



Physical and Emotional Considerations in Conducting Research in Prisons

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Abstract

This article reflects the experiences of the authors as two prison teachers conducting research in the prison. It signals the pressures experienced in conducting qualitative research in a prison setting and explores the conditions within which the prison researcher functions, particularly if one already forms part of the prison regime. The article should serve as an eye-opener for those planning to carry out research in prison, notably to the novice prison researcher. The article discusses two types of encounters a researcher will meet in prison: physical challenges and emotional concerns. The reflection exemplifies the distinctiveness of doing research in prison.

Keywords: prison research, prison environment, emotions in research

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Introduction

Much research in prisons is conducted by university students as an integral part of their studies. Other research is conducted by academics, alone or in conjunction with their students. Normally this research is published in peer reviewed journals, some of which, unfortunately, is written in such an obscure and academic language that it ends up not being that useful for the prison administration itself. More recently it is common for those involved in EU projects, such as Erasmus+ projects and DG Justice and Consumers projects, to start their project by means of a needs analyses exercise. Typically these projects have to produce 'deliverables' including training manuals for prison staff and/or for inmates. From the point of view of the prison authorities these projects have high value since they tend to be more practical in nature. Other research in prisons is conducted by charities and non-governmental organisations with a very specific focus directly related to their raison d'etre. Few prisons have their own research units; most prisons subcontract research if they are intent on transferring knowledge to practice within their institution. This article focuses on the experiences of a minority group doing research in prison: the practitioner researcher. In this case, the practitioners worked as part-time teachers in Malta's correctional facility, Corradino Correctional Facility. Having taught in both male and female sections of the prison, the practitioners wanted to understand better how they could reach the needs to the female population in prison better. The paper does not discuss the research per se, but the experiences the researchers had in conducting their research. The authors categorise their reflections and experience in three sections: those of a physical nature (obtaining approval, the conditions during interviews, power relations, lack of privacy, negotiating space and time, gaining access), those of an emotional nature (positioning oneself, negotiating emotions etc.) and those of an ethical nature. This article focus only on the first two.

Physical challenges

Being familiar with the prison does not mean that 'physical' challenges become much easier than for the novice researcher entering the prison the first time. It is true that one is familiar with the procedures of entering and exiting the prison, the smell of the prison, the noise and shouting, the dealing with officers and the initial encounter with inmates. Still practical difficulties arise all the time. Some of them may sound trivial such as finding a room where to hold an interview, or obtaining permission allowing one to take in the necessary equipment, such as a laptop, or a recorder. But they are not. Having some privacy is very difficult in a correctional setting (Davies, 2000, p.86): the constant presence of inmates and staff, prison guards checking your belongings every time one goes in and out not only of prison, but also different wings within the same prison, with everyone observing who moves where and who talks to whom. The researcher tends to feel as if her or she is being assessed all the time by everyone. Restriction of movement in prison does not only affect the inmates but it also impinges on the researcher since one has to move within a space that is highly marked by power relations. Negotiations around space and time are important and necessary in a penitentiary system in which

even the researcher has to submit to all restrictions, despite her privileged status compared to that of the inmates (De Miguel Calvo, 2013, p.10). Ideally the researcher should try to negotiate for a private interviewing room without, if possible, the presence of a prison officer during the interviews. The reason is that inmates do not trust officers in general, and any form of information, both to other inmates and to officers can later be used or misused against the very inmate. Information in a prison setting is power. On the other hand, it is good for an officer to be within earshot for safety reasons. But this is not always possible, particularly because of shortage of staff in some prisons. If prison rooms are equipped with internal close circuit cameras, issues of physical security are reduced and the researcher feels assured.

In carrying out research in prison, the structural location of where the research takes place cannot be neglected. Marx (2001) and Reiter (2014) examine how the structural location influences how access to participants is gained and how rapport with them is corroborated. By its own nature, prison is a 'closed' institution, a setting full of dynamics/structures of power, where hierarchy is all pervasive and is constantly observed (Lučić-Ćatić, 2011, p.59). It is constructed in such a way as to create and emphasise this power inequity, to produce in the inmates (and visitors) a certain obedience and compliance. This makes the researcher's 'fitting in' a more complex experience (Ugelvik, 2014, p.471, 474). Formal distinctions of power include the high rank administration of the prison and a ladder ranking of prison officials each of whom gives great import on how s/he is seen and addressed. This hierarchy, in turn, affects the researcher in gaining access to the participants and how one establishes a rapport with them (Davies, 2000, p.86; Hart, 1995, p.169; Liebling, 2013, p.22; 2014, p.483; Lučić-Ćatić, 2011, p.59). For the authors, they could already understand and respect such a hierarchy, but for the novice research this issue could potentially be a minefield, particularly in areas where the officers do not wear a uniform and it becomes difficult to distinguish between an officer and an inmate. One thing that the authors kept in mind in researching in prison is that they were entering the participant's environment as a privilege, as guests, and not as a right (Newman, 1958, p.127). Although it is a place where the presence of strangers is relatively commonplace, particularly in low security prisons, everyone has to be rapidly recognised and placed by both the authorities and the inmates. As a researcher, one is thus "identified, positioned, and managed accordingly" (Rowe, 2014, p.406; see also Liebling, 1999, p.150; Ugelvik, 2014, p. 475). This is even physically done by being given a large, visible visitors' tag to wear. All this highlights the tensions of working in a rigid institution where security is all-pervading, including the stress on doing one's best not to lose the visitor's tag itself. One feels as a temporary insider, but at the same time, a total outsider. Beyens, Kennes, Snacken & Tournel, (2015, p.66) describe the prison as a place where there is "a constant process of negotiation".

Prison authorities are often cautious where research is concerned (Kazemian, 2015, p.117; Lučić-Ćatić, 2011, p.59). More often than not they are averse to the use a tape

recorder. In some prisons the authorities insist on reading the notes taken of interviews with inmates. Unfortunately such notes may be misinterpreted, or seen as 'trouble' to the prison's reputation or to themselves as administrators (Newman, 1958, p.128). Prison researchers encounter more often than not emotions like helplessness and frustrations. Sutton (2011, p.50) points out that 'accommodating researchers is not a primary concern of most prisons and assisting researchers is an added burden in an endless list of a prison official's responsibilities. It is a location where assisting a researcher is viewed more as a nuisance than a priority'. During fieldwork, the prison researcher must remain aware that s/he is intruding in the daily, regimented life of prison and sometimes one may need to interrupt an interview and return to the prison on another date (Kazemian, 2015, p.119; O'Brien & Bates, 2003, p.219), for example in the event of a lockdown. When conducting research in prison, one also has to keep in mind the participants' priorities; meetings might need to be structured around meals, inmate counts, visitations, lock-ups, recreation and other factors such as their emotional state, impending court appearances and medical appointments. Thus, flexibility is important and the inmates must feel free to postpone or cancel the interview any time. Such setbacks are inherent to prison research. Access to research might be more readily forthcoming by the administration if the research carried out can be of some prospective benefit to the institution (Hart, 1995, p.168; Newman, 1958, p.128).

Building trust and relationships across various departments in the correctional institution is necessary to carry out one's research. Thus, in such a low-trust setting (Molding Nielsen, 2010, p.308), the prison researcher must not only safeguard the rapport with the inmates but also that with officers. Sparks, Bottoms and Hay (1996, p.349) write about the dynamics of the prison setting; how uneasy relations can easily develop between prison staff and researchers and the tricky position the researcher might find him/herself in (see also Liebling, 1999, p.150; Newman, 1958, p.127; Sutton, 2011, p.50). The entry of an outsider in prison is often regarded as a nuisance or worse, as a threat. This might be further worsened when opting to use a tape recorder during the research (Roberts & Indermaur, 2008, p.319). Gaining formal approval from authorities does not mean that the field will open up for the researcher eager to receive and accommodate him/her. Thus, the prison researcher must carefully plan his research in order to avoid as much as possible being a liability to the correctional staff going about their everyday responsibilities (Hart, 1995, p.168, 174; Liebling, 1999, p.150; Lučić-Čatić, 2011, p.60, 70). The advantage the authors had in conducting their research was that they were known quantities. They could be trusted as familiar faces, possibly identified as loyal to the interest of the prison and the correctional officers.

This trust is not automatic, particularly with the inmates, especially those who do not know you. Our experience is that inmates categorise teachers in two: the 'alright ones' and the 'pains'. Luckily it seems that the authors were categorised within the former bracket. Inmates tend to view researchers with suspicion and curiosity, curious to know what one is doing with the information given, and to whom it is being reported. Of

course they also think of what they can get out of this encounter, both in terms of physical objects, such as bottled water, some clothes etc., and in terms of privileges such as an extra telephone call, an extra five minutes with the family, etc. The tacit understanding is that the inmate will give you information only if h/she receives something in return. This is prison culture. Sparks et al. (1996, p.349) describe the researcher as the 'ignorant spy' in prison. Sparks et al. (2006, p.349) further mention how it takes times and effort for the researcher to pass from being "a grudgingly tolerated fool to a fairly welcome one". Sutton (2011, p. 49) argues that in strict settings such as prisons, even a fault in equipment may be perceived as a researcher's carelessness, lack of preparation or professionalism. It can be construed as a "lack of regard for the inmate and his time" and thus break the circle of trust. Whilst equipment failure is not limited to prison research, it can cause inconveniences for inmates and prison officials and can pose challenges in a setting dominated by discipline and routine.

Prisons are also highly politicised and unpredictable fields (Ugelvik, 2014, p.476). In a prison setting where situations, prison staff, senior management and rules are fluid and change constantly, another problem which the researcher needs to face is on what happens if/when the setting changes (Liebling, 2013, p.22; 2014, p.483). All this makes establishing relationships more difficult for the researcher. Therefore, establishing continuous rapport not just with the interviewed inmates but also with prison staff is vital. It is by no joke that Patenaude (2004, p.69) argues that "it is far easier to gain access to study the residents of a remote Alaskan community than to study the lives of prison inmates." Gaining access to inmates requires permissions at various levels, patience and perseverance (see Davies, 2000, p.87-88; Jewkes, 2014, p.389; Shaw, Wangmo and Elger, 2014, p.275). During the authors' period of research the Director of the Prisons changed twice, meaning that a rapport had to be built again from scratch. Heads of divisions also changed constantly, and with them their attitudes towards the idea of research in prison in general and the authors as researchers in particular. Liebling (1999, p.150) describes how, during a particular research, inmates and staff had been "largely interested, responsive, friendly and agreeable" while a year after, in the same prison wing, she and her research team faced for the first time the "difficult prisoner: angry, hostile, resentful, suspicious and challenging." This forced her to reflect on how one can possibly carry out research in such a field which changes all the time and so reactive to internal and external pressures. In carrying out prison research, Tournel and Kennes (Beyens, et al., p.69) elaborate how, in order to gain easy access and trust, they tried to project themselves as harmless doctorate students relatively new to prison context but willing to learn from the more experienced prison staff. However, this posed difficulties in juggling this image without giving the wrong picture of being incompetent, unprofessional students and thus risking not being taken seriously (see also Sloan & Wright, 2015, p.152). Similar to Beyens et al. (2015), Davies (2000) and Rowe (2014) have both elaborated about the positions they adopted (or where imposed on them), and how they were placed and misplaced by both inmates and prison staff while carrying out research in female prisons. Sieber (1992, p.29) reasons how useful it

is in certain difficult research settings to “identify legitimate leaders or gatekeepers (...) and to work with them to make the survey mutually useful. A gatekeeper is a person who lets researchers into the setting or keeps them out”. In the case of the authors, the gatekeepers were two: the administration of the prison and two particular female inmates. The authors were lucky for they knew these two inmates from other encounters in the prison during their work as teachers within the same prison. It was apparent that nothing happened in the wing without the approval of these two female inmates, and luckily we were in their good books. Although they did not participate in the research, the research and the participation of other inmates in the interviewing process, was given their blessing. What worked for the authors in gaining trust during their research was time and coffee. The authors always found time to chat with both inmates and officers, each getting to know one another in an informal environment, each cautious on how much information to part, but at the same time, closing the initial gap of the unknown.

Emotional challenges

Another issue surrounding the whole experience of carrying out qualitative research in prison is that of emotions. The emotional factor has not traditionally formed a substantial part in prison research and has often gone unreported. Researchers usually tend to report findings in an ‘emotionally disconnected’ way (Bosworth et al., 2005; Davies, 2000; Jewkes, 2012; 2014; Lučić-Čatić, 2011; Molding Nielsen, 2010; Reiter, 2014; Rowe, 2014; Widdowfield, 1999). Some would rather prefer to evade any form of ‘connectedness’ between the researcher and participant and to make believe that their research is “unsullied by such concerns” (Bosworth et al., 2005, p.258). Rowe (2014, p.404) mentions how in prison research, “the researcher often all but disappears.” Jewkes (2012, p.63; 2014, p.387) and Ugelvik (2014, p.472) discuss how prison researchers, who are often proficient in talking about inmates’ feelings and experiences, often neglect the feelings and emotions they themselves go through before, during and after their research process and how these are seldom mentioned in their work. This is a pity, since, Jewkes argues, “the acknowledgment of the ethnographer’s biography, motivations, and emotions can uniquely enrich data, analysis, and writing up.” She goes as far as arguing that those prison researchers who do not divulge emotions in their research are doing “a disservice to those who follow them ... who frequently approach the field with high levels of anxiety” (Jewkes, 2012, p.18). Qualitative research goes beyond simply handing out questionnaires to fill in; it is more humane and sensitive in nature where “numbers become names and those names ‘real’ people with whom the researcher has face-to-face contact” (Widdowfield, 2000, p.201). If the knowledge one produces is simply evidential, informative and unemotional, it would result in knowledge that is short on meaning and in a vacuum (Jewkes, 2014, p.388; Liebling, 1999, p.163). Over the past decade various feminist researchers have emphasised on the importance of acknowledging the emotional aspect inherent to doing research in prison (Bosworth et al., 2005; Liebling, 1999; 2014). Emotions are not only felt by the prison

researcher but even the researched can undergo certain emotions as a result of participating in a research, especially one of a qualitative nature (Lučić-Ćatić, 2011, p.67). Although various feminist researchers (Harrison, MacGibbon & Morton, 2001; Reinhartz, 1992) have stressed on the importance of establishing an egalitarian and sharing relationship with the researched, the delineations are not always that simple or clear in a prison environment. Researchers, including the authors, ask themselves on how best to connect with inmates who have been behind bars for several years, are awaiting their sentence or will soon be released. Researchers ponder on how they will deal with dilemmas when facing such an emarginated group asking for help, or how to relate to someone who has been defined by the media and the courts as pure evil. It is these issues that the authors often thought about and discussed. For prisons are not simply spaces where the participants are detained; they are spaces where punishment, deprivation, aggression, masculinity and frustration form part of daily life. Jewkens and Liebling point out that research in prisons is likely to be intense for the researcher regarding emotional, sensorial and tangible experiences also in terms of sight, sounds, smells, security, fear and injustice (Jewkes, 2014, p.389; Liebling, 1999, pp.158, 161). One of the biggest emotional challenges the researchers found themselves in was on how to react to instances of injustice, at worse, cruelty, in prison. Such injustices could range from trivial matters such as inmates being served inadequate prison food or denied phone calls or family visits, to officers making derogatory comments about them or more serious abuse. These feelings create, to some extent, not only a degree of frustration, but also a degree of the fear of powerlessness to do anything about some issues, the inability to act for various reasons; be it of fear from the administration (for example being stopped in the middle of one's research), to a feeling of helplessness, of not knowing what to do (see Arditti, Joest, Lambert-Shute & Walker, 2010). Looking the other way may not be within one's character, but researchers may be forced, even implicitly, to do just that. It may even come to a decision between doing what one considers to be right and as a consequence, being stopped from continuing one's research, or closing both eyes. Gatekeepers in prisons are very powerful, particularly in countries where there is only one prison, and for some students, it may even mean the end to their PhD studies.

Authors such as Davies (2000, p.87) and Sloan and Wright (2015, p.151) discuss other emotions and thoughts they felt when carrying out research in prison, such as, what to wear, what to take with you, how to sound credible to prison staff, arriving on time and whether the security staff at the prison gate would be informed and let one in. These are probably seen as trivialities, but for the prison researcher they are a reality one has to face every time one sets foot on prison premises. Prison researchers often choose to omit admitting emotions of 'insecurity and confusion they experienced when entering the field, the rites of passage they endured, the interplay of different identities adopted by them and ascribed to them, and the bonds they formed as they traversed the threads of the prison security "web"' (Jewkes, 2014, p.387). This is the fear of the unknown – the fear that a prison researcher feels inside before even starting research in prison. Yuen

(2011) weighs the coping strategies she employed to help her deal with the emotions that emerged during her study working with female inmates. Similarly, Liebling (1999, p.150) recounts how her research team tried to deal with a particular strenuous research experience in a male prison and how, after research, they tried to “let off steam”.

Ugelvik (2014) and Crewe (2014) mention the various tests and ploys posed on them by both inmates and staff while conducting research. Davies (2000, p.92) suggest that the prison researcher should learn how to “strike a balance between reacting naturally to disclosure whilst not appearing too shocked” since interviews would naturally lead to disturbing accounts of injustice, abuse, trauma and hardships (see also Widdowfield, 2000, p.201). Such disclosures can have a traumatic effect on the researcher who is unprepared for them as well as have “effects on the interviewer as researcher in the longer term.” Liebling (2001, p. 475) affirms that “one of the difficulties of prison research ... is that those researchers who feel sufficient sympathy cannot bear very much prison research, and those who are the best often move on to less painful topics.” Carrying out research inside a prison setting can be very risky since certain testimonies regarding prison irregularities, conditions and services could have consequences on the participants interviewed who might fear reprisal from the prison officers or institution. So, the researcher has to make it clear that s/he will not give prison staff any information that could prejudice them in any way (Molding Nielsen, 2010). It is also important for the researcher to protect the inmate by making sure that the latter does not prejudice him/herself, and to stop the inmate from continuing to talk even if the ‘data’ being given is invaluable. As researchers, the authors often felt that it was better not to note information that was gold from the point of view of the research, but detrimental to the inmate if the officers read the notes that were being taken, and/or eventually the research report itself.

There is always the temptation for a researcher to ‘go academic’ and play the part of the detached researcher (Lučić-Ćatić, 2011, p.67). However, the researcher can take an alternative route by being more transparent about his/her involvement and position, and to express views sympathetically and critically (Fuller 1999, p.223). Liebling (1999, 2001, 2013, 2014) has written profusely on the role of emotion in prison research. She considers doing prison research as “emotional edgework” which raises all kinds of methodological, political and emotional dilemmas in a researcher who must always be ready with decisions, negotiations and trade-offs to make on the field (see also Beyens et al., 2015). These, in-turn, will affect the research experience and its outcomes (Davies, 2000, p.94; Khawaja & Mørck, 2009, p.28; Widdowfield, 2000, p.199). The researcher’s involvement and engagement will therefore reflect on the production of knowledge (Doucet & Mauthner, 2006, p.42). Both Liebling (1999, p.149, 2001, p.475) and Jewkes (2014, p.389) argue that carrying out research in prison, with its unwelcoming environment, can be a highly emotive task for the researcher and remaining unaffected and objective is practically impossible. As such, our emotions need not be cancelled.

They constitute part of the data (Kirschner, 1987, p.213; Liebling, 1999 p.164). Sutton (2011), recommends that a prison researcher should train him/herself in emotion management:

For instance, there were times when I was frustrated by prison policies, angered by the actions of corrections officers, annoyed by inmates, and sympathetic to those who were incarcerated. I also met inmates and staff members with whom I likely could have established friendships had we met under different circumstances. Regardless of how I felt, I kept my opinions and emotions to myself to ensure that neither prisoners nor staff had reason to associate me with 'them'. I also chose to contain my reactions when experiencing negative emotions and encountering language and behaviour I found offensive (Sutton, 2011, p.56).

Moods and behaviours are unpredictable in prisons and this is something to be considered when conducting interviews in prisons. In some instances, there is the risk of inmates becoming disagreeable or even aggressive, venting their anger and frustration about the system upon the researcher (Kazemian, 2015, p.119; Liebling, 1999, p.150; Lučić-Ćatić, 2011, p.66). Prison researchers also find themselves in a position of power: they can bring change within the participant while at the same time bring about change to themselves: "...not only does the researcher affect the research process but they are themselves affected by the process" (Widdowfield, 2000, p. 200). It is often assumed that the researcher has power during all the stages of the research. But power is not unilateral; only exerted by the researcher upon his participants and vice versa. It is also exercised by the prison institution upon the researcher (Marx, 2001). This is where the prison researcher is further weighed down during the course of one's research. The power balance is clearly not all one-sided in favour of the researcher. By withdrawing participation or withholding data, participants can also challenge the researcher (Costelloe, 2007; Lučić-Ćatić, 2011; Marx, 2001). One must also take into consideration the potential danger of inmates who push for a particular agenda or cooperate in order to attain or maintain approval or favour of a prison officer (Roberts & Indermaur, 2008 p.314). On the other hand, there is the risk of prison officers biasing the researcher against particular inmates by making prejudiced comments in their regards, thus risk field contamination (Bosworth, 1999; Waldram, 1998). For this particular qualitative research the authors took a feminist research approach since such methods are "not exploitative but are appreciative of the position of women." (Finch, 1993; Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002), an approach that made the authors strive to minimise the power imbalance between them and the inmates. Another goal was to seek to change inequality in the provision of education in prison, which the authors managed to achieve. Emotionally this was extremely satisfying.

Within the authors 'relaxed' and 'confident' approach to this research, resulting mainly from familiarity with the location, and enjoying high levels of trust from the inmates, they also often found themselves taking the role of social workers, being 'friends' and being shoulders to cry on. Boundaries were always made clear, and it was stressed that if the authors were informed of anything that fell into the 'harm to self and harm to

others' category, or if the inmates spoke of anything that was illegal, both in prison and outside prison, they would have to report to the authorities. The stories the authors heard brought about emotions such as anger, frustration and also disgust, at times towards the system, at times towards the inmate herself. The authors always felt that after a session they could not simply walk away and continue with 'life'. Often, also being in unison with the feminist approach to research, the authors ended up advocating for the inmates even for minor things, such as a change in cell location. Bosworth et al. (2005) points out that some inmates participate in prison research because they felt empowered and believed that through research, they could help bring about reforms in their environment or social change (see also O'Brien & Bates, 2003, p.220; Shaw et al., 2014, p.275). The authors experienced a transition from a professional relationship with the inmates to one that became increasingly personal and friendly as the research moved on. Such a relationship brought about a new responsibility on the authors, through a feeling of a need to give more voice to female inmates, to help them in their everyday struggles in prison, to educate the general public and change the public's negative perception of prison inmates. Bosworth et al. (2005, p.261) emphasises the need to work directly with inmates rather than simply writing about them and how listening to them and their experiences and sharing can make a difference to individuals. Fuller advocates how

... the researcher must occupy a space in which the situatedness of our knowledges and positionalities is constantly renegotiated and critically engaged with. This space necessarily involves the removal of artificial boundaries between researcher, activist, teacher and person, and proposes instead movement between these various identities in order to facilitate engagement between and within them (Fuller, 1999, pp.222-23).

However, Guillemin & Heggen, (2009, p.292) stress that the researcher's ethical responsibility is to maintain "a fine balance between building sufficient trust to be able to probe participants for potential rich data, while at the same time maintaining sufficient distance in respect for the participant." Besides, the researcher must prevent prisoners from developing idealistic expectations about what the research can deliver (see also Bosworth et al., 2005, p.256-57; Shaw et al., 2014, p.275). Thus, it is vital not to raise their hopes but to advise them that what:

... [I] can offer is a fair representation of prisoners' views in any report [I] write, but stress that while [I] can make recommendations for change, it is others who decide whether or not recommended changes will be accepted and implemented (Roberts & Indermaur, 2008, p.319).

When Sutton (2011, p.51) was conducting prison research he tried to avoid this conundrum by presenting himself as being "committed to learning about prisoners rather than as an advocate for inmates or employees." Khawaja and Mørck (2009, p.38), explore the issues behind what they term as "going native" versus "going academia" and how in their research they tackled dilemmas of "commitment versus distance, advocacy versus reflexivity, and researchers as political versus researchers as neutral." The experience of the authors is that in a prison setting, where at times deprivation, scarcity

of services and material provisions abound, (e.g. decent meals, phone calls, medicine, visits to doctor etc.) rapport between individuals tends to become instrumentalised. One has to keep in mind that an inmate might be 'befriending' one in order to secure a service or some form of support. Keeping this in mind, however, the authors discovered that prisons can also be places where human contact with someone from the outside is something from which one is deprived and being able to confide, or simply to talk, to have someone to hear, is in itself a luxury (Kazemian, 2015, p.121; Lučić-Ćatić, 2011, p.66). However, prison research is not always a harrowing experience (Jewkes, 2012, p.66, 69) and prisons "can also precipitate remarkable honesty" (Liebling, 1999, p.152). In one instant an inmate informed the authors that having a conversation with them was the only beckon of sanity in a mad prison world. Relationships of mutual respect can be affirmed and some inmates craving exchange and conversation open up about their situation, drawing one into their world. Yuen's study on Aboriginal women inmates, (2011) captures these emotions well:

I was so caught up (I still am, somewhat caught up) in the thick of things. Very much affected by my emotions and the pain of the women. How can I not? I've spent so much time with them. The group is affected by what happens to its members and I am a member... How do you just take yourself out? ... My time with the women has become ingrained into a part of my everyday life (Yuen, reflexive journal, August 9, 2006).

Establishing trust is not easy in a prison setting. The truth is that no one trusts anyone in prison. The basic underlying imperative is that the researcher propagates a "sense of rapport, trust and mutual respect" and to be "responsive to the concerns of the subject" (Sieber, 1992, p.26). In a prison context, this rapport extends further from the researcher, to the researched, to the gatekeepers and prison staff and administration. This rapport, in turn, is essential to safeguard the validity of the results (O'Brien & Bates, 2003, p.219; Roberts & Indermaur, 2008, p.320). Carrying out qualitative research can go beyond simply gathering data and is an emotional experience for both researcher and participants; it is only a question of acknowledging these feelings which render the research more humane. Doing research in prison is "an emotional minefield" (Beyens et al., 2015). This makes prison research differ from any other type of qualitative endeavours (Jewkes, 2014, p.388).

Reflections

In carrying out their research, just like in carrying out their duties as prison teachers, the authors are convinced that it is practically impossible to put aside one's feelings and emotions. Effort has to be placed in how to deal with these feelings, in how to handle the various dilemmas one encounters during one's research. Support, ideally by a councillor familiar with a prison environment, or even someone who experienced research in prison, helps. The authors feel that their prior experience in knowing the prison before actually conducting research in prison helped tremendously. The authors recommend that anyone planning to do research in prisons should spend time there before doing

any research whatsoever, either as a volunteer with some non-governmental organisation or simply as helpers. The feeling of a prison helps immensely in navigating oneself during a research exercise.

Liebling (2014, p.485) concurs with Rowe (2014, p.414) in that the best research emerges when one knows the field “emotionally, as well as intellectually.” Our suggestion is that knowing the prison ‘physically’ also helps. As authors of our research, it was decided to go along with one’s feelings and not to hide behind power barricades. Day after day of working with inmates the authors embraced the emotionality of the research. Judgements resulting from the research were not only based on data, but were also grounded in the authors’ feelings. This in itself made us feel closer to the study. The authors’ opinion is that the researcher has to make his or her emotions visible and documented so that the reader is aware of the kinds of emotions, conflicts, pitfalls and subjectivities a prison researcher encounters in one’s study. The researcher’s description of emotions will help one to understand better the phenomenon under study. It will make it richer and real.

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