The Presenters of Anger Management Programmes: Their Experiences of Working in the Context of Prisons

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THE PRESENTERS OF ANGER MANAGEMENT PROGRAMMES: THEIR EXPERIENCES OF WORKING IN THE CONTEXT OF PRISONS

By

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Award of Honours in Bachelor of Social Science in Human Service Administration at the Faculty of Health and Human Science Edith Cowan University

Date of Submission: April 1995
USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.
ABSTRACT

The study was an exploration of the experiences of eight presenters of anger management programmes in relation to their work in prisons. It was conducted within an interpretive paradigm using a phenomenological framework. From the data analysis, four principal themes emerged. One centred on the impact of the prison environment; another on the work culture of prisons; a third on experiential group processes; and a fourth on personal concerns of the participants. The results suggest the environment and culture of the prison had a strong impact on the presenters personally and had a dominant influence on the way they could work there. Prisons are very restrictive environments where the potential for violence is always present. Therefore it is both challenging and stressful for those who work there. Non-custodial workers need to learn to understand the culture and to adapt to the prison environment to work there effectively. They need training and support to operate within that context, and to have strategies implemented to ensure their personal safety. The study has implications for the selection, training and support of non-custodial prison workers, particularly contract workers. This research is a first step in a possible major research area.
DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signature

Date October 1995
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There are a number of people I would like to thank who assisted with their expertise but mostly with their encouragement during the time I worked on this thesis.

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Thanks to Peter Prisgrove and other members of the Alternatives to Violence Unit for their continued support and interest. I am particularly grateful to those programme presenters who agreed to be interviewed, and who shared so much of their experiences and knowledge with me.

A special thanks to my husband Dan who has been my main support.
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CHAPTER 1

PRISON PROGRAMMES AND RESEARCH

Programmes in Prisons

There are a number of self-development programmes offered in prisons in Western Australia. Some are programmes in general education similar to those offered in Technical and Further Education Colleges. Others offer knowledge and skills development relevant to personal behaviour change. The three areas on which these latter programmes focus, are drug abuse, sexual offending, and anger or aggression control. The staff who conduct these programmes in prison are referred to as non-uniform or non-custodial staff. Personnel employed to work in prison programmes are required to have appropriate qualifications and experience in their particular field of endeavour. New staff are offered a brief orientation visit to the prison prior to working there but they receive no other specialised training in prison work.

Research on Programmes in Prisons

Research relating to programmes in prisons has traditionally focussed on the philosophy of providing programmes for prisoners, programme content, programme outcomes or techniques used to deliver programmes. Duguid (1981) supported the provision of education programmes for prisoners. He discussed the culture of criminals which influences their decision to commit illegal acts. He quoted studies in the United States and Canada showing that criminals often have cognitive deficits which "spring from an underdeveloped reasoning ability, an immature set of attitudes, and a rather crude sense of social relations" (p. 98). He claimed that education is an efficient and effective medium to bring about cognitive development, an improvement in moral reasoning and sociopolitical awareness. Other researchers have studied the outcomes and effectiveness of prison programmes. McCullock (1993) reported on the utility of a social skills training programme for sex offenders. After discussing the personal insights
gained by the participants, the author recommended that a similar programme be set up in the community. Morrison (1992) discussed the positive outcomes of an anger management programme for prisoners convicted of violent offences. Most of the participants of this programme reported finding the course helpful and worthwhile.

Each of the above mentioned studies were evaluations of either programme philosophy or programme effectiveness. There appears to be little research relating to the experiences and perceptions of staff who deliver programmes in prison. An extensive search of library catalogues, in consultation with an experienced librarian, failed to find any research reported on this topic. However, there were several studies in related areas. For example, Wolford (1990) examined opportunities for professional development for specialised staff within correctional facilities. He concluded that such opportunities were at best haphazard and at worst nonexistent. Fox (1990) set out to investigate the perceptions of prison educators regarding their practices of adult education in prison. Studies prior to that of Fox had looked at the content and presentation of programmes for prisoners. They had addressed the questions of whether programme goals and strategies were relevant to the needs of prisoners. However, there were no studies which examined the perceptions and experiences of those who delivered these programmes. As Fox (1990) concluded from her studies:

Studies in the area of prison education generally deal with the educational characteristics of prisoners or descriptions of programs ... research concerning teaching prisoners is rare. (p. 175)

It was considered that a study of the experiences and a knowledge of the expertise of people working in prison programmes could provide a valuable source of rich data. Their knowledge of the prison culture and how to work effectively within that environment could be explored and could provide useful data for managers and programme planners. Such a study could complement the previous research on other aspects of prison programmes.
Research question

What are the experiences of staff who work in programmes within a prison context?

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the research was to investigate the experiences of certain staff who deliver programmes in prison. The particular group selected for this study were those who present anger management programmes in prison. It was expected that their experiences would focus on:

- The impact of working in a locked environment.
- The culture of the prison as defined predominantly by prisoners and prison officers.
- The group dynamics operative within an educational or treatment group for prisoners.
- The motivations of the programme presenters for, and reactions to, working in prisons.

The Significance of the Study

The study has significance for two reasons. No previous research has explored the experiences of non-custodial staff such as programme staff working in a prison context. When Fox (1990) investigated how teachers set about establishing an environment conducive to learning, she found that the whole prison environment adversely affected the work of the teachers. From her findings she concluded that:

The most dominating and overriding theme arising from the comments made by all of the education personnel interviewed was in respect of the *prison environment*. (p. 180)

Therefore, in view of this strong conclusion, it was decided that an exploration of the experiences of programme staff working in a prison context could be significant and enlightening.
Secondly, the study was considered significant because it could provide useful information for managers and the management of prison programmes. While research often provides managers with useful data regarding programme goals and programme outcomes, studies on the efficiencies of those providing the programmes are limited. According to Covey (1990, p. 52), establishing and maintaining an efficient workforce is an important component in achieving effective programme outcomes. While it is acknowledged that the outcome of this study is limited to a specific sample, nevertheless the findings may inform later research across a broader spectrum. For example, managers may seek to explore issues impacting on efficiencies of staff, which in turn could be related to contingences of the work environment. Such information is useful in developing policies for the selection, training and containing of an efficient workforce.
CHAPTER 2

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Anger Management Programmes

Explaining Anger Management Programmes

The concept of managing anger has been the subject of considerable debate both in terms of defining what anger is and in considering what are effective strategies for intervention (Bowie, 1989). For the purposes of this study, an outline of the concepts of anger control was considered necessary for understanding the bases of anger management programmes and hence the work of the programme presenters. A brief outline follows:

The term "anger" can be understood as being the normal human emotion evoked in response to a given provocation. Anger is seen as either a positive emotion or one that evokes negative or destructive reactions. The destructive aspects of anger are referred to as aggression or violence (Bartol, 1991). In this context aggression contains the intention of harming other persons or things. Therefore, when designing programmes for anger management, programme planners include in those programmes the concepts of control of aggression and prevention of violence. When researchers discuss the causes of aggression and strategies for its prevention, a number of different views are put forward. Chappell (1989) suggests that successful solutions will require a variety of sustained interventions. The anger management programme offered to Western Australian prisoners is one such intervention.

The anger management programme currently run in Western Australian prisons is a ten-session course involving group discussion based on cognitive-behavioural theories. It is a revised version of the original "Video Anger Management Programme" developed by the New Zealand Department of Justice's Psychology Services Division. The
programme invites participants to explore ways of recognising anger, staying in control of anger and identifying early bodily sensations associated with anger. Interpersonal skills - such as effective ways of communicating, the assertive expression of anger, skills for managing close relationships and ways of resolving conflict - are all examined during the ten sessions of the course. While the key concepts presented in the sessions remain the same, there have been several local initiatives by programme presenters to make the programme more appropriate for the given clientele, particularly in those prisons where the majority of offenders are Aboriginal.

Provision of Anger Management Programmes

Anger management programmes are provided for the prisons by the Alternatives to Violence Unit which is a sub-unit of the Programmes Branch of the Ministry of Justice in Western Australia. The unit develops and provides programmes for offenders convicted of violent offences. Initially the unit provided a limited number of programmes to prisoners in metropolitan prisons. In 1993 as a result of state government policy all prisoners were to be provided with opportunities to address their offending behaviour (Justice Charter, 1993). The provision of anger management programmes was subsequently extended to all country prisons. At the time of this study, anger management programmes were offered in all prisons for male offenders. A pilot study was being undertaken with a programme for female offenders.

Profile of Programme Presenters

Persons employed to run anger management programmes in Western Australian prisons are employed on part-time contracts. They are required to have expertise in working with groups and are given an introductory training course prior to presenting the programme to prisoners. The programme presenters who were working for the Alternatives to Violence Unit at the time of the study had a diversity of academic
qualifications and work experiences within the field of Human Services. Table 1 contains a summary of the personal background of the staff at the time of the research.

Table 1

**Professional Background of Programme Presenters**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Areas in which participants had worked</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Counselling Psychology</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex Abuse Counselling</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychiatric Counselling</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couples &amp; Relationship Work</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol &amp; Drug Counselling</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug and Alcohol rehabilitation and other work with Aboriginals</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Prisoners</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Work/Team Building/Conflict Resolution Skills/</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transactional Analysis/Psychodrama/Gestalt Therapy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Some programme presenters had expertise in more than one of the above-mentioned areas.

To become an accredited anger management programme presenter, a person was initially required to attend a two day training session. The first group of presenters had this type of training. The training has now been changed. The two day workshop is no longer used but trainees are required to attend three complete programmes as a participant observer. By the third programme the trainee is expected to co-facilitate the programme with an experienced presenter. The trainee can then be accredited to run the programme. At the time of this research twenty three people had been accredited to run anger management programmes in prison. Of these, sixteen were working in the prisons.
Researcher's Background

At the time of this study, the researcher had been working for fourteen months as a programmes officer in the Alternatives to Violence Unit. The work involved programme planning, programme evaluation and systems coordination. The task of coordinating programmes involves liaison with programme presenters and programme managers regarding the practical details of running anger management groups in all Western Australian prisons. The researcher has also had some experience of working in prison. This involved interviewing prisoners for the programme and attending one complete anger management course as an observer. However, the researcher's main work with prisons has involved attending meetings with managers when decisions on anger management programmes are being considered.

Search of Related Literature

Situating the Research Topic

Traditionally a literature search must precede the collecting and analysing of data. As this study was conducted within a phenomenological framework, the search of the literature on the research topic was left until after the data were collected. This strategy is supported by Shipman (1988), Patton (1990) and Van Manen (1992), who all claim it is best for a researcher working within an interpretive paradigm to endeavour to suspend all notions and preconceptions regarding the research topic prior to going into the field.

However, in order to situate the research topic, it was considered important to conduct a literature search in related areas. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) have argued the need for this type of literature search prior to setting up the study. While they acknowledged that the researcher may be unduly influenced by the conceptual frameworks and theories of others, they nevertheless emphasised the benefits of reviewing related literature before and during data collection.
First read the literature to verify that you have chosen a justifiable topic ... Second, use the literature to help find a focus for your topic. (p. 17)

This rationale has been adopted by the present researcher. The previous chapter contains references to related fields of study in the area of prison programmes. The literature has also been used to support the argument that no work has yet been done in the area of prison programme presenters' experiences. Throughout the remainder of the paper references to the research literature will be used to support discussion and to clarify and define concepts.

Understanding "Context"

According to Hinds, Chaves & Cypess (1992) the use of the term context has varied markedly in research papers. Broadly, the term means the environment or setting where behaviour occurs. The following definition of context is used in the discussions in this paper. Miles and Huberman (1984) - quoted by Hinds, Chaves & Cypess (1992) - define context as:

The immediate relevant aspects of a situation, such as a person's physical location, the other people that are involved, and the recent history of their involvement, plus the relevant aspects of the social situation in which a person functions. (p. 63)

So the physical aspects of a prison setting constitute one element of the context of the prison. The impact of the physical environment on the programme presenters may have a bearing on their experiences of working in prisons. The other people involved in the prison work setting are the prison officers and the prisoners. By becoming immersed in a work culture constituted by prison officers and prisoners programme presenters could experience and learn something of that culture. According to Louis (1985, p. 74) a group's culture is characterised by the set of meanings shared by those belonging to the group. Those meanings are largely tacit among members, are clearly relevant to that group and are distinctive to that particular group. Programme presenters in the course
of their work may tap into the culture of the prisoners and the prison officers. Their experiences may reflect their knowledge of this culture and how they adapt their programme content to the prison culture. Therefore the study of the context of a prison is the study of the physical aspects of the work environment, the culture of those in that environment and the impact of these on the programme presenters.

Prison Environments

Although there is no research literature about the experience of non-custodial staff working in a prison environment, there are other related studies about prison environments. For example, Toch (1977) set out to study prisons as environments, seeking to understand stresses on inmates who had trouble surviving in prison. He looked at the personal connotation of the prison environment for inmates and sought to establish what was valuable and what was noxious to them. Because he was investigating the perceptions of those living in the prison and the stresses on them, Toch (1977) who chose a phenomenological approach for his study, believed that such an approach—

Tells us how people who operate in an environment or who live in it perceive it and adjust to it. Such an approach ... highlights the problems we must address by realigning transactions to reduce stress and maximize 'match'. (p. 9)

Throughout the study, Toch (1977) explored the concerns of inmates about what he termed "a set of eight hypothetical environmental concerns" (p. 16). He described the portraits which emerged from the inmate interview protocols. These were tied to causes of stresses on inmates in relation to safety, structure, support, emotional feedback, social stimulation, activity and freedom.

There was another study focussing on aspects of prison environments and its impact on detention workers. Bazemore & Todd (1994) sought to understand the individual characteristics of detention workers and their backgrounds. They also studied
the occupational conditions the detention workers experienced and the impact on them of the organisational environment. They chose to look at juvenile detention workers. They drew a number of conclusions about attitudes of workers to their clients and found one influencing factor was the environment. "The facility in which workers operate can have a dramatic influence on how they view their clients" (p. 300). Therefore in the light of the findings of these studies it was assumed the prison environment could have a considerable influence on the experiences and perceptions of the programme presenters working there.

The social environment in which a programme exists may facilitate or constrain the development, maintenance or termination of the programme. Kelly (cited in Sarri & Lawrence, 1980, p. 11) reported on the problems associated with implementing programmes without giving due consideration to the environment in which they were operating. He reported that programmes have failed because not enough consideration was given to the environment in which the participants were immersed. It would seem that programmes for prisoners need to address the environment in which they are provided. That same environment in which those delivering the programmes work then needs to be understood. Therefore eliciting and outlining the experiences of those delivering programmes in prison may provide worthwhile information for managers and programme planners.
CHAPTER 3

STUDY DESIGN AND PROCESS

The Study Design

Theoretical Orientation

The method of investigation must relate to the problem to be investigated. In essence, the focus of this study was the exploration of the experiences of a group of non-custodial staff working within the context of a prison. The empiricist or rationalist approach according to Addison (1989), Patton, (1990) and Van Manen (1990), has proved inadequate for illuminating the conditions and context within which social action takes place. Such conditions and contexts are better understood within an interpretive paradigm. A qualitative approach allows the researcher "to uncover the thoughts, perceptions and feelings experienced by informants in the context of their lives" (Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell & Alexander, 1990, p. 6). Therefore a qualitative approach was adopted for this study. There are a number of theoretical approaches which can be used in qualitative inquiry depending on the purpose of the research question. In this study the experiences of people working in a particular setting were explored and so a phenomenological approach was selected as best relating to the question being investigated.

Phenomenology has its roots in philosophical traditions developed by the German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859 - 1938). It continued to be developed by Schutz (1899-1959), Giogi (1971) and other philosophers. Husserl's explanation of phenomenology is that it is a study of how people describe things and experience them through their senses. His basic philosophic assumption was that "we can only know what we experience" (Patton, 1990, p.69). It is by attending to our perceptions that meaning can be derived from them. Interpretation of experience is essential to understanding experience and it is through this process that we gain a world-view. Following from this
thinking one concludes there is no objective reality for people, only what they know from their experience and what it means to them. As explained by Van Manen (1990)

Phenomenological human science is the study of lived meanings; it attempts to describe and interpret these meanings to a certain degree of depth and richness ... it does not offer us the possibility of effective theory with which we can now explain the world, but rather it offers us the possibility of plausible insights that brings us into direct contact with the world. (p. 11)

There are two concepts which need to be considered. One is that it is important to know what people experience and how they interpret the world, and the other is that the only way to know another person's experience is to experience it ourselves. A phenomenological study can include either or both of these. The focus of this research was to explore what people's experiences are within a given context - the context being a prison environment. Therefore their perceptions of their experiences were explored although the researcher did have some experience of the phenomena.

The Sample

At the time of the study there were sixteen programme presenters working with anger management programmes across all prisons in Western Australia. With such a small population it would have been important to approach them all if one were working according to probability sampling techniques. However the purpose of the study was to seek data from "information-rich cases" (Patton, 1990, p. 169). Purposeful sampling was selected for the study in order to gain sufficient information-rich cases for an in-depth study. As explained by Patton (1990):

Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research. (p. 169)

A sample of eight programme presenters was selected according to the method of maximum variation, a strategy allowing a wide range of variation on dimensions of interest (Patton, 1990, p. 182). The variables considered in selecting the eight participants related to their professional background, experience of working with
programmes, and experiences of working in different types of prisons. These variables are summarised in Tables 1, 2, and 3.

Table 2

Variables Relating to Anger Management Programme Presenters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>All presenters</th>
<th>Sample presenters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced (AMP)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced (other)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Experienced (AMP) refers to those who have worked with the anger management programme in prisons for at least twelve months. Experienced (other) refers to those with experience of working in other personal development groups. (November 1994)

Table 3

Prisons in West Australia According to Security Ratings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Security Rating</th>
<th>Metropolitan</th>
<th>Country</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>North West</td>
<td>South West</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The security rating of a prison is based on its physical structure, the involvement of the Metropolitan Security Unit and the ratio of custodial staff to prisoners. (November 1994)

There are maximum, medium and minimum security prisons established across the metropolitan and country areas of Western Australia. Prisons in the North of the state
and Eastern goldfields have a majority of Aboriginal prisoners, while the metropolitan and south-west prisons have a majority of non-Aboriginal prisoners. Anger management programmes are provided for all male prisoners.

Of the sample of eight programme presenters, three had worked in maximum, medium and minimum security prisons. Two had worked in medium security prisons only, and three had worked in maximum and minimum security prisons. All were experienced in working with groups of non-Aboriginal prisoners. Three programme presenters had been involved in developing and working with culturally appropriate programmes for Aboriginal prisoners.

**Data Collection**

Datum is used in its original meaning of something given. Data or units of analysis of human science research are human experiences (Van Manen, 1990, p. 54). Data were gathered for this study from two sources:

- using personal experience as a starting point, and
- obtaining experiential descriptions from others.

**The Research Process**

**The Researcher's Perspective**

In phenomenological research it is important for the researcher to become aware of personal bias and to eliminate personal involvement with the subject material as far as possible (Patton, 1990, p. 407). The researcher, having had some experience of working in prison and having observed an anger management programme being conducted there, reflected on those experiences and discussed them with work colleagues. By making explicit our understandings and beliefs we can, according to Van Manen (1990, p. 47), come to terms with our own assumptions about the research area. During the presentation of the research proposal in September, 1994, the question of personal bias
and researcher influence on the process was discussed thoroughly. There were a number of strategies suggested to minimise researcher influence and these were frequently considered throughout the research process.

Participants' Perspectives

The second and most important source of data in a phenomenological study according to Van Manen (1990, p. 62) is obtained by seeking experiential descriptions from those involved in the phenomena. Therefore eight people working in anger management programmes in prison were approached and they agreed to participate in the study. Each of them was interviewed for approximately one hour about their experiences of working in prison. The interviews were tape-recorded for later analysis.

Pilot Study

It was thought that a pilot study prior to the research interviews would be useful to obtain feedback about the interview guide. As the number of people conducting anger management programmes in prison was small, it was decided to approach two members of the education team for a pilot study. A questionnaire guide was developed (Appendix I) and each participant was interviewed for forty minutes.

Both commented at the beginning that they were nervous and not sure of what to say. Once they understood the reason for a less structured interview, the two respondents felt the interview guide was quite useful to help them to focus their comments. Each of these interviews was quite different. One person spoke of personal motives and goals in working with prisoners and how these had changed over time in response to negative experiences of working in a prison context. The second person was less experienced and discussed aspects of confronting prisoners on a daily basis and adjusting to the myriad of agendas often brought to the tutorial situation by the prisoners. From the pilot study the researcher learnt it was important for the interviewer
to give a clear explanation of the reason and method being used before beginning to tape record the interview. The questionnaire guide was found to be an appropriate tool for keeping a focus on the interview content without restricting the participants' responses.

**Interview Process**

The anger management programme presenters selected for the study were each contacted by telephone and the purpose of the study explained to them. They were then sent a letter with an explanation of the research and the role of the researcher. Total confidentiality and anonymity were assured to those who agreed to be a participant in the research (Appendix II). Since the researcher was also a programmes officer in the Alternatives to Violence Unit, it was considered important to assure the participants of the distinction between the two roles. All correspondence to the participants was sent on Edith Cowan University letterhead and countersigned by the research supervisor (Appendix IV). Those who agreed to the interview, signed and returned to the researcher the consent form attached to the letter.

All eight programme presenters approached agreed to be interviewed. The interviews were conducted away from any work environment at a place chosen by the participant. The permission of the participants was sought to tape-record the interview. Each interview was kept to a maximum of one hour. The researcher travelled to metropolitan and country locations to interview participants and it took two months to complete the recording and transcribing of the eight interviews. Some of the participants seemed nervous at the beginning of the interview. However, once they had overcome their initial inhibitions, they talked freely about the experiences they had had. A considerable amount of rich data was obtained.
Method of Analysis

The processes of obtaining and analysing data in a phenomenological inquiry are sometimes difficult to separate. The first steps in this analysis, that of reducing researcher bias, has already been mentioned (see researcher's perspective). The next step was that of inductive analysis of the interview transcripts and this was carried out through three distinct phases.

1. Each interview transcript was examined according to a method suggested by Patton -

   Locate the key phrases and statements ... interpret the meanings of these phrases [and] obtain the subjects interpretations of these phrases" (Patton, 1990, p. 408).

The following steps were undertaken in this process:

- The taped interviews were listened to again and the transcripts of each read carefully.
- Each transcript was summarised with all information given included.
- The summarised version of each interview transcript was returned to the original interviewee for comment. This process allowed the interviewee a chance to comment, explain, elaborate or challenge the researcher's interpretation of the interview. In other words, it served as part of the validation process.
- The summarised transcripts were all returned from the interviewees. They were substantially accepted as accurate. Two interviewees asked for some clarification of the data, and as a result some minor changes were made to their interview transcript summaries.

2. The second stage of the analysis was a categorising of topics in each of the transcript summaries. (A list of these topics and abbreviations used is contained in Appendix VI). The researcher worked with a colleague on one transcript to gain another perspective on possible topics and themes. The clusters and themes arrived at by these two individuals were substantially the same, thus adding to the validity of the content analysis. Once the topics were identified - there was a total of twenty at this stage - the content of the transcript summaries was re-organised under these headings.
3. The researcher moved into the textual portrayal of each theme, a process according to Patton (1990) which is an "abstraction of the experience that provides content and illustration". Each identified topic was examined, with the researcher going back and forth through the topics defining and aggregating emerging themes, and eliminating anything repetitive. The themes emerging were essentially as follows:

· The presenters’ anticipations about and first experiences of working in prisons.
· The presenters’ learning to understand and to adjust to the prison culture.
· The influences of prison culture on the process of group learning.
· Personal concerns of the presenters about working in a prison environment.

It became evident that some topics, such as working with Aboriginal Prisoners, could be followed up as a separate research project. A decision was made not to separate this important issue but to incorporate comments regarding Aboriginal prisoners within the selected themes. Having selected four main themes with related sub-themes, the researcher then selected from the original transcripts relevant comments from the interviewees to support that concept.

Limitations of the Research

This research project was part of a requirement for an honours degree and needed to be kept small. The collection and analysis of the data was carried out over a period of six months. The researcher is reporting on the findings and results of a study of eight cases of experiences of people working within the Alternatives to Violence Unit. The analysis of the data aims to be sensitive to the informant’s subjective interpretations and makes use of their own words in developing categories of themes. Therefore, in this sense the findings are limited within this context.
Ethics

There were important ethical considerations in the conduct of this research. Access to information relating to prisoners is highly confidential. In speaking to people who work with prisoners, the researcher specifically did not seek or report any information regarding individuals - be they prisoners, prison officers or other staff. The informed consent of each participant was sought prior to the research (See Interview Process). Confidentiality and anonymity were assured (Appendix IV). Because the researcher was also a programmes officer in the Alternatives to Violence Unit, the Manager of that unit sent a letter to the programme presenters explaining that permission had been granted for the study to be conducted, their participation in it was voluntary, and their decision would have no bearing on their employment by the Ministry. (Appendix V).

All efforts were made to protect the anonymity of the participants. In the transcripts of the interviews all names of participants were changed to pseudonyms to protect their identity. In writing the findings and results of the study care was taken not to report specific locations or incidents which may identify a participant. Parts of interviews were excluded from the discussions for this reason. The tapes will be destroyed when the project is completed. The transcripts will be kept in a safe place for five years as required.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND RESULTS

Definition of Findings and Results

In qualitative analysis the terms findings and results have a special meaning. According to Minichiello, et al. (1990, p. 316) "findings" refer to what the data say and "results" offer interpretations of what the data say. A considerable amount of rich data from the interviews was collated from the original transcripts of the interviews. A number of categories emerged from this data and these were examined for patterns and themes. Of these categories, four principal themes were selected for analysis and reporting in this paper. To support the findings and results of the study a number of thematic statements were selected from the original transcripts and reported in the discussion that follows:

Categories of Themes

Four principal categories of themes emerged from an analysis of the data. These categories were as follows:

- In the first category, participants explain their preconceptions of what it would be like to work in prison. They explore those experiences and report their perceptions of them.

- In the second category, participants reflect on their understanding of the prison culture and how they have adapted their work to this culture.
In the third category, participants explain the strategies and processes they have developed in working with prisoners in groups.

In the fourth category, participants explain some personal concerns about working in this environment and also their motives for continuing with this work.

Category 1: Themes Relating to First Experiences of Prison

The participants discussed their views on (a) what they were expecting prisons to be like, (b) the impact on them of the physical structure of prisons, and (c) their perspectives on first working with prisoners. Each of these is discussed separately.

Expectations About Working in Prison

In reflecting on their expectations of what working in prison would be like, some participants acknowledged that they held parochial, or as one explained, "stereotyped" images of prisons and of prisoners. Some felt nervous and apprehensive about going into prison, not knowing what to expect. Some were not aware they had held preconceptions about prisons and prisoners until after they had spent a few days working there and were surprised by their own responses and reactions.

- I didn't know what to expect.

- I was very wary ... I had all the layman's views of what a prison was like, what prisoners were like.

- A prison at that point conjured up a whole lot of mean characters.

There were different views about what it would be like working with prisoners. For example, one participant expected to find prisoners quite tough. As part of a training programme, trainees were asked to portray their impressions of what prisoners would be
like. The trainees were told they were portraying prisoners to be tougher than they in fact were. One of them remembered that:

· They were seen ... to be more tough than we might expect.

Six of the eight participants had felt nervous and apprehensive about working with prisoners. One who was not phased by any of the physical aspects of prisons, anticipated that working with prisoners convicted of violent offences could be difficult, challenging and personally threatening. He wondered how he would react when faced with a threatening situation.

· I was apprehensive about what the prisoners themselves would be like and how they would actually view me.

· I became a little nervous about working in a prison ... with a focus on violent offenders, we were going to be dealing with some tough characters.

The Impact of the Physical Environment

In discussing the impact on them of the physical environment, most of the participants talked of feeling threatened by the appearance of what looked very much to them as an inhumane structure. This was particularly the case with maximum security prisons. The high walls, the razor wire, the picture of a savage guard-dog on a well-secured entrance gate - all serve as reminders that the prison was a harsh, inhumane, locked environment designed to keep inmates securely inside. The experience of walking into the prison was often quite formidable. Two participants explained:

· That great, big, grey wall ... it seemed so oppressive!

· I think that probably the most aware you are that you are going into a prison, is when you walk through the front gate ... there is this big, heavy door slammed shut ... clang, it goes ... it's that feeling of having doors clanging behind you.
When walking through a prison to get to a work area, some participants talked of feeling insecure and concerned about their own personal safety. These feelings were heightened in maximum security prisons where structural aspects of the prison were more closed than in other prisons. The experience for some was unnerving. Some chose to move about the prison at times when the prisoners were not in transition from one location to another to avoid passing prisoners in narrow corridors. In describing different prisons, two participants explained their feelings of insecurity:

- Prison "d" still has that feel because it is all narrow, dark, dimly-lit corridors; you feel there is a lot of places - if someone is going to get you, they would.

- It's just getting into there ... it brings up my own feelings of insecurity ... just being very conscious of safety, which corridor to take ... will there be someone lurking around?

One aspect of working in a locked environment is that staff can either be escorted through the prison by a prison officer or given a set of keys to get to the designated work area. Being escorted through the prison can create a feeling of both security and insecurity. One participant explained that while she felt secure in being escorted by a prison officer, it was also:

- scary ... a reminder of where you were and what type of people were there.

Those who were given a set of keys to move through the prison spoke of the initial anxiety that this responsibility involved. They devised ways of securing the keys on their person and of making sure gates were properly locked after them. An interesting comment from one participant was that gates should be closed quietly to avoid reminding prisoners of the harsh, locked environment in which they were placed. The fact that participants could be charged in an outside court if they mislaid keys, caused considerable anxiety for some. As one participant explained:

- Initially I was terrified I would leave a door unlocked ... I could be charged in an outside court ... if I thought I hadn't locked it properly, I'd unlock it and re-lock it again.
Not all the participants responded negatively to the physical aspects of prisons. There were two participants whose reactions to the same prison environment were quite different. On walking through a maximum security prison which had a fairly open plan, one respondent thought it was like walking into a university campus. The participant realised later that being deprived of personal freedom and initiative was the most difficult aspect of being in prison more so than the experience of being locked in. However, another participant who entered the same prison felt quite insecure and vulnerable in an open setting.

Those who had worked in minimum security prisons noted they felt less threatened and more relaxed than in other prisons. A participant who had only worked in a minimum security prison did not feel threatened in any way by aspects of the physical environment:

- The physical environment seems to me not to be all that threatening ... fairly open in a sense.

It seemed to be other, less obvious aspects of the prison environment which had an impact on this participant. For example, she liked to work in an attractive environment and endeavoured to decorate the work area with some personal items. When the participant found these items had been removed, she was initially surprised and angry. She soon learned that every person and every thing brought into a prison can be subject to search. The invasion of privacy in every aspect of prison work, which would not be tolerated in any other work environment, was a difficult aspect for this participant. It was with some frustration that she learned:

- You don't have any privacy whatsoever.
First Encounters With Prisoners

Some presenters found their first encounters with prisoners less of a hassle than they had expected. As one explained:

· It was probably easier than I had anticipated. I didn't find it difficult at all ... the prisoners received me well ... the prison officers received me well.

Others found some of their initial fears about working with prisoners confirmed. For example, one participant felt unnerved when a prisoner arrived for the group in a body belt and escorted by two prison officers. Another recalled feeling nervous and vulnerable when locked in a room with the prisoners. The only way he could get out was to knock and attract the attention of the prison officers. He found the prisoners in that group to be fairly tough and difficult to work with. These two participants made the following comments about their first encounter with prisoners:

· A fairly unnerving experience.

· That led to some discomfort for me as a person working in a prison for the first time.

It could be said that all the participants found their first experience of prison turned out to be different from what they had anticipated. One example is worth recalling in more detail as it illustrates how prison environments do affect those working in them. The participant, experienced in working with groups of adults, had not anticipated any difference between working in prison and working with other groups. After an orientation exercise with an experienced programme presenter the participant felt ready and "unfazed" about starting a group in prison. As she explained:

· "A" had warmed me up to it, I think, rather well. ... to the prison environment ... but I'm not sure I responded to her warming up ... and in we went and I ran the first session relatively well.
The participant conducted the first session of the programme and thought everything had gone as well as with other groups. She then left the prison feeling satisfied with the way the group had worked. However, as she was about to drive out of the prison car park, a reaction began to set in, which at first she could not understand. She recalled that she found it difficult to think what to do. "I thought, I can't get out of this car park". She noticed another car leaving the car park and decided to follow it. When she was out on the road, she began to realise something was happening. She recalled:

- I felt this overwhelming sense of ... I don't know what ... do I want to cry? ... do I want to yell? ... what is it?

Realising she was feeling disturbed, she stopped off at a friend's place for a chance to talk and sort out why she was experiencing this reaction.

- I collapsed into a chair and they gave me a couple of cups of tea and that ... so what I'm saying is that the environment had a huge effect on me but I didn't notice it until later.

In thinking about this reaction later, the participant believed it was in response to the prisoners. At some level she had a stereotyped belief about prisoners and expected them to look and behave differently from other men.

- What really knocked my socks off ... I really expected to be able to tell they were prisoners ... I was absolutely "unearthed" by the fact that there were no distinguishing features. It questioned my understanding of humanity and I fell for what I try very hard not to, and that is stereotyping.

Summary

All the participants found either the physical aspects of prisons or their work with prisoners had a strong effect on them. The physical aspects of the prisons they found to quite formidable and oppressive. The presenters were wary of prisoners and initially felt quite nervous and apprehensive about working with them. Some were aware of their own vulnerability in working with violent prisoners. The participants on some occasions
were surprised to discover their own stereotyped preconceptions and beliefs about prisoners. The initial experiences of the participants could be reflected in the words of one of them who reported after the first day in prison, "that was the most extraordinary experience I've ever had."

Category 2: Themes About Experiences of Prison Culture

Prison Culture

The participants all found they were initially exposed to a culture they did not understand. Although they had been given an orientation to the prison when the operational rules were explained to them, the presenters found they had much more to learn. They spoke of learning how best to work with the culture of the prison officers. The prisoners had their own sub-culture which the presenters set about trying to understand. They also discussed how they became aware of the different assumptions on which one operates within a prison culture. As one participant explained:

- It's always easier when you know the culture, and you know the rules. So, just that confidence knowing where you're going and what you can and can't do, what you can expect, what you can demand ... all those sorts of things.

The culture involving prison officers and the culture involving prisoners will be discussed separately.

Prison Culture and Prison Officers

The participants' experiences of working with prison officers were varied although there were some common threads which emerged from their experiences. The prison officers' role is to maintain security and ensure the safe conduct of all activities within the
prison. Therefore the participants found it was important to consult them whenever in doubt. As one participant learned:

- They are with these people twenty-four hours a day and as far as I am concerned, they are the experts ... I only drop in and out.

In most working environments employees have a degree of autonomy and are allowed to use some initiative in the work place. The participants in this study found working in prison to be quite different. All recalled at least one incident where they had acted with the best of intentions and later found that their action was against prison procedures. To illustrate how a seemingly innocent action could cause problems, one participant described the following incident. It happened during a training period for the participant. A prisoner came into the room as the participant was taking out a piece of chewing gum. Out of politeness the participant offered some to the prisoner. The prisoner declined the offer. Later the participant learnt that chewing gum is banned because it can be used to make imprints of keys or to stuff into locks. The participants learned very quickly that in prison one cannot operate on the same assumptions that one uses in other settings. In prisons it is important to always consult the prison officers. One presenter explained:

- Don't assume anything - because your brain just isn't thinking along prison lines.

The participants learned that by following procedures and consulting with prison officers they gained the respect and confidence of the prison officers. Otherwise, the officers may have concerns about non-custodial staff who could put themselves in danger or allow a prisoner to cause an incident.

- If you just got out and wandered about ... they'd feel very nervous and wary about you.

- I follow the procedures so that they know where I am ... so, that way they don't think I'm an air-head.
Participants spoke of difficulties they experienced in working with prison officers. Some saw a few prison officers as steeped in power and control. There were incidents where the participant had acted in a manner not acceptable to the officer. Subsequently the participant found it difficult to negotiate arrangements for work areas and access to prisoners.

- You get on the wrong side of them and they can make your entire working life so miserable it's just not worth it.

The participants spoke of the attitudes of many prison officers towards non-custodial staff. Some see non-custodial staff, particularly some programme staff, as not really understanding the tough world of the criminal. They believe the programme staff are "do-gooders" who can cause trouble by giving prisoners wrong ideas.

- A lot of officers don't think that there should be any non-uniform staff in the prisons.

Some participants have been asked by prison officers to explain how the anger management group is conducted and what is discussed. These officers believed the prisoners to be entrenched in their beliefs and values and that no programme would make any difference to them. The officers also believed aspects of the programme could undermine their authority if during group sessions prisoners were allowed to discuss incidents that happened. Therefore, some of the participants spent time explaining the rationale of the programme to prison officers.

- We had to spend a lot of time giving some education about what we were doing and why ... it's not that we are against the officers ... but that is often a source of conflict.

However all the participants had gained experience through their work and believed they had established acceptable working relationships with prison officers.

- The treatment I receive from the officers and the rapport I have with them ... contribute to the fact that I feel quite comfortable in that environment.
Prison Culture and Prisoners

The prisoners have their own culture, their own code of behaviour. Participants found that as their understanding of that culture developed, they were better able to communicate and work with the prisoners. Also, they were able to establish realistic views about what could be achieved with programmes such as the anger management programme. A participant explained:

· There is a culture that the prisoners themselves have, and if you are able to adapt and to be part of that culture when you are presenting the programme, then it makes an enormous difference.

Part of the prisoners' culture can be learnt from understanding the language they use. Participants found it takes time to tune into the terms and meanings of words as used by the prisoners. For example, prisoners have terms for different areas of the prison such as "chokie" or "down the back". There are other terms that have a particular connotation for the prisoner. One example is the word "dog" which when used in a particular context could mean a challenge to a fight. In coming to terms with the way prisoners communicated, one participant commented:

· I remember when I first started ... it's like a different language.

The prisoners often have their own view of the world and their own sense of justice which can be different from that of other people in society. A prisoner belonging to a criminal sub-group will adhere to the rules of that sub-group even if this means risking further imprisonment for such behaviour. Within the prison there are certain rules and expectations which the prisoners adhere to. They cannot be seen to lose face in front of the other prisoners. Therefore the participants learned that there were certain limits on what they could expect from the prisoners.
· You can't implement rules they are just not going to follow, because they'd rather get into all the trouble in the world than do them.

· It's this saving of face ... you can't ever let anybody put it over you.

The participants found many of the prisoners easy to work with if they respected them as persons. Rather than focus on the crime, they sought to understand what led the prisoner to jail. In many cases the prisoners had horrific backgrounds.

· A lot of the guys I have in my group have come from fairly horrendous backgrounds.

· I think what you need to be able to do, is to separate that part of their behaviour from them as a person in order to be able to work with them.

Another aspect of working with prisoners is to keep them informed about what is happening with the group. One participant believed strongly that what really upsets the prisoners is not to be told what is happening. On one occasion this participant had to close the group and the prisoners were returned to their units and locked in. The participant first explained to the prisoners the reasons for taking this action. The prisoners indicated they understood and accepted the explanation.

· One of the biggest problems for prisoners and what drives them absolutely nuts ... they don't get told what is going on, and it's that not knowing what is going on that really drives them nuts.

Prisoners sometimes approached participants with requests such as getting information for the prisoner. Participants have found from experience that it is best to immediately refuse such request. This is against prison rules and the prisoners find it easier to receive a straight refusal than a delayed let-down. Participants found it was a disservice to the prisoner to build up unreal expectations.

· If we say we can do something about that ... all of a sudden their expectations are raised ... and if nothing is done or they get the answer in the negative, it really knocks the wind out of their sails ... they have got such low self esteem.
Summary

When the participants started work in prison they had to learn to adapt to different cultures. They found it important not to assume anything and to consult prison officers whenever they were in doubt. Some experienced difficulties working with prison officers who saw the participants as "do-gooders" who were not in touch with the real world of the criminal. With experience, the participants accepted that the prison officers were responsible for maintaining the safe operation of the prison and were in that sense the experts. The participants found working with prisoners involved learning to understand their language and to understand that prisoners had their own rules for living both in the prison and on the outside. Some assumptions of prisoners could be challenged but others could not. Some participants spoke of respecting the person of the prisoner rather than focussing on the crime committed.

Category 3: Group Processes and Prisoners

Group Methods and Processes

The participants used a variety of methods in presenting the anger management programme including group discussions, teaching, role-playing, experiential exercises and showing video-taped interactions. The number of prisoners in each group was on average eight to ten. The participants found that the group processes operating within a group of prisoners were in some ways similar to those operating in other groups. However there were differences which the participants learned through experience. Differences were noted during the establishment phase of the group and in the manner of presenting the programme content. The participants spoke of the special knowledge and skills they had each developed in (a) establishing realistic goals for the programme, (b) making the programme content relevant and interesting for the prisoners, and (c)
understanding the group dynamics and how to respond to them. Each of these is discussed in more detail.

Goals of Programme Presenters

The participants spoke of being realistic in their expectations of what could be achieved in a twenty-hour programme. They knew that most prisoners who applied to do the anger management programme did so to better their chances for parole. Often prisoners came to the group thinking either that they did not have a problem with violence or that the programme would be "a whole load of b...".

- It's pretty rare that they really want to change anything.
- I don't have any high expectations about what they are going to get out of it.

During the establishment phase of the group participants had developed strategies for motivating prisoners to participate in the group process and to be positive about the outcome of the programme for them. They found with some groups there was a tussle for power, to see who will take charge. A prisoner who was an accepted leader within the prison culture, would attempt to dominate the group process and set the agenda. One participant experienced strong power struggles in his first few groups which were difficult to handle.

- There were some guys who were quite aggressive ... I had some power playing going on which again is a testing ... whether or not I can be intimidated and dominated in the group.

At the time the participant was new to the prison culture and believed his own nervousness and uncertainty was apparent. Once he felt more at ease, he began to challenge the group members about their reasons for participating in the programme.
· If we can all survive that first one or two sessions, then somehow I pass the test, then they accept my authority ... I'll honour them if they honour the process and honour me as well.

At the start of the group one participant invites the prisoners to put forward their views and to help establish the group rules. She believed it was important to seek their opinions, as these were not generally sought in the prison.

· They are told their opinions don't count a lot of the time ... I invite them to criticise, to disagree with me.

There were other strategies participants had developed to motivate prisoners to participate in the group. For example, one outlined the following technique. At the beginning of the programme group members were asked if they could recall an incident where anger or violence had caused them a problem. If they wished the outcome of this incident to be different, then perhaps they could learn some skills from the programme to help them achieve this. If the prisoners can feel secure and motivated to drop their defences and to cooperate, the group will run well.

· In some groups that façade drops away, they forget to act tough, and they just go ahead and participate.

Most groups ran well although occasionally there was a group where the process for the participant was an "uphill battle all the way". Either the prisoners were completely switched off or were antagonistic all through the group. Each of the participants had experienced at least one such group. On rare occasions a prisoner has had to be put out of a group because of his negative attitude and disruptive behaviour. One participant explained that with some prisoners:

· I know some of them are completely switched off ... they think it is a whole lot of b....
All the participants found the material in the anger management programme provided a sound basis for teaching an understanding of anger and how to develop skills and strategies to deal with anger. However they found they had to adapt the programme to the language and culture of the prisoners. There were some exercises and video-taped interactions which they would not use, as they believed the prisoners would respond negatively to them.

- A lot of the language is a bit patronising ... it has to be put into a perspective that they can relate to, that has some relevance or reason for them to listen to or participate in.

- So trying to find that line between teaching them something new and talking over their head is, I think, a bit of an art.

Many prisoners are pragmatic individuals, sometimes with minimal education but not lacking intelligence. Learning to let down their defences and talk in a group for the first time is a difficult step for them. Once they develop sufficient trust, prisoners can often reveal much personal material. For example, two participants explained:

- People say they are reluctant to talk in a group because of where they are, but it has been my experience that some of them have actually come out with stuff that I know they've never actually told another person.

- You may not condone some of their beliefs but you may understand them and therefore you've got other ways of presenting what you are wanting to get over.

**Group Dynamics**

If a programme presenter is aware of the stresses and concerns of prisoners outside the group, then it may shed light on some unpredictable behaviours within the group. The prisoners may be concerned about pending court hearings; there may be issues concerning family visits or custody arrangements with children; there may be conflicts
with prison officers or other prisoners. If the prisoners can trust the presenter and other
group members enough to talk about personal issues, then group cohesion is greatly
enhanced and much learning can take place.

- Someone might say quietly to you "this happened ... they are all feeling uptight about the
  incident". And generally once it has been said and once people get it out and start talking
  about the incident, then you find a marked difference in the attitudes of the participants.

One thing all the participants found was that the prisoners were particularly sensitive to
any insincerity on the part of the programme presenter.

- I think being honest is the biggest thing in jail work.

- I think to a large degree people in prison are very alert to your feeling about them ... if you
can't believe in what it is you are going to say to them, then you are better off not saying it.

On a number of occasions participants found that as the course progressed some
prisoners reported finding certain topics useful. The prisoners believed aspects of the
course were not relevant to the world outside prison to which they would return.
However, the participants believed they had given the prisoners another way of seeing a
problem and responding to it. They considered such changes in understanding and
behaviour to constitute success in their work.

- The comments I've got back from the guys I've dealt with so far ... the programme ... it's
  not what it is like when they get on the outside ... but I've found every course they've done
  that at the end they come and say there are some parts that may help.

- Almost in spite of themselves they are actually learning and then they come back ... they're
  quite thrilled because they have got a success thing.

Presenting anger management programmes in prison has been for each of the participants
an ongoing process of learning and adapting to the prison culture. One presenter
summed up this process:
A lot of the time I'm learning about where they're coming from and how to structure things so that it is a learning time ... so there is a whole lot of learning going on ... I think the time when that stops, you hand in your card.

Aboriginal Prisoners and Groups

The number of Aboriginals in Western Australian prisons constitutes a high proportion of the prison population. Most participants expressed concern at their limited knowledge of Aboriginal culture and discussed the need to gain appropriate knowledge and skills to work with Aboriginal prisoners. They learnt through experience that at times the content and presentation of the programme were inappropriate for Aboriginals. For instance, Aboriginal men will not talk about "men's business" with a female presenter. Many times Aboriginals appeared uncomfortable in the group but the participant had no way of knowing how to respond. Therefore, it was considered important that opportunities be provided for the participants to gain sufficient cultural awareness to effectively work with Aboriginals.

Incidents in Groups

The participants were always aware of the potential for a violent incident occurring in the group simply because they were working with men convicted of violent offences. Their experience was that violent incidents were rare. Generally they felt safe in the group situation, believing that if a threatening incident arose, there would be members of the group who would protect the programme presenter. As one explained:

'I think realistically you would be safer in a group situation because if one of the guys got up to hurt you, I think there would be some other guys in that group that are going to try to stop them.

Nevertheless while they were conducting the anger management programme each participant had faced at least one incident which was cause for concern. They
experienced concern for their own personal safety as well as concern about the consequences for them if the incident was not handled well.

Some examples illustrate the difficulties these incidents posed. On one occasion before the session started one participant was confronted by a very angry prisoner who had been put out of the group the previous week because of his negative attitude and disruptive behaviour, and consequently had his parole revoked. The participant at the time was some distance away from the mainstream prison and prison security. She finally persuaded the prisoner to go with her to the prison superintendent to discuss the matter. In another incident a fight erupted during a group session. It began as a verbal disagreement when suddenly the two concerned stood up to fight. The participant was close to one of the men but decided not to interfere. She realised that a distraction to the prisoner closest to her would afford his opponent an opportunity for a "king hit". As it happened the two antagonists settled down and no blows were exchanged. Had the incident continued, the participant decided the best strategy would have been to seek assistance from a prison officer.

The participants developed ways of ensuring their own personal safety. For example, a participant on one occasion temporarily closed a group until a prison officer was made available in the area where the group was meeting. Another participant experienced serious intimidation from a prisoner during a group session. In subsequent groups this presenter always made sure the interior of the group room was visible to prison officers outside. As she explained:

- I always make sure there is an officer who can see what is going on ... you have to protect yourself.
Summary

The experiences of working with groups had for the participants several common elements. They described methods and strategies they used to motivate prisoners to participate in the group. They were aware of the limitations of what could be achieved through the programme. They adapted the content and presentation of the programme to the prisoners' culture. Most participants saw their need to be informed of the relevant aspects of Aboriginal culture in the context of group processes as a priority. They were always aware of the potential for violence and discussed how they handled crises that arose in groups. The participants were all motivated to continue their work with prisoners because they believed they achieved some positive outcomes with the programme.

Category 4: Personal Concerns

Safety and Stress

The issue of personal safety was a recurring theme in the discussions of the participants. Some had taken the initiative and negotiated with prison management to establish safety checks for themselves. For example, some participants will not conduct groups unless a prison officer is in the vicinity. One would like to carry some sort of alerting device as a safety precaution. There are times when an emergency muster takes place. The muster is called for a count of prisoners or a search and at such a time the prisoners and the prison officers have set procedures to follow. The participants found there were no procedures for them and were unsure of what they were to do. Some participants found they were locked into a room with up to forty prisoners. After these incidents the participants involved held discussions with prison officers and decided on an acceptable procedure for presenters when a muster is called. Incidents like these
reminded the participants of their vulnerability in a prison setting and the possibility of unforeseen violent events occurring. One experienced participant explained:

- Although I appear fairly relaxed and friendly, I don't ever forget I'm in a prison ... I don't let my guard down.

The increased stress level induced by this type of work was apparent to the participants, even the most experienced. Initially some found this very draining. Some participants choose to run only one session in a day as two session proved too tiring. When compared to their other work, most participants found their work in prison the most demanding. Some explained that:

- I like to take time off in between groups ... it is very stressing.

- It is demanding ... now I don't feel nervous ... then again, what a relief to come into head office for a day!

- I think it is important when you are going to a prison not to be too stressed out or tired.

**Women Working in a Male Prison**

Most of the programme presenters are women. Those interviewed spoke of some responses to them as women and of the need for establishing strict boundaries in working with the prisoners. One participant recalled on starting work in a traditionally all-male environment that she had no standing whatsoever with prison officers:

- There is an element who believe women should not be allowed in a male prison ... when I first came in, I was not a prison officer, I was a woman and as such had no standing whatsoever ... now I have proved myself.

The female presenters learned to take precautions in the way they dressed for working in prison, and explained how important it was to maintain a strict professional relationship with the prisoners at all times. They found they had to be more cautious and
to take steps not required in any other work setting. For example, one participant when
going into a toilet, would always check behind the main door before closing it. Some of
the female participants had experienced unpleasant incidents after another female worker
had behaved inappropriately. Most of them insisted on working in areas where they
could be seen by prison officers.

- I always make sure there is an officer who can see what is going on ... you need to protect
  yourself.

However, the female participants believed a woman could provide a different perspective
when working with male prisoners.

Participant's Motivation

The participants had chosen to work with prisoners for different reasons. Some had
identified a desire to work with people whom society often rejects. For one it was a
change in career path. Having previously worked with highly motivated people who had
the means to enjoy life, the participant found working with prisoners a different type of
challenge but one that was rewarding. Asked why they continued to work in a relatively
difficult area, the participants spoke of enjoying the challenge, of being stimulated by
small successes, and of believing that at some level they were helping these men to see a
better way of life.

- People you deal with in prison are at the other end of the scale.

- A tiny bit might make a difference.
Advice for New Presenters

When asked what advice they would give new presenters, all the participants said they would stress the need to take care of personal safety. They would tell new workers to ask about the correct procedure when in doubt, even if they feel they should know what to do. This advice was considered particularly important for contract workers like the programme presenters who only work in the prisons for short periods. New presenters should not feel reluctant to take the time of the officers nor should they feel they could put their contracts in jeopardy by appearing not to know all the procedures. An experienced participant would tell them:

- I would talk to them about their own safety ... not putting themselves in a position anywhere.

- If they've got any queries at all, ask ... always ask.

Summary

One recurring theme throughout the discussions with the participants concerned the issue of personal safety. They worked in an environment in which there was always the potential for violence and so they were always alert and on guard. The participants had chosen to work in a difficult field because they believed some positive achievements could be made with the prisoners. The female participants were particularly aware of the acute need to guard personal safety and to maintain strict professional boundaries at all times when dealing with prisoners.
CHAPTER 5

THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Reflections About the Research Process

One of the strengths of phenomenological research is that it appears to be particularly relevant to all concerned. The researcher found this to be the case with this study. While interviewing presenters about their experiences and perceptions of working in a prison environment, the researcher also reflected and reported on personal experiences of those phenomena. The understanding of the interviewer and the interviewee about working in prisons was enhanced through this process.

There were some unanticipated but significant incidents which occurred during the research process. These were recorded at the time and the possible significance of these events considered after the data had been analysed. The process of writing and seeking to understand these events is described by Van Manen (1990, p. 155) as "thoughtful learning ... re-instating lived experience". It is a process whereby one can discover new insights into the research area, and gain ideas for future research activities. While offering some descriptions and interpretations of these unanticipated events, the researcher acknowledges there may be other ways of viewing them. As claimed by Patton (1990), a phenomenologist's way of knowing is derived from how he or she experiences and makes sense of the world, and the phenomenologist accepts that there can be other subjective interpretations of the same events.

Interviewer and Participant Relationship

The researcher and the participants in this study worked for the same Unit and were known to each other prior to the study being undertaken. It was anticipated that there
could be some hesitancy on the part of the participants at the start of the research interviews. However, once the interview protocol was explained and confidentiality and anonymity assured, it was expected that the interviews would be fairly informal and relaxed. What was surprising for the researcher however was that some of the participants seemed nervous and cautious at the beginning of the interview and a few remained so for the whole of the interview time. Others were quite relaxed and spoke freely of their experiences. Most did benefit from the opportunity to explore their experiences and to make suggestions about possible changes to their work environment.

The participants who seemed rather nervous and cautious either at the beginning or throughout the interviews, made different comments reflecting their feelings at the time. For instance, one felt in some sense being tested and seemed initially anxious to say the right thing. One anticipated being asked a lot of questions regarding knowledge of the anger management programme. Some expected to be given a list of questions and initially felt uncomfortable with simply being asked to recall and describe their experiences of working in prison. These participants believed they were not "experts". One other participant seemed relieved that the interview turned out to be easier than expected. There could be a number of different reasons for these reactions and a few are suggested here.

- Since the researcher was also a programme officer working in head office, it is possible that some uncertainty may have been created in the minds of the participants about the reasons for the research. However, this seems unlikely as programme presenters appeared to be very relaxed with the researcher in other situations. (Also see "Ethics")

- Some participants may have felt some insecurity in their role as anger management programme presenters working with prisoners. Most had had
limited experience in this particular field, having worked in this capacity for a period from a few months up to fourteen months.

Most programme presenters were part-time, contract workers and each worked individually in different prisons. There may have been some hesitancy on their part to discuss with personnel from head office the problems they were experiencing. They may have believed they were expected to know how to deal with all the difficulties which might arise in the course of their work. They may have had a perception of being judged incompetent if they made criticisms or discussed difficulties they had. This could also have created a worry about the renewal of their contracts.

On the other hand there were some participants who appeared confident and who readily discussed their experiences of working in prisons. Because the researcher was also a programmes officer, more than half of the participants, including some of those who appeared nervous, saw the interview as providing the opportunity to discuss general concerns they had about their work. The researcher on those occasions, turned off the tape recorder so that the two different discussions were kept separate in the minds of both interviewer and interviewee.

Other researchers (Minichiello, et al., 1991; Patton, 1990; and Van Manen, 1990) acknowledge the difficulties of ruling out all factors which can influence the behaviour of research subjects. They also note that a researcher too can have an influence on the respondents. According to Wilson (1977, p. 248), respondents in research can bring different agendas to that process. For example, they can be suspicious about the intent of the research, they may have a sense of a behaviour which they believe is appropriate, or they may have a desire to be evaluated positively. Such attitudes can influence the way they respond to a survey instrument or behave in an interview. Therefore, it is accepted among researchers that respondents can bring different personal agendas to an interview and will respond accordingly. It can then be assumed that the participants in this study, while sharing much valuable information with the researcher, were also influenced to some degree by their own personal agendas.
There is the question of the status and influence of the interviewer in research studies. Minichiello, et al. (1991, p. 216) discuss the possible impact which the researcher's attributes may have on the informants and raises the question of the "inside/outside" status of the researcher. They discuss the strengths and weaknesses of each approach. For example, insiders may have a special knowledge of the setting or group which is under study. On the other hand it can be argued that an outsider will have unprejudiced knowledge about the setting and/or group. While putting forward several other arguments to support each position, Minichiello, et al. (1991) concluded that in social science research there can be no claim to neutral objectivity from either "inside" or "outside" interviewers.

The researcher believes there were strengths in the researcher being an "insider", a part of the organisation where the study was situated. The study was a phenomenological inquiry and as such had two different perspectives. The first was to understand the experience of the presenters and how they interpreted them; the second was to experience that phenomena personally because as Patton (1990, p. 70) claims "the only way for us to know what another person really experiences is to experience it ourselves." The participants in this study saw the researcher as a person who also had knowledge and experience of the organisation in which they worked. The interview provided for them the opportunity to describe their experiences, to comment on their concerns and to explore the possibilities of changes to their work environment.

There were some positive outcomes from this process. The researcher became aware of the isolation of the most of the presenters, particularly those working in country areas. The interview provided for some of them the first opportunity to talk about their concerns. There was an evident need for them to be given opportunities to debrief after experiencing difficult incidents in the prison, also to share ideas with other programme presenters. The researcher thought that other programme presenters not included in the research sample may be having similar experiences, so discussed this possibility with the Manager of the Alternatives to Violence Unit. Different strategies to meet these perceived needs were discussed and it was thought an in-service day may be the best
solution. Subsequently, all the programme presenters were contacted to elicit from them their responses to this proposal. They were quite positive and supportive of the idea. The researcher worked with other members of the Alternatives to Violence Unit in planning and organising the in-service which took place in January 1995. Most of the presenters attended, travelling from all over the State to do so. They later reported that they had found the informal sharing of ideas, and the opportunity to meet each other to have been a valuable part of the day. It is planned to hold another in-service later in the year. This activity was an important, immediate and unanticipated outcome of the research.

Inquiries Relating to Prisons

About the time this study was being undertaken some official inquiries relating to prison operations were instigated. These inquiries were partly in response to complaints regarding treatment of some prisoners in two of the larger metropolitan prisons and they were initiated by The Western Australian Police Taskforce and the Director General of the Ministry of Justice. There was a progress report on these inquiries from the Director General of the Ministry of Justice in February 1995 (Grant, 1995).

The question may be asked: Did these inquiries have any relevance or bearing on the research data? The timing of these inquiries and the undertaking of the research was purely coincidental. When I first planned this study, I was relatively new to the Ministry of Justice, having worked there for only four months. I had no knowledge of any of the matters which were brought up for investigation in these inquiries. The interviews for this study were undertaken in November and December 1994 before the inquiries commenced. If the participants had any knowledge relating to matters pertinent to the inquiries, they did not discuss them with me. I believe there was no contamination of the research data due to the inquiries.
CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

"I don't think I recognised how much the environment would affect me."

This study set out to explore the experiences of eight people working in the context of a prison environment. The results indicate that these people found working in prison significantly different from other work environments in which they had operated. They reported the experience of working in prisons to be both demanding and challenging. As one of the participants commented, "I don't think I recognised how much the environment would affect me". Generally, this was the reported experience of the other seven participants. The environment and culture of the prison had an affect on them personally and on their work there.

The major themes that emerged from the interview data reflect the principal aspects of the impact of working in a prison environment. When people begin working in prisons, it is quite likely they will be affected by the physical aspects of that setting which are strong reminders of the nature of that establishment. They may not be aware of their own preconceived ideas about prisoners and may be surprised by their reactions to them. There is a definite culture which they will need to understand and adapt to in order to work effectively in a prison. They will always experience an element of stress in working in this environment because of the ever-present potential for violence. Taking care of oneself and ensuring one's personal safety are important elements of successfully working within a prison context. These findings support and greatly extend those of Fox (1990) whose study focussed on a prison classroom environment.

The participants in this study worked in rehabilitation programmes and from their experiences believed these programmes were worthwhile. They acknowledged the
necessity of setting realistic goals, given the constraints of the work environment and the attitudes of many of the prisoners. Nevertheless, they found they were achieving positive outcomes with the programme.

The experiences of these eight programme staff may have implications for other programme staff and other non-custodial staff, and may have particular significance for those staff who work in prisons on a contract basis.

Implications of the Study

The participants interviewed in this study were quite experienced and skilled in their work and the data gathered from their interviews could be used as a source of information for those who select and train prison programme staff. The issues are particularly relevant for staff employed on contracts. The following are some suggestion arising from the results of this study.

- Since contract workers spend limited time working in prisons they often learn through experience and by making mistakes how to best work within that context. Initial training and on-going support are needed. They need to understand the importance of prison protocol, and learn to understand and to adapt their work to that culture.

- The issues of personal safety for contract workers could be considered by managers of prisons and those who employ contract workers. For example, at the present time there are no overall strategies for ensuring the safety of contract workers. The initiative is largely left to the individuals concerned.
The environment in which programme personnel work is a stressful one and workers need support in the task of negotiating acceptable behaviour from prisoners.

The environment of a prison imposes restrictions on those who work there. People not prepared to accept the necessity of these restrictions would be unsuitable candidates for this type of work.

Presenter's believed that the provision of on-going training on programme content and on effective group processes to work with prisoners would maintain and improve the quality of their work.

There is a need for programme personnel working in Western Australian prisons to receive some background knowledge and training in working with Aboriginals since they constitute a large proportion of the prison population.

As contract workers often work individually and can be somewhat isolated in their work, they would benefit from the establishment of support networks in the prison, with other contract workers and with programme planners.

The participants of this study believed the support they received from management was important in their continuing to work in what can be a stressful environment. By addressing issues of staff selection, training and support, efficiencies of the work force can be maintained.
Research Implications

The results of the study have implications for further research. There are a number of areas which could be investigated further. For example, the training needs of non-custodial staff, the impact of prison environments on non-custodial staff, effective ways of presenting programmes to prisoners, the personal impact on the lives of those who work in prison. The research could be expanded to prisons in other parts of Australia or elsewhere. This research is only the first step in a major research area and further work is needed.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX I

Questionnaire Guide

The following diagram illustrates the context in which the questions will be framed.

Questions will explore each aspect of the defined context by using the following type of questions.

* What were your expectations about working in a prison in relation to the physical environment, prisoners, etc.?

* What was it like for you when you first started working in a prison?

* What is it like for you now?

* If you were working with a trainee programme presenter, what issues relating to working in a prison would you discuss with the trainee?
APPENDIX II

Letter and consent form sent to programme presenters.

(These letters were typed on Edith Cowan University Letterhead paper to distinguish between my role as a Ministry of Justice Programme Officer and Edith Cowan University research student.)

Dear ____________

I am currently working on an Honour's Degree in Social Science at Edith Cowan University. I am proposing to research the experiences of programme presenters who are working with anger management programmes in a prison context. The study may provide information useful for training new programme presenters.

I would like to talk to programme presenters about their experiences of working in prison. Would you be willing to be interviewed?

The interview will focus on your experiences of working in a prison. The interview will take up to one hour of your time and will be tape recorded. After the interview has been transcribed any identifying information will be deleted and the tape erased. The research has no bearing on your employment by the Ministry of Justice.

If you agree to be interviewed, would you please sign this letter and return it to me?

Monica O'Keefe

____________________________________________________
I have read the information above and agree to participate in the research.

Participant ___________________________ Date ______

Researcher ___________________________ Date ______
APPENDIX III

Letter to the Ministry Of Justice

(Letter to seek permission to carry out the research project)

Peter Prisgrove  
Manager  
Alternatives to Violence Unit  
Programmes Branch  
Ministry of Justice  
Box F317 GPO  
Perth 6001

13 October 1994

Dear Peter,

As you are aware, I am currently completing my studies for an Honour's degree in Social Science at Edith Cowan University. A requirement of the course is that candidates undertake a research project. I have completed the writing of a proposal to undertake a study of "programme presenters' experiences of working with anger management programmes in a prison context".

I appreciate you taking time to attend my research seminar and for your feedback relating to the study. I would like to begin the research and am requesting your consent to my going ahead with the study.

Yours sincerely

Monica O'Keefe
APPENDIX IV

(This letter was sent to each of the research participants together with the summary of the interview transcript.)

January 1995

Dear ________________

I have finished typing up the transcript of my interview with you regarding your experience of working in the context of a prison. I've now made a summary of that interview and include a copy for your perusal.

I would appreciate any comments from you as it is one way for me to check if I have accurately done my job. While I have taken out any identifying information, it may still be possible to read some of the interview summary and know who the respondent was. However this summary is just for my use and will not be written into my thesis in its present form. What I will be doing is reading across all the interview summaries to analyse for common themes and in doing this task I will delete any personal identifying information.

I'm looking forward to doing the analysis as I think it will be the most interesting part of this project. The final writing up will probably be a bit time-consuming but a signal that I am getting near the end. Time for celebration maybe!

I would greatly appreciate hearing from you. Please send your comments to my home address above.

Best wishes.

Monica O'Keefe
Honours Student
Bachelor of Social Science
in Human Service Administration

Dr Irene Froyland
Department of Justice Studies
Research Supervisor
As explained in the attached letter, Monica O'Keefe will be conducting a research project as part of her studies for an Honours Degree in Social Science.

I believe the proposed research is both interesting and useful for the Alternatives to Violence Unit. However I want to emphasise to you that your participation in the research is quite voluntary and has no bearing on your work with the Ministry.

Peter Prisgrove
MANAGER
ALTERNATIVES TO VIOLENCE UNIT

18 October 1994

attach
APPENDIX VI

**Data Categories**
(Used during stage 2 of the analysis process)

When the summary transcripts were examined for topics, the following emerged:-

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE</td>
<td>Physical environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P's</td>
<td>Prisoners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Expectations about working in prison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W/P's</td>
<td>Working with prisoners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W/PO's</td>
<td>working with prison officers</td>
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<td>Interest in working with AMP</td>
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<td>RF</td>
<td>Reflection of research process</td>
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