

## **NWRPA Newsletter May 2024**

### **Probation practitioners' experiences of managing high risk individuals on probation within the offender personality disorder pathway**

**Dr. Victoria Blinkhorn**

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#### **Summary by Frank Kelley**

**Dr. Victoria Blinkhorn** is a Senior Lecturer in Forensic and Investigative Psychology at Liverpool John Moores University, and a chartered member of the British Psychological Society. Her research interests broadly concern how mental illnesses, personality disorders and traits help to explain offending behaviour in adults, specifically females. She also undertakes work in some areas of applied psychology and is a Research Consultant for the NHS and Probation Service, Merseyside and Cheshire.

The Department of Health and the National Offender Management Service jointly commissioned the Offender Personality Disorder (OPD) pathway in 2011. Its aims were to provide a pathway of psychologically informed services for a highly complex and challenging offender group. They are likely to have traits of personality disorder and pose a high risk of harm to others.

In 2013, the OPD pathway commissioned a Psychologically Informed Consultation Service (PICS) for the Merseyside and Cheshire Probation Service. The service offers Probation Practitioners the option of accessing a consultation and a case formulation. This aids a psychological understanding of the offender and their risk; and, where appropriate, the identification of appropriate pathways, which meet the needs of the individual. The service seeks to develop a more psychologically informed workforce by providing knowledge and understanding of the bio psychosocial framework in an accessible way, thus improving the quality of the professional relationship with the offender and the management across services in custody and the community.

In this talk, Victoria presented the research she conducted in collaboration with the NHS and Probation Service. She also discussed what is currently in progress including future plans, all with an aim to further improve the management of high risk individuals within the OPD pathway.

She very kindly offered us her richly informative slide presentation. You can find this in the News section of the NWRPA website under. Newsletters for May 2024, or by clicking on this link [May 2024 Slides](#).

While there are psychologists and psychiatrists in prison services, prison officers do not have any routine training in personality disorder. A collaboration, begun in 2014, reached out to colleagues for students to do PhD research. Victoria became a research PhD student and later a Research Consultant.

Research began with a large quantitative study. This was four focus groups with 23 staff from the Prison and Probation Service (PPS). They discussed their views and experiences of the PICS. These practitioners got a lot out of the focus groups and wanted more. The research was reported to the commissioners and showed this approach worked.

This led to a second study, during lockdown, where Victoria interviewed nine PPS staff, who used the PICS. Themes emerged of a lack of support, impersonal management, problematic

working environments, high workloads, the helpfulness of PICS and it giving a silver lining at a difficult time in the pandemic. PPS staff said the only time they worked with offenders was on the phone. There was a difficulty in this research of no negatives about PICS.

The third research project was a qualitative study of seven PICS staff. The themes were, the impact of PICS changes, advantages and disadvantages of being a removed service, high workload having a negative impact on the consultation and formulation process, the emotional impact of the role and an overall sense of gratitude for the role and appreciating it's purpose.

The fourth project involved developing a validated evaluation measure for the PICS. The 15 items of a 5 point Likert scale questionnaire came from the first quantitative study in 2011. Victoria asked 150 PPS who had used a PICS consultation. Exploratory Factor Analysis revealed a three factor model.

- Professional support
- Personal reflection
- Practicalities

There is fuller information about past, present and future research in your copy of her slide presentation.

**Thank you very much to Victoria Blinkhorn** for her clarity and enthusiasm in presenting a summary of her, and her team's, complex work to an audience of largely non-researchers,