**MNS Disorders in Guyana's Jails, 1825 to the Present Day**

Methods and Context for Data Deposit

Dr Emma Battell Lowman, July 2022

The objective of MNS Disorders in Guyana's Jails, 1825 to the Present Day was to develop a historicized analytical approach that addresses a critical but almost entirely neglected aspect of prison systems in the Global South: the definition, extent, experience and treatment of MNS disorders among inmates and the people who work with them. The project consolidates a previous collaboration between Clare Anderson (University of Leicester), Mellissa Ifill (University of Guyana), and the Guyana Prison Service (<https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/projects/uk-international-challenges-17-history-and-security-sector-reform-crime-and-punishment-british-colonial-guyana/>), and develops new relationships between the University of Leicester, the Ministry of Public Health (Mental Health Department), Guyana-based NGOs, and HMP Leicester.

The project's perspective is historical, social and cultural. It covers the period from 1825, when the British opened the colony's first jail in Georgetown, to the present day (project concluded July 2022) following Guyana's independence in 1966. It is rooted in the hypothesis that the existence of MNS disorders in jails today can be traced back to the British colonial period, and that they cannot be disconnected from the country's history as a sugar colony that employed and controlled Indigenous peoples (Amerindians), enslaved Africans and indentured Indian labourers. Empire created particular forms of trauma, shaped demography and religious practice, and instituted patterns of population control including through institutionalisation, laws and other forms of social control such as carcerality. This project is explicitly rooted in Guyana’s colonial and post-colonial history, and connects economic and social history to criminology. Non-academic partners and users were key to developing the research design, management and dissemination strategy – in particular, the leadership and officers of the Guyana Prison Service and Specialists in Sustained Youth Development and Research (SSYDER), Georgetown, Guyana. The project offers new interdisciplinary and policy-relevant ways of thinking about issues such as mental health, cognitive impairment and addiction, and the relationships between them.

The work was conducted over four years by the academic project team and the project administrator:

Professor Clare Anderson (PI)

Dr Mellissa Ifill

Dr Deborah Toner

Dr Tammy Ayres

Professor Martin Halliwell

Dr Dylan Kerrigan

Dr Kristy Warren

Dr Kellie Moss

Dr Di Levine

Ms Estherine Adams

Ms Queenela Cameron

Ms Shammane Joseph Jackson

Dr Emma Battell Lowman

Ms Rachel Dawes

This paper explains the project’s multi-disciplinary research and approach to inter-disciplinary analysis, engagement, and dissemination. We hope it contextualises the data deposit for potential users and serves as a useful record of particularly effective multi- and inter-disciplinary team research in the humanities and social sciences.

**Collection**

Colonial-Era Research: 1825—1966

Called the ‘pre-66 group’

* Historical research, archives in TNA Kew and Guyana plus
  + Literature on empire, carcerality, etc.
  + Maps and photographs in addition to textual sources (reports, letters, official documentation)

Independence to Present Day: 1966-2022

Called the ‘post-66’ group

* Historical research in the British Library, the Caribbean Research Library at the University of Guyana, the National Library of Guyana, the Guyana Prison Service headquarters, the Parliamentary Library, and the Ministry of Public Security
  + Scoping interviews with prison and mental health experts in Guyana including NGOs
  + Interviews with inmates, prison officers, family members, community members (transcribed and coded)
  + Focus groups (families, officers, etc.)
  + Policy review

**Multi-Disciplinary Analysis**

Team members initially worked as one big group developing research plans. The two teams then worked for a period independently to collect and then process their materials. They then worked collaboratively within the pre-66 and post-66 groups on analysis. Meetings were called on an ad-hoc basis to discuss progress and find connections. An iterative approach to collection and analysis helped insights from other team members to feed into each person’s work. Shared online space provided by the University of Leicester facilitated secure access so that collected materials could be safely stored and accessed by the team. There were also regular weekly one hour team meetings where all team members from Guyana and the UK attended.

In the early part of the project, team members produced two types of outputs during: scholarly blog posts, and working papers. The project blog created a space to share regular research insights and reflections as the work progressed. Team members authored the blog in monthly rotation, and used posts as an opportunity to work through specific research questions or findings, receive feedback, and engage with public and academic audiences. Posts were approximately 1000 words, were written in accessible academic language, and included captioned images. The project blog was hosted on an external website, publicised on Twitter, FaceBook, and in email signatures, and all (approximately 30) posts are publicly available in this data deposit. Also during this period, team members delivered presentations in Guyana and London to share early findings and solicit critical feedback to support the further development of the research.

Working papers were the second output produced during this stage. The series was published by the Leicester Institute of Advanced Studies and the papers summarised and analysed research findings from the various project elements of the pre-66 and post-66 groups. The nine working papers of approximately 4000 words each were authored by team members from all career stages of the team. These generally engaged in more discipline-specific investigations with close attention to primary source materials. Papers were discussed in the project meetings and members commented on each other’s work. Review was organised by the Leicester Institute for Advanced Studies (LIAS). Since publication, the working paper series has been publicly available and is included in this data deposit.

**Relational Working**

The ambitious scholarly aims of this project necessitated rich and effective inter-disciplinary collaboration between a large team with significant diversity in terms of geopolitical locations, lived experiences, disciplinary expertise, and career stage. A relational approach was scaffolded into the project, based on previous experience of the PI and other team members to support collaborative working that would be both positive and productive.

The project began officially with a visit of the Leicester-based members to Georgetown, Guyana. This visit included tours of prisons in Guyana, a formal launch event, public talks, and meetings with key individuals and organisations. As noted by Dr Dylan Kerrigan, the intensity and impact of the site visits (especially to the remand yard at Lusignan) created a shared experience that brought the seriousness of the work into focus. This was also an opportunity to develop complex understandings of the specific contexts of the research sites in Guyana. It provided enlightening and challenging opportunities to connect directly with the people potentially most impacted by the project’s work. This form of relationship-building helps ensure research and analysis is robust and appropriate, it also begins a relationship of accountability, implying a commitment to return the results of the project to these groups.

From inception to mid-March 2020, the project followed a structure of weekly 1-hour meetings for team members to connect with one another, give updates about their research, discuss ideas and issues and receive feedback and insights from team members working in the same discipline and from the others represented in the group. Those in Leicester met in person, those in Guyana joined via Zoom, also gathering in person in Georgetown. These informal meetings were led mainly by the PI who curated a welcoming, positive, and energetic atmosphere that encouraged all team members to communicate updates, findings, questions, and possible connections or issues with confidence and clarity. Other project team members took turns leading or facilitating the project meetings. The chance to get to know one another in-person during the project kick-off visit in 2018 meant communication at these meetings was underpinned by a sense of mutual understanding and appreciation. It also facilitated an open approach to constructive feedback, obstacles, and mentorship.

From mid-March 2020, project meetings were moved wholly online. The significant project disruption resulting from the public health measures necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a greater need for regular communication as the project team worked to adapt [see COVID statement?]. It is also important to note the invaluable point of connection and coping these meetings provided for team members during extensive periods of lockdown. During the last year of the project, the weekly project meetings were particularly effective in supporting the timely and efficient completion of high-quality final project outputs.

International travel became possible again in 2022. Two small-group visits of Leicester-based team members to Georgetown took place in the first half of that year, and in July 2022 the Guyana-based team visited Leicester for a week of site visits, collaborative writing, and discussion time, The project concluded with a visit in late July of the Leicester-based team to Georgetown. [Explain this visit, and point to the bookending of the project with this type of trip and connections in the place].

Rich communication and a positive, iterative approach to research were the result of the relational work undertaken by the project team, and facilitated by Professor Anderson and Dr Ifill, whose relationship was a key part of the project’s instigation. This relational approach gave rise to high quality interdisciplinary outputs, significant positive impact for the non-academic partners, and a working environment that allowed team members to make maximum contribution with minimum friction.

**Inter-Disciplinary Analysis**

The writing retreats and working papers provided the necessary context for the development of the more ambitious set of articles for publication in international, peer-reviewed scholarly journals. These outputs mapped onto the advances the project sought to make on its specific research questions, and further, its methodological and inter-disciplinary findings. All articles were co-or multi-authored. Author order was sensitive to the appropriate ordering of authorship according to contribution, geopolitical location, forms of marginalisation, and a positive approach to inclusivity and representation.

Because team members read and critically engaged with each other’s working papers and blogs, the pre-66 and post-66 groups were well-prepared to develop analysis and connections in response to the project’s highest-level questions. The experience of regular project meetings with informal research discussions and regular constructive feedback contributed directly to building rapidly-effective co-writing relationships. Author groups corresponded by email, traded partial drafts, met for discussion, and contributed writing of different sections and stages. Articles were targeted to specific journals and discussed with the PI and other team members at the weekly project meetings. Before submission, full drafts were circulated to the team for feedback and discussion.

**Conclusion**

The project concluded with a one-week series of events in Guyana that included presentations to government and prison officials, workshops with prison officers, media spots (radio and television interviews, also podcast recording at the University of Guyana), site visits, and opportunities for team members to develop plans for future collaborations. This trip took the project outcomes to the people and places to whom the research was most relevant and impactful, and as such underlined the importance of relational and ethical working across significant forms of difference.

This data deposit includes all project materials that can be shared, though part of the deposit will remain embargoed as it proved impossible to anonymise some sources and materials to a sufficient extent to protect the identities and sensitive information of individuals. Access to embargoed files is only permitted to members of this project team (listed above). Any questions or further inquiries about this project may be directed to Professor Clare Anderson, University of Leicester, [ca26@le.ac.uk](mailto:ca26@le.ac.uk).