needs'. Whilst these are all important aspects of supervising people on probation and towards working with trauma, these do not constitute the principles of trauma informed practice.

These responses suggests that most participants consider trauma informed practice to be about awareness, which does not automatically translate to working in a trauma informed manner. This confusion over *knowing* and *doing* is symbolic of the “*over-use of terminology*” that Bradley (2021, p10) cautions as a threat to the effective implementation of trauma informed approaches. A critique of attempts to introduce and embed trauma informed practice across the prison estate is that the term *trauma informed* has become over-used and wrongly applied, resulting in its value being lost (Bradley, 2021, Petrillo and Bradley, 2022) and it appears that this mistake may be being repeated within probation settings.

5.6 What are practitioners doing?

There was a clear sense from participants, of a disparity between what individual practitioners may be *doing* to work in a trauma informed way, and what the organisation is *doing* to facilitate and encourage this approach to practice. Whitehead (2007) refers to a cultural dissonance that has arisen from an organisation focused on bureaucracy and targets, whilst many practitioners remain focused on people-based

work. This disparity was also reflected within Petrillo and Bradley's (2022) findings and was highlighted by the following participant's explanation:

As individuals I think we do our best...but as a company...they like to think that they do... but it's not a priority (Amelie, PSO with between 3 and 5 years' experience).

This comment by Amelie reinforces the notion of individual responsibility as previously outlined. This emerging theme of a divide between practitioners and the wider organisation is indicative of a service that does not appear to be authentically embracing the concept of trauma informed practice. Similarly, Imogen also emphasises the separation between what the organisation *expects* of its practitioners, and what it is enabling and encouraging practitioners to do.

There is kind of a want for us to work that way, definitely. But their [the Probation Service] approach is an expectation...they don't train you in that area. It's just an expectation that it's how you'll kind of work...I feel the expectation is there, but actually the support and the training around it isn't given, so it kind of conflicts and contradicts (Imogen, PO, with between 3 and 5 years' experience).

Imogen's observation reinforces the notion of individualised responsibility (Liebenberg, Ungar and Ikeda, 2015) whereby the expectation to work in a trauma informed manner is placed on practitioners rather than the organisation. This creates the uncertainty and ambiguity of the organisation's expectations of how trauma informed approaches should be implemented in practice that Imogen refers to. Without clarification and guidance, practitioners are not able to effectively implement trauma informed methods, and the organisation is not able to provide trauma informed care because this requires the whole organisation to be engaged in its delivery (Wilton and Williams, 2019). That this is not yet being achieved is most clearly reflected in the research findings concerning the organisations failure to provide practitioners with guidance on working with people on probation in a trauma informed manner. Senior Leader with over 11 years of experience, Emma acknowledged there to be "*no real*

mechanism for doing it [trauma informed practice], there's no set processes...it's all reliant on the practitioner to record what they see as important". While Madison, a PSO with between 6 and 10 years' experience commented "*I don't believe that there's a tool kit or anything specific*". Similarly, these findings were replicated in Petrillo and Bradley's (2022) research who also concluded that there is no operational guidance available for practitioners. Rachel states that the consequence of not providing practitioners with guidance is that when "*no one tells you what work you should do to help someone with their trauma...you sort of make it up as you go along*". The responsibilisation of practitioners means that they are expected to manage any risks that arise because of someone's experience of trauma and failure to do so correctly, can result in blame being apportioned to individuals, along with allowing for discriminatory practice to occur (Liebenberg, Ungar and Ikeda, 2015). This represents how personal, cultural and structural levels of oppression (Thompson, 2014) interact with one another; the organisation not adequately addressing an area of practice perpetuates the opportunity for personal and cultural prejudice and bias to occur.

The lack of operational guidance is a contributing factor to the overarching sense of paradoxes that Imogen draws attention to above. Practitioners not only identified a lack of specific trauma informed guidance, but also an absence of trauma being considered within other policies and processes, as the following two excerpts illustrate:

When I've looked at like Mappa guidance and things like that and there's no reference to it [trauma], or in risk of serious harm guidance. There's no real reference to trauma informed approaches (Rochelle, PSO with over 11 years' experience).

It feels like...this is their risk, or this is their need and we're going to do this – but doesn't necessarily take into account someone's trauma maybe to the extent that it could (Kaitlyn, PQiP less than 2 years' experience).

These comments imply a more general prescriptive and process driven approach that take precedence over individuals (Whitehead, 2007). The findings indicate that more

experienced practitioners may be more likely to reflect the values associated with the earlier origins of the organisation, while newer, less experienced practitioners may have been indoctrinated by the neo-liberal agenda. The changing purpose of probation has created a cultural conflict between practitioners and the organisation (Whitehead, 2007) and the findings of this study suggest there are potential indicators of discord between more and less experienced practitioners. This corresponds with Mullen, Dick and Williams (2022) findings that people on probation perceived there to be more concern with adhering to processes than being responsive to individuals. Beth, an SPO with more than 11 years' experience, reinforces this view, commenting "*it has been less about the way we work with people and more about the way we do our jobs in terms of referrals and processing cases*". The idea that the organisation is focussed on people being 'processed' is in direct opposition to the approach of trauma informed practice which encourages and promotes recognition of individuality. Putting processes before people is identified as a substantial barrier to trauma informed practice (Wilton and Williams, 2019).

It also became apparent from the findings that practitioners were not only unclear of *what* they should be recording in terms of prior traumatic experiences, but *where* they should be recording people on probation's experiences of trauma. The lack of specific space to reflect someone's experience of trauma immediately emphasizes the absence of attention given to trauma when case recording systems (nDelius) and risk assessment tools (OASys) were designed, and when subsequent updates of both systems have been undertaken⁸. The impact of this for practitioners is highlighted by Kaitlyn as follows:

⁸ nDelius is the case management recording system used by probation since 2014. OASys is the structured clinical risk assessment tool used by Probation since 2001.

There's not a specific section that talks about trauma that they [people on probation] have been through...it could be set up slightly differently in a way that makes you think more about the trauma and the impact and then how are you going to approach it based on the trauma that that person has been through (Kaitlyn, PQiP less than 2 years' experience).

This lack of clarity is indicative of practitioners not being provided with guidance, which carries several associated risks. It permits the application of personal bias as Senior Leader Emma, with over 11 years' experience highlights "*there's no set mechanisms, it's all reliant on the practitioner to record what they see as important*" which increases the opportunity for discriminatory practice to occur and wide variations in practice to exist. While Jenny referred to the potential for improper recording to result in retraumatisation:

One of my ladies was raped by her ex-partner...there's nothing on NDelius to actually say that...if that information isn't there....to actually have to go through all that again... it [can be] more traumatic for them (Jenny, PSO, with more than 11 years' experience).

Jenny's example was contextualised as information concerning previous trauma not being immediately obvious to colleagues that may interact with a person on probation on behalf of an allocated practitioner. Absence of knowledge regarding individuals not being supervised directly by the practitioner who is undertaking contact with them is identified as a long-standing issue (Denney and O'Beirne, 2003). Amelie also highlighted that when covering appointments for colleagues, information regarding trauma is often not considered.

It's not something that I would look for if I was covering...I just don't think you would go looking. We just don't have a habit of delving deep into someone else's case when you're covering for someone else. You know, you might read the last appointment just to see what was going to happen at the appointment you were covering, but no, I don't think you would go looking (Amelie, PSO with between 3 and 5 years' experience).

The notion of having to search for information concerning experiences of trauma is indicative of it not being recorded in an easily accessible format, particularly problematic when there is a change in practitioner. This supports Whitehead's (2007)

assertion that the neo-liberalist agenda has resulted in their being less interest in understanding ‘why’ someone has, or does, behave in a certain way. Whilst Amelie’s comments are in respect of practitioners providing cover for one another, research by Dick, Mullen and Williams (2022) indicate that people on probation have expressed their frustration at the frequency of probation practitioner changes and emphasised the impact this has on the ability to develop positive relationships and access appropriate support. Whilst there will be occasions when practitioner changes are unavoidable, arguably changes that occur because of the current staffing crisis due to issues with recruitment, retention, sickness, experience and workload (HMIP, 2023, HMIP, 2025) are preventable at a structural level. The organisation should consider how its failure to offer people on probation consistent supervision impacts on its ability to provide a trauma informed service.

Research with practitioners found that covering for colleagues and providing ‘office duty’ which involves encountering people whose personal circumstances are often unknown to the practitioner conducting the appointment, heightens levels of stress and anxiety and increases the potential for exposure to violent behaviour (Denney and O’Beirne, 2003). A consequence that was explained by Fay who highlighted the potential for retraumatisation, which can result in increased incidents of challenging and abusive behaviour:

There could be trigger words or situations that could increase their response...some could be quite violent or aggressive and you don’t know why...until you talk to their individual practitioner...so that in itself is a reason, an issue in terms of management of that individual (Fay, PO with more than 11 years’ experience).

This example provided by Fay illustrates the relationship between trauma and emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983, Phillips, Westaby and Fowler, 2020). Research by Denney and O’Beirne (2003) found that verbal abuse, threatening behaviour and

physical assaults can be a frequent feature of probation work, again reiterating the need to perform surface acting by conforming to 'display rules' (Hochschild, 1983, Phillips, Westaby and Fowler, 2020). Fay went on to reflect an occasion where she experienced such behaviour:

I've asked them a question around family to which they became very aggressive. Quite verbally abusive and I just couldn't understand it. They were asked to just leave the office because I wasn't quite sure what I was having to manage. It came across as an individual who's just getting really arsey and being really abrasive around very generic questions. Later on, after speaking to their officer, I found out that actually family was a real issue for him because he'd been sexually abused, his experience of coming into the service was really negative and equally he hadn't met me before, so having to try and explain his family circumstances kind of made him relive that over again. It's a real disadvantage to them as well as to the practitioner. (Fay, Probation Officer with over 11 years' experience).

This emphasises how potentially working in a more trauma informed manner could help reduce the risk presented to practitioners. It also suggests that identifying how trauma has manifested itself and the impact of this on behaviour is often misunderstood, with people on probation frequently being incorrectly perceived as hostile, aggressive and non-compliant (Kubiak, Covington and Hillier 2017, Bradley, 2021). As Toby, a PSO with less than 2 years' experience, summarises "*we're very reactive to what they've done, rather than why they've done it*". Practitioners should be encouraged to conceptualise behaviour through a trauma informed lens and ask the question "*what happened to you?*" instead of "*what is wrong with you?*" (Harris and Fallot, 2001, Wilmot and Williams, 2019, McCartan, 2020, Bradley, 2021).

Encouragingly, participants were engaged in considering how they felt experiences of trauma could and should be recorded and most believed that trauma histories should be reflected within both case management records and within risk assessments. Fay, a PO with over 11 years' experience, suggested that trauma should be recorded within OASys assessments "*where it fitted best, but more than likely in lifestyle and*

associates, thinking skills or relationships. It would probably be one of three of those sections". Similar sections were identified by three participants:

OASys allows you to add specifics for example, in the relationship section you can add relevant information which allows you to justify your assessment as to whether you link the trauma experienced as a risk to re-offending or serious harm (Zoe, between 3-5 years' experience).

I think it would be nice to know, at the very least, it was being taken into consideration...and it's a reminder to the practitioner (Ethan, PO with more than 11 years' experience).

I feel that it is included in the SARA⁹ tool e.g., witnessing any violence (Gwen, PQiP with less than 2 years' experience).

Arguably, Fay's sentiment that experiences of trauma should be reflected within the OASys assessment section where it holds most relevance, which is supported by Zoe and Ethan's comments, appears to be the most obvious solution to recording knowledge of trauma. Although with the combination of a deficit in knowledge and understanding of trauma, a tendency to identify and categorise the most common forms of trauma and the influence of individual practitioner's approaches to working with trauma, this level of autonomy may allow for too much inconsistency. And as Emma persuasively argues, it is not just about recording someone's experience, it is about using that information to understand the impact on the person.

It should flow through into things like how that might have affected their thinking and behaviour, their attitudes, their lifestyle choices, but I just don't think we think like that (Emma, Senior Leader with over 11 years' experience).

This comment from Emma suggests that knowledge of previous trauma is not effectively being used by practitioners to inform their understanding of its potential relationship to offending behaviour, risk to self and others, influence of risk management activities and overall compliance and engagement. It is recommended that guidance is issued to practitioners that encourages and promotes an increased

⁹ The Spousal Assault Risk Assessment Guide (SARA) is used to assess the risk domestic abuse posed by men towards intimate partners

understanding of the impact of trauma on an individual. But, as Shepherd (2022) argues, practitioners need to be given time to engage effectively with complex individuals, instead of workloads being based solely on levels of risk as this underestimates the time and investment needed from practitioners. Given the current staffing crisis and impact of workloads (HMIP, 2023), it is acknowledged that this may not be immediately achievable, but nonetheless, there should be an acknowledgement of its necessity in longer term workforce planning.

5.7 'Being' – Trauma Responsive

Once an organisation acknowledges that it *knows* about trauma and has brought about change so that it is *doing* business in a trauma informed manner, the organisation starts *being* trauma responsive. This requires thoughtful reconsideration of ways of working that are trauma responsive and are embedded as part of the organisation's culture (Petrillo and Bradley, 2022).

There was a general view from participants that current probation practice is not trauma responsive, as the following three practitioners highlighted:

I still continue to view my clients holistically, with an awareness of the impact their experiences have, but there has been no particular change to my practice to reflect this 'approach' (Tina, PO with more than 11 years' experience).

To underpin policy/practice, a level of understanding is required which I don't feel exists - staff aren't trained around this. It requires responsivity and flexibility which isn't always encouraged (Sophie, PSO with between 6 and 10 years' experience).

I don't really think sentence management has got it in their heads, actively doing it on a day-to-day basis (Beth, SPO with more than 11 years' experience).

There appeared to be a sense of frustration from participants of an implied responsabilisation from the organisation to practice in a certain way, without any real support being given to achieve this, as these two participants identified:

I do think they rely on the fact that we do all know, so therefore they don't have to promote it. It's just an expectation that you're expected to take it into account every time (Amelie, PSO with between 3 and 5 years' experience).

Whilst there is an expectation that trauma informed approaches is more than likely incorporated in policies, practices are often left to the practitioner to apply - more often than not the victim of the offence is considered before the perpetrator and it is only after a rapport is achieved with the perpetrator, that they are likely to share their experiences, which may have contributed to the subsequent behaviour (Max, Probation Services Officer with over 11 years' experience).

These reflections insinuate an organisation that is placing the responsibility for trauma informed practice on individual practitioners, rather than holding itself accountable. This suggests a lack of organisational awareness of the relationship between personal, cultural and structural influences (Thompson, 2014).

5.8 More harm than good

Trauma informed practice aims to be responsive to individuals who have experienced trauma, rather than the expectation that trauma symptoms are treated (Harris and Fallot, 2001). Practitioners who have not received adequate training can lack understanding and confidence to work in a trauma informed manner (Wilton and Williams, 2019). This was a clear theme identified by participants (see section 5.3) that appears to have contributed to practitioners feeling ill-equipped to work with people who have experienced trauma, as the following two reflections explain:

It's my own hope that I am doing the right thing because we haven't been trained in that area. It's the hope you're not messing them up even more by the approach that you're using. It's a really dangerous subject because you don't know how, once it's opened up a can of worms and it can be quite dangerous for that individual to then sit with that...it's extremely dangerous opening up and then not having the tools and the skills to help them repair that in a sense. We're expected to support them, but if you're not given the tools to do that in a safe way, it's dangerous. They are [the organisation] setting up their staff by getting them to do that and not providing valid training because they're doing this and then actually it can lead to some really dire results (Imogen, PO, between 3-5 years' experience).

I guess maybe we don't feel qualified to do that, like... I wouldn't want to worry that I'm, like, retraumatizing them by bringing it up and getting them to discuss it. And like, is it actually helpful? Because for some people, it would be helpful because they've never spoken to anyone about it. But then other people they may have spoken about it so many times, it's just bringing it

back up again. They just want to move on (Rachel, PQiP, less than 2 years' experience).

These comments by Imogen and Rachel emphasise that practitioners are mindful of the impact for people on probation from practitioners that lack the skills and knowledge to work with people affected by trauma; an example of practitioners needing to manage the emotions of those they supervise. Imogen is also highlighting, at a structural level (Thompson, 2014), the consequences of failing to address trauma adequately and the systemic potential to cause more harm. Encouragingly, Rachel is evidencing an awareness of the individualisation of trauma and engaging in reflection around this.

Imogen's continued use of the term '*dangerous*' in the context of worrying about adverse responses, signifies the extent of damage that practitioners believe they may cause through discussing trauma and not being sure how to support people with this. This echoes findings (HMIP, 2021) in relation to the race equality agenda that practitioners lacking confidence in discussing sensitive topics perpetuates oppressive practice (see Chapter Three). These concerns were shared by Ethan who described the fear practitioners can experience of being asked to work with trauma without adequate training or supervision:

There could be a temptation if you think you might identify somebody as having experienced trauma or even living with it now, you might be mindful, fear[ful] of opening up a Pandora's box, and not being equipped to kind of deal with that (Ethan, PO, more than 11 years' experience).

Despite Ethan's reservations around working with trauma, given the prevalence of trauma experiences within the probation population, practitioners are already undertaking this work. However, feeling deskilled has the propensity for this to lead to feelings of anxiety and stress (Fitzgibbon, 2009) and feelings of increased stress and pressure have the potential to impact on the well-being of practitioners (Phillips,

Westaby and Fowler, 2016). Ethan also appears to be referring to the need for surface acting (Hochschild, 1983, Phillips, Westaby and Fowler, 2020); that is to disguise his fear and present as confident and comfortable in exploring trauma in the event of a disclosure. This practice scenario can contribute to practitioner well-being, being compromised. It is also possible that in the event, surface acting is not adequately performed (Phillips, Westaby and Fowler, 2020), people on probation may pick up on practitioners' reluctance to explore previous experiences of trauma which may in turn act as a barrier to sharing relevant information and seeking appropriate support.

As Fay highlights below, if practitioners are unsure what to do when a person on probation shares their experience or trauma, and there is an absence of support to offer to someone who may be struggling with their previous traumatic experiences, then there would appear to be little purpose in asking someone to share that information.

Even after 12 years, I will still very much feel completely out of my depth. And it's like, I don't know what I can do. It's not like I can say, right, we've got this brilliant service so I can refer you into for some support. It feels like the trauma has to get to the point of where it's significant mental health for there to be any kind of form of intervention...I don't have the skills to manage that, and we don't have the resources to even refer individuals for additional support. So, it's kind of you're teasing this information out...but actually, what do we do with that information? Because we're not equipped to deal with it (Fay, PO, more than 11 years' experience).

Similar practice identified in the social work profession is described as representative of 'a hierarchical relationship' involving an expectation that information concerning previous trauma is shared with professionals (Tseris, 2018). This is despite the potential for retraumatisation. This is likely to derive from shared assumptions operating at both the cultural and structural level, as Fay's comments infer that there is an expectation that this information is gathered which suggests an external driving

force rather than this type of practice being situated solely at the personal level (Thompson, 2014).

As the findings of this research highlight, practitioners who are fearful of working with trauma are unlikely to be as effective as they could be if they felt they had the adequate knowledge, skills and resources to work in a trauma informed manner and whilst this remains the current status of practice, the organisation cannot be considered trauma responsive.

5.9 Concluding Remarks

This chapter provides a contribution to developing the knowledge base surrounding how knowledge of trauma has been translated into practice through exploring practitioner attitudes. Overall, the findings presented in this chapter suggest that as an organisation, the probation service is in the very early stages of becoming trauma informed and there is minimal evidence of trauma informed approaches being implemented effectively. Utilising Petrillo and Bradley's (2022) *Stages of the Trauma Journey*, probation is identified as at the first stage of '*knowing*', that is, taking its first steps towards raising awareness and knowledge of trauma and trauma informed practice.

Because the organisation is at such a premature stage of becoming trauma informed, this chapter has demonstrated that largely, probation practitioners have either not been provided with trauma training, or those that have completed the training, generally consider it to have been inadequate in equipping them to work in a trauma informed manner. As a result, it is suggested that practitioners are becoming responsibilised for their own learning, development and practice. This suggests that the organisation would benefit from reviewing its current training offer and ensuring that future training is specific to the organisation and tailored to the varying roles and

responsibilities across the organisation. It should ensure that training is of a sufficient standard to enable practitioners to feel equipped to apply the principles of trauma informed practice and delivered by those with knowledge and expertise in criminal justice and trauma. It may be that there is merit in conducting further research concerning access to training since reunification, given the insinuation from the data that this may have reduced, to inform future training programme developments.

Evidence was presented that participants identified that training was provided as a singular event, and consideration should be given to the frequency with which refresher training is delivered to ensure an ongoing commitment to trauma informed practice that enables new information and developments in knowledge to be shared. This may alleviate the need for practitioners to feel it necessary to train and develop themselves, particularly without oversight, through creating uniformity in training.

This chapter has highlighted that practitioners are unclear about what is expected of them as individuals to ensure they are working within a trauma informed manner, which is manifesting itself in the fear that they may cause harm to the people they supervise, and this is in part a result of operational guidance not having been provided. Participants are unsure what they should do with information concerning trauma; they are uncertain what to record and where to record it and how this should inform their assessments and understanding of behaviour. Recording of prior experiences of trauma should be reflected within OASys risk assessments, both in terms of where this information 'best fits' and evidencing that it has underpinned the assessors understanding of behaviour and informed the most effective ways of working with an individual in the event of previous trauma. Whilst assessments continue to be conducted using the existing OASys assessment tool, practitioners can be encouraged to include trauma experiences within the current framework. This could

be promoted during trauma training events and as part of quality assurances procedures. However, it was clear that practitioners do not always have sufficient time to read through an assessment, particularly when providing 'office duty' or cover for colleagues and therefore a more expedited way of obtaining this information is necessary.

Having established that there are several significant gaps in the provision of training and guidance to practitioners, alongside evidence that despite this, practitioners are attempting to work in a trauma informed manner, the next chapter explores the factors influencing practitioner's attitudes towards working with trauma.

In summary, the recommendations identified throughout this chapter were for the organisation to:

- Ensure training is specific to probation settings and tailored to specific roles and responsibilities
- Ensure training is delivered by those with knowledge and expertise
- Critically reflect on the changes to training provision that have occurred since reunification
- Ensure trauma informed training is revisited as a refresher rather than a 'one-off' event
- Provide practitioners with guidance on recording previous experiences both within assessments
- Add a registration flag that asks practitioners to summarise prior trauma experiences to alert other practitioners as to how this may manifest itself in behavioural presentations and what actions should be taken to reduce incidents of retraumatisation

Chapter 6

Balancing Trauma and Accountability

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter determined there to be a lack of evidence of trauma informed approaches being implemented effectively across sentence management functions of probation. As a result, the organisation is considered at best to be in the very early stages of becoming a trauma informed organisation. In the absence of adequate training and guidance, the last chapter identified that much of practitioner's existing baseline knowledge originates from prior experiences or self-directed learning and development, all of which can influence personal views. This chapter draws on the data generated from fourteen interview participants and thirty-three survey respondents to examine practitioner attitudes towards trauma and trauma informed practice in more detail.

This chapter begins by reviewing key pieces of literature surrounding the dissonance that exists between the dual role of victims and perpetrators (Canton and Dominey, 2020) that have shaped attitudes towards trauma and offending. The chapter then moves to explore the prominent themes identified from the findings, starting with the difficulties encountered balancing the duality of the role of victim and perpetrator. Attention then turns to the factors which may influence the adoption and implementation of trauma informed approaches. First, attitudes towards trauma and the use of blame, minimisation and denial are considered. Second, the level of risk someone poses and the impact of this on the consideration given to prior experiences of trauma is reviewed. Next, the differing types of offending behaviour and the extent to which this influences practitioner willingness to working in a trauma informed manner is explored. Lastly, consideration is given to whether the type of trauma

experienced, has had any impact on how readily practitioners consider earlier trauma experiences and apply the principles of trauma informed care.

6.2 Existing literature: the victim-offender dichotomy

Debates surrounding victims are often centred around apportioning blame and responsibility (Leisenring, 2006) which Lamb (1996) simplifies as wanting to divide the ‘good’ from the ‘bad’. This is underpinned by a desire to separate the “*two extremes*” into those who *cause* harm from those who *experience* harm (Lamb, 1996, p5). The separation of people into two distinct groups is reminiscent of the narrative that underpinned the origins of the probation service (Vanstone, 2004) and has helped maintain its power disparity ever since (see Chapter Two, Section 2.3 for further details). Although there is a plethora of evidence that highlights that many people on probation are also themselves victims (Canton and Dominey, 2020, Wainwright, Burke and Collett, 2024) and likely to experience multiple disadvantages (Mullen, Dick and Williams, 2022), evidence suggests that practitioners can find it difficult to recognise and respond to the duality of this (Marshall, 2023). It has been suggested that such difficulties arise from the perception that victim’s and perpetrator’s rights and needs cannot be addressed simultaneously, arising from the belief that to give to one, takes from the other (Canton and Dominey, 2020). While Marshall (2023) proposes that the separation of victim and perpetrator should be understood as relational, due to the transient nature of the victim status.

The prevailing debate underpinning the victim-offender dichotomy is whether explanations of offending provide an excuse or justification for behaviour that has caused harm (Pleasants, 2021). Some have argued that acknowledging offenders’ prior experiences as a victim enables them to avoid taking responsibility for their offending behaviour (Lamb, 1996), while others have reasoned that understanding

what has contributed to someone's behaviour does not excuse or absolve them of their crimes (Zimbardo, 2007) but instead assists with understanding why the behaviour has occurred. However, Pleasant's (2021) warns that acknowledging an explanation, such as trauma, can sometimes lead to the explanation being given no further consideration, for example recognising someone has experienced trauma in the past and then not reflecting on how this may have impacted the individual. As Chapter Three explained, it is important that prior experiences of trauma and subsequent trauma related responses are correctly identified, but they then need to be understood to reduce further incidents of re-traumatisation (Miller and Najavits, 2012, Harris and Fallot, 2001, Edleman, 2023).

6.3 It's a balancing act

As illustrated, the complexities of acknowledging a person's experience of trauma when they have themselves caused harm to another person is not a new situation (LaGuardia-Lobianco, 2021, Marshall, 2023). However, several participants from this research identified that it remains a contemporary practice issue that requires consideration, as Beth highlights:

I think we do need to consider trauma more [but] I do struggle with that balance from the old school approach where we didn't consider it (Beth, SPO, more than 11 years' experience).

Beth's reference to struggling, highlights that recent attempts to work in a more trauma informed manner may not always be straightforward or welcomed by practitioners (Wilton and Williams, 2019). The conflict that Beth refers to, appears to be a consequence of the often-contradictory responsibilities of a practitioner's function of '*enforcer*' of court-imposed sentences and the '*therapist*' seeking to develop an emotional connection and relationship to facilitate change (Knight, 2014, p119). This is perhaps further evidence of a desire to hold individuals to account, rather than

acknowledging the role social structures play in someone's crimes (Annison, 1998, Canton and Dominey, 2018). Rochelle, a PSO with over 11 years' experience, acknowledges that the duality of the role can be challenging for practitioners to balance, reflecting that when *"someone's experienced trauma, and then they've harmed someone else, then [working in a trauma informed manner] is a bit more difficult"*. The dualism of the practitioners' role is symbolic of that of the victim-offender dichotomy, and one that Knight, Phillips and Chapman (2016) say requires emotional courage on behalf of the practitioner; this inner strength is also necessary for trauma survivors. Fay explains how the duality of the role can be a difficult balance for practitioners:

It is a constant battle for every practitioner about offering support and flexibility at the same point as public protection, because that's our role. We're constantly in conflict. I'd like [to] say my personal practice is that I will be as flexible as I possibly can, especially for those individuals who have very chaotic lifestyles because that's very much about their life, their experiences and at times their lack of trust with professionals. We do have to be very mindful of their experiences and what's happened to them. But it is a constant battle with our quite rigid enforcement policies, but I would say we have got better at making sure that we're kind of, you know making those allowances for the individual (Fay, PO with over 11 years' experience).

The internal conflict that Fay refers to is indicative of the emphasis on utilising 'display rules' to demonstrate an appropriate use of emotions (Phillips, Westaby and Fowler, 2020); it may be that feelings of empathy and sympathy related to trauma are disguised to focus on the harm caused, or emotions attached to a person's offending must be managed to enable a more compassionate response to trauma. People on probation also highlight their confusion around the often-contradictory nature of the probation practitioner's role and describe how this has led to a lack of trust in practitioners (Mullen, Dick and Williams, 2022). This is likely to act as a barrier to people on probation sharing their own experiences if they feel unable to engage

effectively with a practitioner and emphasises the importance of being able to establish probation settings as a safe environment (see Chapter Seven).

Additionally, there is an insinuation in the above comment made by Beth in the use of the term '*old school*', often used to symbolise something positive, that there may be some underlying resistance to recent attempts to promote trauma informed working. Wilton and Williams (2019) describe several factors which may influence such resistance; uncertainty about how new initiatives will operate alongside existing practices, fear of moving away from familiar ways of working or '*change exhaustion*' (my term) because of the frequency with which changes are implemented and then later overridden with new priorities, particularly within the public sector. This emphasises the need for the organisation to ensure that changes are communicated effectively and transparently to practitioners and that attention is given to explaining the strengths and advantages such changes can bring. Wilton and Williams (2019) also warn however that practitioners who demonstrate cynicism should be acknowledged, both because trauma informed environments must be delivered by practitioners who trust in their value and because an organisation that ignores its own practitioners is not one that is trauma informed (Wilton and Williams, 2019). However, the vast majority of practitioners that took part in the study did advocate for the use of trauma informed methods, despite it being a recently new concept in probation terms, as Emma notes:

I think it's talked about an awful lot in recent years. It's definitely not been present in conversations throughout my whole career. It's only recently that I've heard lots of reference to it, and I've seen lots of mention about it (Emma, Senior Leader with more than 11 years' experience).

Introducing new ways of working can imply that the value once placed in previous approaches has diminished (Wilton and Williams, 2019, Alfes et al. 2023), leading to a defensive response from practitioners, who like Beth, have been in the organisation

for a number of years. This is likely to be compounded when new ways of working are introduced without adequate training (see Chapter Five) or organisational support that provides a clear rationale for change (see Chapter Eight). Ezell et al. (2018) study found that willingness to accept trauma informed approaches may be generationally influenced, suggesting that older practitioners may find it more difficult to accept newer ways of working. This study did not gather data concerning practitioner's ages, which was a limitation of the findings. The data did gather the number of years of experience that participants had of working in probation, but the results were varied and so did not provide any meaningful analytical contribution surrounding whether age is likely to be an influencing factor on practitioner willingness to adopt trauma informed approaches. This is an area that future research may benefit from exploring further.

New ways of working can encourage practitioners to reconceptualise knowledge of trauma as something that explains, rather than excuses behaviour, as Beth describes:

The things that we would now consider to be trauma were probably things that we previously would have looked at as people making excuses for their offending (Beth, SPO with more than 11 years' experience).

This observation suggests that both within the organisation, and wider society, there has been a shift in terms of understanding how some former experiences may have been traumatic and how such experiences may have manifested themselves. Whilst Beth is not explicit in her comment, there is a subtle inference that for some practitioners such an exponential change in thinking about behaviour explanations, that challenges years of practice knowledge and experience, can lead some practitioners to find it difficult to recognise people on probation's experiences as victims as well as perpetrators (Knight, 2012). This is likely to arise from established beliefs that recognising someone as a victim, prevents them from taking responsibility

for the harm they have caused (Lamb, 1996), a sentiment that Toby appeared to share:

They'll point to the experience of what they've been through rather than discussing the offence or the events or taking acknowledgement and ownership of what's happened and taking responsibility (Toby, PSO with less than 2 years' experience).

This illustrates that attitudes highlighted by Knight (2012) over a decade ago, where some practitioners reframe victim experiences as attempts to create a 'poor me' narrative to manipulate practitioners and avoid engaging with offence focussed work remains a contemporary topic. Considered through an emotional labour lens (Phillips, Westaby and Fowler, 2020), it may be that practitioners are more comfortable with '*surface acting*' to disguise how they feel about being exposed to another person's trauma. Or that practitioners are reluctant to engage in '*deep acting*' to protect themselves from having to imagine an individual's traumatic experiences or connect disclosures with their own prior experiences. Practitioners may experience a genuine emotional response to the person's account of their trauma but feel displaying this would be in opposition to the expectations and responsibilities of their role (see Chapter Two, Section 2.7'). Practitioners may benefit from developing their understanding of the concept of emotional labour to be able to better relate their responses to 'emotionally dirty work' (Phillips et al, 2021).

Ethan describes how conceptualising previous traumatic experiences as an excuse may stem from prior guidance to ignore traumatic experiences of people on probation:

I've been around a long time...when I did my training...we were kind of trained or told, not to indulge them in their trauma and encourage them to see the reverse of that coin, which is for them to take responsibility for their offending behaviour no matter what's happened to them. And to kind of quickly scoot over "well yeah ok so you were sexually abused from the ages of you know 4 to 9, you know, so deal with it. This is about your abuse [that you've committed]"... I like to think that's gone, because I'm sure that kind of straight up approach isn't particularly helpful. It's more likely to get people

to close down and disclose less anyway (Ethan, PO with more than 11 years' experience).

Given the lack of adequate training provided to practitioners to work with trauma (see Chapter Five) little has been done to change the existing narrative, particularly for more experienced practitioners. Ethan's comments imply a culture within the organisation whereby the duality of victim and offender status have been actively dismissed. This is reinforced by Marshall's research (2023) which found that once someone has caused harm, their victim status is transferred to the victim of their offence and their own victim experiences become overshadowed. This highlights the need for the organisation to consider its provision of training around understanding the relationship between trauma and offending behaviour. It is also important that a framework is established that supports practitioners in managing the internal conflict that arises from the many varied aspects of the duality of the probation practitioner role. This should include utilising reflective supervision and the provision of guidance that supports practitioners in understanding how to balance the harms experienced by people on probation alongside the harms they have caused.

Whilst Ethan suggests that he hopes such attitudes have dissipated, Max reveals that despite claims that probation practice is seeking to promote trauma informed approaches (Petrillo and Bradley, 2022), there appears to have been little appetite in recent years to readdress the victim-offender imbalance:

More often than not the victim of the offence is considered before the perpetrator and it is only after a rapport is achieved with the perpetrator, that they are likely to share their experiences, which may have contributed to the subsequent behaviour (Max, PSO with more than 11 years' experience).

This illustrates the importance of establishing a relationship that facilitates someone being able to share their experiences of trauma, something that recent research with

people on probation suggests the culture of probation can be a barrier to achieving (Mullen, Dick and Williams, 2022).

Rochelle explained that practitioners may not deliberately avoid acknowledging someone's experience of trauma, but that failure to do so, may be driven by fear that they will be deemed to be collusive with the person on probation (Knight, 2014), as she outlined:

It might be your worry that if you're focusing too much on the trauma it kind of takes away what they've done to someone else (Rochelle, PSO with more than 11 years' experience).

This concern is likely to be borne out of previous criticisms that earlier probation practices were 'too soft' (Deering and Feilzer, 2019) and failed to hold individuals to account for their offending (Knight, 2014). The resultant change was a government agenda that sought to be viewed as 'tough on crime' (Raynor, 2018, Canton and Dominey, 2018). Worrall and Mawby (2013, p105) express that these external factors have led to the role of probation practitioners being seen as something to "*probably be ashamed, rather than proud of*" because of their work with those who have committed criminal acts, which is likely to exacerbate concerns around being perceived as collusive. The recent movement towards trauma informed practice represents yet another shift in agenda, which it appears from Rochelle's comments, practitioners are still coming to terms with, resulting in uncertainty. Despite all of the current ambiguity around the direction of practice, there is a need to be sensitive in responding to previous experiences of trauma that are shared, as Ethan emphasises:

I think if I was somebody who was being managed by probation and had disclosed [an] experience of some kind of significant trauma I think it would be nice to know, at the very least, that it was being taken into consideration and was in black and white as a reminder to the practitioner (Ethan, PO with more than 11 years' experience).

This highlights the argument made by Senker et al. (2023) that to work in a truly trauma informed manner is to demonstrate compassion through recognising the harm caused to the person on probation and how this has influenced their own behaviour. LaGuardia-Lobianco (2021) describes this concept as '*compassionate blame*' which acknowledges how someone's trauma may have shaped them, whilst holding them responsible for their own wrongdoing. LaGuardia-Lobianco (2021, p512) compellingly argues that to blame "*someone for a transgression that results from trauma must be bound up with compassion*". It is recognised that sometimes this can create internal conflict and tension, which Knight, Phillips and Chapman (2016) propose can be navigated through using the skills of emotional literacy to hold people to account whilst also forming positive relationships.

6.4 Practice Influencers

Research undertaken by Wood et al. (2010) found several factors which impact the nature and extent of information shared by people on probation with practitioners. Whilst Wood et al's (2010) study was focused on risk relevant disclosures made by those convicted of sexual offending, several factors identified are also relevant to the disclosure of trauma. It was identified that positive working relationships between practitioners and people on probation that encompass feelings of trust, confidence and safety, facilitate openness, principles crucial to trauma informed practice. They further discovered that practitioners need to be perceived as accepting, non-judgemental and less likely to show a negative emotional reaction (Wood et al, 2010). Research undertaken by Phillips, Westaby and Fowler (2020) demonstrated that practitioners recognise this and are actively engaged in performing neutral emotional displays for the purpose of gathering information to assess and manage risk. Information is shared when practitioners ask the correct questions, are prepared to listen to difficult

information and are not entirely focussed on risk management (Wood et al.2010). This requires in particular '*surface acting*' or the regulating of '*genuine emotional responses*' (Phillips, Westaby and Fowler,2020). But, as Madison shared, it is not always possible to be completely unprejudiced (Knight, 2014):

If it's something that you're not particularly comfortable talking about, or something that you don't particularly agree with, or you can't understand why it then led to them doing this particular incident, then sometimes it can make it harder for you then to be as approachable and as trauma informed as you possibly can be (Madison, PSO with between 6 and 10 years' experience).

This highlights the use of 'surface acting' by practitioners to display a different emotion to the one being felt (Phillips, Westaby and Fowler, 2020) whilst acknowledging the influence at the personal level (Thompson, 2014) of attitudes towards trauma that can affect a practitioner's ability to practice in a trauma informed manner. This next section expands on Wood et al. (2010) findings to explore some of the factors that can influence practitioner's perceptions of trauma and subsequently the extent to which trauma informed approaches may be applied to working with individuals based on these influences.

6.5 Blame, minimisation and denial

Within this study, participants were almost evenly divided in their views regarding whether they perceived people on probation to use trauma as a mechanism to minimise, justify or excuse offending behaviour. Lamb (1996) describes the use of blame, minimisation and denial as attempts to present a positive image to others for behaviours that ordinarily attract a negative reaction. As Goffman (1956) emphasises, there is a tendency to seek acceptance or where rejection is anticipated, to seek sympathy instead. In this instance, disclosure of prior trauma is conceptualised as something that is utilised to create a positive self-image, despite an established body

of literature that suggests individuals may resist sharing previous experiences for fear that it creates the exact opposite image (see Ali et al. 2002).

Amelie candidly explained her experience of how she feels trauma can be used as an excuse for offending:

It's kind of like an excuse to be able to do what they've done. "So, it's happened to me. That person beat me up and they didn't get in trouble, so why have I?". Minimising the trauma or basically ignoring it...excusing it as if it's the reason why they've done it, so they shouldn't get into trouble for doing it. That they shouldn't get into trouble for their actions because of the trauma that they've been subjected to (Amelie, PSO with between 3 and 5 years' experience).

The desire to blame, minimise or deny offending behaviour may be driven through fear of being judged based on worst behaviour (Canton and Dominey, 2020), or as Amelie's comments suggest, it may be motivated by the desire to avoid the consequences. Knight (2014) suggests that approaches that focus too much on viewing people on probation favourably, can prevent offending behaviour being appropriately challenged. As Daisy reinforces, this is a difficult balance to strike:

"I think they [trauma and offending] are very connected. But I don't think they should be excused. That's where I think it's really hard" (Daisy, PO with between 3 and years' experience).

This suggests an underpinning view that experiences of trauma may be shared by people on probation as an attempt to detract from discussing their offending behaviour and place the blame elsewhere. These comments imply the presence of a shared view that trauma can be used as a means of minimising, blaming or justifying behaviour that it likely to be present at the personal, cultural and structural level (Thompson, 2014), albeit evidence provided in Chapter Three highlighted that trauma responses and behaviours displayed are often misinterpreted. It is also the result of neoliberalism's focus on individual accountability, rather than considering a person's circumstances (Burke and Collet, 2016) and fear that this may be perceived as

condoning or colluding with offending behaviour (Canton, 2018). Practitioners would benefit from training that gives attention to understanding the offender-victim dichotomy and provides practical advice on how to balance these sometimes-conflicting identities. In addition, recognising the balance between harms experienced and harms caused should be a feature of reflective supervision sessions to provide practitioners with a safe environment within which to explore underlying attitudes towards trauma including concerns around collusion and use of blaming, minimising and justifying techniques, along with reviewing any potential practitioner bias.

Practitioners taking part in Knight's (2012) research identified manipulation and defensiveness as some of the most common emotions demonstrated by people on probation. These emotions were deemed to have been expressed both consciously and unconsciously to prevent demonstrating genuine emotions and as an obstruction to engagement. A similar observation was noted by Toby:

It's sometimes hard to tell whether they feel like they're the victim as well, or whether they're acting as if they are the victim to try and coerce a situation to their benefit. And I think someone's trauma can cause them to react like that. I think sometimes it can come out in manipulative behaviours as well. For example, how they treat a situation, how they were in a situation, how they respond to a supervision appointment (Toby, PSO with less than 2 years' experience).

This finding is reinforced by recent research conducted by Berryessa (2022) in the United States which emphasised that the duality of offender-victim led to scepticism of displays of remorse, affected whether someone was considered able to take responsibility for their behaviour and if they deserved forgiveness. Toby's comment insinuates that there is a perceived benefit to being seen as a victim, despite the sometimes negative attitudes and stigma of victims that can exist (Gilchrist, 2009).

In contrast, Rochelle was unable to recall an instance where she believed someone had attempted to use their experience of trauma as an excuse for their offending behaviour:

I don't think I've had it. I've not worked with many people who've been like that, No. But I can see it perhaps with the riskier people (Rochelle, PSO with more than 11 years' experience).

This insinuates that there may be a perception from practitioners that trauma informed practice is more relevant to higher risk individuals, and therefore more relevant to the Probation Officer grade practitioners that manage these individuals.

6.6 The influence of risk

The data gathered identified that nearly all participants considered that the impact of trauma was relevant when assessing a person on probation's risk. Albeit the previous chapter (Chapter Five) highlighted that there is a lack of guidance on how to record a person's experience of trauma within assessments, suggesting that the ability to fully consider its relevance to risk has not been fully actualised. Overall, most participants considered that managing risk is prioritised over adopting a trauma informed approach. This is not unsurprising given that the organisation has become synonymous with risk management and public protection (Deering and Feizler, 2019). A risk averse culture has had a detrimental impact on its ability to engage effectively with people on probation (Mullen, Dick and Willams, 2022); which in turn can prevent people from sharing their previous traumatic experiences. In part, this may be because if practitioners are to undertake emotional labour and present an image to the public that is in keeping with their role of enforcer and public protector, this is likely to be one that conveys authority and power, not characteristics associated with the principles of trauma informed practice.

This studies data was gathered shortly after the reunification of probation services, following the process of transforming rehabilitation that saw CRC providers blamed for

the delegitimized state of probation when contracts were terminated, as part of the State's attempt to dissociate itself from the chaos of the probation service (Robinson, 2021). Much of the reunification propaganda had been underpinned by claims that amalgamating the public and private sector probation services would improve public protection and effective risk management that never materialised. The desire to blame CRCs for the failings of probation, came after a series of headlines such as "*Community Rehabilitation Companies are failing to tackle domestic abuse and keep victims safe*" (HMIP, 2018) and "*Private probation companies letting convicts commit more crime and allowing them to disappear*" (The Independent, 2018). The inference that public safety had been compromised by the CRCs, reinforced the need to reunify probation services and strengthen a risk averse culture.

The findings from this study with practitioners, mirrored the findings of Mullen, Dick and Willams (2022) research conducted with people on probation, with both groups considering the management of risk to be the overarching priority for the organisation:

I don't think we naturally give as much attention to the trauma in those cases [shoplifting] because we are a risk focussed service (Beth, SPO with more than 11 years' experience).

You have to go back to your role of managing risk...so you have to be understanding of the traumatic experience they've gone through, but also understand that in the context of the current events [risk] (Rachel, PQiP with less than 2 years' experience).

With those that present a higher risk, you're going to be more focussed on that risk (Rochelle, PSO with more than 11 years' experience).

Whilst both Beth and Rachel acknowledge the need to recognise prior experiences of trauma, they reinforce risk as the primary focus, as have others (see Phillips et al. 2012). This is commensurate with Cox's (2018) finding within the juvenile estate that focusing on risk enabled trauma to be overlooked. While Natasha reinforced this view, her comments are suggestive that consideration is given to trauma:

I would say that risk management definitely supersedes and public protection is put first and then kind of trauma informed practice secondary (Natasha, PQiP with less 2 years' experience).

Furthermore, Rochelle observed that trauma informed practice can be overlooked in favour of other priorities:

If their risk is to children, for example, then that is going to be the focus, safeguarding, so it could take you away from the trauma informed approach (Rochelle, PSO with more than 11 years' experience).

Such statements exemplify the perception of trauma informed practice as an optional method of working with people on probation, rather than a standardised approach, and one that is not considered as important as other organisational commitments. For trauma informed practice to be successfully embedded within the probation service, there is a need for the organisation to demonstrate its commitment and prioritisation to adopting these approaches as complimentary to achieving the organisations objectives. Rochelle's comments suggest that managing risk and working in a trauma informed manner are not yet viewed as coexisting; it is a choice of one or the other. However, Rachel goes on to argue that to manage risk effectively, factors such as trauma should be considered:

I think the priority is risk, which obviously is important. That's what our job is. But in order to manage risk, I think there's other things to take into consideration like trauma... I think it does sort of go hand in hand with managing risk and I think we can do both. It's not a matter of choosing between one or the other. I think they complement each other (Rachel, PQiP with less than 2 years' experience).

I think there's more focus on risk than where that risk kind of stemmed from in the first place (Imogen, PO with between 3 and 5 years' experience).

It is encouraging that some participants recognised earlier experiences of trauma and the impact of this on someone's offending behaviour and engagement with services can complement risk assessment and risk management procedures, although this was not present throughout the participant sample. As other studies have found, even where the significance of trauma is recognised it does not always result in trauma

informed practice (Ezell et al. 2018, Holloway et al. 2018, McAnallen and McGinnis, 2021, Senker et al. 2023).

From a practice perspective, the data from this study indicated that there was a disparity in how a person's level of risk may influence the use of trauma informed approaches. Some practitioners believed that those individuals who pose the highest risk were more likely to have their prior experiences of trauma acknowledged as the following three reflections illustrate:

If you're working with somebody that's high risk or very high risk, then you have automatically kind of got it instilled that you should kind of poke and prod that person to open up and talk to you about any trauma that they've experienced (Madison, PSO with between 6 and 10 years' experience).

When you're given a case, and you are given a high-risk case, you probably go into it with a different mindset than you would a medium or a lower case (Kaitlyn, PQiP with less than 2 years' experience).

I'd say your low-risk people [are less likely to have experiences of trauma recognised] perhaps because unfortunately you don't have as much time and you have to prioritize, perhaps you know, it's less trauma informed (Natasha, PQiP with less than 2 years' experience).

Such comments derive from the influential Risk Need Responsivity (RNR) model that higher levels of intervention (and time) are given to those posing the highest levels of risk (Bonta, 2023). It is on this basis that probation services operate. Individuals who pose the highest risk of serious harm are likely to have been convicted of serious crimes and the desire to understand the causes of the most serious offending behaviour may encourage the opportunity to discuss behaviour in more depth, as Madison suggests. But Ethan explains that the focus on risk can result in a more authoritative response particularly for those who pose a high risk:

If we get a high-risk case it generates perhaps a different response from us. Automatically we're programmed to think that way around control measures and then we'd maybe forget about some of the protective stuff which if you're aware of you can be more mindful of including your risk management

plan...you know to try and support that person dealing with that trauma (Ethan, PO with more than 11 years' experience).

The inference here concerns the influence of training, policies and existing practice, which is indicative of the way in which trauma informed approaches could be effectively implemented when there is organisational buy-in (Ezell et al. 2018, Senker et al. 2023).

Comparatively, there was some suggestion that those at the lower ender of the risk spectrum may be more likely to have their prior experiences of trauma recognised as outlined by the following participant:

If someone is a bit of a lower risk, you might allow for more time and space to talk about that potential trauma that they've been through (Kaitlyn, PQiP with less than 2 years' experience)

It is noted that Kaitlyn is completing the PQiP programme, having joined the probation service to undertake the training and as a result, is a lesser experienced probation practitioner who will have predominantly experienced working with lower risk cases and therefore may not be truly able to compare the differences between low and high-risk cases.

There have long been discussions surrounding the potential harms of over supervising lower risk people on probation, with suggestions that these individuals are better placed being referred to external agencies as appropriate (Vigilone and Taxman, 2018). In the context of trauma informed practice this can be problematic as a prominent theme identified by participants was the lack of suitable partnership agencies offering appropriate support for trauma that participants could refer to (see Chapter Eight). People on probation posing a lower risk have less regular face-to-face interactions with practitioners, thereby reducing the opportunity to build meaningful relationships (Vigilone and Taxman, 2018). Kaitlyn demonstrating more willingness to

take a trauma informed perspective with lower risk people on probation may be a result of practitioners often preferring to work with lower risk individuals who tend to be less challenging and demanding, than their higher risk alternatives (Vigilone and Taxman, 2018). Whilst Phillips, Westaby and Fowler's (2016) study of working predominantly with high-risk individuals under the auspices of the NPS found that some practitioners preferred the less chaotic, more stable, more compliant nature of working with high-risk individuals. Moving forward, the reunification of services enables for the adoption of trauma informed principles to be applied with all people on probation, rather than being risk specific.

6.7 The influence of differing types of offending

Over half of participants admitted that the type of crime someone has been convicted of, influences how easy they find it to acknowledge previous experiences of trauma. The influence of bias is not a new occurrence (see Kemshall, 2021) but it is salient because of the potential to inform risk assessment, risk management decisions (Day et al. 2014, Knight, 2012) and whether someone engages effectively with their sentence. As Madison described:

There are plenty of professionals that have got like a bias in terms of offences that have been committed and then it makes it difficult to identify with that person and then go through and speak about trauma and what they've been through in their life (Madison, PSO, between 6 to 10 years' experience).

This finding is reinforced by Berryessa's (2022) research which identified that the ability to understand or interpret behaviour is impacted where issues exist in a practitioner's emotional connection to a subject or individual. Madison's comments support the earlier findings by Wood et al (2010) referred to above, that emphasise a practitioner's willingness to ask the right questions and listen to sensitive details will impact the information shared by people on probation regarding their previous traumatic experiences. Some practitioners may struggle with hearing details of trauma

(Wilton and Williams, 2019) and may need to use emotional labour techniques such as '*display rules*' to regulate their own emotions and create a safe environment (Phillips, Westaby and Fowler, 2020). Rochelle recognised this, saying:

I suppose it's just about how we feel comfortable you know, listening. And creating that space where they can talk and share as much as they want to (Rochelle, PSO with over 11 year's experience).

The significance here is the responsibility and power held by practitioners to recognise, or ignore, prior experiences of trauma, based on their own personal views (Thompson, 2014). As Senker et al. (2023) note, working in a trauma informed manner involves enabling the person on probation to identify what earlier experiences are significant, not practitioners. Knight's (2012) research identified the potential for practitioners to be judgemental or be influenced by their own emotions. This is reflected within this study's findings that just under half of participants acknowledged that they found it easier to recognise a person on probation's trauma if they had committed less serious or harmful offences, despite the suggestion by PO Daisy with 3-5 years' experience that it is the "*more serious offending where people have had a lot more trauma*". This idea is expanded upon by Fay who suggested that applying theoretical concepts around social learning theory (Jensen and Akers, 2017) may explain why trauma is recognised more readily for certain offence types:

I would say if we were kind of putting service users into a generic kind of bubble or a box of type of offending, from my experience a lot of practitioners who are managing Registered Sex Offenders (RSO) who committed offences against children or domestic violence perpetrators... as we know evidence around learned behaviour for children who have witnessed domestic violence happening within the family home when they are younger can sometimes be linked into normalized behaviour within the context of relationships... with registered sex offenders, not always, but there are strong links between early normalized sexual behaviours that they have experienced or witnessed themselves as a victim that then can also be linked to their offending as adults. So, I think in the context of individuals who kind of fit the remit for domestic violence or child RSOs, yes, I do think so (Fay, PO with more than 11 years' experience).

In contrast, other participants, such as Jenny, considered the offence to be insignificant and were instead evidencing adoption of the whole person-centred approach that is aligned with trauma informed practice:

If they've got trauma, that's trauma...it isn't about their offence. Obviously, it could be linked, but that wouldn't change the way I was with them or to help them come to terms with their trauma (Jenny, PSO with more than 11 years' experience).

It is positive that some practitioners, such as Jenny, may be able to put aside any personal bias they have in relation to specific offence types. However the findings highlight that there are indicators that at the personal level a proportion of practitioners possess personal bias in the context of trauma informed practice (Thompson, 2014). What is less clear from the findings is what action is being taken, if any, to address personal bias towards trauma, which is a limitation of the study that this was not explicitly explored with participants. It is recommended that the organisation should ensure that there are effective and supportive supervision arrangements in place which include exploring personal bias (Wilton and Williams, 2019).

6.8 The influence of different types of trauma

Some participants candidly acknowledged that the type of trauma a person on probation has experienced has influenced the extent to which they have considered its impact on the individual and the significance to which they give it. This could be the result of the issues surrounding defining trauma (see chapter two and four).

Corresponding with my findings is Marshall's (2023) research with youth justice practitioners that found when young people's behaviour was perceived as excessively harmful, this overrode the person's experiences as a victim. Significantly, this raises the issue of individual practitioners determining whether trauma informed approaches are applied to working with an individual (see Chapter Eight).

Amelie candidly suggests that this may arise from practitioner's ability to identify more easily with some types of traumas:

I don't know if maybe subconsciously, I empathise more with some than others, dependent on the trauma (Amelie, PSO with between 3 and 5 years' experience).

The ability to relate to a specific type of trauma may arise from stereotypes and assumptions concerning trauma held at the personal or cultural level (Goffman, 1956, Thompson, 2014) or it may be that practitioner's personal experience mean that they are more easily able to relate, as Natasha suggests:

Some people may be a little more sympathetic, particularly if it is a trauma that they really understand, or they've experienced themselves...if it is something that you can empathise with, you want to make sure you don't start taking that on as part of an excuse (Natasha, PQiP, less than 2 years' experience).

The capacity to empathise with some individuals, and not others, necessitates the need to employ the use of display rules (Phillips, Westaby and Fowler, 2020). As Natasha describes there may be a desire for practitioners to distance themselves from the genuine emotional response, they experience to ensure that the response is appropriately displayed (Phillips, Westaby and Fowler, 2020). Amelie also goes on to explain how practitioners may find it easier to deal with certain types of traumas:

Sometimes there's a trauma that I might be happy to deal with, but there's another trauma that you just don't know how to deal with...sometimes they will tell you something and you just need 10 minutes just to digest that and understand that and then come back to them, but you can't do that when you're in the appointment. You have to just keep going and then wait for it to sink in afterwards (Amelie, PSO with between 3-5 years' experience).

This reflection from Amelie highlights the impact on practitioners from being exposed to hearing accounts of trauma and acts as a reminder that even experienced practitioners that may be considered resilient at coping with exposure to trauma are not impenetrable and supervision of practitioners should routinely include a review of their well-being, to ensure where appropriate, that support is provided.

6.9 Concluding Remarks

This chapter provides the findings from one of the first studies in the UK conducted that examines probation practitioner attitudes towards trauma and trauma informed practice. Overall, the findings offered in this chapter highlight that the art of balancing the harm someone has caused alongside their own experiences of trauma poses a challenge for practitioners. Some of these difficulties arise from the influence of established attitudes connected to the victim-offender paradigm, the dualistic role of the probation practitioner and the introduction of trauma informed practice as a new initiative in probation. Whilst presenting the data findings, contributions have been made to address the gap in research surrounding understanding how knowledge of trauma and offending has been translated into practice.

The chapter presented a divided practitioner perspective regarding whether trauma is considered as a mechanism for blaming, minimising or denying a person's offending, although there was a general sense from practitioners that there can be occasions where people on probation may attempt to use trauma as an excuse. Data was then presented that shows nearly all the practitioners taking part in the study considered trauma to be relevant to the assessment of risk, albeit priorities surrounding risk assessment, risk management and public protection often take precedence over this and there appeared to be uncertainty around how to balance these with one another. Notably over half of practitioners conceded that the type of offence someone has been convicted of influences how easy they find it to acknowledge previous experiences of trauma. Similarly, evidence was presented of similar attitudes surrounding types of traumas that people have experienced. These are potential sources of bias and oppressive practice that requires further exploration and adequate consideration through reflective supervision.

Having established that there are several factors influencing practitioner attitudes towards trauma and working in a trauma informed manner, the next chapter considers the gendered concept of trauma and the impact of this on trauma narratives.

In summary, the recommendations identified throughout this chapter were for the organisation to:

- Ensure a framework is established that supports practitioners in managing the internal conflict that can arise from duality of the probation practitioner role, including the use of reflective supervision.
- Provide guidance that supports practitioners in balancing the harms experienced by people on probation alongside the harms they have caused.
- Ensure that changes are communicated effectively and transparently and focus on conveying to practitioners the strengths and advantages such changes can bring.
- Develop practitioner knowledge of the concept of emotional labour so that they are better able to understand internal responses to 'emotionally dirty work'.
- Demonstrate a commitment and prioritisation to adopting trauma informed approaches that are considered complimentary to achieving the organisations objectives.
- Ensure that supervision arrangements are supportive and effective in exploring personal bias and promoting anti-discriminatory practice, with consideration as to how trauma informed methods can support this.

Chapter 7

Gender Responsive or Gender Bias?

Aspects of this chapter have been published in the article “Men, Trauma and Probation an overlooked population?” in Probation Quarterly (2023), Issue 28

7.1 Introduction

The previous chapter illustrated the challenges facing practitioners in balancing being trauma informed whilst holding people to account for the harms they have caused. The chapter also identified several factors that can influence practitioner attitudes towards trauma. This chapter draws on the data generated from fourteen interview participants and thirty-three survey respondents to examine the role of gender in relation to attitudes to trauma and the implementation of trauma informed practice within probation.

Interest in trauma informed approaches within a criminal justice setting originated from attempts to readdress the balance of women being managed within a system designed for men (Bloom, Owen and Covington, 2003) that had led to women specific needs receiving little attention (Bradley and Petrillo, 2022). This movement re-emphasised the role of gender in pathways to offending and persuasively argued that improved outcomes for both men and women can be achieved through greater responsivity to gender differences (Bloom, Owen and Covington, 2003). However, much of the literature concerning gender responsive practice within the CJS has concentrated solely on developing practice with women (Pemberton, Holdsworth, Mackenzie, 2024).

Gender was a reoccurring theme identified by participants when considering working with trauma. The findings of this research suggests that rather than the organisation achieving gender responsivity, there are discrepancies in the ways in which trauma is

considered and applied between men and women on probation. Overall participants consider that while attempts have been made to recognise the impact of trauma on women, the extent to which this has been understood and effectively utilised to inform practice is varied. This chapter explores the gendered impact of understandings of trauma and considers how the influence of stereotypes portraying women as disproportionately affected by trauma has impacted the way in which the organisation has approached working with trauma. The chapter concludes that, despite evidence of attempts to incorporate trauma informed approaches within probation practice, this has been almost exclusively with women on probation, and men's experiences of trauma are largely overlooked, perpetuating gender bias.

7.2 Existing literature: Gender and Trauma

As the literature review in Chapter Three illustrated, men and women's experiences of trauma are influenced by their gender (Dunn, 2020, Miller and Najavits, 2012). The types of traumas experienced, the way in which trauma symptoms manifest themselves, and how trauma is identified can all be impacted by gender (Søegaard et al, 2021). Gender can also influence behavioural responses to trauma, with research suggesting that women are more likely than men to internalise negative emotions (McNeish and Scott, 2014, Chaplin, 2015, Miller and Najavits, 2012) and more likely than men to carry out violent acts against themselves rather than others (Yakeley, 2010). Comparatively men are considered more likely to externalise their emotions and display aggressive behaviours towards others (Grant, 2019), despite higher rates of suicide in men (Wyllie et a, 2012).

According to existing research, there are numerous reasons why gender may impact emotion regulation and expression (Chaplin, 2015). Bio-psycho-social models suggest that gender differences in expression of emotions are a result of biology, socialisation,

social context and cultural expectations (Chaplin, 2015). Critics of this approach argue that gender differences in responses to trauma are a result of unequal economic and power division and social and cultural gender norms, rather than biological differences that affect coping responses (Weinberg, 2022). Whilst there may be opposing views on the causes of gender differences in trauma responses, it is accepted within the literature that differences do exist, and that such differences need to be understood to enable the demonstration of emotions to be appropriately interpreted by practitioners (Chaplin, 2015).

As children, boy's and girl's risk of experiencing trauma are similar to one another. This changes throughout the life course, with men more likely to experience trauma from harm caused by strangers or rivals, and women more likely to experience trauma because of interpersonal relationships (Dunn, 2020, Yakeley, 2010). Understanding these nuanced differences is gender responsive, but authors such as Dunn (2020), are drawn into declaring that women's trauma is more damaging because the source of trauma is often from someone with whom they either have, or have had, a relationship with. Such claims are likely to occur because intimate relationships are considered the most important form of relationship based on their characterisation of the following three elements: *physical intimacy*, *emotional intimacy* and *intimate knowledge* (Morgan, 2009). Combined, these factors create an interpersonal connection based on physical touch (not just sexual), the sharing of feelings and thoughts and the exchanging of personal information (Morgan, 2009). The result is that when harm (and subsequent trauma) is caused within the context of an intimate relationship, it is determined as "*more serious because it represents a violation of the trust and security that normally exists*" within such a relationship dynamic (Sentencing Council, 2018, p3). Trauma for women is therefore contextualised as often caused "by

those who abuse and exploit them” resulting in the female population being considered to “*contain some of the most disadvantaged, damaged and vulnerable people in our society*” (The Centre for Social Justice, 2018, p7). The inference here is that women offenders are more disadvantaged than men, despite recognition that many people in the CJS, irrespective of gender, have experienced significant levels of social and structural inequality (The Centre for Social Justice, 2018). This echoes Canton and Dominey’s (2020) observations in the previous chapter of the broader concerns of the capability of the CJS to simultaneously address the needs, of what are perceived to be opposing groups, without disadvantaging one group in favour of the other.

7.3 Gender, trauma and stereotypes

There has been a plethora of criticism alleging that traditional criminology has focused its attention on men (Bloom, Owen and Covington, 2003, Ellis-Devitt, 2020a, 2020b), somewhat understandably so, given that most crime is committed by men (Garside, 2024). In contrast, attention to the relationship between trauma and offending has been largely focussed on women (Matheson, 2012). This has been defended by scholars who argue that women’s trauma is more severe and more frequent than men’s (Matheson, 2012, Tam and Derkzen, 2016, The Centre for Social Justice, 2018); the conjecture here is that it is therefore more deserving of attention. This almost exclusive attention on women’s trauma is captured by PQiP Sophia, who joined the Probation Service twelve months prior, with the sentiment “*when I think trauma informed, I automatically think women*”. What Sophia is highlighting is the subconscious personal level with which she has associated women and trauma with one another; it is beliefs such as these that can contribute to maintaining oppressive practice (Thompson, 2014), which in this instance results in the needs of men who have experienced trauma going unmet.

Furthermore PSO Jenny, with more than 11 years' experience, refers to trauma informed practice with women having become a shared consensus about the right way to approach women (Thompson, 2014), within her remark: "*because I work predominantly with women, it's all trauma informed*". This suggests the presence of a culture within probation that encouragingly recognises women's trauma but that this has been at the expense of men with trauma histories being ignored. Findings by Petrillo and Bradley (2022) also indicated that there was a shared identity for practitioners working in a trauma informed manner with women, again reinforcing the prevalence of a culture that recognises women's trauma, but not men's.

Some participants recognised that the perception of trauma as an issue affecting women has contributed to the formation of stereotypes, as Madison reflected:

I think we are more responsive to females because they [the Probation Service] tend to believe that females are the ones that suffer the most trauma...like a stereotype, I suppose, that it always happens to a woman...it's like the stereotype of a woman always being a victim (Madison, PSO with between 6 and 10 years' experience).

As with all stereotypes, this oversimplifies the complexity of trauma and contributes to distorted practitioner perceptions (Thompson, 2006). Mohamed's (2015) concept of the '*moralisation of trauma*' describes the decision-making process that exists at a personal level (Thompson, 2014) based on predisposed perceptions and judgements that determine whose trauma should be acknowledged (Mohamed, 2015). According to Mohamed (2015) perceptions of who can experience trauma are profoundly influenced by beliefs surrounding victims; the more vulnerable someone is perceived, the more easily they are recognised as having experienced trauma. That women's trauma is more readily acknowledged than men's trauma implies that this is directly linked to women's vulnerabilities being more easily recognisable.

The embodiment of prejudice and oppression of men's trauma within the structure of the organisation (Thompson, 2014) is reflected within Senior Leader Emma's comments on how trauma stereotypes have influenced policy and practice decisions:

The women's strategy...that was very much based on the fact that they [women on probation] were victims of abuse and trauma. So that strategy was based on that as a foundation, that a lot of the people who we work with who are female will, a high proportion, have had traumatic experiences (Emma, Senior Leader, more than 11 years' experience).

This is an example of Mohamed's (2015) '*moralisation of trauma*' which reflects the presence of dominant and entrenched stereotypes founded on wider societal beliefs that women are more likely to be victims because they are powerless and weak, whilst men in comparison are perceived as powerful and strong (Gerber, 1991). Such perceptions of gender, position women as less culpable for becoming victims, while men are viewed as being responsible for becoming victims (Davies, 2017). This is reflected in Bates et al (2019) research of gendered models of intimate partner violence (IPV) which locates the causes of IPV as male privilege and gender inequality, reinforcing the notion of women as defenceless and victims of a patriarchal society (Yakeley, 2010). These perspectives fail to adequately explain female perpetrated violence towards men, or violence within same sex relationships. However, this viewpoint is reflected in recent desistance literature which argues that whilst intimate relationships can have a positive impact on men's desistance, for women, intimate relationships are more likely to be characterised by obligation, dependence and control exerted by men (Petrillo, 2019). These perceptions somewhat contrast with the theoretical underpinnings of current probation practice that have been influenced by the neo-liberalist agenda that encourages responsabilisation of individuals (Liebenberg, Ungar and Ikeda, 2015, Burke and Collet, 2016) rather than structural inequality and collective responsibility (Phillips et al. 2022). The social

construction of women as victims reduces their individual responsibility, suggesting that the process of responsibilisation is primarily applied to men who commit crime. The consequence of this is seen when PQiP Rachel admitted:

I feel like I'm more likely to ask them [women] if they've been a victim of domestic violence, but I wouldn't necessarily ask that of a male (Rachel, PQiP, less than 2 years' experience)

This exemplifies how the '*moralisation of trauma*' (Mohamed, 2015) is deep-rooted within probation practice, with decisions being made by practitioners based on gender, either consciously or subconsciously, as to whose trauma is acknowledged. That Rachel suggests there may be a tendency for practitioners to not even ask about men's experiences of trauma leads to the inability to offer appropriate support, which places men at a substantial disadvantage in terms of their needs being adequately met by the organisation. The influence of individual and organisational judgements to focus almost exclusively on women's experiences of trauma, further reinforces existing barriers for male victims reporting their experiences of trauma and seeking support for trauma (Bates et al. 2019). The organisation would benefit from considering how perceptions and attitudes towards vulnerabilities and gender impact the identification of signs and symptoms of trauma by practitioners (Pemberton, Holdsworth and Mackenzie, 2024). It would be of further benefit for the organisation to undertake a review of its policies and practices concerning trauma, with particular attention to how men's trauma is portrayed to address the existence of a culture that acknowledges and responds only to women's trauma.

7.4 Doing trauma informed practice...just with women

Some scholars have argued that there has been a lack of research, and therefore evidence, into the implementation of trauma informed approaches within probation (Ezell et al, 2018, Senker et al, 2023). However, others have claimed there to be

evidence of “*significant developments*” in applying gender responsive trauma informed approaches with women on probation (Bradley and Petrillo, 2022, p18). It is suggested that the introduction of policies which acknowledge women’s lived experiences of trauma is evidence of a commitment to embed trauma informed practice within Probation settings (see Shepherd, 2022, Baldwin, 2022, Bradley and Petrillo 2022). As this relates only to women, who make up a relatively small proportion of the population of people on probation, it is questionable that this can be deemed to be evidence of a commitment to a whole system approach to trauma informed practice. Additionally, awareness of women’s experiences of trauma does not necessarily equate to practicing in a way that is responsive to, and takes account of, individual experiences of trauma (Walton and Williams, 2019). Concern has also been expressed that possessing a simplistic understanding of trauma can weaken or eliminate gender responsive practice with women (Petrillo and Bradley, 2022). Yet, the implication remains that trauma is a women’s issue and encouraging the existing focus on trauma informed gender responsive practice to that being undertaken exclusively with women on probation reinforces this (Sanders, 2023). Participants in this study acknowledge that current attempts to work in a trauma informed manner have been predominantly applied to women on probation, and similar approaches have not been adopted when working with men, as the following four comments emphasise:

I feel that trauma informed practice is more accessible for specified groups, e.g., female service users etc, however there is a significant gap across the board (Heidi, PO with more than 11 years’ experience)

I feel trauma informed approaches have been incorporated more so when working with females (Lisa, PO with 3-5 years’ experience)

It appears to be discussed much more when working with female offenders (Phoebe, PO with less than 2 years’ experience)

We have adopted some different approaches to working with women (Emma, Senior Leader, with more than 11 years’ experience)

Whilst all four of these participants recognise that trauma informed practice is being deliberately targeted at women, there was a sense that the consequences of this for men on probation has not been fully realised, thereby creating a gender biased approach rather than one that is gender responsive.

There are some participants that have formed the view that there is a lack of evidence across the board of trauma informed approaches being utilised in probation practice, or that where there was evidence of attempts to work with trauma, it “*has been limited*” (Katrina, SPO, with over 11 years’ experience). There was some indication that participants who held these views may do so, because they are working almost exclusively men and therefore, have not been exposed to the same expectations that appear to be present in working with women. It is a limitation of the data that it did not explicitly capture practitioner’s levels of experience of working with each gender to test this hypothesis. With hindsight, had questions been asked that elicited this type of information it may have provided another opportunity to understand whether (and how) trauma informed approaches have been applied to both men and women on probation.

As within the previous chapter which considered some of the obstacles in recognising the dual status of offender and victim, participants working with women emphasised the difficulties that arise from the victim-offender dichotomy, particularly given the narrative of women as victims. Madison describes her experience of women using trauma as an excuse for their behaviour:

I think specifically with a number of female cases that I've had...they've minimised their behaviour through what they've been through...kind of excused themselves for what they're doing. It is sometimes what they've said in terms of sexual assaults they've experienced, continued substance misuse, maybe domestic violence or children being taken away from them due to their behaviours. It starts to become a pattern of everybody is being unfair and not treating them very well and not supporting them, but actually is it their behaviour? (Madison, PSO, between 6 and 10 years’ experience).

The reference to women's perceptions of fairness may derive from wider socio-economic and political factors (Bloom, Owen and Covington, 2003), whereby women's criminalisation "*is often underpinned by social and economic inequalities*" (Women in Prison, 2022, p10). Madison's comments are reminiscent of Knight's (2014) observations (see Chapter Two, Section 2.6) that practitioners must continuously manage the heightened emotional state of people on probation that can be further aroused by being processed within the CJS. Madison further explains how the experience of trauma can affect the willingness of people on probation to engage with services:

Obviously, the trauma has impacted their offending behaviour, but now they're not kind of accepting any trauma informed approach, or any trauma informed style of working. All everybody has done is these horrible things to them and not supported them throughout their lives, so then now they're "I'm not going to engage". And when they commit further offences, it's just "well, you didn't give me the support" (Madison, PSO, between 6 and 10 years' experience).

This focuses attention to the importance of understanding how trauma may influence presentation and how this is interpreted by practitioners. The implication here is both the need to try and manage the person on probation's emotions, but also the emotional response it creates for a practitioner who may feel blamed. The findings suggest that some participants recognise that they may witness different behavioural responses to trauma based on gender, as Madison commented:

I think there are differences between how males deal with trauma and how females deal with trauma, and I think we'd be silly to think there isn't a difference (Madison, PSO, between 6 and 10 years' experience).

This comment is encouraging, because it recognises a relationship between gender and trauma. But the lack of expansion on what these perceived gender differences are and how these impact on practice, reflected generally across the data set, infers to a limitation within existing practitioner knowledge. Future training should ensure that it

equips practitioners with an understanding of the way in which gender can influence the types of traumas experienced and how trauma may manifest itself.

7.5 Women working with women

A prominent theme from the findings was that women on probation are predominantly supervised by female practitioners, as Gayle notes:

There has also been an expectation that a female officer will be allocated to work with a female case, unless otherwise requested. This is to ensure again that professionals are not triggering any trauma for a female case, by automatically allocating to a male officer where barriers to engagement may automatically be there (Gayle, PSO with over 6 years' experience).

This implies that the practice of allocating women on probation to female practitioners is underpinned by the assumption that any prior traumatic experiences have been caused by men. It is also influenced by the belief that women are better able to understand the needs of other women (Ellis-Devitt, 2020b). Whilst Gayle alludes to women being able to request to be supervised by a male practitioner, Emma highlights the lack of choice and autonomy given to those on probation:

We allocate our women to female officers as a standard, as a default...trying to actively minimise the impact on women who might have been abused by men coming into a probation office sitting in the same waiting room (Emma, Senior Leader with over 11 years' experience).

The automatic allocation of women on probation to female practitioners is highlighted further by Emma who went on to describe how this happens “*even if the source of the woman's trauma might have been women themselves*”. This emphasises the lack of responsivity and sensitivity to working with trauma because of the stereotyping referred to earlier in this chapter. The *Guidance on Working with Women in Custody and the Community* (HMPPS, 2018) outlines that women *should* be made aware that they have the option of working with a female practitioner and being interviewed in a women-only space; equally women on probation are able to request working with a male practitioner. The guidance appears to encourage women on probation to have

flexibility in choosing the preferred gender of their practitioner. Although the data from this study suggests that the way in which the guidance has been applied to practice has resulted in choice being removed, because it has been applied “*as a blanket approach*” (Emma) and as a “*one-size fits all*” method (Carla, PO with more than 11 years’ experience). An unintended consequence of offering a lack of choice is that it can suppress, disempower and remove autonomy: factors often reminiscent of the source of trauma and in distinct contrast to the principles of trauma informed care. Some practitioners such as Hayleigh recognised the impact of this. She describes:

They [women on probation] are automatically allocated to a female officer which I think is meant to be a trauma informed approach but takes discussion /choice / agency away from them. Many are happy to be supervised by a male or to use male waiting areas, some are not. (Hayleigh, PO with over 11 years’ experience).

As discussed, trauma informed practice should consider gender specific needs, but as highlighted by participants, the desire to be gender responsive has been implemented in practice as matching the gender of the practitioner to those they supervise. Interestingly, this does not apply to men who are frequently supervised by women practitioners; a likely consequence of the feminisation of the probation workforce over recent decades (Annison, 2007, Tidmarsh, 2023). The lack of male practitioners means that it is not possible to offer men on probation a choice, because the organisations workforce, from a gender perspective, is not reflective of the population it serves. This highlights the discrepancy in the perceived significance attached to the role of gender in the supervision process. It is, rightly, argued that women should be given the choice over whether they are supervised by a male or female practitioner (Ellis-Devitt, 2020b). This upholds the trauma informed principles of voice and choice, creating of safe environments, transparency and collaboration. However, to adhere to the trauma informed principle of gender responsivity, this

level of choice should be extended to men, to be considered truly gender responsive. The resistance to do so may derive from a practical inability to achieve this. Whilst the organisation may not immediately be able to address the gender imbalance of its workforce, it should at least consider how it can promote the recruitment of male practitioners and at the very least, the organisation should demonstrate that it has understood and considered the impact of men being supervised by women practitioners particularly in the context of trauma informed practice.

7.6 Gendered environments

Establishing a setting that promotes physical and emotional safety is a fundamental principle of trauma informed practice (Fallot and Harris, 2009, SAMHSA, 2014). The significance of the physical environment and the message this conveys to people on probation was highlighted by practitioners, some of whom described probation offices as unfriendly, repressive and reminiscent of other criminal justice settings such as Police Stations and Prisons (Sanders, 2023). This may be particularly challenging for those people on probation who have experienced prior traumatic events within criminal justice settings (McCartan, 2020).

The uninviting and oppressive architectural settings often utilised to deliver probation services is reinforced by Worrall and Mawby's (2013, p113) descriptor of probation offices as "*security-conscious environment[s]*" that in turn convey "*suspicion and mistrust*" (Tidmarsh, 2021, p79). Similarly, this was echoed by Phillips (2014) description of the interior of probation interview rooms as characterised by windowless corridors, access-controlled security doors, panic buttons, seating that provides practitioners with easy access to leave the room and CCTV (closed circuit television). Some have argued that organisations

characterised by these approaches can be traumagenic for both the people using their services, and those working within them (Jones and Willmot, 2022). Despite these observations being made over a decade ago, little attention appears to have been paid to probation spaces, with recent accounts of some probation offices being “*unwelcoming*” and “*dispiriting places*” (HMIP 2024, p12). Such remarks have extended beyond probation offices to other probation settings, such as Approved Premises, which have similarly been described as dominated by a focus on security, surveillance and public protection achieved by a range of control measures (Marston and Reeves, 2022). Phillips (2014) applied Goffman’s (1969) ‘frontstage’ and ‘backstage’ analogy to describe ‘protected’ and ‘unprotected zones’ between people on probation and probation practitioners. Accordingly, Phillips (2014, p117) highlights that this separation of spaces “*potentially perpetuates the rise of risk, punishment and managerialism in probation*” and contributes to a divide between practitioners and people on probation. In contrast, women’s centres are described as “*quiet, safe, warm, and friendly environments*”, characteristics which are seen as essential to delivering trauma informed practice (Pemberton, Holdsworth and Mackenzie, 2024, p11). Such a significant disparity in the physical environments men and women are supervised in, reinforces that the application of trauma informed approaches to men are so far absent in probation settings.

The lack of interest and attention paid to the physical environment is reflective of probation being deemed ‘dirty work’ undertaken with people who are considered undeserving (Worral and Mawby, 2013), perhaps even of comfortable and welcoming spaces, reinforcing the punitive purpose of the CJS. This is indicative of systemic oppressive practices that maintain existing power relations (Thompson,

2014), in this instance that people on probation are deserving of punishment and therefore their own experiences are considered less relevant. The design of probation settings reinforces the power imbalance between practitioners and people on probation (Phillips, 2014) which can emphasise the sense of powerlessness that is reminiscent of prior trauma experiences (Senker et al, 2023). But as Tidmarsh (2021) emphasises, physical spaces can be designed to offset unequal power dynamics, and the organisation should take this into consideration when designing the use of probation spaces.

Furthermore, Daisy, a PO with four years' experience, described how people on probation "*absolutely hate*" reporting into her local office, describing the office as having a negative "*vibe*". At a time when research has highlighted that people on probation are increasingly considering probation supervision as "*a form of policing*" (Mullen, Dick and Williams, 2022, p10) the physical environment's potential to reinforce these perceptions should be considered in terms of its capacity to act as a barrier to engagement and as a source of re-traumatisation.

The significance of the physical environment within delivering trauma informed practice appears to have received some consideration for working with women on probation, but this has essentially been focussed on ensuring that women are separated from men on probation and male practitioners (Ellis-Devitt, 2020b), as Gayle explains:

There has always been an expectation [for women] that appointments can be held in a different office to that of males. This is to avoid re traumatising or triggering any females who have been a victim of abuse (Gayle, PSO with other 6 years' experience).

Practically, this has been achieved through either supervising women in different settings (HMPPS, 2018) such as women's centres' or providing women-only

sessions where men on probation are not able to attend the probation office at the same time, typically a specific day or morning/afternoon. This approach is championed as being gender responsive through claims of creating safe environments for women. However, it also serves to reiterate the idea of men as the causal factor in women's trauma while simultaneously failing to give any consideration to men on probation who have themselves experienced trauma. It is also reflective of the use of physical architecture to create division (Phillips, 2014).

A further theme identified by participants was in relation to appointment locations. This centred around the ability to exercise flexibility and autonomy over the location of an appointment to promote trauma informed approaches, rather than a concern with separating individuals based on gender. This focussed on being able to meet people on probation in less formal environments than the probation office, such as within the communities which probation serves (Phillips, 2014), for example, *"meeting for coffee instead of [an] expectation to visit the office"* (Phoebe, PO, with less than 2 years' experience). The advantage of this is explained within PSO Rochelle's account of taking a flexible approach to appointment locations:

I've got a woman who comes in and she's totally different seeing her in the office to if I do a home visit, sometimes I'll meet her and go for a walk, she changes when she's in [the office]... she's so difficult...the environment is not very nice (Rochelle, PSO with more than 11 years' experience).

This reflection reinforces Phillips (2014) assertion that architecture shapes behaviour and impacts on the nature of the social interaction that takes place. Importantly, Rochelle's comment highlights the extent to which an individual's presentation and engagement can be affected by the physical environment.

The use of alternative environments may be more conducive to achieving some aspects of trauma informed practice that can be difficult to achieve in *"unwelcoming"*

(Daisy, PO with 3-5 years' experience) probation settings, such as a more equal distribution of power, collaboration, trustworthiness and transparency between probationer and practitioner (SAMHSA, 2014). Disappointingly, it was highlighted that the same responsiveness and flexibility is not being extended to men:

I don't necessarily think that we are encouraged to give the same treatment to male individuals, and they are expected just to report to the office, it's kind of non-negotiable (Madison, PSO, 6 to 10 years' experience).

This suggests that men are at a disadvantage as potential barriers to engagement are not being identified or addressed with the same magnitude as they are for women, again suggesting that attempts to achieve gender responsiveness are actually being replaced with gender biased practice that results in inequality (Thompson, 2014). Supervising men in hostile environments not only increases their likelihood of re-traumatisation but given their propensity to externalise rather than internalise their emotions (Smith, Mouzon and Elliott, 2018) has the potential to increase the risk to others through triggering aggressive or problematic behaviours. For these reasons, waiting areas specifically, can be a cause of stress, anxiety, and trauma (Lamb, 2021) and if the organisation is committed to trauma informed practice as it suggests, then it should ensure that the physical environment within which probation services operate reflects its aims (Phillips, 2014).

7.7 Suffering in silence? Current practice with men who have experienced trauma

The focus on women's trauma has been maintained despite evidence of only a negligible difference between men and women's experiences of trauma frequency and duration (Søegaard et al, 2021). Furthermore, the depiction of men as less complicated and with lesser emotional needs (Ellis-Devitt, 2020b) has enabled

probation practice to overlook the needs of men who have experienced trauma, as Emma explains:

Because their [women] plight in the criminal justice system has been well reported, is well understood and kind of accepted, but young men is a whole other kettle of fish. I think that there's a lot of people who really are trauma survivors and will have associated difficulties and it will be relevant, but I don't think we do enough (Emma, Senior Leader, with more than 11 years' experience).

This exemplifies how the recognition of women's traumatic experiences at a structural level enables men's trauma to be overlooked and arguably perpetuated at all levels (Thompson, 2014, Wilton and Williams, 2019). The lack of attention to men's trauma histories is reinforced by Lisa who notes the impact of this on practice:

[There are] limited policies and practice within probation regarding taking into account trauma when working with young males (Lisa, PO).

These comments exemplify how ideologies, such as those which ignore male trauma, have been adopted at a culture and structural level (Thompson, 2014). The key aspect within Lisa and Emma's comments, is what Karim (2023) refers to as 'inaction', which is concerned with the failure to do anything. Karim (2023) cautions that consideration should be given to the extent to which practitioners are able to exercise autonomy and influence practice. The absence of policies and practice guidance that Lisa mentions, reduces practitioner capacity to work in a trauma informed manner with men on probation. Arguably, the probation service's oppressive hierarchical structure maintains a sense of powerlessness at the personal level (Thompson, 2014, Robinson et al, 2014) which prevents individuals from being able to effectively challenge cultural and structural discrimination and oppression. Yet individuals are responsabilised when taking 'inaction' (Karim, 2023) represents being complicit in maintaining oppressive practice.

Emma's reference to *associated difficulties* may be reflected within probation settings by young men as heightened levels of emotional arousal that result in reactive behaviours such as instrumental aggression (Grant, 2019), as Imogen describes "*we're dealing with some very volatile, very vulnerable individuals who need our help*". Incidents of aggression and anger can be symptomatic of trauma because of "*hyper-arousal, hyper-vigilance and inappropriate hostile reactions*" (Grant, 2019, p100). But when practitioners have not received adequate training to understand and work with trauma (see Chapter Five), behavioural presentations are not conceptualised from a trauma perspective (Aiyegbusi and Tuck, 2008). Given the absence of men's experiences of trauma being recognised generally within probation practice, it is likely that these inaccurate representations will disproportionately impact men on probation.

This is likely to have increasing relevance for decisions made relating to compliance and enforcement. Participants considered that enforcement decisions were the least likely area of practice to be considered from a trauma-informed perspective. Participants reflected on the difficulties in making these decisions with little guidance as Daisy comments:

Some people probably take it way too far and probably and think there's no boundaries because [its] trauma informed...we've had some issues with different areas going "oh him not attending and not getting a warning, that's trauma informed", but it still needs to have enforcement...so it's really hard. It's like everybody's kind of line is really different as well (Daisy, PO with between 3 and 5 years' experience).

While there is no desire to advocate for prescriptive measures around trauma informed methods and approaches, the uncertainty highlighted by Daisy suggests that such decisions are likely to be left to individuals to apply. This means that decisions may be exposed to prejudice at both the personal and cultural level

because of the role of the individual practitioner in making enforcement decisions and the oversight provided by local management (Thompson, 2014). However, others have argued that in the wake of neo-liberalism, practitioner's autonomy to make decisions particularly around enforcement, has been reduced in favour of prioritising risk (Phillips et al, 2022), again emphasising the difficulties practitioners can face in attempting to adopt a trauma informed approach.

As with other areas of practice, there were indicators that increased pressure to deliver trauma-informed practice with women to evidence gender responsiveness, is leading to gender biased enforcement practice as Beth candidly acknowledges:

With our females we will *think* about the impact of a recall, whereas with a male we probably will just hit that recall button (Beth, SPO, with more than 11 years' experience).

This comment infers a wider commitment at a cultural and strategic level to acknowledge the impact of practice on women. This is reflected in Petrillo and Bradleys' (2022) review of gender responsive trauma informed practice, which identified that a structure of organisational accountability has been established for delivering trauma informed approaches with women. This a further example of structural oppression of men (Thompson, 2014), as throughout the organisation there has been a deliberate creation of a structure that ignores men's experiences of trauma and a desire to address this, thereby resulting in discriminatory practice. To readdress this balance, organisational accountability to trauma informed practice should be applied to both women and men to ensure a gender responsive service is provided.

Furthermore, the increased likelihood that those externalising their emotions (McNeish and Scott, 2014, Chaplin, 2015, Miller and Najavits, 2012) which results

in negative behaviour (Grant, 2019), will be men on probation rather than women, places them at a disadvantage for enforcement, a further consequence of structural issues perpetuating inequality (Thompson, 2014). The power held by practitioners in this respect is evidenced by Emma's comment:

Seems like when they fight with us and our rules, we're holding them to higher accountability than when we're looking at their original offence and how they should be sentenced (Emma, Senior Leader with more than 11 years' experience).

These findings are echoed by the research undertaken by Mullen, Dick and Williams (2022, p12) that enforcement action is frequently instigated for "*minor infringements*" rather than being based on risk or public protection. The notion of resistance against the organisation may be explained as an attempt to resist power or dominance being exerted against the person on probation's will (Thompson, 2014). This may be reminiscent of the trauma they have experienced. It was clear that practitioners felt there to be a significant focus on enforcement action, and they query whether this is ever likely to be conducive to trying to work in a trauma informed manner, as Rochelle reflects when considering the induction process:

You've got to go through enforcement in an induction so then everyone knows what is what, but still banging on about it for 10 pages, it's not a very positive way to get someone to open up and to feel safe (Rochelle, PSO with more than 11 years' experience).

Whilst the above comment demonstrates satire, it also conveys the extent to which practitioners believe that there are existing processes that are not encouraging trauma informed practice, and at times, are in distinct opposition.

7.8 Concluding Remarks

This chapter has contributed to expanding the knowledge base concerning how the relationship between trauma and offending is being translated into practice, achieved through reviewing the ways in which trauma informed approaches have

been implemented in probation work with women. It is also the first piece of research that has specifically considered the impact that the focus on women's trauma in probation has had on men with trauma histories who are subject to probation supervision.

The chapter presented the findings that demonstrated the effect the creation of a narrative of trauma as an issue affecting primarily women has had on practitioners. There was evidence of gender-based stereotypes of trauma being transferred into practice which are resulting in a lack of attention being paid to men's experiences of trauma and indicative of systemic oppressive practice. It was highlighted that existing attempts to promote trauma informed methods with women have been applied as a blanket approach and therefore evidence little adherence to the principles of trauma informed practice in relation to individuality. The use of single gender environments was examined, identifying that these are underpinned by the assumption that men are the cause of women's trauma and subsequently the same responsiveness and flexibility for appointment settings has not been provided to men. The chapter concludes by emphasising that the current landscape for men on probation is one that fails to be trauma responsive and take account of men's gender specific needs.

In summary, the recommendations identified throughout this chapter were for the organisation to:

- Consider how perceptions and attitudes towards vulnerabilities and gender impact the identification of signs and symptoms of trauma
- Ensure future learning takes account of gender differences and trauma
- Consider how men's trauma is portrayed in existing policies and practice

- To develop a culture that acknowledges and responds to both women and men's trauma
- Consider how to increase the recruitment of male practitioners
- Explore the impact on men from being supervised by women practitioners in the context of trauma informed practice
- Consider how the design of probation settings, particularly those where men are supervised, reinforce unequal power dynamics, and the impact of this as a barrier to engagement and potential source of re-traumatisation
- Ensure clear accountability, at all levels of the organisation, for ensuring that trauma informed practice is applied to both women and men

Chapter 8

Ticking the Box

8.1 Introduction

This chapter is the final of the data chapters presenting the projects findings gathered from fourteen interview participants and thirty-three survey respondents. The previous chapters have highlighted gaps in the adoption of trauma informed practice in probation around the themes of knowledge and understanding, attitudes towards trauma and offending and the gendered concept of trauma. This chapter focuses on examining some of the barriers encountered in adopting and developing trauma informed probation practice.

Firstly, this chapter explores the concept of 'practitioner lottery' which emphasises the variations in trauma informed approaches being adopted within sentence management functions of probation. Some of the factors considered as contributing to the divergence in adoption rates of trauma informed practice include the personal values held by practitioners and the impact of external factors such as neoliberalism. Secondly, the impact of these influences is explored to understand the development of a 'tick box' culture in both the wider context of the organisation but also with specific consideration to this as a barrier to authentically embracing trauma informed practice. Thirdly, attention is given to partnership working with external agencies and delivery of a consistent trauma informed service amid lack of access to adequate resources for people on probation. Lastly, the chapter considers the adverse impact of working with trauma on practitioners and an absence of an appropriate support framework. Throughout the chapter, recommendations are made to support the organisation in

addressing the areas identified by practitioners as barriers to delivering a trauma informed service.

8.2 Trauma informed probation practice: it's a practitioner lottery

As the literature has demonstrated, probation practice and experiences of trauma are inherently connected to issues surrounding power, discrimination and oppression. The widespread disparity of trauma informed approaches being utilised within the probation service was a reoccurring theme identified by participants. Natasha, a PQiP with less than 2 years' experience, described the implementation of trauma informed approaches within probation practice as "*a lottery, it totally is*". This is not only an indicator of just how extensive the gap in trauma informed methods being effectively applied is, but the phrase 'lottery' infers that application to practice is based on luck opposed to anything more deliberate, such as policies, processes and guidance. The notion that trauma informed practice is delivered as a practitioner lottery, emphasises that in the absence of clear guidance (see Chapter Five), practitioners have been left to adopt trauma informed practice, or not, depending on their own personal preferences which can manifest in discriminatory or oppressive practice (Thompson, 2014). Similar commentary has been offered in relation to unequal access to healthcare, colloquially referred to as the 'NHS postcode lottery', which emphasises that the unequal distribution of services and resources originates at a structural level (Thompson, 2014). The idea of geographical locations dictating access to services and resources, as has been attributed in other public sectors such as the NHS, was not possible to determine within this study due to the limitations on data gathered around participant localities (see Chapter Four, section 4.10 for a more detailed explanation).

The probation service should seek to develop specific guidance on embedding trauma informed approaches across sentence management functions and a quality assurance framework to review adoption rates of trauma informed approaches. Consideration should be given to conducting evaluative research with both practitioners and people on probation, after the provision of practice guidance to understand its effectiveness.

Senior Leader Emma also felt that there was a disparity in individual practitioners practicing through a trauma informed lens:

We have pockets of people who will work in a trauma informed way because they've had the training and so you know, I can think of a couple of practitioners who are very, very focused on trauma informed approach. But it's just pockets of people who have implemented that approach...there are pockets, but [it's] definitely not a consistent organisational approach (Emma, Senior Leader, over 11 years' experience).

Emma's recollection of a '*couple of practitioners*' is indicative of the low rate of adoption of trauma informed approaches. Emma suggests that where trauma informed approaches have been implemented, these are a result of training having been provided. This is despite the general dissatisfaction expressed by practitioners concerning the quality of the training provided and its inability to equip practitioners with the confidence to work with trauma (see Chapter Five). In contrast, Beth proposes that it is less about the training provided to practitioners and more about working in a trauma informed manner because it is intuitive to practitioners:

I think that those practitioners that do it are probably 9 times out of 10 more than [likely] it's in their style of working as much as it is about their training (Beth, an SPO with 11 years' experience).

The practitioner instinctiveness that Beth alludes to reflects Robinson, Burke and Millings (2017) earlier research findings that practitioners are often motivated by a desire to make a difference to those they work with and approach their work with humanitarian values (Mawby and Worrall, 2011, Butter and Hermanns, 2011, Burrell, 2022), which lends itself to working in a trauma informed manner. While Deering

(2008) has argued that macrolevel changes have had little effect on practitioner values, Mawby and Worrall (2011) found that practitioner's attitudes had been affected and newer practitioner values were less attuned to welfarist origins and were more focussed on practical aspects such as salary, job security and status. That the organisation has a "*relatively inexperienced workforce*" with a high volume of new practitioners (HMIP, 2025, p39) who may be more likely to align to neoliberalist views may explain the low adoption rates of trauma informed methods. Furthermore, it may account for Beth's insinuation that there may be some practitioners who may find working in a trauma informed manner more challenging, or who may be resistant to this type of approach (Wilmot and Williams, 2019). This studies' research did not find any notable difference in length of employment and commitment to delivering trauma informed practice, however, as noted previously (see Chapter Four) the findings may have been influenced by participant bias that led to the decision to take part in the study.

Whilst the context of Beth's comment was offered favourably in relation to describing those practitioners who are perceived as working in a trauma informed manner, it situates the responsibility for implementing trauma informed approaches at the personal level (Thompson, 2014). Alternatively, instead of considering practitioners being driven by intuition, Harris and Fallot (2001) argue that this constitutes sharing the philosophy of trauma informed care, which is an essential part of establishing a trauma informed system (Wilmot and Williams, 2019, McAnallen and McGinnis, 2021).

Despite situating trauma informed practice with the individual, Beth goes on to describe how this can also be influenced by managers:

Different practitioners having different approaches...different managers have different approaches...rather than it being a process being driven from the top (Beth, SPO, more than 11 years' experience).

It demonstrates the level of power held by practitioners and middle managers when working with people on probation (Thompson's (2014) personal and cultural levels) which is being perpetrated and maintained by the lack of guidance at the operational level (structural). Similarly, Fay emphasises the significant divergence in whether people on probation may experience practice that is underpinned by a knowledge of trauma or not:

I think it's not just the individual practitioner, I think it's also the case load that you're holding...for example I think individual practitioners sometimes focus a lot more on enforcement and the quite stringent guidelines that we have. I also think it's your SPO well. I think it's not just the practitioner. I think it goes above that with your senior and how they view enforcement (Fay, PO, more than 11 years' experience).

Fay's example of enforcement procedures emphasises the power held at the personal level by individual practitioners and managers (Thompson, 2011) to "*take life-changing action...such as breach proceedings and threatening to recall them [people on probation] back to prison*" (Mullen, Dick and Williams, 2022, p12). The focus on enforcement reflects a determined effort at a structural level, through centralised government control (Deering, 2011, Guilfoyle, 2013) for the probation service to be recognised as an organisation responsible for public protection, risk management and enforcer of sentences (Cracknell, 2024, Tidmarsh, 2024) as a means of legitimising its purpose and demonstrating efficacy (Phillips et al, 2025). The use of performance targets, brought in by managerialist processes, to influence and control decisions such as enforcement, has reduced the ability to respond to an individual (Phillips, 2011, Mawby and Worrall, 2013). As a result, the use of enforcement procedures was identified as a particular area that practitioners struggle to align with trauma informed approaches, possibly because it is often misinterpreted as the need for practitioners to evidence extra flexibility (Criminal Justice Joint Inspection, 2024).

Practitioners considered trauma informed practice to be hindered by rigid enforcement processes and targets and the potential to consider alternatives can be a source of anxiety where there is not explicit guidance to do so. Petrillo and Bradley (2022) found that practitioners were often concerned that when Serious Further Offences (SFO) occur, individuals are held to account with limited responsibility taken for system failures by the organisation. In 2022, Jordan McSweeney sexually assaulted and murdered Zara Aleena only 9 days after he was released from prison from a custodial sentence imposed for weapon possession, criminal damage and a racially aggravated public order offence. The Independent Serious Further Offence (HMIP, 2023b) review concluded that the failure to promptly recall Mr McSweeney back to custody after he failed to attend successive appointments led to opportunities for Mr McSweeney to have been arrested sooner being missed. High profile SFOs such as Jordan McSweeney emphasise that when a policy or process is not followed precisely, irrespective of whether this was practical, due to workloads and inexperience, practitioners receive a significant proportion of blame. Becoming preoccupied with the potential for serious offences in the future is a form of organisational trauma (Jones and Willmot, 2022). In a risk adverse environment, it is increasingly difficult for practitioners to evidence responsivity. This is increasingly problematic in the absence of any formal guidance on trauma informed approaches (see Chapter Five) and particularly what this means in the context of enforcement; it is unsurprising that practitioners are unclear of the expectations. Increased knowledge and understanding of trauma informed approaches would support practitioners and managers to consider enforcement decisions in the context of trauma informed practice. The principles of trauma informed practice are upheld by clear boundaries; ensuring that people on probation understand the expectations placed on them and the consequences of not adhering to these and

that these are implemented fairly and transparently. The provision of guidance should encourage practitioners to consider whether previous experiences of trauma have influenced the behaviour leading to enforcement to determine whether alternatives to enforcement are a more appropriate way forward, for example referrals to partnership agencies rather than punitive responses such as warnings/recall to custody. Practitioners should be supported to ensure that all reasonable barriers to engagement, that may be present because of previous experiences of trauma, are removed. In addition, decisions should evidence that consideration has been given to whether the chosen type of enforcement action is likely to be re-traumatising and what actions can be taken to minimise this. To support decision making, practitioners and managers may be assisted by the introduction of an enforcement decision template that ensures the aforementioned areas are considered.

8.3 A 'tick box' culture

The literature review (see Chapter Two) provided a summary of the continuous changes inflicted upon the probation service. Some have argued that despite this, the motivation to work with people has remained a consistent reason that many practitioners join probation (Deering, 2011, Mawby and Worrall, 2013, Burrell, 2022, HMIP, 2025). These motivations are significant for the organisation to be perceived by its practitioners as having legitimacy (Robins, Burke and Millings, 2017) and their role as having a purpose. Although, others have argued that there is evidence that managerialist values have firmly embedded themselves (Deering and Feilzer, 2019). Some newer recruits to the organisation have acknowledged having little interest in the work of probation, instead joining the organisation as a means of gaining a qualification and accessing opportunities within the wider Civil Service (HMIP, 2025). This transformation in motivations for joining the organisation is reflective of the

change in perception of the probation service, as the government has strived to achieve legitimacy in the eyes of other stakeholders such as the public and the victims it serves, less so that its own practitioners. The impact on probation practice of these sometimes-conflicting audiences is encapsulated in Ethans' comment:

I think that's why a lot of people join probation, because they think they can, they've got something to give that can help people. Unfortunately, the job has become about IT skills now and processes and procedures and all the rest of it (Ethan, PO with more than 11 years' experience).

Ethan's reflections on the reasons people choose probation as an occupation was echoed in the recent HMIP thematic inspection (2025, p47) findings that practitioners are attracted to the organisation because of a "*desire to help vulnerable people, to reduce crime and prevent further victimisation, and to understand why people act in harmful ways*". Yet, Ethan's remark also alludes to the disenfranchisement between what practitioners think and hope the role entails, compared to the reality of the job. Similarly, HMIP (2025) described such personal motivations as idealistic, presumably because of their alignment to the organisation's original values of 'advise, assist and befriend' which successive Governments have repeatedly attempted to replace with a focus on public protection and risk management (Deering and Feilzer, 2019). This exemplifies the importance of not just recognising individual thoughts, feelings and values at the personal level, but how these are influenced by the cultural and structural environment within which an individual practices (Thompson, 2014) (see Chapter Three).

Ethan's reflections, and HMIP's (2025) recent findings, provide optimism that at a personal level many practitioners may already align to the philosophy underpinning trauma informed practice (Harris and Fallot, 2001, Wilmot and Williams, 2019, McAnallen and McGinnis, 2021). Albeit they may not recognise or associate these

values as associated with trauma informed practice, a likely consequence of inadequate training and awareness (see Chapter Five).

However, Ethan notes that despite personal intentions, the role of probation practitioners and subsequently the ability to achieve individual aspirations is dictated at a structural level. At an organisational level it has become about meeting bureaucratic processes and procedures (Deering and Feilzer, 2019) designed to gain legitimacy with the wider public, through defending probation's purpose. Similarly, HMIP (2025, p46) attributed the high attrition rate of practitioners to their desire to *"make a meaningful difference"* being overshadowed by the *"focus on achieving performance targets [rather] than on providing practical help"*, exemplifying the consequences of the managerialist agenda on the organisation. Trauma informed practice can only be realised if, at a cultural and structural level there is a shared commitment to embed such approaches into probation practice. This requires the organisation's leadership to take responsibility in driving forward the implementation and growth of trauma informed probation practice (Petrillo and Bradley, 2022). There is little evidence of this currently and such cultural incompetence has led to practice that is exclusionary and unequal (Foldy and Buckley, 2017). At a structural level, it requires at the very least acknowledgement of the existence of structural inequalities and at best a determined desire to address these.

From a practitioner perspective, at a cultural level, the data gathered indicated that participants largely considered the organisations attempts to implement trauma informed practice within probation to have amounted to little more than 'ticking the box'. The inference is that appearing to operate in a trauma informed manner satisfies the demands of academics, women's advocates and the international trauma informed care movement rather than genuinely acknowledging and embracing the benefits of

trauma informed approaches. Similarly, in the wake of neoliberalism precedence (Deering and Feilzer, 2019) probation practice generally has faced criticism for becoming synonymous with a ‘tick box’ culture (Fitzgibbon, 2009, MOJ, 2011, Clinks, 2018, Tidmarsh, 2022). It is interesting that practitioners within this study chose to reflect this same language, using variations of the notion ‘*tick box*’ to describe how they perceived trauma informed methods to have been implemented into practice so far, as the following three participants highlighted:

We are just tick boxing (Beth, SPO, more 11 years’ experience).

Sometimes it feels a bit like a tick box exercise... “I have to ask these questions, ok, I’ve done that” (Rachel, TPO, less than 2 years’ experience).

Just get things done...just get kind of [get] the box ticked sadly (Kaitlyn, TPO, less than 2 years’ experience)

The repeated reference to a ‘tick box’ culture within the literature is indicative of an entrenched cultural problem around prioritising the service’s own agenda to the detriment of people on probation, victims and practitioners. These participant’s comments reinforce the sense of detachment from practice that Ethan referred to earlier in the chapter. This can be attributable to systems focused more on administrative processes rather than individuals (Fitzgibbon, 2009) and a consequence of regulating and managing the expression of emotions when working with people (Hochschild, 1983). This level of alienation has mostly been associated with experienced practitioners like Beth (Fitzgibbon, 2009) but it is evident from Rachel and Kaitlyn’s comments that such perspectives are also shared by less experienced staff. These participant’s responses were in relation to being asked how they considered trauma informed practice to have been promoted both within their local teams and the wider organisation. These responses appear an attempt by practitioners to convey the lack of commitment by the organisation to effectively implement trauma informed practice. However, there is also the insinuation by Rachel

and Kaitlyn that practitioners directly supervising people on probation are themselves complicit in the action of '*ticking the box*' to meet the organisation's expectations, rather than authentically adopting the principles of trauma informed practice. The context within which these comments arose indicated that this complicity was not necessarily the practitioners' intention and appears representative more of attitudes at a cultural rather than a personal level. The tendency to go along with this unfailingly, because culturally it is normalised to just 'tick the box', reinforces oppressive and discriminatory practice (Thompson, 2014). The apparent ability of the organisation to fail to embrace trauma informed practice, despite its principles seemingly aligning with many practitioners' personal value bases, is likely an example of what Petrillo and Bradley (2022, p27) termed a culture of "*fear, shame and blame*". Such an environment is unlikely to encourage practitioners to express where they feel practice may be oppressive and discriminatory and is in direct opposition to the principles of trauma informed practice. This is not a new problem facing the probation service. Mawby and Worrall (2013, p112) found "*the absence of 'voice' at every level within the organization was one of the most frequent complaints*" raised by practitioners. Preventing or discouraging practitioners from speaking out enables the existing power dynamics to be retained by those in leadership positions. Whilst feedback is gathered, for example, through annual staff surveys and external research, the persistence of the problem indicates that this has not been acted on by those in senior positions. The organisation would benefit from reviewing its internal processes for data analysis of practitioner perspectives and the interpretation of this into action to address issues that are raised by its employees.

Crucially, the concept of '*ticking the box*' is concerned with perception; it is about being *seen* as working in a particular way, as Worrall and Mawby (2013, p119) note "*it no*

longer matters what you do, provided the appearance of how you do it meets organizational requirement". Similarly, Phillips (2023, p130) analysis of inspections of probation practice found that preparatory work ahead of inspections involved *"checking that the right boxes, had, literally, been ticked"* which constructs a misleading perspective. The organisation's manipulation of perceptions to maintain legitimacy is reflected in the cultural and structural inauthenticity towards trauma informed practice as Tina explained:

It feels very 'tick boxy' in that we now say we work with a trauma informed approach, but nothing has actually changed. I still continue to view my clients holistically, with an awareness of the impact their experiences have, but there has been no particular change to my practice to reflect this 'approach' (Tina, PO, more than 11 years' experience).

Tina's remark about probation, *saying* practice is trauma informed may be influenced by a desire to be seen to have responded to growing calls for the public sector to deliver trauma informed services (Wilton and Williams, 2019), whilst also trying to balance being seen as 'tough on crime' to satisfy wider societal expectations (Raynor, 2018, Canton and Dominey, 2018). Similarly, Emma also emphasises the perception of the organisation as a driving factor that denotes a level of superficiality to trauma informed practice:

We tick a box but don't reflect on how that impacts people... [we are] being seen to tick in the box in terms of what we're supposed to do, but not giving it wider consideration (Emma, Senior Leader, more than 11 years' experience).

Part of establishing a trauma informed environment involves the identification of prior experiences of trauma, so in essence, Emma's reference to asking about early childhood experiences 'ticks the box'. But the intention behind basic screening for trauma histories is that thought is given to how these experiences have impacted an individual (Harris and Fallot, 2001), which Emma highlights is missing from current

probation practice. Harris and Fallot (2001) suggest that taking the time to ask someone about their experience of trauma can help create an environment whereby people feel cared for, but this is undermined when trauma informed practice is implemented as a ‘*tick box*’ exercise. Mullen, Dick and Williams’ (2022, p17) inquiry into lived experiences of probation described a “*significant number of people feeling like their relationships with probation were like a tick-box*” which is an immediate barrier to principles of trauma informed practice, such as emotional safety, collaboration and respect. The organisation would benefit from understanding how current practice can result in people on probation feeling as though practitioners: do not have time for them, are unaware of what it is important to them, have not understood what has led to their involvement in crime and are uninformed on the support they require moving forward (Mullen, Dick and Williams, 2022). Reviewing current approaches to working with people on probation through a trauma informed lens would support increasing levels of engagement through the creation of a trauma informed environment which upholds the principles of trauma informed care.

The description offered by Emma is reminiscent of display rules (Hochschild, 1983). Gathering information, particularly that which is sensitive in nature such as prior experiences of trauma (Lewis, Lewis and Garby, 2013), may require the suppression of emotions experienced by the practitioner (Westaby, Fowler and Phillips, 2019) and this is increasingly necessary in roles such as probation which hold authority and power, as neutrality strengthens the status and power held by the practitioner (Smith and Kleinman, 1989 as cited by Westaby, Fowler and Phillips, 2019). But Emma’s suggestion that once a person’s trauma history has been obtained, little further consideration is given to it which creates a sense of disingenuity regarding the intention for gathering such information. Consequences could be retraumatising

individuals and risking undermining professional integrity (Worral and Mawby, 2013).

Despite this there were some signs of attempts to resist the '*tick box*' culture as Jenny highlights:

Nothing fits one person, you know. They're not boxes. You can't fit people into boxes. You've got to sort of go with the way that person is feeling at the time, and if we want to talk about that time, well, that's absolutely fine. If they don't, then that's fine too. You know, you can't force somebody to open up to you when they're not feeling as though they can (Jenny, PSO with more than 11 years' experience).

This comment demonstrates Jenny's understanding of the principles of trauma informed practice. She is not demanding to be told the details of trauma experiences (Tseris, 2018) but is instead focused on nurturing a safe environment in which the person on probation is given choice and autonomy, which contributes towards the development of trust between practitioner and the person on probation. Jenny implies some resistance towards stringent, process focussed practices (Deering and Feilzer, 2019), while encapsulating Harris and Falloot's (2001) notion of 'trauma champions' (see Chapter Three, section 3.4). Moving forward, the organisation would benefit from considering implementing the 'trauma champion' role as part of a commitment to supporting the embedding of trauma informed approaches. Trauma champions need to be those who are committed and passionate to trauma informed practice and should be represented at all levels of the organisation. The process of identifying suitable trauma champions should be authentic and not conducted as a further '*tick box*' exercise, where the focus is on meeting the aim of having a trauma champion to the detriment of ensuring that the right people are chosen for the role. To embed trauma informed practice meaningfully, where possible, trauma informed champions should be identified for every office. They should be practitioners that have volunteered for the role, and whose own conduct and practice is reflective of the principles of trauma informed practice. Trauma champions should be supported to attend advanced

trauma informed training, regular trauma champion meetings should take place, and the sharing of good practice should be encouraged with a particular focus on the practicalities of 'how to' nurture and promote trauma informed approaches in practice on a personal, cultural and structural level.

8.4 Trauma and partnership agencies

Operating within the wider CJS involves probation working alongside a range of agencies, all of whom are pursuing their own agendas (Silvester, 2022). The difficulty this poses for practitioners is explained by Madison:

The only thing that we probably can't kind of control, but I do think is something that we struggle with as probation [practitioners] is that we can't be certain that everybody that is working with our case, our individual, has taken a trauma informed approach. So, I think when somebody is arrested, obviously we can't control that, but then they're taken to court, and they're either remanded, or they're seen for their [court] appearance and we can't control that...but I don't think necessarily its trauma informed from the experiences that I've heard about...we're expected to complete referrals to other agencies, and I've never met these agencies or these people that are then completing the work so I don't know first-hand if they are trauma informed and I'm then sending this person to complete work that I've specified that they need to do with somebody that I'm not confident would do it in the way that I would suggest that they do (Madison, PSO, between 6 and 10 years' experience).

Encouragingly, Madison's comment demonstrates a good awareness of trauma informed systems, recognising that effective trauma informed practice exists when everyone working with an individual is trauma informed (Harris and Fallot, 2001, Wilton and Williams, 2019). As Madison highlights, there is a lack of *control* at the personal level to influence trauma informed practices being adopted by external agencies, but there is the potential at a cultural and structural level (Thompson, 2011) to ensure that as an organisation the probation service seeks to work alongside others that uphold its commitment to trauma informed services.

As highlighted previously (see Chapter Five), practitioners feel ill-equipped to deal with people on probation's trauma, but the findings also suggest that there is an absence

of available interventions and support to refer people to. This is explained by Fay, a PO with over 11 years' experience who noted, "*we don't have the resources to even refer individuals for additional support*". This is likely to only exacerbate practitioners' sense of fear around how to work with trauma because it places pressure on them to find the answers and emphasises the lack of support and guidance, they can seek. Liebenberg, Ungar and Ikeda (2015) explain that the approach of issuing instructions, in this instance either to people on probation, or practitioners, of the actions they should seek to address their issues, irrespective of their relevance or feasibility is in part driven by neoliberalist cost efficiency focus and responsibilisation, whereby the State reduces its accountability by transferring this to individuals.

It was apparent from the data that for the most part practitioners conceptualise trauma as a mental health issue that should be referred to health services to be addressed, as illustrated by the following two comments:

I think if someone was to open up to me about experiences of trauma, then obviously there's the GP route etc (Imogen, PO with between 3-5 years' experience).

I know you can do referrals to the mind charity, and they can have access to like talking therapy. And I guess maybe the GP, but I mean the waiting list for mental health and things at the moment is [extensive] (Rachel, PQiP, less than 2 years' experience).

Earlier findings (see Chapter Five) highlighted that the lack of training and guidance provided to practitioners has resulted in confusion over how to work with trauma and this has often been confused with misconceptions around responding to trauma and treating it (Harris and Fallot, 2001). There is the potential that referrals for treatment may not be necessary and that a trauma informed practitioner may be better placed to make informed decisions around when referral for trauma treatment is needed.

The organisation should also consider its approach to introducing trauma specific resources as they become available. Care must be taken to ensure that these are not

delivered as a 'tick box' exercise, for example, instructing practitioners to discuss interventions with individuals based on their age, gender and ethnicity. Whilst interventions must be gender responsive and consider factors such as intergenerational trauma, systemic discrimination and overrepresentation of marginalised communities, these should not be at the exclusion of others. This not only reinforces practitioner powerlessness (see Chapter Three) as there is no autonomy to identify those individuals on probation that they feel most require this support but alludes to the potential for cultural and structural discrimination through excluding people on probation based on factors such as age, gender and ethnicity. In addition, it conveys to people on probation and practitioners that some experiences of trauma are not as important, which can further alienate and retraumatise and is in direct opposition to upholding the principles of trauma informed practice. People on probation who have experienced trauma should be given the autonomy to decide whether they want support. The decision to offer this to specific groups to meet other organisational priorities reinforces the power held at cultural and structural levels (Thompson, 2014) and that the effects of neoliberalism, where resources and targets are more important than people, remain dominant in current practice.

8.5 Working with practitioners working with trauma

In her influential work '*emotional labour*', Hochschild (1983) warned of the consequences for practitioners of suppressing and hiding emotions and the potential for this to result in an inability to connect to and feel emotions. This can lead to the disenfranchisement and detachment mentioned earlier in this chapter. According to Dudau and Brunetto (2022) the discrepancy between how practitioners feel and what they may be able to display can lead to poor well-being and increased levels of stress that result in practitioner burnout. Whilst focussed solely on women practitioner's

supervising women on probation, Shepherd's (2022, p26) recent study reinforced these concerns, concluding that "[women] *practitioners are suffering...support is limited, inconsistent, and not always trauma-informed*". Shepherd's findings are particularly alarming given that working with women is considered a priority and has an organisational structure of accountability (Petrillo and Bradley, 2022) and suggests that the outlook for those practitioners (male and female) working with men on probation is likely to be even bleaker.

Whilst concerned with trauma informed care in secure psychiatric hospitals, McGuire, Carlisle and Clark (2022, p350) surmise that staff attempting to develop trauma informed relationships with their clients "*whilst navigating systemic philosophies that counter this will have insidious and damaging consequences to all involved*". The adverse emotional impact that professionals experience from their working environment is traditionally conceptualised as 'compassion fatigue' and 'burnout' (Oliverira et al. 2016) and is often portrayed as something of an occupational hazard (Bride, 2007, Rhineberger-Dunn, Mack and Baker, 2016). This not only has a reductive effect in terms of the seriousness, but it also implies that the responsibility for succumbing to the negative outcomes that arise from the practitioner's role is situated at the personal level (Thompson, 2014). It is a further example of the impact of neo-liberal systems responsibilisation of practitioners which expect individuals to "*manage their own risks and demonstrate self-care*" (Liebenberg, Ungar and Ikeda, 2015, p1008). This both removes the responsibility from the organisation, but it also potentially creates a culture that prevents practitioners from seeking support when required due to internalising the difficulties they are experiencing. But when burnout is understood as the culmination of toxic cultural and structural workplace dynamics (Lambert et al, 2011) it places the responsibility back on the organisation (Simmons,

Cochran and Blout, 1997). This is reinforced by Fay's comments highlighting exposure to traumatic information and lack of support in relation to this from the organisation at a structural level:

As practitioners, we are exposed to really quite horrific accounts from individuals of things that they've experienced or things that they've done. We get our monthly supervision with our SPO... but we're not offered anything other than, you know, a telephone number to ring someone who you've never spoken to, to talk about difficulties that you might be experiencing. I think that's one of the biggest issues within the service (Fay, PO with over 11 years of experience).

Practitioners' exposure to information that can cause trauma, particularly when this is a repetitive experience, is not a new situation. Lewis, Lewis and Garby's (2013) study, aptly named 'surviving the trenches' gathered data from Probation Officers based in three American states: Arizona, California and Texas. They found that exposure to violent and sexual recidivism, suicide and threatening behaviour and assaults experienced in the context of their role as practitioners led to significantly higher rates of traumatic stress and burnout. The recognition of exposure to information that may create emotions within the practitioner, reinforces the necessity to at times suppress these and adhere to display rules (Westaby, Fowler and Phillips, 2019), where some emotions are considered appropriate to express, such as compassion and empathy (Lewis, Lewis and Garby, 2013) and other less so, such as distress or disgust.

A further problem identified by Fay is that there is an overreliance, organisationally, for SPOs to provide support to practitioners who may experience vicarious trauma. This is particularly problematic when considered against HMIP (2025) findings that practitioners perceived their managers to be more concerned with following processes and meeting performance targets and findings discussed in Chapters Five that managers have also not received adequate training. This emphasises that managerialism has not only focussed attention away from people on probation, but

also away from staff, resulting in the perception that the organisation does not care about practitioner well-being (HMIP, 2025). While the sole responsibility for practitioner well-being should not rest with SPOs, Phillips (2023) proposes that creating time to sit with practitioners and engage in reflective discussions focussed on development can increase resilience.

Fay discusses how it can be difficult to seek support from colleagues:

I don't feel comfortable talking to a colleague about my own experiences. I think that's something really, really private and I don't think you can be very open and honest about the problems that you're having with a particular case or your own emotional well-being with someone who is a co-worker who you don't very often work with, and other individuals like your peers and your colleagues over a Teams call...everything's Teams now. And that itself is difficult. When I first started in the service, you could access 6 sessions of counselling face to face with a counsellor local to where you resided and that didn't even have to be with regards to stress at work. It could be anything. It could even be a relationship breakdown which you could access and that's now gone (Fay, PO with more than 11 years of experience).

This observation highlights the move to, and normalisation of, more remote versions of working in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic and is a reminder that this form of communication and support may not be everyone's preference. Future support frameworks should consider giving practitioners the options to access support both remotely, and in-person, and ensure that it is a confidential service, to actively reduce potential barriers and promote support being accessed by practitioners when needed.

Fay's comments are a stark account of the extent to which practitioners feel unsupported with their emotional well-being. It is also pertinent to note that experienced members of staff may even perceive that the support has been withdrawn or declined which potentially reinforces the message that their well-being is not an organisational priority. Practitioners appear to have little optimism that this is likely to change any time soon as Toby, a PSO with less than 2 years' experience highlights *"there's no long-term work being done to support staff"*. Practitioners consider at the structural level of the organisation, there *should* be support offered to practitioners but

there is a lack of trust that practitioner well-being is a priority. Natasha, a PQiP with less than 2 years' experience suggests that lack of time and prioritising well-being may act as a barrier to accessing support because *"everyone is so busy they probably think, well, I don't have time for that"*. This implies that lack of self-care may be a feature of the organisational culture which may also be preventing trauma from being recognised, further reinforced by HMIP (2025, p48) that many practitioners *"described working long hours, and not being able to 'switch off'"* a result of excessive workloads. Managing high workloads, intensities and regular crises and feeling powerless to change systemic issues have been identified as a cause of emotional challenges for those in 'people professions' alongside witnessing trauma (Pemberton, Holdsworth and Mackenzie, 2024). The emotional demands of roles like probation practitioners were identified by Pemberton, Holdsworth and Mackenzie's (2024, p25) research with caseworkers in women's centres. They identified issues such as:

"Difficulty switching off after work, sleep disturbances, forgetfulness or difficulty concentrating, making mistakes, feeling rundown or exhausted, and turning 'robotic' or desensitised...feelings of self-doubt and distress"

These were suggested as contributing to difficulties with practitioner retention, as reflected in the probation service (HMIP, 2025). Whilst there is some evidence of reducing caseloads becoming a focus for the organisation and Government (as seen in recent initiatives such as Probation Reset) this appears to be in place of concern for the welfare of practitioners or the wider context within which are working (Liebenberg, Ungar and Ikeda, 2015). This further exemplifies the cultural dissonance that Whitehead (2007) explains is prevalent when an organisation is focussed on bureaucracy and targets rather than people.

A fundamental part of delivering a trauma informed service is the inclusion of a framework that meets the needs of practitioners that arise from working with those

with trauma histories are recognised and responded to effectively (Silvester, 2022). This includes considering how personal experiences of trauma may influence attitudes towards trauma informed practice, as Natasha and Toby suggest:

I would say that it [trauma informed practice] is important. I would also say as a side note, that anyone that goes into this job, most people have suffered trauma themselves and that kind of links to the kind of person that wants to help others (Natasha, PQiP with less than 2 years' experience).

People get into the work that we do, potentially sometimes because they've experienced trauma in their own lives or have lived a life that's enabled them to be able to have an empathy with maybe what others are going through...I think a lot of us, because of the reason why we get into the role, we end up drawing from [our] own experiences, trying to adapt that to support others (Toby, PSO with less than 2 years' of experience).

Whilst it is acknowledged that some probation practitioners have prior experiences of trauma (Burrell, 2022, Sheppherd, 2022), Natasha's inference that is applicable to '*most*' is indicative of assumptions and stereotypes prevalent at the personal level (Thompson, 2014). There are undeniable advantages to be gained from being able to draw from lived experiences (Mullen, Dick and Williams, 2022), but there is also the potential for this to contribute to prejudice, as noted in Chapter Six, and the need to increasingly perform emotional labour (Phillips, Westaby and Fowler, 2020).

An unanticipated participant response was from Sasha who disclosed that the training she attended was relevant to her own experiences of trauma:

It has also helped me identify and overcome my own traumas I have carried and kept inside for many years of my own. (Sasha, PQiP, less than 2 years' experience).

While Sasha is positive about her experience of attending training as a practitioner with a trauma history, this may not always be the outcome, and it is a reminder that future training should ensure it is sensitive to practitioners with trauma histories. Research has also shown that practitioners with previous trauma histories may be at

an increased risk of vicarious trauma (Ellis-Devitt, 2020b) which reinforces to the organisation that it is essential practitioners have access to appropriate support. The organisation is urged to review staff well-being policies to ensure that it focuses on the provision of confidential support and that practitioners have the time and space to engage meaningfully with this support. Additionally, opportunities for effective training and development have also been identified as a mechanism for increasing practitioner confidence and resilience (Pemberton, Holdsworth and Mackenzie, 2024).

8.6 Concluding Remarks

This chapter has presented and analysed the data findings concerning the application of trauma informed approaches within probation practice. It has highlighted the disparity with which trauma informed practice has been adopted for a variety of reasons; personal values and the extent to which it feels natural for practitioners to work in a trauma informed manner, the effectiveness of training provided, the changing nature of practitioner values and the extent to which some aspects of the practitioner role, such as enforcement, can be balanced alongside trauma informed practice. The notion of 'ticking the box' was examined to emphasise the extent to which neoliberalist ideologies have prioritised efficiency over people which has translated into attempts to adopt trauma informed probation practice being perceived as inauthentic. For practitioners there was evidence of dissonance and alienation because the role of a probation practitioner is not aligning with the values that first motivated them to join the organisation, which can be attributed to bureaucratic processes. Exploration of partnership working within the context of trauma informed practice highlighted significant gaps in resource availability for people on probation and practitioners. Lastly, the chapter considered the impact on probation practitioners working with

trauma and the lived experiences of trauma that practitioners may bring to the role, stressing that responsibility for practitioner well-being rests with the organisation

In summary, the recommendations identified throughout this chapter were for the organisation to:

- Develop specific guidance for implementing trauma informed approaches
- Introduce a quality assurance framework for trauma informed practice
- Undertake evaluative research to assess effectiveness and implementation of trauma informed practice
- Ensure enforcement decisions are considered through a trauma informed lens
- Develop clear local, regional and national accountability
- Review internal data analysis processes
- Consider how trauma informed practice can be utilised as an opportunity for maximising engagement
- Introduce 'trauma champions' to support the implementation of trauma informed approaches
- Ensuring people on probation are given autonomy regarding their engagement with trauma related support and services
- Practitioners should be provided with access to both remote and in-person support that is confidential

Chapter 9

Conclusion

9.1 Introduction

The increasing acknowledgement of a connection between experiences of trauma and people on probation (Ford et al, 2019, Dermody et al, 2018, Bride 2007, Petrillo and Bradley, 2022) has been accompanied by mounting calls for public services, such as probation, to become trauma responsive (Bear, Durcan and Southgate, 2019, Wilton and Williams, 2019). It was unclear from the existing literature however, whether the probation service had begun to react to these demands and if it had already started to implement trauma informed practice. Therefore, this study aimed to identify to what extent (if any) existing probation practice is underpinned by trauma and trauma informed approaches.

This chapter commences with my reflections on undertaking this research project, including the strengths and weaknesses of the final product before considering what could be done differently if the study were to be repeated and future areas for research. This is followed by some suggestions for future research. The chapter then provides a summary of Chapters Five to Eight to draw out the main themes and to highlight how each chapter has contributed to answering the research question. The original contribution that this study makes to the literature on trauma informed probation practice is highlighted throughout the chapter summarisations. This thesis arose from the desire to meaningfully influence probation practice and therefore the chapter concludes with a series of recommendations for developing future trauma informed probation practice.

9.2 Reflections on the research process

Probation practitioners with experience of sentence management practices were invited to take part in either an anonymous online survey or a semi-structured interview to provide their views on how trauma informed approaches have been implemented in probation practice to date. Fourteen participants took part in an interview and thirty—three participants completed the survey. The fieldwork for the data collection was undertaken with practitioners based in the East of England region of the Probation Service which covers eight geographic areas. Interview participants were based in Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire, Essex and Suffolk. Participants from these areas also took part in the online survey, with the addition of participants from Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire. This left practitioners from Norfolk unrepresented within the study. However, given the similarity in findings across the sites that did take part, I deemed that a useful amount of data was produced to address the overarching research question, which was to understand the extent that existing probation practice is underpinned by trauma and trauma informed approaches.

There were several significant challenges encountered along the way (as described in further detail in Chapter Four) which included the Covid-19 Pandemic in 2020, followed by the reunification of probation services in 2021, delays in gaining approval for the project by the University's Ethics Committee and the researcher applying for two extensions for bereavement and maternity leave. Once the project was ready to be advertised to participants, it was done so during the festive period of 2021, where there were higher than normal periods of annual leave and whilst practitioners were still feeling the significant effects of having reunified into a single probation service. For many practitioners this meant significant changes in working practices, caseloads and even physical working locations. The project was advertised to participants by a

weekly newsletter, during a period where participants were still trying to grasp new information technology and communication systems. It is presumed that these factors are likely to have contributed to the painfully slow response rates to the project. Alternative methods of advertising the project to practitioners were undertaken, along with an extension approved for the data collection period. As a result of these difficulties, the initial design to carry out an exploratory sequential mixed method approach was replaced with a convergent parallel method. Despite this, the findings from both data sets did not indicate any significant disparities to suggest that not being able to employ the initial research design impeded the overall findings of the project. To ensure that the research findings can be determined as credible and trustworthy (Lincoln and Guba, 1986, Shenton, 2004), the following factors were considered:

- **Adoption of well-established research methods.** The study was designed as a mixed method approach as the most frequently utilised method of data collection in contemporary criminology (Chamberlain, 2013). Albeit the final product did not present the numerical data gathered from quantitative surveys in line with recommendations from the late-stage reviewers who were concerned with the small sample size that may not be representative of the larger practitioner population.
- **Early familiarity with the culture of the participating organisation.** My role as an 'insider researcher' was advantageous in the sense that I was familiar with the setting that the research was being undertaken, I was mindful of some of the pressures and difficulties facing practitioners which were used to inform the research design and allowed access to alternative advertising methods. However, it also meant that several survey participants were known to me, thereby reducing the anonymity often considered advantageous when

undertaking research. Prior knowledge of myself as a probation practitioner may have influenced some of the answers provided by participants.

- **Random sampling.** Non-probability sampling was necessary to ensure that participants had knowledge of sentence management practices within probation. It is possible that this resulted in practitioners with an interest in trauma informed practice taking part in the study, which may account for most participants seeing the value in understanding trauma and trauma informed approaches. This means that potentially those practitioners with alternative perspectives may not have been captured within the data findings. There was also an absence of those in senior leadership positions taking part in the study, except for one participant, which meant it was not possible to capture attitudes towards trauma and trauma informed practice in any depth at a strategic level. Other than to presume that a reluctance to take part is perhaps reflective of the level of prioritisation given towards trauma informed practice at a structural level within the organisation.
- **Triangulation.** Site triangulation was conducted by gathering data from across different locations within the East of England, delivering similar findings across the site locations. Similarly, triangulation was achieved through using both semi-structured interviews and surveys, again producing similar results.
- **Methods to ensure participant honesty.** Taking part in the study was voluntary and all participants had the option to not take part, or to withdraw from the study at specific stages. An overview of the study was included within the project advertisement. Interview participants were supplied with a participant information sheet and consent form (see Appendix D and E). Survey participants were asked at the beginning of the survey to provide their consent

(see Appendix B). In total, twelve survey participants chose not to complete the survey part-way through. There were no instances of withdrawal by interview participants, but all were sent transcripts of their interview and given a further opportunity to withdraw before their data was included within the project findings.

- **Iterative questioning.** Semi-structured interviews were designed to allow for the opportunity to probe and elicit further information from participants. Attention has been given to highlighting within the project analysis areas where possible discrepancies were identified with potential explanations offered.
- **Frequent debriefing sessions.** Throughout the project, regular sessions with a supervisor were undertaken, providing the opportunity to explore alternative perspectives and to review researcher bias and prejudice (Shenton, 2004).
- **Peer scrutiny.** The survey was piloted with a probation service colleague and feedback sought from both the pilot respondent and from the project supervisor. Important contributions were made through this process, such as the rephrasing of initial questions that could be leading. The project has also been subjected to ethics approval and both early and late state reviews by academics from the university.
- **Reflective Commentary.** This has been captured specifically within the methodology (Chapter Four) and within the data findings chapters (Five to Eight) outlining the projects themes.
- **Background, qualifications and experiences of the researcher.** The duality of the researcher's role and experience as a probation practitioner and the potential influence of this is captured and considered through the term '*insider researcher*' and the advantages and disadvantages to this considered.

- **Member checks.** This was achieved through surveys by allowing participants the opportunity to review their answers prior to submission. For interview participants, each were sent transcripts of their interviews and provided with a 14-day period to review and check that the transcript was an accurate representation of the answers they provided.
- **Examination of previous research findings.** Throughout the project, research undertaken within similar settings such as prisons or within probation services themselves has been included. The most recent comparable research undertaken by Petrillo and Bradley in 2022 has been used to structure the first of the data chapters to highlight similarities and differences between their study and this projects findings.
- **Transferability.** Undertaking the research across different site locations was indicative of the transferability of the data findings as there was a similarity across the locations. There was also evidence from existing research of support for several themes identified across the data findings. Additionally, practitioner led research, such as this project, can be considered transferable because practitioners may be more easily to identify similarities with their own situations (Noaks and Wincup, 2004, Shaw and Gould, 2001a, Shenton, 2004).
- **Dependability.** The processes undertaken to conduct this research have been outlined in detail (see Chapter Four) to ensure that the study could be repeated in future. This also allows for transparency of the research practices followed.
- **Confirmability.** The rationale has been provided for the research design and methods adopted, including explanations for when these have been deviated from and the suggestions and feedback provided to the researcher during the project. The research's underpinning interpretivist epistemology is

acknowledged, along with the researchers' 'insider' status and reflections of the influence have been provided to increase the objectivity of the project findings.

9.3 Future Research

Based on the limitations highlighted throughout this thesis with the data findings, the following suggestions are made for areas of future research that would seek to expand on furthering understanding and knowledge of trauma informed probation practice:

- This thesis focuses solely on practitioners' views of trauma informed probation practice, and future research would benefit from exploring the perspectives from people on probation regarding the extent to which they consider practice to be trauma informed.
- This thesis has identified significant disparities in the application of trauma informed approaches between men and women. Whilst there is a growing body of literature concerning the use of trauma informed approaches with women on probation, little is known about men on probation's experiences of trauma informed approaches and this is an area that would benefit substantially from further research.
- The data findings from this project identified that legacy CRC practitioners were most confident in their understanding of trauma and trauma informed methods. It may be beneficial to revisit the extent of knowledge held by practitioners in future to consider the impact, if any, that reunification may have had on trauma training.
- The data findings identified that practitioners felt increasingly responsibilised for their own learning and development. Whilst this was considered specifically in relation to the themes of trauma and trauma informed training, there may be merit in conducting wider research regarding practitioner responsibilisation for

learning and development. There were some early indicators that this may be different for experienced practitioners compared to newer recruits which future research may benefit from exploring to ascertain whether there is evidence of a cultural shift towards learning.

- This study identified that there may be discrepancies in the willingness to adopt trauma informed methods, or indeed, new initiatives more generally, based on the number of years' experience held by practitioners. Whilst Ezell et al. (2018) found that adoption of trauma informed approaches may be generationally influenced. Given the connection made between trauma informed practice and probation values and the subsequent influence of neoliberalism on practitioner motivations, future research may consider whether these factors are influential in adopting trauma informed practice.

9.4 Chapter Five - Knowing, Being and Doing

This was the first of the data chapters to present the study's findings. This chapter provided an original contribution to developing the knowledge base surrounding how knowledge of trauma has been translated into practice through applying Petrillo and Bradley's (2022) *Stages of the Trauma Journey* to critically examine the extent to which existing probation practice can be considered to be trauma informed. The first stage examined was that of 'knowing' (trauma awareness) which considered the extent to which practitioners can evidence an awareness and understanding of trauma. Encouragingly, most practitioners felt that they understand what is meant by the term trauma, although there is a lack of confidence in their knowledge surrounding the topic. There was strong evidence that whilst around two thirds of practitioners reported having received trauma training, many were frustrated and disappointed with the quality of training provided. There were clear indicators that practitioners felt that

they have been responsibilised for educating themselves, either through completing their own learning or drawing on knowledge gained from elsewhere, such as previous job roles or their own experiences of trauma. This appears to be a further consequence of neoliberalist influences that encourages individual, rather than collective responsibility (Phillips et al. 2022). Examining evidence of the second stage of 'doing' (trauma-informed) showed that most practitioners hold a basic understanding of what constitutes trauma informed practice. Practitioners demonstrated frustration and uncertainty around the organisation's expectations in relation to trauma informed service delivery. The stage of being (trauma responsive) emphasised that as a result of the lack of training and guidance, some practitioners have become fearful that they may cause people on probation more harm through their lack of knowledge and skills surrounding trauma

9.5 Chapter Six – Balancing trauma and accountability

This chapter provided an original contribution by presenting the study's findings of the factors that influence probation practitioner attitudes towards trauma and trauma informed practice. The findings highlighted that a significant contributing factor to practitioner attitudes was the difficulties encountered when trying to navigate the victim-offender dichotomy and the considerable '*emotional labour*' (Hochschild, 1983) required for practitioners constantly trying to navigate and balance conflict. Other prominent themes identified as contributing factors to the implementation of trauma informed practice were practitioners' attitudes around trauma being used to blame, minimise or deny harmful behaviour, levels of risk, attitudes towards offending types and attitudes surrounding the types of traumas experienced. These factors highlighted the potential for prejudice and bias to influence practitioners' application of trauma informed methods and reinforces this thesis's proposal that trauma informed practice

should be conceptualised as an extension of anti-oppressive practice. Adopting this perspective would encourage trauma informed practice to acknowledge the complex nexus between power, inequality, oppression and experiences of trauma and to gather support at all levels of the organisation for trauma informed practice to be effectively implemented within the organisation.

9.6 Chapter Seven – Gender Responsive or Gender Bias?

This chapter provided an original contribution to the literature sounding trauma informed probation practice, because it is the first piece of research specifically concerned with understanding the impact that the focus on women's trauma has had on men with trauma histories who are subject to probation supervision. The role of gender stereotypes and how these have been applied to understanding of trauma highlighted that men's needs have been overshadowed. The chapter argued that there is increasing evidence that whilst gender can influence the type of trauma experienced and the way in which symptoms manifest themselves, men and women are both affected by prior trauma experiences (Søegaard et al, 2021). The chapter provided evidence that attempts are being made to work in a trauma informed manner with women, although there were indicators that this has been somewhat simplistically applied and has been done so with a '*one size fits all*' approach to working with women. The chapter concludes that the focus on women has genderised trauma in probation practice and resulted in gender biased practices that fails to meet men's needs. It further argues that to be considered a truly trauma informed organisation, and one that it committed to delivering anti-oppressive practice (Thompson, 2014), there must be evidence of gender responsiveness.

9.7 Chapter Eight – Ticking the Box

This was the final data chapter to present the study's findings. This chapter provided an original contribution to knowledge of how trauma informed approaches have been translated into practice through considering the personal values held by practitioners and the influence of neoliberalism. The chapter emphasised the variation in trauma informed approaches being adopted, termed the 'practitioner lottery'. At a cultural level it was exemplified that the existence of a cultural dissonance within probation, where the focus has been on bureaucracy and targets, rather than people on probation (Whitehead, 2007), has resulted in attempts thus far to deliver trauma informed practice have amounted to little more than a 'tick box' exercise. Practitioners identified that in some instances external agencies do not always appear to have adopted trauma informed practice themselves, resulting in an inconsistency of practice being delivered, and that there is an absence of available support to refer people to if required. Lastly, the chapter considered the adverse impact of working with trauma on practitioners and highlighted the absence of an appropriate support framework and that there appears to have been a process of responsibilising practitioners for their own self-care in relation to working with trauma.

9.8 Recommendations for Practice – Developing a framework for Trauma Informed Practice

The thesis's last original contribution is to conclude with a series of recommendations aimed at supporting the development of a framework designed to implement and embed 'Trauma Informed Probation Practice' (TIPP).

- **Standardised trauma informed language**

It has been highlighted throughout this project that the use of language has been a powerful concept in expressing the underpinning beliefs and intentions of the

organisation. There is no agreed definition of trauma or trauma informed practice, with many organisations having created their own. The absence of universal definitions, particularly in the context of multi-agency working where shared understanding is crucial, has been met with criticism. However, failure to provide the organisation's definition of these terms is also problematic as it implies a lack of interest or concern regarding people's previous experiences. It is recommended that the probation service offers its understanding of trauma and commitment to trauma informed practice through defining what these terms mean to the organisation to convey to practitioners and people on probation that their previous experiences of trauma are important and recognised by the organisation.

This should extend to ensuring that language utilised by the service and its practitioners is trauma sensitive. This would support the organisation in developing a culture that seeks to reduce the use of stereotypes, bias and oppressive language which will reinforce the organisation's commitment to anti-discriminatory practice.

- **Developing the evidence base**

Policymakers should involve researchers and experts to ensure that policies and practice are based on the most contemporary available evidence. As part of developing the evidence base for trauma informed probation practice, a thematic review of probation practice should be undertaken. It may be of benefit for this to be conducted jointly with the prison service to explore the continuity of trauma informed practice for those serving custodial sentences and who are therefore managed across two organisations. There would be considerable benefit to ensuring that future research gives adequate attention to men's experiences of trauma informed practice as this is particularly limited within existing literature.

- **Trauma training**

A prerequisite to establishing a trauma informed environment is that basic trauma awareness training is provided to all staff across the organisation. This should be inclusive of both men and women's experiences of trauma, albeit key differences should be recognised to ensure that the training provided is gender responsive. This study has highlighted some factors that should be considered in the design and delivery of future trauma informed training, which should: build on existing levels of knowledge, include a theoretical understanding of trauma, provide practical advice on managing incidents of heightened emotional arousal for example grounding techniques and be delivered by experienced and knowledgeable trainers (both in trauma and criminal justice settings). Training should be continuously reviewed to reflect advancements in knowledge and delivered as a series of training events rather than a singular event to ensure practitioners develop a thorough understanding and have opportunity to develop it into their practice. This would also support ensuring that trauma informed practice remains a priority for the organisation and practitioners. The training should be considered through a trauma lens and consider the impact of such on those members of staff with trauma histories of their own and ensure that appropriate support is available where required.

- **Guidance**

The lack of guidance on working in a trauma informed manner was identified by practitioners as contributing to feeling uncertain and unclear as to how to approach working with trauma, particularly when considering how to balance this against other priorities. The organisation defining how it views trauma informed practice may assist with starting to address this.

The way in which trauma manifests itself is individualised; what helps one person may not be appropriate for another which makes it difficult to standardise responses or provide rigid guidance. However, practitioners can be encouraged to consider trauma through the provision of guided questions for example; has this person experienced trauma? If so, what was the context of this? What behaviours have I seen that could be linked to trauma? How might their experience of trauma influence offending, risk and engagement? What circumstances could act as trigger to re-traumatisation and how can these be minimised?

The study identified that there was ambiguity around how and where details of trauma experiences should be recorded, both in terms of within risk assessments (Oasys) and case records (NDelius). The issuing of guidance concerning the appropriate recording location of information relevant to trauma may help to reduce incidents of traumatisation and reduce placing practitioners at unnecessary risk of volatile behaviours that could be avoided.

- **Decision Making**

To encourage both recognition of trauma and to support practitioners in balancing the conflicts that arise because of the victim-offender dichotomy, decisions-making should be guided to consider both trauma experiences and risks posed to others. Where the needs of one must override the other, the rationale for this should be recorded to give practitioners confidence that in the event of hindsight scrutiny, they are able to evidence the decision-making process. Practitioners and managers may be assisted by the introduction of a decision template that ensures the aforementioned areas are considered.

- **Partnership agencies**

The organisation's commitment to trauma informed practice should extend to ensuring that the partnership agencies it chooses work alongside, for example through commissioned rehabilitative service, also uphold the values of trauma informed care to enable a truly whole person approach. This should be a transparent process which gains practitioner trust that the external agencies whom they are making referrals to will also be delivering their services in a trauma informed manner. Given the evidence of extensive histories of trauma in many people on probation, ensuring adequate referral pathways are in place for those individuals requiring treatment is critical.

- **Trauma Champions**

It is recommended that trauma champions are identified at all levels of the organisation. The role would support all aspects of trauma informed practice, but in particular the revision of policies and practices through a trauma informed lens and to act as a knowledgeable person available to offer support/guidance to less experienced/confident practitioners particularly whilst the organisation is in the early stages of its journey to becoming trauma informed.

As part of their role, trauma champions will benefit from involvement in networking with trauma champions across the organisation, the wider CJS and partnership agencies. This will facilitate the sharing of good practice and dissemination of new knowledge.

- **Trauma informed probation settings**

A review should be undertaken of all physical probation settings, such as waiting areas, to ensure that these are designed to reduce re-traumatisation through removing common triggers (where possible) and both facilitate and promote safety physical and

emotional safety. Attention should be given to prior research conducted regarding probation architecture (see Phillips, 2014, Tidmarsh, 2021) that emphasises how the layout of spaces can contribute to unequal power distribution and convey negative messages to people on probation that can be a contributing barrier to effective engagement.

- **Reviewing policies and procedures**

As part of striving to achieve trauma informed practice, a review should be undertaken of all existing policies and procedures through a trauma informed lens. This should be applied to the development of new policies. This could be achieved through utilising the format of equality impact assessments to ensure that policies uphold trauma informed principles. Attention should be given to ensuring that policies are gender responsive, but they should include attention to both men and women's experiences of trauma.

There should also be a commitment at a strategic level to support a cultural change that ensures men's trauma, both that experienced by people on probation and practitioners, is recognised, and addressed.

- **Vicarious/Secondary Trauma – support for practitioners**

There should be a commitment at a strategic level to providing adequate support to practitioners. Authentic support extends past the signposting of practitioners to external agencies. It involves practitioners seeing and experiencing change. It involves the organisation taking a prominent role in reconceptualising the impact of vicarious trauma because of the emotional work undertaken when working with individuals with trauma histories, rather than something that individual practitioners can influence or control. Given the indication that people with experiences of trauma may be drawn to

roles like probation, and that this can lead to increased vulnerability to experiencing vicarious trauma, the organisation needs a clear support framework, both as part of trauma informed practice, but also as part of its commitment to staff well-being. There appears to be limited confidence in the organisation's willingness to appropriately support practitioners; addressing this may support staff satisfaction and improve staff retention levels. It is recommended that an action plan is designed that clearly and transparently outlines the steps to be taken by the organisation to promote staff well-being and how this will make a tangible impact on practitioners.

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Appendices

Appendix A

SAMSHA (2014) Immediate and Delayed Reactions to Trauma

Immediate Emotional Reactions	Delayed Emotional Reactions
Numbness and detachment	Irritability and/or hostility
Anxiety or severe fear	Depression
Guilt (including survivor guilt)	Mood swings, instability
Exhilaration as a result of surviving	Anxiety (e.g., phobia, generalized anxiety)
Anger	Fear of trauma recurrence
Sadness	Grief reactions
Helplessness	Shame
Feeling unreal; depersonalization (e.g., feeling as if you are watching yourself)	Feelings of fragility and/or vulnerability
Disorientation	Emotional detachment from anything that requires emotional reactions (e.g., significant and/or family relationships, conversations about self, discussion of traumatic events or reactions to them)
Feeling out of control	
Denial	
Constriction of feelings	
Feeling overwhelmed	
Immediate Physical Reactions	Delayed Physical Reactions
Nausea and/or gastrointestinal distress	Sleep disturbances, nightmares
Sweating or shivering	Somatization (e.g., increased focus on and
Faintness	worry about body aches and pains)
Muscle tremors or uncontrollable shaking	Appetite and digestive changes

<p>Elevated heartbeat, respiration, and blood pressure</p> <p>Extreme fatigue or exhaustion</p> <p>Greater startle responses</p> <p>Depersonalization</p>	<p>Lowered resistance to colds and infection</p> <p>Persistent fatigue</p> <p>Elevated cortisol levels</p> <p>Hyperarousal</p> <p>Long-term health effects including heart, liver, autoimmune, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease</p>
<p>Immediate Cognitive Reactions</p> <p>Difficulty concentrating</p> <p>Rumination or racing thoughts (e.g., replaying the traumatic event over and over again)</p> <p>Distortion of time and space (e.g., traumatic event may be perceived as if it was happening in slow motion, or a few seconds can be perceived as minutes)</p> <p>Memory problems (e.g., not being able to recall important aspects of the trauma)</p> <p>Strong identification with victims</p>	<p>Delayed Cognitive Reactions</p> <p>Intrusive memories or flashbacks</p> <p>Reactivation of previous traumatic events</p> <p>Self-blame</p> <p>Preoccupation with event</p> <p>Difficulty making decisions</p> <p>Magical thinking: belief that certain behaviors, including avoidant behavior, will protect against future trauma</p> <p>Belief that feelings or memories are dangerous</p> <p>Generalization of triggers (e.g., a person who experiences a home invasion during the daytime may avoid being alone during the day)</p> <p>Suicidal thinking</p>

Immediate Behavioral Reactions Startled reaction Restlessness Sleep and appetite disturbances Difficulty expressing oneself Argumentative behavior Increased use of alcohol, drugs, and tobacco Withdrawal and apathy Avoidant behaviors	Delayed Behavioral Reactions Avoidance of event reminders Social relationship disturbances Decreased activity level Engagement in high-risk behaviors Increased use of alcohol and drugs Withdrawal
Immediate Existential Reactions Intense use of prayer Restoration of faith in the goodness of others (e.g., receiving help from others) Loss of self-efficacy Despair about humanity, particularly if the event was intentional Immediate disruption of life assumptions (e.g., fairness, safety, goodness, predictability of life)	Delayed Existential Reactions Questioning (e.g., “Why me?”) Increased cynicism, disillusionment Increased self-confidence (e.g., “If I can survive this, I can survive anything”) Loss of purpose Renewed faith Hopelessness Reestablishing priorities Redefining meaning and importance of life Reworking life’s assumptions to accommodate the trauma (e.g., taking a self-defense class to reestablish a sense of safety)

Appendix B

A critical appraisal of the implementation and use of Trauma informed approaches in Probation

You have been invited to take part in my PhD research project which explores the implementation and use of trauma informed approaches in Probation practice. Participants with experience and current knowledge of sentence management have been invited to take part. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study, without providing a reason, until February 2022, after which withdrawal of your data will no longer be possible as your responses will have been processed and committed to the final report. Withdrawing from the study will not affect you in any way.

Consent

Before taking part in this research, please confirm the following:

I. I have read and understand the participant information sheet for the this study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions. Any questions I have asked have been answered satisfactorily. II. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time until February 2022, without giving any reason, and without any adverse consequences or penalties. III. I understand that I can choose not to answer any question and I can terminate the interview at any time IV. I understand that this project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, Staffordshire University Research Ethics Committee. V. I understand how the information I provide will be processed in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation 2018 (GDPR). The data controller for this project will be Staffordshire University. VI. I understand how this research will be written up and published and that any extract used from the answers I provide that appear in the final report will be fully anonymised to ensure I am not identifiable. VII. I understand how to raise a concern or make a complaint

☐ Yes, I confirm the above statements are true and I wish to participate in the study

The first series of Questions will ask you about your personal characteristics

Are you currently employed within the Probation service?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Which organisation were you employed by prior to reunification in June 2021?

☐ National Probation Service (NPS)

☐ Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC)

☐ Neither

Please state your current role (open text box)

Please state which geographical region you currently work in, for example: Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire, Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire or Essex (open text box)

How long have you worked within Probation?

- ☐ Less than 2 years
- ☐ Between 3 and 5 years
- ☐ Between 6 and 10 years
- ☐ More than 11 years

Please state which gender you identify as

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Other
- ☐ Prefer not to say

The next series of questions is all about your understanding of trauma and any training you may have received.

How would you rate your current knowledge and understanding of trauma?

- ☐ Extremely clear
- ☐ Somewhat clear
- ☐ Neither clear nor unclear
- ☐ Somewhat unclear
- ☐ Extremely unclear

In a few words, can you tell me what your understanding of trauma is?

Have you received any formal training on trauma from your current or legacy employer?

☐ Yes

☐ No

How would you rate your current knowledge and understanding of trauma informed practice?

☐ Extremely clear

☐ Somewhat clear

☐ Neither clear nor unclear

☐ Somewhat unclear

☐ Extremely unclear

In a few words, can you tell me what trauma informed practice means to you ?

Have you received any formal training on trauma informed approaches from your current or legacy employer?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Which type of training have you received? Please tick all of those that apply

- ☐ Internally delivered classroom training
- ☐ Externally delivered classroom training
- ☐ Internal on-line training
- ☐ External on-line training
- ☐ Briefing papers
- ☐ Team Meetings

Do you feel that the training you have received regarding trauma and trauma informed practice is sufficient to your role?

- ☐ Definitely yes
- ☐ Probably yes
- ☐ Maybe
- ☐ Probably not
- ☐ Definitely not

In a few words, can you explain the rating you gave for your level of satisfaction regarding the training you have been provided about trauma and trauma informed approaches?

Within your work place, do you consider that policy and practice is underpinned by the principles of trauma informed approaches?

- ☐ Definitely yes
- ☐ Probably yes
- ☐ Might or might not
- ☐ Probably not
- ☐ Definitely not

Please give an example of how you feel that trauma informed approaches have been incorporated into policies and practice? (Open text box)

Start of Block: Attitudes and Opinions

The next series of questions explore your attitudes and opinions about trauma. You will be asked to identify the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement. Please choose the option you feel most accurately represents your view

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement "I have a good understanding of what is meant by trauma"

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree

☐ Somewhat disagree

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly disagree

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement "I have a good understanding of the impact of trauma on those Persons on Probation I work with"

☐ Strongly agree

☐ Agree

☐ Somewhat agree

☐ Neither agree nor disagree

☐ Somewhat disagree

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly disagree

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement "I have a good understanding of what is meant by trauma informed practice "

☐ Strongly agree

☐ Agree

☐ Somewhat agree

☐ Neither agree nor disagree

☐ Somewhat disagree

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly disagree

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement "Being aware of a Person on Probations' past experiences of trauma is important in understanding their offending behaviour "

☐ Strongly agree

☐ Agree

☐ Somewhat agree

☐ Neither agree nor disagree

☐ Somewhat disagree

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly disagree

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement "It is important to understand a Person on Probation's experience of trauma when considering their risk factors"

☐ Strongly agree

☐ Agree

☐ Somewhat agree

☐ Neither agree nor disagree

☐ Somewhat disagree

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly disagree

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement "It is important to understand a Person on Probation's experience of trauma when considering their protective factors"

☐ Strongly agree

☐ Agree

☐ Somewhat agree

☐ Neither agree nor disagree

☐ Somewhat disagree

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly disagree

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement "It is important to consider the impact of trauma when assessing a Person on Probation's risk"

☐ Strongly agree

☐ Agree

☐ Somewhat agree

☐ Neither agree nor disagree

☐ Somewhat disagree

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly disagree

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement "It is important to consider the impact of trauma when formulating a risk management plan"

☐ Strongly agree

☐ Agree

☐ Somewhat agree

☐ Neither agree nor disagree

☐ Somewhat disagree

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly disagree

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement "It is important to consider the impact of trauma when developing a sentence plan"

☐ Strongly agree

☐ Agree

☐ Somewhat agree

☐ Neither agree nor disagree

☐ Somewhat disagree

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly disagree

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement "Experiences of trauma can be used as an excuse for offending"

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement "Experiences of trauma can be used to minimise or justify offending behaviour"

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement "Too much consideration is given to a Person on Probation's past experience of trauma when making case decisions"

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement "Experiences of trauma can contribute to a Person on Probation's vulnerability"

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement "Being aware of a Person on Probation's past experiences of trauma is important to be able to work with them effectively"

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement "Risk is often prioritised over trauma informed practice"

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement "Trauma informed practice is often prioritised over risk"

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement "The type of trauma experienced, influences how likely I am to consider it's impact on a Person on Probation"

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement "I find it easier to be considerate of a Person on Probation's trauma if they have committed a less serious or harmful offence"

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement "Some types of offending behaviour make it more difficult to acknowledge previous experiences of trauma"

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement "When making a decision about a case, I always consider a trauma informed approach"

	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Sentencing proposals to Court	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Risk Assessment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sentence Planning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Risk Management Plans	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Intervention Delivery	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Enforcement action (e.g. breach/recall)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement "I do not need a good understanding of trauma informed practice to be an effective practitioner"

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Somewhat agree

- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement "The organisation I work for is committed to understanding the impact of trauma on Person on Probation"

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement "The organisation I work for is committed to ensuring practice is trauma-informed"

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement "The team I work within promotes trauma informed practice"

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement "Case discussions with my colleagues often include the topic of trauma and trauma informed practice"

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

Thank you for your participation in this research project. If you have any questions regarding the project or would like to participate in an individual interview, please contact the lead researcher Laura Sanders, School of Law, Policing and Forensics, Staffordshire University, Email: laura.sanders@research.staffs.ac.uk.

Appendix C Survey Information Sheet



School of Law, Policing and Forensics

Project Reference Number: SU_20_159

Project Title: A critical appraisal of the implementation and use of trauma informed approaches in probation

Dear Participant

I would like to invite you to participate in this research project which forms part of my PhD research. Before you decide whether you want to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being carried out and what your participation will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

What is the purpose of the study?

Existing research has recommended that all public services adopt a trauma-informed approach to working with individuals and it has been argued that this is also essential within probation. It is therefore important to consider the extent to which Probation practice has already begun to embed trauma informed practice as a starting point. It is also vital that the complex relationship of balancing risk and trauma informed practice, alongside practitioner attitudes towards this, is better understood. As the public and private sector probation services have begun the process of reunification, it is an appropriate time to consider what currently works and identify areas for improvement to inform the imminent redevelopment of policies and practice.

Why have I been invited to take part?

This project will explore the implementation and use of trauma informed approaches in Probation practice. Participants with experience and current knowledge of sentence management have been invited to take part.

How might I benefit from contributing to this project?

When policy changes are implemented that alter working practices, practitioners are not always consulted. It is important that practitioners have a voice, and that their views and perspectives are utilised to inform future practice; this is particularly crucial as Probation Services embark on a journey of re-joining the private and public sectors. Taking part in this research project allows practitioners to share their experiences and views of trauma informed practice. The intention is for the research findings to be disseminated to those in positions to bring about change and who implement policies and practices to enable future decisions to take into account practitioner attitudes about what works and what is required moving forward.

What am I being asked to do?

You are being invited to take part in an online questionnaire. This should take approximately 15 minutes to complete. The questionnaire will ask whether you have undertaken any training in relation to trauma and trauma informed approaches. You will also be asked whether you believe your practice is informed by the principles of trauma and your views on how easy this is to achieve based on your experiences of working with different types of offending behaviour and levels of risk.

Do I have to take part?

Participation is completely voluntary. You should only take part if you want to and choosing not to take part will not disadvantage you in anyway. Once you have read the information sheet, please contact us if you have any questions that will help you make a decision about taking part. If you decide to take part, you will be asked to confirm your consent by answering a series of questions at the beginning of the survey.

How will my information be used and how will you preserve my confidentiality?

At the beginning of the questionnaire, you will be asked to identify which organisation you are currently employed by, your current role, the region within which you currently work, the length of time you have worked in Probation and your gender. You will not be asked to provide your name. Your responses will be recorded on the Qualtrics software used to produce the questionnaire; this will be downloaded once all responses are received and stored within a password protected folder on the

University OneDrive account that is accessible to the lead researcher only. The final research findings may include selective quotes from the open text questions contained within the questionnaire; these will be anonymised to ensure that any quotes used do not identify individual practitioners.

Data handling

Your data will be processed in accordance with the data protection law and will comply with *the General Data Protection Regulation 2018 (GDPR)*.

Data Protection Statement

The data controller for this project will be Staffordshire University. The university will process your personal data for the purpose of the research outlined above. The legal basis for processing your personal data for research purposes under the GDPR is a 'task in the public interest'. You can provide your consent for the use of your personal data in this study by completing the consent form that has been provided to you.

You have the right to access information held about you. Your right of access can be exercised in accordance with the GDPR. You also have other rights including rights of correction, erasure, objection, and data portability. Questions, comments and requests about your personal data can also be sent to the Staffordshire University Data Protection Officer. If you wish to lodge a complaint with the Information Commissioner's Office, please visit www.ico.org.uk.

What if I change my mind about taking part?

You may withdraw from the study, without providing a reason, until February 2022, after which withdrawal of your data will no longer be possible as your responses will have been processed and committed to the final report. Withdrawing from the study will not affect you in any way. If you choose to withdraw from the study we will not retain any information that you have provided us as a part of this study. If you wish to withdraw from the study, please telephone 01782 295906.

How is the project being funded?

The project is funded through the researcher's university scholarship. There is no funding provided through the probation organisations involved in the project.

What will happen to the results of the study?

The results of the study will be included within the final PhD thesis submission. It is intended that the results of the study will be shared with the new Probation Service and may be published in peer reviewed journals.

If I have any further questions who should I contact?

If you have any questions regarding the project, please contact the lead researcher:

Laura Sanders (PhD Researcher), School of Law, Policing and Forensics, Staffordshire University, Email: laura.sanders@research.staffs.ac.uk

What if I have further questions, or if something goes wrong?

If this study has harmed you in any way or if you wish to make a complaint about the conduct of the study you can contact the study supervisor or the Chair of the Staffordshire University Ethics Committee for further advice and information:

Primary project supervisor: Dr Em Temple-Malt, Course Director Sociology and Criminology, School of Law, Policing and Forensics, Staffordshire University, Email: Emma.Temple-Malt@staffs.ac.uk or Telephone: 01782 295906

Secondary project supervisor: Professor James Treadwell, Professor of Criminology, School of Law, Policing and Forensics, Staffordshire University, Email: James.Treadwell@staffs.ac.uk or Telephone: 01782 295836

Ethics Co-Ordinator – Dr Kayleigh Denyer, School of Law, Policing and Forensics, Staffordshire University, Email: kayleigh.denyer@staffs.ac.uk or Telephone: 01782 294009

Thank you for reading this information sheet and for considering taking part in this research.

Appendix D Interview Schedule

Interview Schedule

Introductions

- Project outline
- Has the participant read the information sheet? Do they have any questions?
- Has the participant completed the consent form?
- Does the participant agree for the interview be recorded?
- Explain that participation is voluntary and participant can choose not to answer any questions

Personal characteristics

- Are you a legacy NPS or CRC employee?
- What is your job title?
- In which region do you currently work?
- How long have you worked in Probation?
- Please tell me what gender you identify as

Knowledge and Understanding

- Can you tell me about the training, if any, you have been provided by Probation regarding trauma and trauma informed practice?
- Can you tell me what you understand by the term trauma?
- What does trauma informed practice mean to you?
- How do you feel trauma informed approaches have been implemented within probation practice? Can you give me any examples of where you think it has, or hasn't been implemented?

Personal perspectives

- To what extent do you feel understanding experiences of trauma is relevant within your role in probation? Can you give me any examples?

- To what extent do you think current practice encourages or discourages practitioners to consider trauma? Can you give me any examples?
- How do you approach exploring trauma experiences with service users? Are there any tools/guidance provided?
- How are experiences of trauma recorded?
- Are there any specific points in a service users' journey through the CJS where you feel knowledge of previous trauma is particularly useful?
- Are there any specific points in a service users' journey through the CJS where you feel knowledge of previous trauma is irrelevant or not necessary?
- Do you feel that there is a connection between trauma and offending behaviour? Can you give me an example?
- Do you think the type of crime someone has committed can make it easier or harder to work in a trauma informed manner with the? (Prompt – if someone has committed a sexual offence compared to an acquisitive crime)
- Do you think experiences of trauma are more prevalent in particular offender populations?
- Does the level of risk someone poses impact how easy it is to work with them in a trauma informed manner?
- Have you experienced anyone using their previous experience of trauma as an attempt to justify, minimise or blame their offending behaviour? Do you have an example? (Prompt – how do you feel about this?)
- How do you think trauma informed practice is promoted by your team? Your organisation?

Closing the interview

That brings us to the end of my questions, please take a moment to consider whether there is anything you think I have missed? Or anything further you would like to add?

Appendix E Interview Consent Form

School of Law, Policing and Forensics

Participant Consent Form



Project: A critical appraisal of the implementation and use of trauma informed approaches in probation

Purpose of study:

Existing research has recommended that all public services adopt a trauma-informed approach to working with individuals and it has been argued that this is also essential within probation. It is therefore important to consider the extent to which Probation practice has already begun to embed trauma informed practice as a starting point. It is also vital that the complex relationship of balancing risk and trauma informed practice, alongside practitioner attitudes towards this, is better understood. As the public and private sector probation services begin the process of reunification, it is an appropriate time to consider what currently works and identify areas for improvement to inform the imminent redevelopment of policies and practice.

- I. I confirm that I have read and understand the participant information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions. Any questions I have asked have been answered satisfactorily.
- II. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason, and without any adverse consequences or penalties. I understand that I am able to withdraw my data from the study until February 2022 after which withdrawal of my data will no longer be possible as my data will have been processed.
- III. I understand that I can choose not to answer any question and I can terminate the interview at any time
- IV. I understand that this project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, Staffordshire University Research Ethics Committee.

- V. I understand how the information I provide will be processed in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation 2018 (GDPR). The data controller for this project will be Staffordshire University.
- VI. I understand how this research will be written up and published and that any extract used from the answers I provide that appear in the final report will be fully anonymised to ensure I am not identifiable.
- VII. I consent to an audio recording of the interview
- VIII. I understand how to raise a concern or make a complaint

_____	<u>dd / mm / yyyy</u>	_____
Name of Participant	Date	Signature

_____	<u>dd / mm / yyyy</u>	_____
Name of person taking consent	Date	Signature

Appendix F Recruitment

Do you have experience and knowledge of sentence management? If so, I want to hear from you!

There has been lots of talk about a correlation between early experiences of trauma and criminal behaviour, but what is less clear is how services recognise and response to this. As a probation practitioner I am keen to understand how knowledge of trauma has been implemented into practice and to understand practitioners views and attitudes towards trauma and the ways in which external factors such as risk levels and offending types may affect this along with understanding the wider organisational context. My research project is titled "**A critical appraisal of the implementation and use of Trauma informed approaches in Probation**" and I am looking for participants of all grades with knowledge and experience of sentence management to take part in both an online survey and/or one-to-one interviews. Information sheets outlining both research methods are attached. For those practitioners interested in taking part in the survey, this can be found at: http://staffordshire.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6PyImUwAihKZfdX and for those interested in taking part in one-to-one interviews please contact me on laura.sanders@research.staffs.ac.uk

Appendix G Interview Information Sheet



School of Law, Policing and Forensics

Project Reference Number: SU_20_159

Project Title: A critical appraisal of the implementation and use of trauma informed approaches in probation

Dear Participant

I would like to invite you to participate in this research project which forms part of my PhD research. Before you decide whether you want to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what your participation will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

What is the purpose of the study?

Existing research has recommended that all public services adopt a trauma-informed approach to working with individuals and it has been argued that this is also essential within probation. It is therefore important to consider the extent to which Probation practice has already begun to embed trauma informed practice as a starting point. It is also vital that the complex relationship of balancing risk and trauma informed practice, alongside practitioner attitudes towards this, is better understood. As the public and private sector probation services have begun the process of reunification, it is an appropriate time to consider what currently works and identify areas for improvement to inform the imminent redevelopment of policies and practice.

Why have I been invited to take part?

This project will explore the implementation and use of trauma informed approaches in Probation practice. Participants with experience and current knowledge of sentence management have been invited to take part.

How might I benefit from contributing to this project?

When policy changes are implemented that alter working practices, practitioners are not always consulted. It is important that practitioners have a voice, and that their views and perspectives are utilised to inform future practice; this is particularly crucial as Probation Services embark on a journey of re-joining the private and public sectors. Taking part in this research project allows practitioners to share their experiences and views of trauma informed practice. The intention is for the research findings to be disseminated to those in positions to bring about change and who implement policies and practices to enable future decisions to take into account practitioner attitudes about what works and what is required moving forward.

What am I being asked to do?

You are being invited to take part in a one-to-one interview which will last around 60 minutes and can be arranged at a time and date of your convenience prior to February 2022. Due to the current Covid19 guidance for social distancing practice, interviews will be held remotely using Microsoft Teams. With your consent, I will record the audio of the session to allow for a transcript of the conversation to be produced to enable analysis. You will be provided with the opportunity to review the transcript once available and will be given 14 days to withdraw your participation. During the interview you will be asked whether you have undertaken any training in relation to trauma and trauma informed approaches. You will also be asked whether you believe your practice is informed by the principles of trauma and your views on how easy this is to achieve based on your experiences of working with different types of offending behaviour and levels of risk.

Do I have to take part?

Participation is completely voluntary. You should only take part if you want to and choosing not to take part will not disadvantage you in anyway. Once you have read the information sheet, please contact us if you have any questions that will help you make a decision about taking part. If you decide to take part, you will be asked to sign a consent form and you will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

How will my information be used and how will you preserve my confidentiality?

At the beginning of the interview you will be asked to provide your first name only. Your interview responses will be anonymised and stored within a password protected folder on the University OneDrive account that is accessible to the lead researcher only. I may include selective quotes from the transcription to illustrate points in my thesis and any resulting publications; these will be anonymised, and great care taken to ensure that any quotes used do not identify individual practitioners.

Data handling

Your data will be processed in accordance with the data protection law and will comply with *the General Data Protection Regulation 2018 (GDPR)*.

Data Protection Statement

The data controller for this project will be Staffordshire University. The university will process your personal data for the purpose of the research outlined above. The legal basis for processing your personal data for research purposes under the GDPR is a 'task in the public interest'. You can provide your consent for the use of your personal data in this study by completing the consent form that has been provided to you.

You have the right to access information held about you. Your right of access can be exercised in accordance with the GDPR. You also have other rights including rights of correction, erasure, objection, and data portability. Questions, comments and requests about your personal data can also be sent to the Staffordshire University Data Protection Officer. If you wish to lodge a complaint with the Information Commissioner's Office, please visit www.ico.org.uk.

What if I change my mind about taking part?

You are free to withdraw at any point of the study, without having to give a reason. Withdrawing from the study will not affect you in any way. You are able to withdraw your data from the study up until October 2021, after which withdrawal of your data will no longer be possible as your data will have been processed and committed to the final report. If you choose to withdraw from the study we will not retain any information that you have provided us as a part of this study. If you wish to withdraw from the study, please telephone 01782 295906.

How is the project being funded?

The project is funded through the researcher's university scholarship. There is no funding provided through the probation organisations involved in the project.

What will happen to the results of the study?

The results of the study will be included within the final PhD thesis submission. It is intended that the results of the study will be shared with the new Probation Service and may be published in peer reviewed journals.

If I have any further questions who should I contact?

If you have any questions regarding the project, please contact the lead researcher:

Laura Sanders (PhD Researcher), School of Law, Policing and Forensics, Staffordshire University, Email: laura.sanders@research.staffs.ac.uk

What if I have further questions, or if something goes wrong?

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Ethics Co-Ordinator – Dr Kayleigh Denyer, School of Law, Policing and Forensics, Staffordshire University, Email: kayleigh.denyer@staffs.ac.uk or Telephone: 01782 294009

Thank you for reading this information sheet and for considering taking part in this research.