Practitioner Emotions in Penal Voluntary Sectors: Experiences from England and Canada

Abstract

Mixed economies of welfare have seen increasing numbers of service users funnelled into voluntary, rather than statutory sector services. Many service users with (complex) human needs now fall within the remit of ill-researched voluntary organisations that are rarely social work led. Voluntary sector practitioners comprise a large and rising proportion of the social services workforce, but their experiences have received minimal analysis. Despite the importance of emotions across the helping professions, voluntary sector practitioners' emotional experiences are largely unknown. We address this gap, using an innovative bricolage of original qualitative data from England and Canada to highlight how *emotions matter for penal voluntary sector practitioners across diverse organisational roles, organisational contexts, and national jurisdictions*. We examine the emotions of paid and volunteer penal voluntary sector practitioners relating to their (i) organisational contexts and (ii) relationships with criminalised service users. Problematising positive, evocative framings of 'citizen participation', we argue that continuing to overlook voluntary sector practitioners' emotions facilitates the downloading of double neoliberal burdens—'helping' marginalised populations and generating the funds to do so—onto individual practitioners, who are too often ill-equipped to manage them.

Introduction

Mixed economies of welfare have seen increasing numbers of service users funnelled into voluntary, rather than statutory, sector services. Indeed, "social workers and service users rely heavily on voluntary sector services" (Dillenburger et al., 2008: 1630; also Cameron et al., 2016). In countries around the world, the voluntary sector provides services to address human needs and social problems including: housing and homelessness (Whiteford and Simpson, 2015), forced migration (Robinson, 2014; Robinson and Masocha, 2017), community violence (Dillenburger et al., 2008), domestic violence (Humphreys and Thiara, 2003) and criminalisation (Tomczak and Buck, 2019). Public services e.g. health and social care are also increasingly reliant on volunteering (Naylor et al., 2013). Thus, many people with (complex) needs now fall within the remit of organisations that are neither social work led nor inclusive of social work staff (Fenton, 2015). Voluntary organisations (and volunteers within statutory services) comprise a large and rising proportion of the social services workforce (Teicher and Liang, 2019). Despite acknowledgments of the importance of emotions in the helping professions more broadly (e.g. Morrison, 2007; Kinman and Grant, 2011; Rajan-Rankin, 2014), the emotions of voluntary sector practitioners have largely—and problematically—been written out of social work and criminological scholarship.

We examine practitioner emotions in the penal voluntary sector (PVS), which comprises non-profit, non-statutory agencies working with criminalised individuals, families and victims through prison, community and advocacy programmes, from the micro to macro levels. The PVS is not a niche sector. It increasingly undertakes complex work within and across social and criminal justice institutions (Quirouette, 2018) with and for some of the most marginalised members of societies around the world. For example, in the USA, the PVS manages more criminalised people than the world's largest prison system (Miller, 2014) and in England and Wales, the PVS has a larger workforce than the public prison and probation services combined (Tomczak and Buck, 2019). Paid

and volunteer PVS practitioners around the world (Quinn, 2019) work with people managing complex psychosocial problems and traumatic pasts involving poverty, violence and addiction (also: Wilberforce et al., 2014; Jansen, 2018). Yet, fifty years of literature on emotion in social work practice (e.g. Davis, 1977; Keinemans, 2015) has scarcely been utilised to understand the experiences of (P)VS practitioners. Related accounts of emotion in statutory criminal justice social work (e.g. Littlechild, 1997; Fenton, 2015; Merhav et al., 2018), the legal professions (e.g. Bergman Blix and Wettergren, 2018), jury deliberations (Lynch and Haney, 2015), prison work (e.g. Crawley 2004; Nylander et al., 2011) and probation (e.g. Knight and Modi, 2014; Fowler et al., 2018) have also overlooked voluntary sector practitioners.

Addressing this significant gap, we examine *what it is like* to practice in the PVS, exploring practitioners' emotions using original data gathered through research projects in England and Canada. Constructing an innovative bricolage of complementary data from these two jurisdictions, we illuminate the importance, complexity and diversity of PVS practitioners' emotions, which have long been marginalised in academic, practice and policy discourses. This identifies a previously unacknowledged "means to enrich thinking, action, service delivery and outcomes" (Morrison, 2007: 252) for criminalised individuals and the wellbeing of a little-analysed, numerically significant and increasingly overburdened workforce. We hope that our examination of PVS practitioners as boundary-spanning agents (Marchington et al., 2005) straddling criminal and social justice will stimulate further interdisciplinary research.

Existing scholarship

Emotions comprise both *cognitive processes* (perception, attention and evaluation) and *bodily events* (arousal, behaviour and expressions) (Ahmed, 2004; Colombetti and Thompson, 2007). Across the helping professions, emotions are important in multiple ways. For example, emotions can be

important "motivators of moral action" (Keinemans, 2015: 2186) that encourage individuals to seek out opportunities to help others and/or sustain their involvement in voluntary organisations through compassion satisfaction (e.g. Adamson et al., 2014; Baugerud et al., 2018). Emotions are also important within helping relationships, wherein the 'help' provided "depends as much on the helper's understanding of his own feelings and of the milieu in which he operates as on a detailed knowledge of the problems confronting [service users]" (Addison, 1980: 342). Although it is commonly assumed that "helpers are there to serve others and should be well able to cope with any burdens such caring might entail" (Gibson et al., 1989: 2), extensive literature has described the negative emotional impacts of practice within the helping professions. These include: diverse pressures and stresses (e.g. Huxley et al., 2005; Wilberforce et al., 2014), role strain (e.g. Lev and Ayalon, 2016), existential crises (e.g. Picardie, 1980), burnout (e.g. Travis et al., 2016), vicarious traumatisation (e.g. Joseph and Murphy, 2014; Merhav et al., 2018), shame (e.g. Gibson, 2016) and compassion fatigue (e.g. Robinson, 2014; Baugerud et al., 2018). These emotional impacts also require consideration within and across voluntary sector social service provision, as practitioner emotions can reduce service delivery efficacy (Collings and Murray, 1996), impact priorities and ethical decision making (Gaudine and Thorne, 2001; Lynch and Haney, 2015), have important implications for service users (Blomberg et al., 2015) and affect the implementation of public policy.

Data and Methods

Data in this article are drawn from two research projects using qualitative case study methods undertaken in England and Canada. Case study research is constructivist, recognising the subjective human creation of meaning (Baxter and Jack, 2008). In turn, we have adopted an embodied conceptualisation of cognition, recognising that minds exist in bodies. This approach avoids the oft-reproduced mind/body dichotomy and theoretical tendencies to consider cognitive

and bodily events as separate constituents of emotion (Ahmed, 2004; Colombetti and Thompson, 2007). We offer an innovative bricolage of original qualitative data, assembling multiple texts from two research projects. Together, these data offer an extended, novel framework for exploring more expansive practitioner and organisational terrains (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). Our combination of empirical data, perspectives, and multiple observers is a "strategy that adds rigor, breadth, complexity, richness, and depth" to our analysis (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000: 6). We are neither claiming to offer a multiple case study with strictly replicable findings nor a representative account of the heterogeneous PVSs in England and Canada. Instead, by learning across and bridging national domains (Kincheloe, 2001), our bricolage offers a rich, analytically rewarding account that can inform further research and theory building about the global issue of voluntary sector involvement in social service delivery.

The England research entailed content analysis of government policies, grey literature, PVS organisations' publications and semi-structured interviews. Interviews were conducted in 2012 with 13 paid and volunteer PVS practitioners from 12 organisations, including frontline, middle management and senior management roles (Tomczak, 2017). The Canada research entailed content analysis of government policies, grey literature, PVS organisations' publications, semi-structured interviews and participant observation. Over 400 hours of participant observation were undertaken between 2013 and 2018, including volunteer and new staff training, scheduled volunteer shifts, and the daily work of paid staff. Interviews were conducted in 2017 and 2018, with 15 paid and volunteer practitioners from seven organisations, including frontline and middle management roles. Both research projects received university ethical approval. All participants gave informed consent. Pseudonyms have been used throughout.

Organisations from England provided supplementary support services for adult male and female prisoners and/or probationers, and were principally funded by charitable trusts and

foundations. None were involved in competitive contracting, but two received statutory grant funding. Organisations included: a women's centre in the north of England, a national charity providing support through 'pen pals' and a prisoner resettlement organisation in London. Organisations from Canada sought to help adult criminalised women through services including: mentorship, community reintegration support, employment, housing and crisis counselling. They were predominantly funded by federal, provincial and local governments, receiving further income from non-profit organisations, private donations, foundations, corporations and religious institutions.

Although these research projects were undertaken in different national contexts, both England and Canada have recently seen significantly growing inequality, contraction in the state's redistributive role and decentralisation of social programmes (Banting and McEwen, 2018; Quinn, 2019; Tomczak and Buck, 2019). Complementary project features have facilitated our data combination. Both research projects: (i) took PVS organisations and practitioners as the units of analysis; (ii) bounded the cases using organisational definitions, including organisations working primarily with criminalised individuals and excluding e.g. victim-focussed or general addiction projects; (iii) included paid and volunteer practitioners in different organisational roles; (iv) explored what PVS organisations do in practice, excluding e.g. organisational board meetings; (v) conceptualised the PVS using three exploratory research questions—asking *what* voluntary organisations are doing with prisoners and probationers, *how* they manage to undertake their work, and the *effects* of their charitable work on prisoners and probationers (Tomczak, 2017). The projects differ in that the England research did not include practitioners in training or utilise participant observation, and the Canada research did not include criminalised men. Our bricolage method encourages us to confront these differences in pursuit of expanded interpretive horizons. By

drawing together our data, we intentionally engage in a process of "learning by difference" whereby we "gain the unique insight of multiple perspectives" (Kincheloe, 2001: 686, 687).

'Emotions' emerged independently during thematic analysis in both projects, i.e. descriptive coding of transcripts, interpretation and constructing overarching themes (King and Horrocks, 2010: 153). Our data were then combined, re-coded, triangulated through a literature search regarding practitioner emotion in social service delivery, and thematically analysed in 2019. Our analysis was guided by Crawley's (2004), core questions: (i) what emotions do practice generate and how are they managed? (ii) what emotional pressures do organisational norms (and, we add, organisational contexts) place on practitioners? (iii) what aspects of their work are troubling and how do practitioners cope? (iv) how important are emotions in shaping the nature and quality of practice?

Organisational Contexts and Emotion

"Wider societal, political and legislative contexts" should be considered alongside micro-level analyses of service user-practitioner relationships (Wilberforce et al., 2014: 813). Organisational conditions can be more emotionally taxing than complex client relationships (e.g. Bradley and Sutherland, 1995; Collings and Murray, 1996; Robinson, 2014). These conditions include "caseload size, paperwork requirements, waiting lists for services, decrease[s] in job security, unavailability of supervision and reimbursement for services provided" (Gilgun and Sharma, 2012: 565-566) and "inadequate and inappropriate resources, time pressures, paperwork, and perceived lack of communication including lack of feedback on performance" (Bradley and Sutherland, 1995: 328). Across the UK, US and Canada *inter alia*, public services have receded and voluntary organisations have been pressured to compensate (Cahuas, 2019). Government restructuring has altered state-voluntary sector relationships and significantly revised their funding structures (Ilcan and Basok, 2004; Tomczak, 2017). Recent policy developments in England and Canada have significantly

affected voluntary sector organisational conditions and, by extension, practitioners' emotions and services.

England

Since 2008, England and Wales' austere economic climate has further reduced the PVS's chronically limited resources. Financial difficulties weighed heavily upon paid and volunteer PVS practitioners, whose jobs and programmes could disappear due to unpredictable funding.

Katrina (paid, manager): It's a real struggle […] you don't have the money for stuff and you have to be inventive and you want to do so many things but you just can't […] because you haven't got the staff and you haven't got the money […] Erm, the future's not great, […] everyone just has a bit of a long face really. And you also feel like you're trying to do something really good and that you really care about and you're just fighting all the time, just to get enough money to run the place.

Phoebe (paid, frontline): That contract ended […] and at that stage, I was on my own then. You know, staff had to be let go, another member of staff left because […] there was no security […] There's peaks and there's down times, you know, especially when I've been working on my own and I've felt quite isolated, erm, but even then I could have bailed out when it was like that, but I didn't because I believe in what the charity does.

Assuming personal responsibility for structural failings, Jacqui felt guilt for failing to reliably support service users:

Jacqui (paid, frontline): What can be really difficult, cause you get to Christmas, then you have to start saying to women "we don't know how much longer we're gonna be here". And have to start closing down all your cases and you know […] that is *extremely* difficult […] those women who are *absolutely* in crisis and *absolutely* in need, and then you have to start closing their cases anyway and that's really hard.

Since these interviews in 2012, pressures have only increased. The Conservative government's welfare reforms, lack of safe housing and widespread difficulties accessing community mental health provision are further straining already pressured organisations (Drinkwater, 2018: 5). PVS practitioners are attempting to respond to increasingly *complex and urgent social needs* including: "housing, debt and financial management, problematic substance misuse and poor mental health" (Drinkwater, 2018: 25). In another study of PVS peer mentoring in England, Gough (2017) demonstrated that these pressures were exacerbated by the proliferation of Payment by Results funding (a public policy instrument whereby payments are contingent on the independent verification of results). The burdens of doing support work *and* meeting reduced reoffending targets were downloaded onto peer mentors:

> I'm quite happy if my job was simply to support people who needed help, […] the fact that we are supposed to be reducing reoffending makes it that much more stressful, because you've always got to think hang on a minute, will this help you to stop reoffending? You end up questioning everything you are doing […] (One service peer mentor – Gough, 2017: 157; also Gosling, 2018 on drug and alcohol treatment)

In England, therefore, PVS organisations and practitioners alike are under increasing pressure as they attempt to meet intensified human needs whilst also navigating challenging economic and political climates.

Canada

Welfare retrenchment has also had "profound implications" for the Canadian voluntary sector (Hall et al., 2005: 23). Government funding has reduced, become more short-term, more competitive and less predictable, whilst the demand for services has increased (Ilcan and Basok, 2004; Cahuas, 2019). This has strained voluntary organisations and practitioners, who confront: unstable funding preventing long-term and strategic planning, additional administrative burdens, fewer resources, rapid staff turnover, restricted funding for infrastructure, changing funding priorities, and increasing financial accountability requirements (Hall et al., 2005: 25-26).

> **Emily (paid, manager):** There's absolutely nothing extra in the budget already so when the budget gets smaller…when we find out something's been cut, then it's just scrambling trying to save everything we can…programming and people…some of it can fall to volunteers, but it's not always the case.

> **Rose (volunteer, frontline):** I have no clue what's going on most of the time. I ask so many questions. I literally feel like I have to ask for help for everything…It's super stressful because everyone here is already so busy and I don't want to be a pest.

> **Shauna (paid, manager):** You can really tell when we're dealing with any sort of funding issue. The whole place is just more tense […] It affects everyone here in every way…these issues pervade everything. And then things will be fine again for a bit after

we all adjust to the new normal, but yeah it's just constant shifting, constant re-

adjusting.

Together our data from two national jurisdictions illustrate that voluntary sector practitioners must

manage competing organisational and interpersonal pressures: keeping the lights on and 'helping'

service users. As a result, service users and practitioners may now have a *shared austerity reality*

(Pentaraki, 2017). While this may provide some practitioners "new insights about the connections

between themselves and the service users" (Pentaraki, 2017: 1251), such connections must not

obscure that practitioners are too frequently burdened with financial hardship, short term contracts

and illness (Cahuas, 2019).

Service User-Practitioner Relationships and Emotion

As with many forms of social work, front-line PVS practice involves regularly discussing

service users' "traumatic pasts filled with violence, substance abuse and poverty" (Jacobi and

Roberts, 2016: 353), along with their potentially traumatic and/or austere present realities. PVS

practitioners across jurisdictions described frequent and intense emotions in their relationships with

service users. The emotional textures of these relationships encompassed emotional labour, trauma,

the (perceived) high stakes of engaging with criminalised individuals, difficulties helping and relating

to service users, and the potential transformation of practitioners' world views (see also: Quinn and

Tomczak, forthcoming).

England

All 13 participants in our England sample referred to challenges in their relationships with

service users. Practitioners' emotional experiences involved listening to the emotional traumas and

witnessing the unmet needs of service users in addition to the emotional labour documented in

related frontline and helping relationships (Quinn and Tomczak, forthcoming). For example, Adrian described the difficulty of working with service users at higher risk of self-harm:

> **Adrian (paid, Director):** We're imprisoning women in this country […] when they're so unwell, and the level of self-harm and the *gruesomeness* of the self-harm […] these women are effectively being held in segregation units […] because you can't keep them safe anywhere else. Its barbaric […] it's either you melt down because you can't cope, or you become slightly hardened to it.

Emerging peer support scholarship from England involving professional/volunteer ex-s does not directly explore the emotional textures of practice but is illustrative here. For example, Buck (2018: 203) found that peer mentors were burdened with an expectation of emotional toil for little or no financial reward. Jaffe (2012: 352) found Listeners (prisoner volunteers who support peers in distress) were burdened by visible prisoner distress and the difficult information 'off-loaded' onto them, and could struggle to step back from their role. Marvin, from our sample, explained that helping criminalised individuals involved understanding how service users' formative experiences and traumas may mean that they possess particular (adaptive) dispositions that may complicate helping relationships (see: Littlechild 1997; Adamson et al. 2014):

> **Marvin (paid, Director):** Most of the guys that come to us have very poor decision making skills […] if you grow up in a household with more than one person in it, you learn negotiation, rather than, "that's mine, back off". And of course, if you learn it that way, every time someone takes something of yours, it's like (mimes a punch).

In other scenarios recalled by participants, we uncovered potentially intense emotional experiences for volunteers and practitioners being re-packaged and framed as 'pro-social'

influences for service users (see also: Quinn, 2019). For example, Jasmine described how her organisation—offering support to individuals convicted of sex offenses—drew upon the emotional labour of female volunteers to change one service users' problematic beliefs about women:

> **Jasmine: (paid, frontline)** Service users, the majority are men, struggle with […] relationships. The whole area of relationships is just so problematic for them […] through the volunteers and things, I think sometimes we can move people into seeing that, you know, perhaps they've got strange attitudes. One man had quite strange attitudes about women really and I ended up putting 3 female volunteers in with him. And they soon kind of erm, dispelled some of his notions.

Though we remain open to the possibility that this experience may have been empowering for the volunteers involved (who we did not interview), we are alarmed by the organisation's apparent lack of consideration for how these volunteers may have been affected by the process of dispelling this service user's "strange attitudes" about women. The needs and development of this particular service user apparently eclipsed potentially negative emotional impacts for the volunteers involved.

Practitioners in our sample were not merely committed to helping service users, but also to helping them in an inclusive and enabling way. For example, practitioners spoke about how their work required them to see beyond service users' criminalisation.

> **Solomon (paid, Director):** When we're working with people in prison […] we have to *see* that goodness in people and look past, you know, their behaviour.

For PVS practitioners, cultivating a humanising perspective of service users meant actively and reflectively working against cultural narratives and myths surrounding criminalisation and marginalisation. This process can be productively understood as a form of emotional labour wherein "the emotional style of offering the service is part of the service itself" (Hochschild, 1983: 5; also Quinn and Tomczak, forthcoming). Practitioners worked to transcend social prejudices, which may have, at times, involved hiding or suppressing particular feelings and/or immediate reactions in their interactions with service users. Though this was work that practitioners were personally and politically committed to, this does not negate the extent to which *a priori* commitments to seeing the goodness in others—referred to in other substantive areas as 'pro-customer attitudes'—potentially requires monitoring their own emotions (see: Hochschild, 1983; Korczynski, 2003).

Compounding these emotional pressures, voluntary sector practitioners are considered especially *dedicated*, *devoted* and *committed* to their service (Huxley et al. 2005 on the UK; also: Hall et al., 2003 on Canada). PVS practitioners in England were committed to their work with criminalised individuals, 'going the extra mile' and breaching work/ personal life boundaries:

> **Matilda (volunteer, frontline):** The voluntary sector is different […] there's more commitment, we don't work 9 to 5. I have a phone and one of the other volunteers has a phone […] if someone rang up in the middle of the night, we wouldn't say, you know, "we're not open".

> **Katrina (paid, manager):** That's the voluntary sector for you, you can't say no!

Problematically, "those who are most committed [to their work] are most in danger of becoming distanced and alienated from those whom they aim to serve" (Franzway, 2002: 263). The combination of increasing demands, fewer resources and *committed practitioners* is a *recipe for exhaustion*

and burnout (e.g. Kinman and Grant, 2011; Robinson, 2014; Travis et al., 2016), which may explain dwindling supplies of skilled and committed volunteers in voluntary sectors across jurisdictions (Hall et al., 2003; Huxley et al., 2005).

Canada

Volunteer and staff emotions were rarely addressed directly by voluntary organisations and their management, but at one organisation observed, one training session for new volunteers did specifically focus on anticipating volunteer emotions and mental health concerns. Volunteers were shown 116 PowerPoint slides, with 13 (~11%) addressing emotions that volunteers might feel in the course of helping criminalised women. Near the session's end, Karen—the paid manager leading the training—wrote on the whiteboard: "what the distress of others brings up in us" and asked trainee volunteers, "what do we find challenging?". One immediately responded that "potentially dealing with people who are suicidal or not knowing if they are suicidal or not can be very stressful", and others nodded vigorously. Later, another volunteer expressed concern about "getting out of their depth with counselling and emotions", which led others to express anxiety about needing to "go at it alone" at the end of their training, amidst what were presented as the high stakes of engaging with criminalised women (fieldnotes).

Volunteers were being prepared to work with criminalised women "in crisis". The training session, described above, emphasised that criminalised women were more likely than the general Canadian population to suffer from mental illness, abuse, and trauma. As a result, Karen warned that misinterpretations of criminalised women's behaviours could "pathologise and shame" them, "interfere with their effective support" and "dismiss their survival adaptations" (fieldnotes). In response to these warnings, Danielle—months later—still found herself overanalysing everything she said to service users:

> **Danielle (volunteer, frontline):** I am so terrified of saying the wrong thing. I get in my head about it […]

Certainly, volunteers must recognise criminalised women's circumstances and be attentive to their own demeanor, particularly as service users' likely histories of trauma and abuse may mean they are particularly attuned to others' emotions—given that their safety may have depended upon anticipating the behavior of others (Morrison, 2007). However, as Danielle's perspective indicates, such emphasis can place significant pressure and additional emotional burdens on already challenging work with service users.

Many volunteers disclosed personal histories involving trauma and later referred to client interactions as "triggering" (fieldnotes). This is unsurprising, given that "personal abuse history [can act] as a possible motivator to enter the caring professions" (McFadden et al., 2014: 1551), and in turn "the client's despair involves an act of being with and enduring one's own" (Picardie, 1980: 489). Shared trauma was acknowledged in the organisation's mental health training session, wherein volunteers were instructed to take self-scoring diagnostic tests for depression (PHQ-9) and anxiety (GAD). Yet, aside from being instructed to "reflect privately" on the results, volunteers were given neither space nor organisational support to process emotions potentially induced by these assessments or their ongoing practice (fieldnotes). Not one discussion in the mental health training session recognised the organisation's responsibility to care for practitioners (which, in some subcontractual and employment scenarios, includes legal duties).

Somewhat unrealistically, this organisation required that volunteers be "prepared to hear anything […] and display no judgement or personal bias whatsoever…under any circumstances" (fieldnotes). This responsibility was placed upon practitioners, emphasising personal coping strategies.

Karen (paid, manager): You need a plan […] do exercise, activities that are fun.

The roles of the voluntary organisation and statutory provision were notably absent from the coping strategies that volunteers imagined would help. Volunteers suggested coping strategies that focussed on their physical wellness (e.g. eating well, sleeping, exercising, being in nature), socialisation (e.g. debriefing or talking to others), and personal reflection (e.g. naming their feelings, acknowledging the limits of their empathy, journalling) (fieldnotes). While this kind of self-directed support is valuable and necessary, we consider it insufficient in the absence of further provision, particularly given the stresses of current austere climates.

Once training was completed and volunteers had been engaging with service users for several months, they acknowledged that discussing difficult experiences with service users could be difficult and/or triggering (see: McFadden et al., 2014; Merhav et al., 2018). But, these were not uniformly negative experiences. Some discovered that their own traumas could "help them relate", which made for "more rewarding interactions" with service users. However, not all volunteers were able to use their own experiences to "connect with clients on a feeling level". Conversely, some volunteers felt that the pressure to relate to unknown traumas (e.g. "feeling like you can't relate", "feeling disturbed") was, itself, emotionally taxing (fieldnotes).

For some, criminalised women's life experiences proved unfamiliar and troubling (fieldnotes). Whilst these reactions held the potential to promote shame, anxiety or misunderstanding, in some instances they facilitated boundary-breaking and *underscored the radical potential of PVS work* (Tomczak and Buck, 2019). Once they had begun working with service users, volunteers described how interactions with criminalised women had changed (and challenged) their worldviews:

"doing this work has made me feel different about the world…made me feel less safe in the world", "I'm less trusting of police", "you might become aware of your own

privilege", "become less judgmental", "put our own issues into perspective", "becom[e]

politically savvy", "change prejudice or bias" and experience "emotional growth"

(fieldnotes).

Such moments, when practitioners identified and engaged with the structural inequalities faced by

criminalised women, raised the possibility of a more productive social politics, by moving beyond

status-based antagonisms (Lawson et al., 2015). *Highlighting how, when and where such breaches in the status*

quo occur has potential to facilitate a better future through "alternative understandings, identities and

politics" (Lawson and Elwood, 2014: 210).

However, for some volunteers these realisations were accompanied by existential reflection

(Picardie, 1980) and guilt regarding their previous perspectives and relative social privileges. These

experiences increased "impatience or frustration" as well as pressure to "do something" about the

structural conditions they became (increasingly) aware of. Volunteers expressed feeling "drained" or

"exhausted" by the pressure to help, amidst unfavourable chances of making the difference they

desired. They sometimes "felt inadequate…like [they] didn't help" or expressed "feelings of

incompetence about not being able to help" (fieldnotes). However, throughout training, Karen

steered volunteers away from discussing action and/or advocacy work:

> **Karen (paid, manager):** Don't think that you need to find the answer […] just putting
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> someone in the right direction with resources is helpful. You don't necessarily need to
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> *do* something…[the] most important thing to do is listen […] all [service users] need is
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> to be acknowledged as a human being.

These feelings illustrate how the emotional burdens of helping are often downloaded onto—and

stop with—individual practitioners (Grootegoed and Smith, 2018). Voluntary sector (and volunteer)

delivery of what can be essential social services involves *individual citizens assuming the associated*

emotional and economic burdens under the positive, evocative guise of 'citizen participation' (Armstrong, 2002). In turn, this risks 'laundering' or making palatable the punishment of already marginalised populations (Tomczak and Buck, 2019).

As Addison (1980: 348) explained, social work professionals may pride themselves on being individuals "who can solve problems and offer effective help". Yet, for PVS practitioners this self-conceptualisation was constantly under threat, as they *continuously encountered formidable obstacles and unfair outcomes* in their work with criminalised individuals. These included: lack of support and cooperation from correctional institutions; prison lock downs interfering with visitation; service users being re-incarcerated or unable to obtain employment, stable housing or familial relationships. As social work scholarship has explained, "not feeling empowered to answer or solve specific client problems [is a]…main feature of client-related work contributing to stress" (Collings and Murray, 1996: 384). Like other caring professions, the PVS is likely to attract socially idealistic individuals whose goals are improbable to be realised through stand-alone individualised practice (Gibson et al., 1989: 13-14). Practitioners may, then, experience ontological guilt given their inability to act in accordance with their social values (Taylor, 2008).

Conclusion

Our analysis demonstrates that the emotional experiences of voluntary sector practitioners providing social services are clearly important and deserving of further analysis, within and beyond individual jurisdictions around the world. In our datasets, emotional experiences were significant for diverse practitioners, ranging from front-line service delivery volunteers up to the most senior levels of organisations. Whilst "difficult and burdensome emotions [are] often written out of rational accounts of work" (McMurray and Ward 2014: 1123), our examination of PVS practitioners' emotions is valuable, enabling us "to perceive the world differently" (Jagger 1989: 167) by adding

nuance to the positive, evocative guise of 'citizen participation' (Armstrong, 2002). Our data illuminate the overlapping contexts of diverse emotions in the PVS *across borders*, pushing practice-oriented conversations toward transnational perspectives, raising possibilities for transnational solidarity and collective action against shared austerity realities and the harms thereof.

Illuminating practitioners' emotional experiences has illustrated cases where the emotional and economic burdens of 'helping' criminalised and marginalised populations, through individualised functionalist-interpretive practice (Tomczak and Buck, 2019), are met by the voluntary sector. Social work practice is stressful, but benefits from professional training and supervision. In our datasets, PVS practitioners had very limited training and supervision, but assumed the emotional burdens of shrinking social security nets and shifting welfare states on a personal level. Questions for further research include: how are practitioners within and across organisational roles (not) supported by voluntary organisations? Can current modes of support underpin ethical practice? What are the short and long term emotional effects (for practitioners) of: (i) 'helping' criminalised individuals and (ii) working in increasingly strained organisational contexts? These are questions for all of us who care about the wellbeing of voluntary sector practitioners and the marginalised populations they serve, and provide an opportunity to develop critical social theory and praxis.

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