



Action and Research International

Consulting Services by Brandon Hamber and Associates

“Blocks to the Future”

A Pilot Study of the Long-term Psychological Impact of the ‘No Wash/Blanket’ Protest

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Foreword

Since its inception in 1997 Cúnamh has been involved in a number of groundbreaking projects, which were designed to deal with people's experience of conflict.

Its work with the families of Bloody Sunday, with the families of those killed by the British state and its agents and with the families of former political prisoners will become the future benchmarks of models of good practice in this field. The strength of these projects is that they were constructed with the direct input by those directly affected by conflict.

I want to commend Cúnamh for its latest initiative, 'Blocks To The Future', a pilot research project that examines the effects of the "Blanket/No Wash" Protest in Long Kesh from 1976 to 1981.

There is absolutely no doubt that this period culminating in the deaths of ten men on hunger strike is one of the most important chapters in the history of republicanism, indeed in the history of Ireland.

This research project brings to the fore how this period in our history has affected some of those who were participants in it. The project has provided the space for a number of ex-prisoners to speak about the uniqueness of their experience and how imprisonment impacted upon them. They outline in open and honest terms how the blanket protest affected their physical, emotional and mental well-being. All of this, professionally and sensitively guided by the Cúnamh staff.

Too often in the past there was a tendency to record history as a collective or consensual experience and memory. Whereas that approach leaves us with a valuable reflection of the past, this project allows individual participants to speak of the period not for historical analysis but for its impact on them.

It gives a voice for things deeply felt but never spoken.

Importantly it highlights trauma, which requires attention. It points to and offers ways in which this trauma can be addressed.

It asks of us all to not only accept the findings but to do our utmost to create the services that this report demands.



Ba mhaith liom bhuíochas a ghabháil le Cúnamh as an cháipéis tábhachtach seo, chomh maith leis seo, ba mhaith liom comhgairdeas a dheanamh leis na hiar-chimí poblachtacha, a ghlac páirt sa tionscadal agus a léirigh crógacht agus ionracas, gan na hiar-chimí seo ní tharlódh an tionscadal..

I would like to congratulate Cúnamh for this important piece of work. I would also like to congratulate the former Republican prisoners with whose courage and integrity made this project possible.

MLA Raymond McCartney



Preface

For Cúnamh our interest in doing research on the impact of the ‘No Wash/Blanket’ Protest was twofold.

Firstly, we wanted to explore the psychological impact of imprisonment and the coping strategies employed. Our sense from working on the previous projects was that political prisoners had offset the potential for mental ill health or trauma because they had developed some form of resilience within the gaol and through their identity as ‘soldiers’.

Secondly, we wanted to challenge the policy and political discourses which seek to exclude political prisoners and their families from many spheres of daily life and treat them only as perpetrators, whilst ignoring their experiences

We were therefore pleased that the Community Relations Council agreed to support the costs of this pilot project. We are grateful to them.

The decision to focus upon the ‘No Wash/Blanket’ Protest was taken because—based on our experience—we felt it was a particularly difficult period for those involved and as a result might have a unique set of impacts. We agreed, at least for this pilot, to focus only on male ex-prisoners as we felt we could not adequately incorporate women’s experience in this pilot project. We are keen to explore this in the future.

When Cúnamh staff members were discussing the idea of doing this research we co-incidentally and unexpectedly received a visit from a former prisoner. He requested that we carry out some work in relation to this issue. His request was motivated by his concern for former comrades, who he felt were not coping too well. The result of this was the development of a self-help group of nine ex-prisoners who were on ‘No Wash/Blanket’ Protest.

Initially we had envisaged doing 12 in-depth interviews and writing up the findings. However, once the research started, and the self-help group began to develop, it became apparent that there was an overwhelming desire amongst many former participants on the protest to become involved in the project. Within the time frame we managed to do 21 interviews and although we could have done many more, we feel what is presented here gives a broadly representative picture of many experiences.



In keeping with Cúnamh's ethos of participation and ownership the self-help group has been central to the research, and their input and time is greatly appreciated, along with the contribution of all interviewees.

It is Cúnamh's hope that this report will help to alleviate the obvious ongoing struggle which many former political prisoners and their families face. It is interesting that the self-help group has been keen to include their partners in this project and this is currently being organised by Cúnamh.

Of course, this is not the first piece of work on ex-prisoners, and organisations like us and others have for years been doing work aimed at highlighting the experience of political prisoners. We do feel, however, especially given the announcements by the IRA, the timing of this research is apt. It is time to take stock of the past, deal with the suffering that has taken place and build a new future.

We hope that the report will serve to promote a better and more empathetic understanding from policy makers, politicians and the wider community of the needs of ex-prisoners. We have been inspired by the courage, commitment and honesty shown by all those who have participated in this pilot initiative and are immensely grateful to have been given the opportunity to share this experience with them. They are the ordinary people who have had extraordinary lives.

Cathy Nelis
Cúnamh, Project Co-ordinator
October 2005



Chapter One

Introduction

Background

The pilot study presented here was commissioned of the researcher¹ by Cúnamh, a community led mental health organisation that was established in 1997 in Derry (see *Appendix A*, for more detail on Cúnamh).

Rationale for the study

In Derry City there are over 800 individuals who have experienced political imprisonment and it is estimated that about 70 of them were on the ‘No Wash/Blanket’ Protest. The reason for commissioning this study was that Cúnamh primarily wanted to evaluate the psychological impact of the ‘No Wash/Blanket’ Protest on these individuals. They felt that the psychological impact of the protest and political imprisonment more broadly was still evident in certain individuals with whom they worked (as well in their extended family and community systems)

Cúnamh sought not only to identify the psychological impact of the protest, but also the coping strategies employed by ex-prisoners both then and today. From Cúnamh’s perspective, a greater understanding of the impact and the coping strategies of ex-prisoners would facilitate the better provision of services and support. Cúnamh also hoped the pilot study would break down the perception that ex-prisoners have no right to services and challenge attempts to exclude political prisoners and their families from receiving adequate support. The decision to focus upon the ‘No Wash/Blanket Protest’, according to Cúnamh, was because it was considered a particularly difficult period for those involved.

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Methodology

The study utilised two methods of data collection.

Firstly, the study focused on a group of former Blanketmen who were meeting at Cúnamh as a self-help support group. This group had been set up after a visit from a former prisoner to Cúnamh requesting that they help set up a self-help group for himself and former comrades who he felt were not coping too well. Cúnamh received this approach at about the same time as the staff at Cúnamh were beginning to conceptualise the present study. The group itself, in the spirit of participative and action research, then became a critical part of the research process.

Cúnamh staff began by discussing the aims and methodology of the research with the nine participants in the self-help group. At this stage the group had already taken the decision to meet weekly to share their experiences and develop ways of improving their lives, as well as those of others. During the meetings painful and sensitive experiences had begun to emerge. Members of the group expressed concerns about the research, worried about how the republican movement might react to the project; were concerned as to whether the republican movement would support it if the research would involve the disclosure of sensitive information and worried whether they themselves might be identified through the research. They were also concerned that the research only focused on Blanketmen as they believed that many ex-prisoners who were not on the protest needed help too. They also expressed concern that the research was only focusing on male ex-prisoners and not women prisoners (this is discussed in the section Scope and Limitations). In addition to this, they were worried about whether they would get ongoing support beyond the research, if it was needed. All these issues were broached and discussed by the group and Cúnamh staff, who committed themselves to an ongoing process with the group beyond the research project.

Once the group seemed ready to begin the research, which they now felt was an important vehicle for discussing their concerns more publicly and hopefully drawing other ex-prisoners into support services, the researcher met with the group. In this meeting issues of confidentiality and non-identification were discussed and the parameters of the study outlined. It was also agreed that the process would be participative and that the group would see all drafts of the research before they were made public. To this end, although the research began as a wider pilot study focusing on the needs of those on the 'No Wash/Blanket' Protest, the process of its production has also become part of the group process and their attempts to deal with their current difficulties. As a result, a key part of



the study became the documentation of the individual experiences of the members of the self-help group, their current psychological challenges and social problems they experience. They anticipate using this information, together with Cúnamh, to enhance the support structures for themselves and hopefully for others over time.

The research process then began, while the group continued its own process concurrently (see below). Cúnamh arranged for a number of inputs for the group including an information evening on posttraumatic stress disorder, participation in anger management training and viewing the film *Red Dust*², followed by a discussion. The group also met a leading member of Sinn Féin to discuss the current political situation. In the interim a number of the group members have also begun to avail themselves of the counseling and complementary therapies offered by Cúnamh. More recently the partners of the men have also started to meet with Cúnamh staff.

The second part of the research involved accessing a wider sample of individuals living in Derry who were on the 'No Wash/Blanket' Protest but are not part of the self-help group. This was done to canvass the views of a wider group of individuals, as it was felt that attitudes, experiences and views of those not involved in the self-help group process might differ. This is discussed below.

The following research steps inform the findings of the study:

1. The research officially began in mid-August 2005. Shortly thereafter, a series of meetings with key staff members were undertaken to clarify the purpose and focus of the research.
2. The self-help group met with the researcher to clarify the research aims and objectives, as well as to discuss issues such as confidentiality.
3. A series of draft questions to be used in interviews (a semi-structured interview schedule) was then drawn up, circulated to staff, amended and finalised (see *Appendix B* for questions).
4. Interviews with the members of the self-help group were then undertaken (eight in total) by the researcher, each lasting 1.5 to 3 hours.

² A film based on the book *Red Dust* by Gillian Slovo. It focuses on fictional stories, although deeply linked with actual events, of an ANC activist who appears before the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission.



5. Interviews were then transcribed in full. These were returned to interviewees for clarification and addition.³
6. Following an initial analysis of the interviews, a shorter, more structured questionnaire was drawn up. This was then circulated to staff, amended and finalised.
7. Cúnamh staff sought the assistance of Tar Abhaile, who they knew would be familiar with a number of other men who had been on the protest and an additional 15 individuals were approached and asked if they were willing to be interviewed as part of the study.
8. An additional 13 interviews were carried out by the Cúnamh staff using the shorter more structured questionnaire. These generally lasted one hour.
9. In total 21 interviews (eight with members of the self-help group and 13 with other Blanketmen in the City) were undertaken. These all took place at Cúnamh offices.
10. Throughout the process the researcher also undertook desktop research on the historical developments around the protest and a literature review of the psychological impact of long-term imprisonment.
11. Interview data from the semi-structured interviews and the structured questionnaire was then analysed. The semi-structured interviews were read (and re-read several times), the data was synthesised and dominant themes and categories extracted.
12. Interview data from the structured questionnaire was categorised by the interviewees following the interviews. This was then verified by the researcher through listening to a sample of the recorder interviews and cross-checking these with the categories used by the interviewees.
13. For summary purposes the data was then put into a table (see *Appendix C*) utilising key categories that came out of the interview analysis.
14. Thereafter a process of interpreting the data, giving it meaning, making it understandable and assigning general theoretical significance to the findings (Nueman, 1997) was undertaken.
15. Two interviews with key individuals offering support services to ex-prisoners were then carried out.⁴ A broad discussion on what support

³ The process of developing their own full narrative of their experience continues with Cúnamh staff as separate to the material used in the research presented here. On returning transcripts to individuals it was clear that a process of documenting each individual's story, which many of them wanted to do, was a more long-term project and would not fit with the time parameters of the current study.

⁴ Carol Ní Chuilín, Project Coordinator, Tar Anall and Michael Culbert, full time counsellor with Coiste na n-Iarchimí, both on 11 October 2005.



services were available outside of Derry and what additional services they thought were needed took place.

16. A draft report was then presented to the self-help group and staff in early October. The group ran this process of scrutiny and evaluation as a weekend residential.
17. A series of discussions on the draft report then commenced, with the final report finalised in late October.

Scope and limitations

The study presented here is a pilot study. It is intended to provide some broad findings with regard to the long-term individual psychological impact of the ‘No Wash/Blanket’ Protest. It is by no means exhaustive and as a pilot study it is intended to provide a basis for future research, and to inform how Cúnamh (and the self-help group) can target future support services to ensure maximum support to those who need it. It is not a detailed psychological evaluation of each participant. It is based on self-reporting, and aims to provide general impressions of the impact of the protest. As such, the study presented here is not a prevalence study and should not be used in this way. It focused on 21 individuals in the Derry area. Although this gives it some validity in terms of the fact that there are estimated to be 70-80 individuals who were on the protest from Derry (meaning over 30% of those involved were interviewed), it cannot be simply generalised to all ex-prisoners on the protest (approximately 300 to 400), beyond outlining some key thematic issues affecting the lives of ex-prisoners. That said, wherever possible, the findings of this research are compared to other studies where similarities and differences are apparent.

The study has used a mixture of qualitative and quantitative methods, or more precisely the qualitative data has been analysed and where possible categories and themes extracted. These have been quantified in parts of *Chapter Three*. The core limitation of this method, is that although it provides a very good thematic and overall analysis, quantitative categories are dependent on what individuals say. For example, this means that while a specific abuse suffered by prisoners does not feature prominently (in *Appendix C*), this does not mean it did not happen regularly. It may simply reflect that interviewees did not speak about this particular issue in their interview. The researcher has recorded the frequency of certain issues being raised in the interviews, but this, as mentioned above, is done with the intention of providing a thematic analysis and to create a detailed impression of experiences. The number of times certain activities, themes or issues are mentioned (frequency) should not be confused with prevalence of these phenomena.



A further gap in the study is that the study only focused on men and of course there were also women on the protest. However, given the pilot nature of the study, the decision was taken early on by Cúnamh, that it was best to limit the focus at this stage. The inclusion of a few women in the study would not have done justice to their experiences, which needless to say were very different. This should be the focus of further research. Equally, the study focuses on individuals who were on the protest. It did not focus on the impact of the protest on the families and children of ex-prisoners specifically as this has been discussed and researched elsewhere (Cúnamh, 2002; Farset Community Think Tanks Project, 2005a, 2005b; Jamieson & Grounds, 2002; Shirlow, 2001).

Despite the provisos outlined thus far, it is likely that some of the themes and issues highlighted are true of a wide range of individuals. The validity of this study will become evident when ex-prisoners recognise themselves in the data, and the report becomes a springboard for further discussion.

Importantly, although this is a psychological study, it is not intended to pathologise all ex-prisoners (this is dealt with at length in *Chapter Four*), and although in parts it lists problems that face some ex-prisoners these should not be read as issues that face all ex-prisoners. The listing of different problems, (even if in some cases only affecting two or three interviewees), is to highlight that such problems exist, even if only for a few individuals. This is intended to help Cúnamh anticipate what problems might be encountered in offering services and also will hopefully be beneficial in highlighting issues that, if recognised, might facilitate the recognition of a wider grouping of individuals needing support.

In reading the report it is important to avoid the temptation of drawing causal links between different parts of the data. For example, it is often impossible to say whether certain problems, for certain individuals, would not have developed even without exposure to this particular prison experience. As illustrated in the researcher's analysis in *Chapter Three*, the issues should be considered in their entirety and the themes raised should be taken as indicators and directions for future support service establishment or ongoing research, rather than as a definitive analysis of all the issues effecting ex-prisoners. Having said that, the hope is that the comprehensive and detailed analysis presented below will provide direction for future service provision and will help to highlight some of long-term individual psychological impacts, which the 'No Wash/Blanket' Protest has had for some, as was the intention of this pilot project.



Finally, of course, there are many other groups who have been psychologically affected by the conflict over the years, some directly by the republican movement, this study however only focuses on one aspect of the conflict—that is, the prison experience and its aftermath for republican ex-prisoners on the ‘No Wash/Blanket’ Protest.

Structure of the report

The report is composed of five chapters:

- Chapter One: Introduction
 - outlines the background to the research and methodology used
- Chapter Two: Historical context
 - provides a brief historical context to the study
- Chapter Three: Findings
 - discusses the findings from the research
- Chapter Four: Analysis
 - analyses the findings drawing out key conclusions
- Chapter Five: Recommendations
 - makes a set of recommendations

There are three appendices, i.e.

- *Appendix A*: Background information on Cúnamh
- *Appendix B*: Protocols of the questions used
- *Appendix C*: A summary of the research data

Before moving into the main body of the report, it is important to acknowledge all the Cúnamh staff and the interviewees who gave of their time for this research. I would like to particularly thank the interviewees for their willingness to speak to me. Their openness and generosity is appreciated. I am most grateful to them for sharing their often, difficult memories with me. It is testimony to the work of



Cúnamh that all were willing to engage in this project despite the personal and political challenges it poses.

I would also like to thank Dr David Becker from the Free University in Berlin and the Office of Psychosocial Issues in Germany, as well as Professor Gillian Eagle from the Psychology Department of the University of the Witwatersrand in South Africa for their suggestions and comments on this study.



Chapter Two

Historical context

Background to the conflict

It is not the purpose of a report such as this to re-examine the conflict in and about Northern Ireland. The report assumes a basic understanding of the conflict. A full history of the imprisonment of politically motivated prisoners linked with the conflict in and about Northern Ireland is also beyond the scope of this report. Suffice to say that since the 1960s there was a dramatic increase in the number of prisoners. McEvoy notes that in 1969 when the modern part of the conflict erupted there were some 600 prisoners, but by 1979 there were 3000, stabilising in the 1980s and 1990s to around 1,600-1,900 (McEvoy, 2001). Republican groups that support ex-prisoners estimate that between 15,000 and 20,000 republicans were incarcerated over the course of the conflict. The prison population has dropped dramatically since 1998, following prisoner releases as part of the Belfast Agreement. The changes in the prison population, and the political vagaries and the context of such imprisonment, are beyond the present report. However, in order to contextualise the 'No Wash/Blanket' Protest, the focus of this report, a brief chronology of key associated events and developments is provided below.

Chronology of the Protest

July 1972 – March 1976

In July 1972, Secretary of State, William Whitelaw, granted special category status to all prisoners convicted of conflict-related crimes. Political status was effectively prisoner of war status. This meant that prisoners did not have to wear prison uniforms or do prison work and they were allowed extra visits and food parcels. Republican and loyalist prisoners could run a prisoner of war regime and maintain their own internal command structures.

In January 1975 the Gardiner Committee, was set up by the government and recommended the ending of special category status, arguing that it undermined prison discipline. In March 1976, Secretary of State, Merlyn Rees (Labour), announced the phasing out of special category status. As a result anyone convicted of an offence would be treated like an ordinary criminal and would have to wear a prison uniform and do prison work.

*March 1976 – April 1977⁵*

Those convicted after 1 March 1976 were treated as criminals and the Blanket Protest began. They were transferred to the purpose-built H-Blocks to serve their sentence. As Beresford notes, Long Kesh was:

Divided into what were essentially two separate prisons, surrounded by seventeen-foot high, two-mile long concrete security walls overlooked by a dozen ostrich-like sentry boxes. The Maze (Compound), with its Nissen huts – popularly known as the ‘Cages’ – continued to hold the dwindling numbers of special category prisoners convicted before the cut-off date. For the new wave of inmates the authorities built the Maze (Cellular), a complex of blocks whose characteristic shape brought a new term to the Irish political dictionary: the H-Blocks (Beresford, 1994, p.24).

Ciaran Nugent, the first prisoner sentenced under the new policy, then arrived at the Long Kesh Prison and was ordered to wear a prison uniform. He refused saying he was a political prisoner. He was locked naked in his cell and wrapped himself in a blanket. On 15 September 1976 the blanket protest started and soon other prisoners followed his example. Prison policy also meant that prison uniforms had to be worn if a prisoner left their cell, therefore, effectively prisoners were forced to stay in their cells for 24 hours a day. Non-cooperation also meant the loss of other privileges such as a loss of remission⁶ and prison visits unless prisoners wore their uniforms.

April 1977 – March 1978

The protest was consolidated with more and more people coming into prison and joining the protest. The idea of ‘beating the system’ set in (Campbell et al., 1994) as prisoners found ways to smuggle in communications, pass messages and share goods. As some point, as part of the protest, all prison furniture was smashed by the prisoners. All remaining furniture was subsequently removed by the authorities. The standard inmate was left in his/her seven by eight foot cell with a

⁵ The time periods of the protest outlined below are those as outlined by Campbell, McKeown and O’Hagan (Campbell *et al.*, 1994).

⁶ Under the parole rules a prisoner was entitled to 50% remission of their sentence for good behaviour; loss of remission effectively meant doubling the sentence (Beresford, 1994).



foam mattress, the Bible, three blankets and their cell mate (Beresford, 1994). At this stage there were 250 republicans on the Blanket Protest (Campbell et al., 1994). Most prisoners were in H5 initially, but then H3 was opened.

March 1978 – July 1978

The protest began to escalate and the so-called dirty protest, or ‘No Wash’ Protest began. Beresford outlines the roots of this process as follows:

In 1978 a dispute started over the circumstances in which prisoners were allowed to wash and go to the toilet. They were allowed to go down the corridors provided they covered themselves with a towel. But they were refused a second towel to wash themselves, and, on the principle that they should not be forced into nakedness even in the washrooms, they refused to leave their cells. The ‘no wash protest’ had begun. Brawls ensued with the prison officers over the emptying of their chamber pots and they started slopping out by throwing the contents through spy-holes and windows, the warders sometimes throwing it back. The openings were then blocked, so the prisoners resorted to pouring their urine through cracks and dispersing the excrement by smearing it on the walls. (Beresford, 1994, p.27-28).

An interviewee in this study described the process in a very similar way:

To get out to the toilet you had just a towel to put around you, depending what screw was on determined if you got a beating or not. A few months later they said we had to wear the uniform to leave the cell and that then led to the no wash protest. When we wouldn’t wear the uniforms the screws started coming into the cell and kicking over the pots then some people started throwing pots around the screws and the whole place exploded. The screws started to smash the cells up first and we just finished them off and things just steadily progressed down hill afterwards.

In June 1978 a new block was opened up H4 and now there were almost 300 republicans on the protest (Campbell et al., 1994).

July 1978 – December 1978

The protest continued, and in the August of 1978 a policy of wing shifts was introduced by the prison authorities (Campbell et al., 1994). This entailed moving



prisoners from one wing of the block to the next so that cells could be hosed down and cleaned. This resulted in brutality as prisoners were forced from their cells. The system of searching the anus of prisoners⁷ was introduced, a process many of the prisoners found particularly degrading. A particular technique used, besides physical examinations by warders, was the ‘mirror search’ in which prisoners were forced to squat down over a mirror to search for contraband. At this time in the prison a process of forced washes also began in which prisoners were forced into often scalding or freezing water with disinfectant and scrubbed. Prisoners report beatings and being scrubbed with deck scrubbers by warders and this taking place in front of doctors (Campbell et al., 1994).

The Northern Ireland Prison Service claimed that “In spite of provocation from prisoners taking part in this extremely distasteful form of action, prison officers have sought to deal humanely with the prisoners concerned” (NIPS, 1979 cited in McEvoy, 2001 #72}. However, accounts from a range of sources (Amnesty International, 1978, 1980; Beresford, 1994; Campbell et al., 1994; Coogan, 1980; McEvoy, 2001; O'Malley, 1990; O'Rawe, 2005; Taylor, 1980) at the time and subsequently consistently note abuses as having taken place and were confirmed by interviewees’ accounts in this research, making them difficult to dispute.

January 1979 – September 1980

In early 1979, some of the leaders of the prisoners, about 30 men, were moved to H6 in a hope by the prison administration to derail the protest (Campbell et al., 1994). This did not work and in fact Beresford argues it was equivalent “in prison terms, to setting up an officers’ training academy, and the men, many of whom had served time together in the Cages, set about developing a philosophical and strategic approach – including a refined training course for prisoners” (Beresford, 1994, p.29). The isolation wing in H6 was then closed in September and prisoners dispersed to other blocks (Beresford, 1994; Campbell et al., 1994).

In Armagh jail, which held women prisoners, a ‘No Wash’ Protest also broke out in February 1980 when 32 women prisoners from the IRA joined the protest.

The IRA launched a campaign to selectively assassinate prison warders. Some of these were ‘fingered’ by prisoners for alleged brutality (Beresford, 1994). By

⁷ Prisoners smuggled goods communications, as well as small crystal radios, cigarettes, tobacco and pens in their rectums.



January of 1980, 18 prison warders (17 men and 1 woman) had been assassinated (Beresford, 1994). Tensions increased.

Discussions about a hunger strike as the next phase of the protest began between prisoners and the outside leadership.

September 1980 – December 1980

At this time there were 1,365 prisoners in Long Kesh, 837 of whom were republicans (Beresford, 1994).⁸ By late 1980 there were 341 republican prisoners on the 'No Wash' Protest (Beresford, 1994). The so-called first Hunger Strike begins. On the 27 October 7 men started fasting; on 1 December 3 women from Armagh prison joined the protest and two weeks later 30 more men joined (Campbell et al., 1994). A series of negotiations began and the hunger strike was called off on 18 December in anticipation of a deal being brokered.

December 1980 – March 1981

The initial part of 1981 is described as a time of confusion and low morale among the prisoners (Campbell et al., 1994) as the demands some thought were to be met did not materialize. However, under the leadership of Bobby Sands a new strategy of staggered hunger striking was devised, and on 2 March 1981, Bobby Sands began his hunger strike. The 'No Wash' Protest ended on the day after Bobby Sands began his 66-day fast that ended with his death.

March 1981 – 3 October 1981

The details of the process of the second Hunger Strike, as critically important as they are to the next three decades of the political process and in the lives of the interviewees, are beyond the scope of this report and are documented elsewhere (Beresford, 1994; O'Malley, 1990). Suffice to say that by 1 August 1981 it was fairly clear to the prisoners that "the British were quite prepared to let more hunger strikers die and the subsequent pressure upon the prisoners to call off the hunger strike⁹" was intense (Campbell et al., 1994, p.220). Seven men had died at

⁸ Beresford also notes the dramatic rise in the prison population from 745 in 1972 to 2,300 in 1979 (Beresford, 1994).

⁹ Families had begun to agree to medical attention and effectively take their relatives off the Hunger Strike.



this point. Three more men then died between August and October, and the hunger strike was called off on 3 October 1981. The British government did not rescind its criminalisation policy, which continued into the 1990s (McEvoy, 2001). However, by the end of 1981:

The prisoners had been granted the substance of their demands. As a matter of right, prisoners could wear their own clothes at all times; they could associate freely within adjacent wings of the H-Blocks during mealtimes, work, exercise, recreation, and weekends; they were given 50 percent of the remission they had looked for; and prison work was narrowly defined to include only a small number of activities that the prisoners could refuse to do without significant loss of privilege (O'Malley, 1990, p.211).



Chapter Three

Findings

This section outlines some of the findings of the research. It highlights some of the key data from the interviews, whilst expanding on the summarised information attached in the summary tables (see *Appendix C*).

The challenge of speaking out

Before going into some of the specific findings of the research it is important to acknowledge that although for some it was fairly easy to relate their experiences of the protest for others it was difficult. This is not surprising given the trauma associated with the protest and the fact that the events happened over thirty years ago. A few participants, (by no means the majority), spoke of memory blocks and some struggled to relate events in sequence, going off on tangents. It was also quite apparent that the interview process was stressful for some participants. This, at least in part, points to the difficulty of speaking about some aspects of the past, particularly for those who have never really spoken about the events in detail before. As one participant highlighted, “time stops literally stops” in prison and many experiences blend into one.

A few interviewees mentioned that the difficulty many had in talking about their experiences was also linked to the secretive nature of the organisation they were involved in and how difficult it is to break this culture. As one interviewee put it:

I have never ever never ever spoken to anybody ever in my life, so it's quite hard for me and I know that I am picking and choosing what I am saying. I know that there are things I am not saying that I could say and it's not a trust thing cause I have a good feeling about you. I am from a generation an army that was based on secrecy everything you did was a secret from everybody involved with you so therefore it is hard for me to maybe be as frank as I should be.

Several interviewees have since informed Cúnamh staff that they were fearful of becoming too emotional during interviews and held back out of fear of breaking down.

That said, many Blanketmen over the years have documented their stories (Campbell et al., 1994) and some speak freely and openly about their experiences.



One of the interviewees questioned, however, how deep some these discussions go and whether the real impact of the protest is acknowledged. He noted:

I have no problem talking to any of the boys...One of the things that I would recommend, well I openly admit that I have mental health problems, but I think that a lot of the people that were in jail and the movement obviously being a secret organisation that they don't like to talk about things and I think that somebody needs to say to them that if they wanted to talk about things then they were not loose talking, it doesn't matter now that the Brits know that you were suffering mental problems get yourself sorted, you're entitled to a life now .

Even in speaking with the researcher one of interviewees openly noted that they were not telling the full story, commenting:

I've said that you'll not get an insight into us until you talk to our partners, because we are always going to be economical with the truth and that's not helping us, because we're not telling what we're [*up to*] up in the house.

Others concurred with the importance and value of speaking out about their experiences noting the importance of being in a group that discusses issues. One man commented:

So up until now I had no were to go with this part off my life. Republicans have no were to go if they have problems, yes they can go to A.A. or other self-help groups but they can't really talk or discuss their problems. That is why I came away from the self-help groups feeling psychological I am walking away from my past. That I had no emotional ties to my past.

And another:

The aftermath is worse than anything that preceded it in my opinion because the aftermath is played out solely within in your head and the residue of events, experiences become mish mashed and sort of, I have never tried to disentangle. I have never tried to do that because for me I am familiar with it all so I have never had to break it down because I can instantly, and even sitting listening I know what they are talking about, I was there I know what they are feeling I was there but if you don't mind me saying this, on a personal level, I feel good and glad that we had this conversation. I was suspicious of it before...not of you...but of the process. I'm not sure I wanted anybody else inside my head is what I



mean. I never discussed this with my wife, ever, any of what we are talking about and maybe.

Some individuals have attempted to “move on” from the past and forget it, and the desire to look to the future does need to be respected. In reality the protest was over 30 years ago. However, the line between forgetting as opposed to repressing the difficulties of the past, is difficult to judge. This is not to say that all Blanketmen have to tell of their difficulties to deal with the experience (most of those interviewed seem to have coped fairly well to date, see the section below on coping), but some of those interviewed acknowledged their own attempts to “block out” the past and the difficulties in speaking about it are symptomatic of a general attempt to evade difficult truths and suffering.

All subsequent comments below need to be read in light of the points made above. There is little doubt that interviewees engaged with the researcher in as honest a way as possible, however, equally, there are certainly components of their stories missing and invariably issues or areas they chose not to broach in this pilot study and at this moment in time (the issue of ‘silences’ is discussed in *Chapter Four*).

Early experiences

This study is *not* an attempt to tell a comprehensive history of all the men interviewed or to outline their personal stories in detail. Elsewhere (Campbell et al., 1994) this biographical record has been started. What is presented below is not exhaustive, but aims to paint a broad picture of the lives and experiences of those interviewed—hopefully it will hold some resonance for those interviewed, and perhaps for other too.

Family environment

Most of the interviewees were born in Derry (one grew up in England before moving to Derry) in the mid to late 1950s. They describe growing up in the city as a life of hardship and poverty. Although there were a few exceptions to this (3 respondents or about 14% described their situation as satisfactory), most described a context similar to the quote below:

When I was growing up in the sixties it was very hard, we had abject poverty and its not an exaggeration to say that things like Angela Ashes that whole period although it was thirty years prior to when I grew up. I can identify with that because I saw poverty. I saw us as one of three families living in one house wearing second hand clothes and all that so



the family for me and sustaining the family has always been of prime importance and it has always been my driving force from I was seven when I started selling newspapers and picking spuds and selling things off the back of lorries and going around selling apples, whatever it was that could earn some money I always saw that as a way of helping of the house so for me at that period, when I was eighteen not only had I seen that we were heading for better times but I had also my own money now as well and from that point of view everything was great for me.

And another:

My memory as a child is one of poverty. We lived in one room. There was a double bed in the room also a cot and I can't remember if there was a single bed or not in the room. That one room was where we lived. So obviously there was poverty there as there was a lack of housing. When we moved to Ballymurphy things were better we had a house then, bedrooms and beds. What I do remember was there was not much work about as my father was in and out of work...Our diet wouldn't have been great, in my early days I would have been given dipped bread which was bread dipped in fat and served up with beans or champ, potatoes and scallions that is what we mostly ate. I also remember no coal on the fire, shoes and lino being thrown on to the fire to heat the house.

Yet another noted:

I would say around that time, we would have lived in a 3 bed roomed house, there was nothing great about it, there was no such thing as central heating, you would have had the fire, the rest would have been, we wouldn't have had a terrible lot, my father...he was paying the rent but it just wasn't a great income, you were fed, you were clothed, it was the basics, but none ever complained because everyone was in the same boat.

That said, although most of the participants described their lives as poor, they also described growing up in happy and supportive family environments. They described (whether idealised or not) a strong sense of community in their early lives. Typically:

During my teenage years in Creggan there was a great sense of camaraderie amongst the community because of the actions of the Brits, people in Creggan were good people, they didn't have much but would



give you their hearts and their honesty, it was a great experience to live there then.

Interestingly—5 participants or about 24%—had fathers in the British Army or Navy. This would have not being atypical in Derry at the time, bearing in mind that most of the interviewees' parents would have been born in their early 20s at the time of the Second World War. Of the interviewees, only one described a situation in which his father was still active (in the Navy) when he was politically involved. The other fathers had retired and some were spoken about as being very disillusioned by the armed forces at that time. Another said his father was “an ex British soldier but a republican at the same time. He joined the British army because of economic circumstances”.

A few of the interviewees, however, did talk about wider family difficulties such as losing a parent, being brought up by grandparents and alcoholism in the family. A minimal number of interviewees challenged the view of large supportive families and a supportive community.

Education and employment

Typically, the respondents finished school at 15 (which would have been fairly typical of the City at that period), and 7 of them describe going onto technical college. This generally implied starting an apprenticeship or undertaking training in areas such as plumbing, construction, joining or engineering. The remainder either went straight to work, generally in manual labour (such as factory dock or, construction work.), or reported being unemployed at the time. A few went into full time political activity with the republican movement either in the Fianna¹⁰ or IRA as soon as they turned 15 or 16.

Relationships and social environment

¹⁰ The Fianna was the junior wing of the IRA. Technically they had no access to weapons and explosives, and would have carried out deliveries or messages for the IRA or engaged in other activities such as monitoring processes. As one interviewee noted, in the Fianna he engaged in what “we called tagging, keeping watch should anything be going on, as I said there was no steady presence of the Brits in the area so they had to come into the area. What happened was that every road or alley that they could have come in we would have somebody there and if we seen them we would have started blowing whistles”



As would be expected, considering most were fairly young when first imprisoned, none of the interviewees were married before they went to prison. Fourteen of them did report being in a relationship at the time and one was engaged. Seven were not in a relationship, so roughly a third of the sample were single. Although some relationships were serious, most were described as “going with a girl” and one described their relationship as “sort of”. Some interviewees spoke of how relationships were built around their political activities. For example, one of the participants spoke about young men requesting to be stationed with particular young women that they liked when commanded to undertake a patrol. A few also pointed out that it would be a mistake to assume that despite the conflicted situation so-called normal activities were not taking place, be that forming relationships, going out in the evenings, listening to music and going to parties.

The beginnings of the conflict

Political environment

The onset of the conflict in the late 1960s was talked about by interviewees in a fairly unified way. Most of them would have been in their early teens at that time and they described a context of general civil disorder, police and army on the streets and great deal of animosity between the local community and the army particularly. A number of participants spoke of being part of riots and rioting during school (at times), after school and on the weekend. They spoke of this as a very “normal” part of what was going on at the time.

In 70, I was coming up to near ten or eleven. Started to go to Creggan to school. At this stage the rioting was on at William St. First stop was William St. We never went to school. I used to get the bus to Creggan, school bus to Creggan, got off the bus and then walked down to William Street, about nine o'clock in the morning. At that stage wait to ten. There was always a crowd gathering then at the owl barricades. Waited for the cops or Brits to come in to stone them. This went on for months, for years.

And another:

I can remember even before the civil rights marches I remember the marches in the housing office in the mid sixties my family was involved. My mother and father were involved in them I can remember the sense of injustice I can remember hearing big people talking...by big I mean older people...about how they were disenfranchised because it was unionist controlled city but it was a nationalist population a majority I mean and so civil rights come along and I grew up through that.



Becoming politically active

Reasons for joining up

The reasons for joining the IRA primarily to engage in an armed struggle were varied. However, there was a degree of consistency in accounts. Broadly speaking most of those interviewed joined up at a very young age, either joining the Fianna or joining the IRA directly. A few spoke about lying about their age so they could join up.¹¹ As one participant noted:

I lied about my age to join the Republican movement, in those days most people had long hair so nobody doubted me, I seemed to be on the scene a long time so nobody doubted my age.

In terms of why they joined up, many of the participant's spoke of the general army presence, feeling harassed, discriminated against, the policy of internment and hearing about army excesses, as major contributing factors. Direct experience of army presence seems to have strongly affected most participants and to have contributed significantly to their decision to take up arms. Typical quotes here included:

I used to have to hide in the hedges trying to get to the training centre to work or the Brits would have held you and you would have missed the bus or they would have slapped me about the place. Or maybe if there was snow on the ground I would have to walk two or three miles to work. They sacked me once because I was late quite often.

And another:

The Brits used to take great pleasure in humiliating you on the street. I don't know if they thought it would make us cow down because it didn't and they paid the price for it eventually.

Yet another said:

The house was always getting raided. The front door was kicked in and the house wrecked. One day they raided, my younger brother who was twelve

¹¹ Technically an individual had to be 16 to join the IRA.



at the time was watching the T.V. they give him a beating looking for me. This happened on a weekly basis...One of the very first times I was arrested I was actually running to catch the Creggan bus at the bottom of Rossville Street. The army came running out and shouted stop "where are you going", I said I was getting the bus that they could see was sitting there. I was arrested...I was made to stand facing a wall with a finger from each hand touching the wall. I was being beaten across the back with batons and was also being punched in the ribs. I was then put into a Saracen and driven down by the Brandywell all the time I was being beaten and then I was held out of the back doors of the Saracen as it was moving. It was a Welsh regiment and they were singing we shot one we shot two we shot thirteen more than you. They took me too the Strand Road where I was kicked in through the gates and handed over to the police who in turn beat me. This was shortly after Bloody Sunday. I was about fifteen. Made me very bitter towards the military and the police you were constantly being called a Fenian bastard. Your mother was also constantly called names. I remember one of the names I was called was a Bog Wog they wrote it on the wall it was as if you came from a ghetto. You were being harassed because of where you came from and also because of your religion.

As was mentioned above, from what interviewees said, there appeared to be a general environment of civil disorder. Many of the interviewees spoke about becoming part of this ongoing protest as if it was an ordinary component of community life (in the Bogside and Creggan) at the time. Interviewees described the situation as:

In my teenage years you would get up in the morning and think of ways to make life hard for the Brits and you went to bed with that thought. You didn't think about girls, sport, or watch television and every night in Creggan you would be looking at a riot and there would have been gun battles.

And another:

It seems to me looking back, its almost like a the blitz in England during the forties in the sense of we were living under occupation and things daily, every day and every night something happened there wasn't a day went past when something didn't happen so from gun battles to British Army firing tracer bullets, I mean hundreds of them at one time from all that violence.



It is interesting that one of the interviewees pointed out that although harassment might have contributed to his decision to join the IRA, equally, “Everyone was getting harassed at that time but it was during that time when all this was going on that I did become a volunteer. Although I had friends who never became involved and they were also getting harassed as well”.

The events of Bloody Sunday proved to be a major catalyst for at least 11 of the interviewees (about 52%) in their decision to join an armed group. The commonly held view that Bloody Sunday resulted in a major recruiting process for the IRA certainly holds true for this sample. Several interviewees spoke vividly about recollections of the day and were still emotional in discussing its impact.

Bloody Sunday. That day changed my whole perspective on life. I was just turning sixteen, you could see that they were shooting at unarmed people, it was like some kind of payback. The powers that be, that ordered the Paras in that day have a lot to answer for what happened, and what is going to happen.

And another:

We left there and went in through Kells Walk and that’s where I had my first sight of somebody shot dead and that stays in mind from that day and I will never forget it was the tread marks on the Knights of Malta man’s boots, and he was pumping away at this man's chest, I found out later that it was the fellow McKinney who was an amateur photographer and I looked over and seen another fellow lying. So I made my way home and everybody was in shock, it's something that has lived with me a long time.

Continuing:

One thing I can remember was that on the day of the funerals or the day after, taking into consideration that we had moved to an area that was out of the way of any bother could have been Cork for all anybody knew, was that a three ton army truck passed us as we were playing on a green and it was going slow so we got together what we could and started pelting it and I was screaming and roaring at them, calling them everything. That was one of the few memories from then but certain images remain with me, I was 13 then and it didn’t really sink in then, it was like something from T.V. it was later on that you realised that there was 13 people dead and numerous people injured. I had no mental problems or physical issues; I slept alright and didn’t have any nightmares. Life carried on the same, we



were gathering milk bottles, stones and rioting away, there's a place down close to where events took place and we would hide our school books and riot away.

The above quotation captures many of the views expressed, and implicit within it are two major factors. Firstly, what is evident is the anger that many young men in the area held towards the army at this time, Secondly, the final part of the quotation also points to the fact that the situation of oppression and protest of many forms was accepted as a normal or everyday part of life. Clearly, most of the interviewees grew up in an environment where gathering stones or milk bottles to create petrol bombs was a common childhood activity. It was this context that led several of them to rather seamlessly join the IRA as part of a “natural process” of development. For many there was no process of decision making, it just happened, typically described as:

At that time you never thought about it. Yes it was a part of your life part of your lifestyle. At that age you were not supposed to see much guns and explosives. We would do look out for the bigger boys and carry stuff for them, move stuff for them. If they were going to do a job we would help out. Let them know if there were Brits about, scout out for them.

And another:

I would say I was fifteen maybe fourteen fifteen, that era that age and for me it wasn't a big decision it was something I wanted, something I wanted to do I wasn't sure what I would be able to do and I had no conception of what it entailed but I wanted to try and do something. So I joined the provisional IRA.

A further interviewee said:

It's hard to say why anyone joined the IRA, for myself I never knew anything else and I have been fortunate enough never to wake up in the morning asking why? A lot of people do. I feel sorry for those people that have to ask themselves why, why doesn't come into it for me, never has it's just in my blood.

One respondent, however, told a slightly different story, namely, that he simply wanted to be a soldier at that time and felt it was the only army he could join:

You know my whole life I read comics, war stories, Germans and Brits; I always wanted to be a soldier, a military background type thing. When I



did become full time apart from being a soldier there was that romantic idea of Ireland, being in the IRA, being in a secretive organisation but I always wanted to be a soldier. It was definitely a military thing a sniper thing, a romantic thing as I said I became a full time member.

It appears that roughly 42% of the interviewees who made the transition from engaging in street conflict as part of their “normal” existence to becoming actively involved in armed conflict came from fairly apolitical family backgrounds. Seven of the respondents said they felt they could not tell their families of their views and a few said this was because they were not from republican families. There was a clear sense that there would have been some disapproval of their activities, and of course that the activities that they were involved in were also secretive. As one interviewee noted:

I was just living in a secretive world, nobody knew what I was doing where I was going or what I was at, you would tell lies here and there. I went to 2 training camps and the lies I had to tell to get away like I was going camping or that, it was a very secretive life.

For a number of these individuals it would be fair to say, as some of them volunteered, that when they joined the IRA and/or Fianna between the ages of 15 and 18, they did not have a well developed sense of political consciousness or ideology.

Only about half (10 interviewees, and with one of these only one family member was supportive) of those interviewed described their political activities as supported by their families. Generally these were individuals who came from what could be broadly described as republican families where politics was part of the family discussion and life. These participants spoke about the natural progression in joining an armed group as would have been appreciated by their families. One described his republican “education” as:

...I got talking to my Granny who was a lovely woman, she told me about her brothers, who had died. I was very close to her. She would have told me stories not to educate me but just to reminisce and these stories stayed in my head. When I look back now she was educating me in a kind of manner.

Another said:

You know you are born a Republican, you don't become one, it's



something you inherit from your Grandparents.

And another:

I had had republicanism passed down to me my grandfather was imprisoned in the twenties my mother was republican and my granny had been shot I mean my mother's granny had been shot and lost an eye the Black and Tans had shot her so I knew about Irish history even though it was just verbal but I knew about it and that was fine I didn't know a big deal about it I didn't know what I know now but I knew a bit and ok I may only have scratched the surface of it but what happened was that I saw the brutality of the British occupation forces and that brutality affected me very much it fired give a fire inside me an anger inside me.

A further interviewee noted:

My mother¹² was a Republican, she would tell me stories, horror stories about the Black and Tans and also the B specials.

For some of these individuals the loss of a family member in the conflicts of the past was also a major contributing factor in their decision to join up, at least 4 of the interviewees or about 19% had previously lost a relative in the conflict or someone close to them. One respondent noted how the death of his father understandably, influenced him dramatically:

It wasn't until I spoke to my family that I found out he was brutally tortured they had kept him over night and then he was shot and dumped in a boot of a car. It was a passer by that noticed the blood dripping out off the boot of the car. Some of the vivid memories I have of that time were photographs that were in the newspapers, some which were front-page news. The British army blow the boot door open tied a rope around my father and dragged him into the middle off the street. That's the photo that has always stuck in my mind. There are times I would relive what they did to him and think how did he feel.

¹² Interestingly, although this cannot be said with absolute certainty from the data, it did appear to the researcher that those that spoke about familial influences were most often influenced by female family members (mothers and grandmothers). Few mentioned their father's political influence. This would be an interesting area for future research.



Another linked the loss of a neighbour with how he was influenced by Bloody Sunday:

I would have been 15 at the time but you were witnessing all this, but then I saw a man, I didn't actually see him, but I lived 300 yards away from where he was shot dead, he was a volunteer, he was defending the area against these raids by the British army...he was shot dead that morning defending the area. And all these things accumulated to the point where I made a decision to join the IRA at the age of 16. Bloody Sunday would have been a milestone, which would have been the time a decision was reached. The decision was made for me then; it was then open war. You can't lie back any longer.

Needless, to say once interviewees joined an armed group their lives were transformed fairly dramatically. Whether one judges their actions as justifiable or not, the interviewees in this sample then became engaged in waging armed conflict. Although most would not elaborate on their activities in detail, it was clear that most in the sample were involved in gun-running, planting explosives, shooting at the army and police, and other armed activities typical of the republican campaign at that time. Several described being active "24/7", being constantly on the run and moving from place to place fairly rapidly. One respondent noted:

When you went out at night your mother didn't know if you were going to come home in a box, you didn't know if you were coming home in a box. You would have listened for dogs barking or someone coming towards you would have wired you off if the Brits had been about. So you would have went through the backs or knocked on someone's door and ask if you could stand in until the Brits had passed. That was your life, you were in a scenario that if you were caught you were going to gaol for a long time or worse you faced death, gaol was the lesser of the two evils. If you were captured that was it but I enjoyed it, I was hyper. I couldn't sit, I was never in the house. I always had to be on the move.

And another:

Bombings, shootings, hijacking, anything to do with any IRA activity. That was just on the war side of it, fighting against the Brits and RUC. We were also involved within the community. The time the loyalists went on strike we went out and hijacked food lorries. We also commandeered food factories such as wholesalers; we would load the lorries up and bring them into our own area. If things did really blow up with the loyalist we had



food for our own people. So while we were fighting a war we also knew what was going on in our own areas. We did try to have a good relationship within our community and I think we were successful.

Experiences prior to the protest

Experiences prior to prison

It would be erroneous for a report such as this to focus exclusively on the experiences of each individual at a specific moment in time, i.e. the ‘No Wash/Blanket’ Protest. Obviously, each individual had a range of experiences both prior to this protest and afterwards. Considering this life context is not only historically necessary, but is also important in how the analysis of any presumed psychological impacts that are seen today (this is discussed in detail in *Chapter Four*). For all of the interviewees there was a litany of stressful experiences that had taken place prior to their imprisonment, including house raids, being arrested, held and beaten at times, witnessing acts of violence, and participating in acts of violence. When asked about their experiences prior to going to prison, most spoke of harassment, arrest and interrogation.

One interviewee described the process of being caught and interrogated before prison as ‘not that bad’ from his perspective:

Well the interrogation was a three day process. There was no real serious brutality. It would have been slapping and roaring and shouting and all that mental torture for the three day process; you would have been in and out of the interrogation room on a regular basis for two or three hours then back up for two or three hours. But there was no torture as such, no broken bones like, more slapping, pulling hair but that was basically it you know.

Most typically, however, interviewees spoke of being arrested and held by police at different moments in time. Two major themes emerged here, i.e. that beatings were frequent and that different forms of psychological abuse were starkly evident. This is illustrated in the followings quotations:

Raiding the house was normal, like there they are the day again, aye come on in, though they never found a thing, our house was always kept clean so they never found anything. So they came that day, took me to the barracks and beat the bullocks off me as usual, took me up the stairs to the interview rooms, I was hand cuffed and taken to a wee room with a bed in it and they beat me around there for about one and half hours.



And another:

Thump, kick, you were beat into the Strand, into the cells, that was even before interviews. That was usual formality in 1976. The Strand Road was a place everybody dreaded. Wile brutality in the place.

Yet another added:

Yes, well I can't think of anytime when I wasn't beaten. Even if you were only lifted for a few hours you still got a beating. Sometimes the British army would lift you and bring you into their barracks and give you a beating. It didn't matter who arrested you, RUC, the Brits you still got a beating. I think it was the policy at the time to intimidate and terrorise you. There were other things happening at that time that I didn't experience. Friends of mine were arrested by the British army, taken into a loyalist area, thrown out and the army shouted there is a Provie for you. That would have resulted in the people running for their lives with the loyalist running after them.

Participants also spoke of other experiences at the time that reflected psychological abuse that often took place just before interviewees were put on remand and sentenced:

Well...Castlereagh conditions were you got very little sleep. When you weren't been interrogated the cell they put you had a bed nothing else. The cell would have been very warm and there was always noise coming through from either the radiator heaters or the ventilators. The interrogations went on constantly from morning right though to the early hours of the next morning. Maybe every two hours or so they would bring you back to your cell for ten, fifteen minutes and then back to the interrogation room. That was illegal but that is what they did. At that time the beating wasn't going on as they were before it was more psychological. They would have brought your mother in opened the door was you were being interrogated so you could see her walk pass. They would have told you they were going to charge your mother. Or they would have you sitting on a chair with two branch men in front of you. There would have been a lot of shouting and a lot of abuse. The next thing two very well built branch men would come in and sit behind you. They may not have touched you but you knew they were there and this was to unsettle you. They would lift a chair and fling it across the room or bang



the table in front of you. This was to get a reaction out of you to see if you would jump when they banged the table. They were more into psychological ways of breaking you than beating you.

And another:

When I was arrested, God that was a nightmare I was tortured quite literally tortured, I saw that film...I can't remember its name about South Africa, I can't remember the name, Red Dust¹³ and thought Jesus, God the two poor fellas...Jesus...God forgive me for cursing those two fellas were tortured, I didn't have that type of torture, no that...God. But having said that I had a form of torture that was brutal and it was a relief when I was finally taken to prison to remand it was a relief I would think most people felt like that. Remand was actually good.

Remand

Discussion about remand, which took place largely in the Crumlin Road Jail although most were moved to Long Kesh toward the end of their remand period, with interviewees was interesting. Although some described the period as difficult and obviously the lack of liberty was all pervasive, others spoke about it as a time of camaraderie with relative freedoms compared to what most would experience on the Blanket Protest. Being treated as political prisoners at this time (political status was only removed after sentencing) obviously had a big impact on some of the interviewees, influencing how they perceived their incarceration. As one noted:

[Remand was] very much like Colditz you know they have the courtyard in between C wing and B wing, its like Colditz and that's what it was like except for the units there was no RAF uniforms or anything, but it was very much a prison of war...remand was easy going we had our structures we had our parades on a Sunday and we were very much structured... I never experienced any brutality whatsoever on remand I don't remember any I do remember we had a segregation issue, battle with the loyalists. I do remember being involved in that that is true and normal prison things

¹³ A film based on the novel Red Dust by Gillian Slovo that had recently been shown on the BBC. It focuses mainly on the experiences of an ANC activist in South Africa who was tortured and beaten by the South African Police. It shows graphic scenes of two prisoners being beaten until they could not walk and tortured using a wet bag over their heads used to repeatedly suffocate them almost to death.



like escapes and things like that and that goes back to that Colditz thing. I think it was my duty to escape type of attitude in behind...but you just...the day I got moved after I got sentenced and the day when I got moved to Crumlin Road...or from Crumlin Road to Long Kesh was a nightmare, a nightmare.

And another:

Well at that time there was three to a cell, two bunks and a single. They were only eight by four. You got an hour in the yard in the morning for exercises and an hour in the evening. Meal times were odd times. Here your parents were able to bring you in parcels, fruit and books and papers. You had access to all that. Our own organisation used to have wee lectures, the usual.

Another added, again relativising to other experiences:

Can't think of anything too bad on remand, got a couple of clouts and bangs.

One of the interviewees, who had political status for a while and was in the Cages at Long Kesh, also spoke of the relative difference between it and the H-Blocks. He said:

...the Cages, but it was a totally different and relaxed environment. It was completely relaxed, we had education, you could go training, we had our own reading, and we could do all these things. But once you were sentenced it was the complete flipside.

And another:

...there was reading material, you got newspapers, it was a lot cleaner and then when we came to the agreement with the loyalist that they got out one day and us the next you didn't feel under a lot of pressure Although you had to watch yourself with the screws.

That said, not all spoke about remand in this way, but it is notable to highlight the contrast between this experience and what was to come once men when onto the Blanket Protest. The contrast could have contributed to significant psychological stress once they were on protest. Arguably, however, it also could have been a motivating factor in assisting some to cope with the protest, i.e. having a vision of what type of prison environment they wanted.



The one issue, however, that some of the interviewees did talk about as being particularly stressful during remand was ongoing conflict with loyalists, as prisoners were held together. As one noted:

Although we got out of our cells at different times, sometimes you could have been on the landing and maybe two or three loyalists would come walking down so there were always fights breaking out. My whole memory of gaol was just every day a constant struggle.

And another spoke of a particularly violent clash between republicans and loyalists:

Coming up to the twelve of July 1976 the tension had been building. All day long loyalists had been singing their songs. That night in the recreation room there was about five hundred men. This music came on the T.V and the Derry men started to sing their own words to the song. One Loyalist couldn't take it any more he started to fight and then all hell broke lose. There was blood and skin everywhere. The loyalist locked themselves in a room; we were throwing boiling water and darts at them.

This is not to say that experiences at the Crumlin Road jail on remand were less brutal than after being sentenced for everyone. As one interviewee noted:

Crumlin Road again we're in conflict with the prison regime. So every day was a conflict. They wanted to call us by numbers and we wouldn't allow this we only answered to our names, so you might get a slap for that. The screws were very quick to lift their hands. The loyalists were also on the wing so there was also conflict with them. Although we got out of our cells at different times, sometimes you could have been on the landing and maybe two or three loyalists would come walking down so there was always fights breaking out. My whole memory of gaol was just every day a constant struggle. The screws were always trying to make you do things you didn't want to do. The worse beating I got was in Crumlin Road Gaol. I was beaten from A wing over to C wing. When I got to C wing I had a screw holding each arm up my back it had taken them five minutes to beat me from one wing to another. The most senior officer there told the screws to teach me a lesson and they just used me as a punch bag. I was then put on the boards for twenty-one days. I think I was the last prisoner to be put on what was called number one diet that is dry bread and black tea. That is just one of my experiences of Crumlin Road. They also took twelve months remission off me.



And another:

Crumlin Road gaol was bad. You were locked up twenty-three hours a day with an hour for exercise. It was very dirty and a lot of people picked up diseases. There was a lot of abuse that went on. If you turned a word in the screws mouth you were put on the boards. At that time there was segregation issues between republicans and loyalists and a lot of the time you were set up coming out of the cell. The screws would let maybe four Republicans out and twenty loyalist and you would have gotten a beaten and then put on the boards and had to wait until the board of governors came round to see what sentences they were going to give you. They may have taken remission of you even though you were in remand.

Sentencing

Following remand prisoners were sentenced. Here the process outlined was fairly standard as has been documented elsewhere (McEvoy, 2001), i.e. prisoners refusing to recognise the courts and not contesting their cases.

As can be seen from the summary table (see *Appendix C*) the interviewees in this sample were all sentenced between 1975 and 1978, with the bulk being sentenced in 1976.

Table 1 Year in which interviewees were sentenced

Year Sentenced	1975	1976	1977	1978
Nos. of Interviewees	1	13	5	2
Percentage	4.76%*	61.90%	23.81%	9.52%

*Figures rounded to two decimal places

Prisoners in this sample, therefore, fall squarely in the middle of the strategy by republicans of non-recognition. The conviction rates for those who refused to recognise the courts was therefore particularly high (Boyle, Hadden and Hillyard cited in McEvoy, 2001). By the late 1970s and early 1980s, however, the policy of non-recognition had largely changed with almost all cases were contested, without plea bargaining (McEvoy, 2001). This meant that those in this sample probably received longer sentences than they may have otherwise. One of the interviewees maintains they were totally innocent of what they were charged with.



In terms of charges, these varied and interviewees were often charged with more than one offence. Charges roughly¹⁴ broke down as follows:

Table 2 Frequency of charges against interviewees at time of imprisonment

Charges	Frequency*
Membership	10
Possession	12
Causing an explosion	2
Conspiracy	2
Hijacking a car	1
Attempted murder	6
No answer ¹⁵	1

* Interviewees could have had more than one charge against them

The most common charge was membership of a banned organisation, generally the IRA and a large of the interviewees were arrested for possession of explosives or weapons. Six of the interviewees (about 29%) were charged with attempted murder. None of the interviewees were charged with murder.

The nature of the protest

Age at the time of imprisonment

The age of the interviewees in this study when they began to the Blanket Protest ranged from 16 to 25, the average age was 19.14 years of age. This was typical of the average prisoner beginning the protest. Most of the first republican prisoners who refused political status and were involved in the early days of the Blanket Protest were in their late teens and early 20s (Campbell et al., 1994). The age range of individuals on the protest was particularly young, given the stressors and responsibilities they were to endure over the course of the protest and their time in prison. The age of the prisoners was brought home by one interviewee who commented: “[I was] put into a cell and I found out I was the oldest on the wing. I was 20 at the time”.

¹⁴ It is likely that interviewees did not list all charges, say such as Membership, which some might have considered a more minor charge.

¹⁵ All interviewees were given a sheet to fill in with these details, this interviewee made an error on the form, presumably reading the question wrong.



Year of beginning the protest

Interviewees in this study obviously began their protest at different times, with the earliest interviewee beginning in October 1976 (fairly soon after the protest began in autumn 1976), 5 others in the sample also started later that year. The years in which interviewees began the protest are reflected in the table below:

Table 3 Spread of years in which interviewees protests' began

Year began the Protest	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980
Number of sample	6	10	2	2	1

It should also be noted that at least two of the interviewees started the protest and then left it, rejoining a number of months later.

Blocks in which prisoners were held

As was noted in *Chapter Two* prisoners who had their political status removed were all housed in the purpose H-Blocks at Long Kesh. Different prisoners were housed in different H-Blocks over their time in the prison. As can be seen from *Appendix C*, a range of Blocks were used to house the prisoners, about 48% of the sample (10 interviewees) report having only been housed in one Block, most typically H3 and H4, although one reported being in H1 for the protest. The remainder reported being moved between the Blocks at different times. A few of the prisoners spoke of block H3 and H4 being the worst blocks, with a *relatively* relaxed regime in H5. Other sources have noted this too (Campbell et al., 1994). As one interviewee noted, referring to H3 and H4:

H5 was a lot milder—H4 and H3 were really really bad blocks. Talking to any of the other guys in H4 it was known as the nightmare block—the PO in charge of the block...a Catholic, a Tyrone man he done everything by the book. Say you were entitled to sugar in cornflakes in the morning he give you sugar and the other screws hated him for it you know. Santa Claus they called him, ripped the back out of him. They eventually got him moved. He was completely against any brutality but did everything by the book. If you were to be locked up you were locked up. Give them what they are entitled to you know. Most brutality, 90 percent would have happened in those two blocks. I'll give you an example, when it came to the haircutting and the shaving, the forced washing, it happened in H3 first. The principal officer over there, he's dead now, the IRA shot him, he was a Catholic too and he was bitter and hated you and the brutality there



was pretty bad. Then he came to H5 to do us but we escaped his brutality. And we things like that and we thought is he trying to drive a wedge between us as prisoners? H3 and 4 would look at H5 and wonder why we weren't getting the same brutality and what's H5 doing that there getting jam on their bread at night and we're not. I think when we look back on it he just played it by the book. You would get screws that would do that you know. But the other two blocks were a different kettle of fish.

And another:

Having said that the block I was on wasn't the worst block H3 and H4 were there where young prisoners held. They were beaten day and daily and forced wash where they used deck scrubbers on them until they were bleeding.

Yet another concurred with this view:

In the early days the beatings were very bad in H 5 there had been a few screws shot on the outside. The principle officer at the time was just an animal but before H4 was open he was replaced and the screw that took over wasn't that bad. To be truthful with you he wasn't that bad but he had a few rogue screws under him. If there was something happening he would have tried to get it sorted but I think a lot of the time he came up against a brick wall.

As was mentioned in *Chapter Two*, at some point in the protest some of the prisoner leadership was moved to H6 for a period. After a few months they were moved and dissipated across the wings.

Beginning the protest

Several of the participants spoke of their transfer from remand to the H-Blocks to begin their protest. Understandably, many of them reported being nervous and apprehensive, but had already made up their minds that they would not put on their prison uniforms on arrival. Given the build up to arrival and protest, one interviewee spoke about this with a sense of relief:

Relieved in a way. It's hard to understand that but I knew I was getting back into something. It just gripped you. I knew I could do it. It's hard to explain, I was sentenced to ten years and you were going on the blanket and you said to yourself I know I can do it. And then knowing there was



volunteers who couldn't do it and where they were placed. Nowadays when I sit back and weigh it up it I knew I made the right decision. The other decision was go work and mix. I knew I couldn't live like that, you would have been worse off. You stand with your enemy; they could have done you as quick as you did them that would have been harder to live with.

On arrival a similar scene, also described by others (Campbell et al., 1994), then unfolded, i.e. being placed in a stall and given the prison uniform to wear. When this was refused beatings often followed. As one interviewee explained:

We went into reception in the Kesh and there were six boxes and inside the boxes was a changing area and they put you in the boxes and they closed the door they came along and said there is your prison uniform and you said I'm not wearing it I'm going on the blanket. They said your fucking wearing that and you said no I am not wearing it...and they said we will see about that...sorry for cursing...but so when they came back you were due to strip off which you did you were standing there naked but still wouldn't put the uniforms on...you know those galvanised mop buckets, I was immediately hit with one of those, about the head, the body and ultimately I still wouldn't wear it and was taken to the blocks. So that was my introduction, I think I might have had a towel around me and that was the introduction to that...

And another:

So we went to the Kesh in through admission and it was get your clothes off, this was all humiliation too. In through admission, ten screws standing around you get your clothes off. Screws standing around you, a seventeen year old, in uniform. Its intimidating, its scary to say the least .You knew that there was bigger men than you who didn't do it or couldn't do it. Not to say it was scary it was nerve wracking. So it was scary. After making the decision I knew I was going ahead with it. I told them I wasn't putting on the uniform they slapped you and humiliated you and told you to go and take a bath, take a wash and they stood around laughing. That was my first feel of it.

Yet another told a familiar story:

Arrived at reception at Long Kesh and was given your boots your prison uniform put into a van and taken to the block itself. There is an area in the



block that is called the circle. We were lined up there, the six of us the screws came along and told us to remove our clothes and put on the uniform. The first person refused and he got slapped all around the place, the second person the same thing as they were handing out the beatings they were also pulling the clothes of these people. We were told we were not allowed to resist...The clothes as I said were pulled of us and then we had to run a gauntlet to the cell. My face my black and ribs were badly marked.

What is striking is how vividly this particular incidence in their imprisonment is recalled, suggesting that joining the protest involved extraordinary courage. Within a system in which power was clearly stacked against prisoners it seems that the thwarting of authority posed a risk that participants were acutely aware of. The decision to participate seems to have been made at considerable personal cost and with considerable anxiety.

That said, not all reported this initial introduction involving a beating. One interviewee described a limited amount of abuse:

...you were told get your clothes off and put on the prison uniform and you were like saying I'm not wearing that uniform so they took you naked from reception right into the H-Blocks. They took you in a van naked although you had to carry the uniform. I got into the block that night, it was about 7pm and it was because I was naked that there was about five or six prison officers waiting at the reception and one of them give a bit of a slapping about saying these are the rules you know and if you don't wear it; I went through all this slapping about and basically there were these two ways – you could take it the hard way or the easy way but I just refused to wear the prison clothes so they put me in a cell and I put the blanket on... It lasted about 15 minutes you know when you came in. They were stamping their authority, saying these are the rules, we rule the roost, what we say goes. It wouldn't have been, you were never marked or anything like that not at that stage anyway. They asked the question why are you not wearing the prison uniform and the man standing behind me, a country man with big hands just kept slapping me about the ears because I wouldn't say sir. He wanted me to say sir but I kept refusing to say sir so he just kept slapping me; it just kept on and on and on. It went on for about ten minutes then somebody else came along and said get him down the wing now. It was the case where it was a battle over wills but they were still using force you know.



And another:

We were put into the horsebox, I had been through this before so I knew the procedure and there were all sorts of stories coming down then about severe beatings for not putting the gear on. I was 18 then and I was feared and I'm not afraid to admit that I was scared, I'm nearly certain that I wasn't first in the boxes and I heard doors opening "put the prison gear on, I'm not putting the prison gear on" door closed, next one the same and next one and I thought right we are going to get away with this they are not going to touch us and they didn't touch us.

Cell conditions during the protest

The general conditions in which prisoners found themselves living, and of course the conditions they too created as part of their protest, have been well documented in a number of texts (Campbell et al., 1994; Feldman, 1991). As is popularly known the situation entailed living in cells without furniture (after it was smashed by prisoners), with only a mattress, blankets, a Bible and cell mate (as was mentioned in *Chapter Two*). One of the interviewees described the gradual build up to this situation and also how most of the brutality (documented in the next section) started mainly after the 'No Wash' Protest began. He said:

...it was late 1978 before the whole thing blew up, that is before we went on the dirty protest, you're talking about maybe a year, nine months with all that building up till you ready for it. Basically we refused to do anything, we smashed the furniture, dirtied the walls first before we spread excreta on the walls, we smashed the windows and it was battle of wills and the brutality really started then. They would have come in then, there would have serious brutality and some people got serious beatings...we refused to wash, let the hair grow long, beards grow. Refused to shave or have haircuts, refused to do anything...

This had other consequences too. Prisoners had smashed out the windows in the cells with the result they were freezing in the winter. As one of the interviewees noted:

...it was October and by December we were fucking freezing. They had to come in at night to check us to see if we were still alive because we were living under a blanket of snow. So we were under a blanket but the windows were out so the snow was coming in on us. We had no protection



from the weather so they would come in at night, 2 or 3 in the morning to see if we were alive

The most lasting image of the protest, of course, and particularly for those on the outside, was the smearing of excrement on the walls of the cells, whilst they were occupied by unwashed prisoners with long beards and hair. The stench and filthy conditions, exacerbated by the piling up of rotten food in the corners of the cells as they were only cleaned periodically resulting in infestations of maggots in some cells, has been noted elsewhere (Campbell et al., 1994; Coogan, 1980; O'Rawe, 2005). Prisons report maggots getting into their food and mattresses, as well as their unshaven beards and long hair (Campbell et al., 1994; Coogan, 1980; O'Rawe, 2005).

Interviewees, however, did not speak that much about the general conditions they lived in (for example, only three interviewee spoke about difficulties with maggots) focusing more on direct and physical abuses. However, one or two certainly painted, a vivid picture of the situation:

We were now locked in the cell twenty-four hours a day with no books or anything else. We decided on the no wash protest. At the start of the protest it was disgusting, after all we are all human beings. We broke the windows and emptied the pots out off them but the screws barred up the windows so we had to use the walls. It was obnoxious having to put your excreta on the walls. It was hard when your cellmate had to go to the toilet. We thought we would get all sorts of diseases and none off the screws would come near us. We didn't get any diseases.

And another:

I was on the blanket throughout both hunger strikes I can remember living in conditions where in the cell there wasn't a mattress it was just foam ripped up a blanket to wrap around you and rotten food in the corner and maggots everywhere.

Another interviewee described the general environment as one of stand-off between warders and prisoners, to point where the whole situation started to take on an almost surreal feel. He recalled:

What they done then is that they came in one day and put one hard plastic chair in every cell and then walked away and we were saying what's this in aid of you know but there were these crisscross metal grilles on your



window but some humorous things happened like someone took the bottom off the chair and played music out of it, you know wee humorous things like that. But then that night everybody was sitting looking at these chairs, I mean what do you do with them? There was no furniture in the cells only foam on the floor, maggots about the floor, what I think there were at was thinking that if we don't break the chairs then they will slip in another one, then a table and a bed and eventually build it up until they have furniture again. So that night we got the order to break the chairs, to use the legs of the chairs to break the grilles. And that basically was another part of the process – we broke the grilles. They came that night as well and done a bit of beating then the next morning they replaced the grilles and took the broken chairs away.

One of the respondents raised the issue of why this form of extreme protest was chosen, i.e. the body being used as the last resort of protest when faced with very few other options. Other research (Campbell et al., 1994; McEvoy, 2001; O'Malley, 1990) has found prisoners making similar claims as was outlined in *Chapter Two*. An interviewee in this study explained the protest thus:

You would throw the food into the corner and let it rot and the stench of the place. The diet we were on was bad enough but we were using the food to smell up the cell and all that. As far as urinating in your own cells and putting excreta on the walls. Sounds horrific but you do it. It's hard to explain, this was the only weapon you had. So it made it easier for you to do. People would say how do you live like that but it was the only weapon you had. Put the dog in the corner and he is going to bite you.

That said, and as noted earlier in this section, not too many of the participants spoke about what it was really like to live in such difficult conditions. Possibly this is because talking about the actual process of rubbing excreta on the walls, living with maggots and the like, a process which many in the general population today still find difficult to understand, is naturally difficult. Although a form of protest from the prisoners' perspective, it was self-inflicted in the eyes of most and being dirty and unkempt evokes social taboos.¹⁶ This is not to say that prisoners themselves

¹⁶ McEvoy (McEvoy, 2001) briefly discusses the point, noting, with reference to Aretxaga (Aretxaga, 1995) and McVeigh (1995 cited in \McEvoy, 2001), that protest conjured up images of individuals being uncivilised, uncouth and inhuman provoking a negative response from many in the public. This, McVeigh particularly (1995 cited in \McEvoy, 2001), argues fed into the old racial stereotype of the Irish being dirty.



found it easy, many too felt embarrassed and found aspects of the protest difficult to execute (Campbell et al., 1994). As one interviewee noted:

I couldn't go to the toilet for about 5 days because I knew what I had to do. Mentally you were putting it off. Eventually I got round to doing it. First time I threw it out the window, I didn't put it on the wall and eventually then, once you done it the once, it became a cycle. It was just like a mental barrier, it was 5 or 6 days before I could do it. I know there were people who had to get laxatives in; I know that for a fact. With one fella it was 20 odd days then laxatives had to be smuggled in.

Despite feeling their action was necessary and provoked, some ex-prisoners still, however, harbour some feelings of embarrassment about the whole protest, or at least fear others might not understand their reasons for it. This might be one reason it is difficult for some to speak about. As one interviewee noted:

The blanket protest when we went on it. I thought about how I was brought up and being on the 'No Wash' Protest wasn't the way I was brought up. I know there were people there who wanted to escalate it by smearing the excreta around their bodies. That was one of the times I thought to myself if this goes to that I don't think I could do it. The Blanket Protest and them the 'No Wash' Protests was something we were forced into. It was something that was unavoidable because you were in gaol. The thought of letting them treat you, as a criminal by wearing a prison uniform was just a no for me. The 'No Wash' Protest can be embarrassing at times when people ask you why did you do that. That was another thing I wasn't brought up like that it was imposed on us and we had no way out.

Abuse and severe ill-treatment

“You know you are sent to prison to do time, to spend time and it, time, becomes so important...how long you do, what way you spend your time, the quality of your time or not as the case may be...you're removed from your own reality and you're put into...in my case an abnormal situation...taken away from your home, your work, your girlfriend, your family and so time becomes an enemy, it is never a friend, not in prison...its not a friend its an enemy, and time stops, literally stops...”
(Blanketman, Interview, September 2005)

As was mentioned in *Chapter One*, once in the cells a range of abuses and



hardships were experienced by prisoners over the course of the protest and afterwards. These have been outlined in other reports and books (Amnesty International, 1978, 1980; Beresford, 1994; Campbell et al., 1994; Coogan, 1980; McEvoy, 2001; O'Malley, 1990; O'Rawe, 2005; Taylor, 1980) and findings in this research are highly consistent with these sources. Nonetheless, the abuses mentioned by interviewees in this study are catalogued as they are relevant in considering what the long-term impact of the protest might have been.

Beatings

The most typical form of abuse spoken about by the interviewees was physical beatings. Almost all of the interviewees spoke of being beaten at some point in their incarceration (only 2 did not but even with these it was not clear if they were not beaten or because of the routine beatings they thought it not worth mentioning relative to other abuses they catalogued). Typical examples of interviewees talking about beatings included:

I remember one time when I had to run the gauntlet...there was about fifty screws and they had batons and shields and you had to run down through the middle and they were beating you as you ran down and that was tough. I remember being on the boards one time and solitary confinement you were taken out of the place and taken away a place where there was no bedding with a stone floor and a stone bed and you were given bread and water you were given black tea actually and toast, and having my head put down the toilet and the toilet flushed. And you know that is only a wee tiny piece of what I know, I saw a lot of other people had millions of things worse than what I'm describing to you and worse things happened as well.

And another:

Twice while I was there we got two full blocks beatings. In other words there were four wings in the H Block so the screws went around wing by wing. We had been in protest so we broke the windows and that resulted in the full wing beatings. A few days later the order was given to smash the furniture. The two shifts of screws met in the circle and just went into every cell and handed out beatings. While sitting in the cell you could hear the cell doors being opened and the noise of feet and men screaming as they took their beating. By the time they came to your cell you were nearly glad to get it over with. It is worse sitting listening and waiting for your turn. We could see from our window over to the other wing so we could



see the beatings happening before they came to our wing. The beatings ranged from a couple punches and kicks to men being beaten badly, but that was the type of beatings went on when I was in H6.

Another interviewee described a very severe beating:

We had gone on hunger strike, it was Christmas Day, for that day protesting against the systematic beatings that had been going on...by teatime that night the screws on duty were drunk. I heard a fella getting a beating a few cells down from me. I was in tender hooks waiting for my cell door to be opened. When my cell door opened one screw had a plate in his hand he told me to take it of him I refused and asked him to leave the plate on the floor. He throws the plate on the floor and told me to pick it up. When I refused the three screws started beating me. All I was wearing was a blue towel. The only time I fought back was when they tried to pull the towel off me. It is very hard when you are in a cell with no clothes or shoes on and three big men come in clothed up wearing boots and carrying batons. You can try and fight back but you are only making a token gesture. You are very vulnerable when you are naked. They did get the towel off me and humiliated me; they punched and twisted my privates. One off the screws had lost it and he grabbed my testicles and squeezed then at the same time he was digging his nails into my chest and was roaring at me that the next time he came into the cell he wanted to see me wearing the prison uniform. I was left lying on the floor covered in bruises. A priest came into the cell and saw the state of me. The Governor then came in. I made a complaint and he just laughed at me. That night I felt so lonely I thought I could never be happy again in my life. I cried myself to sleep.

Yet another described a beating he received with the consequence of him ending up on the boards (punishment block):

...there was one incident when we were breaking up the furniture, the fella I was in the cell with...he was hyped up, we were all hyped up, we had broken all the furniture, the grilles, we were throwing things out, wrecking the place and then somebody said "bears in the air" which was a code for the screw are coming. A whole team of the about twenty began reading out the cells and we were all hyped up then somebody up a bit, you could hear his head being banged off the wall and stuff, there were getting into him and I knocked on the wall and said, probably cause your hyped up, get tore into them, then I thought no [*don't*] get tore into them or you'll get killed, and the minute the cell door open my cell mate got tore into them,



so I had to tear into them. We got a good beating that night. We were taken out one at a time and the one taken out would be hit and trailed down the wing over the broken beds and furniture and stuff by the feet. I remember looking out and thinking Jesus what next then they opened the door and said next and I said no I'm not coming out so they said they were coming in, so I did go out but it was a whole boxing match. I was dragged to the circle head banged of walls etc. It was brutality, you know black eyes and then they took us to the isolation box (the boards) and in there they were intent on giving us more but the man in charge said we had had enough and they split the two of us. We were kept down there for 15 days, basically you get sentenced in a wee court, and you know asked how you plead to the charge of assaulting an officer. I refuse to recognise this court – 15 days lost of this and the other, remission etc But we were down there and put on a thing called the number one diet which meant when you got up in the morning you got a cup of black tea, no milk or sugar or anything, and two slices of dry bread. It was like going back to the 1800's.

Hearing the abuse of others

As is evident from some of the extracts above hearing abuse of others or others in distress was also particularly difficult for some interviewees. The powerlessness associated with this was needless to say difficult to bear. As one interviewee noted:

One of the wains was from the Short Strand he was only sixteen, a good kid, shouldn't have been with us he was too young. I even sent word out I didn't even want him on the blanket he was that young, he was too young to experience what we were experiencing. But as an introduction onto the wing they gave him a strip search. They put him over a table, two screws on each leg his arms holding him down and as he was lying across the table they broke his nose off the table and that was just to break that wane. Now I heard that wain crying for his mother.

And another:

I also had to sit in a cell and hear men getting beat up and hear the squeals and the cries of them.

Waiting for a beating

As was also evident from the quotations above the experience of waiting for a beating was also extremely anxiety provoking, to the point that, (as quoted above), "by the time they came to your cell you were nearly glad to get it over with".



Invasive body searches

As has been documented in other texts (Campbell et al., 1994; Coogan, 1980; Feldman, 1991; McEvoy, 2001; O'Malley, 1990; O'Rawe, 2005) the process of mirror searches and anal searches¹⁷ was experienced as degrading and an extreme form of humiliation. It was listed by 15 of the 21 interviewees (about 71%) as a major form of abuse.

I remember being bent over a table naked, I remember have the cheeks of my backside pulled apart I remember being bent over mirrors.

And another:

Every time you were taken out of your cell you were forced to do a mirror search. How they did this was a screw held each arm and you were told to stand astride over this flat mirror which was on the floor both of your legs were kicked from behind and they pushed you down closer over the mirror. If you wanted a visit you had to go through this regime going and coming from the visit. So even leaving your cell was traumatic it wasn't like getting out off your cell and walking.

Yet another said:

There was a strip search that they did where they made you squat over a mirror and they probed you back side they were supposed to wear rubber gloves and most times they didn't. The thought of it alone would drive you to distraction. It happened to everyone. It was done just to degrade you because the screws would stand around laughing and clapping.

Another mentioned the lack of hygiene about the process of mirror or anal searching and added how the process was used as a weapon against the prisoners and to abuse them further:

Say they had their finger up somebody's back side and I was the next to come what they would do is pull my mouth open and put their finger in

¹⁷ Being either forced to squat over a mirror or be forced down over a mirror naked to search the rectum, or being spread-eagled over a table and being probed with by the warder with a finger or forceps.



round my mouth, knowing exactly where their finger was before. And you knew where their finger was but you couldn't do anything because there was six or seven of them there. You could have struggled all day long all they had to do was pull your beard and hair and your mouth open. You know I've seen them sticking their two fingers up there to get my mouth open and if you bit one of them you were dead. You would have been kicked to death.

On top of this four of the interviewees spoke about the mirror searches as either sexual abuse, akin to a form of sexual abuse or felt the warders took some pleasure from doing them. Some of the interviewees felt that some of the warders took some form of sexual pleasure in the practice. Quotes that support this view, included:

The sexual abuse that went on among the Blocks prison guards was unreal. They used strip searching to sexually abuse me... Well if you were brought out for a mirror search, they used to use a mirror which you had to kneel on, four or five would jump you, they would kick you in certain places to put you down in a squat position and your arse would be sticking up. It was always the same screws that loved putting their finger up your arse to see if you were carrying anything up your back passage, now these were not medical doctors they had nothing to do with medicine. These were just ordinary fuckers who got jobs as screws and came into an environment which suited their perversion... Aye you could see a pattern you know, it was the same number of screws there and they really took pleasure you know.

And another:

In some ways we were... I was sexually abused if you look at that it from that point of view the abuse wasn't just physical, mental I liken it to... they didn't actually have to do this, is the point it had no success rate its not as if it achieved anything, do you know, and the other thing about it too is if I have something inside me a mirror is not going to reveal that, you can't see anything with a mirror so it wasn't successful so what reason did they have for doing it. It had to be to try and degrade you to break you to make you go through this humiliation and it was tough it was. But not that last time wasn't tough I was strong I realised I said to him when I was putting my clothes on, I'll walk out of here a better and bigger man than you'll ever be and he was bigger than me because you want to look up my arse and you are another man. What is that about?

Yet another:



I got two mirror searches and got a bit of sexual abuse there, got that sorted there anyway.

A few of the interviewees also felt sexually violated when towels were pulled from their bodies, or warders taunted them when naked.

Abuse of families and visitors

Prisoners on the protest, as mentioned in *Chapter Two*, initially refused visits as they were required to wear their prison uniforms during visits. However, for strategic reasons, i.e. to get their stories to those outside the prison (McEvoy, 2001), they started to accept visitors. As one of the interviewees noted:

Over a long period we hadn't taken visits but then we sat down and thought about it, we need to get propaganda going here, we need to let people know what's going on. No contact, someone up in the cages was looking at it and decided these people [*Blanketmen*] need to get word out. So we decided to take visits, one a month. It started off one every three months, say it was me like seeing the family they would have then gone to the papers, to the press, there was a small machine already there...

Visitors were also used to assist in smuggling in and out communications and goods. One of the interviewees spoke of this as a stressful time insofar as they felt their relatives were harassed and sexually abused every time they came into the prison:

When you seen your family it could be stressful because a lot of times your family would tell you off being abused coming in with screws being to intrusive searching them. It was like a sexual assault on your visitors and you couldn't do anything, you could see how traumatised they were. So prison was stressful for Republican prisoners and their families. A lot of times I didn't get a visit. The screws just told me my visitors had been refused. That not only happened to me all Republican prisoners lost visits in this way.

Tampering with and withholding food

Six of the interviewees (about 29%) spoke about warders withholding or tampering with food. This is summed up by one interviewee who said:



There was a lot of other things went on too you know with your food and that. Like you would have got your food and it would have been at the very least urine in it or you would have got maggots in it or they would spit in it. You were given as least as possible to eat so you wouldn't spread any waste.

Wing shifts and forced baths

As has been documented in other sources (Campbell et al., 1994), the process of shifting wings so that the cells could be cleaned was a stressful time for prisoners. It was frequently the time when prisoners were beaten when they tried to resist leaving their cells or as a matter of course. At these times, most prisoners were also forced into a bath (reportably either scalding or freezing) and washed with scrubbing brushes. At least 7 of the interviewees (about 33.33%) spoke about wing shifts and forced baths.¹⁸ As one interviewee noted:

I remember the first time I got a forced bath. The doctor had come into the cell I didn't even bother taking him on, it was just one of those days. He had come into access you for when ever you were going for adjudication. He had his shoes in his hands and a pair of water boots on him and he said I was to go for a bath. I just kept looking out the window. An hour or two later the screws came in. The screws dragged me out along the wing. I think it was the last time I saw Bobby Sands, I think he was going out for a visit and asked me where I was going, I said they are taking me for a bath. They put me into a van. I sat down on one on the benches in the van. The screw driving the van shouted to me sit on the floor you dirty bastard. When I refused two or three screws jumped into the back of the van and pulled me to the floor. A pair of trousers we were told to wear them. That was the start of the trouble. When I was on the floor I was punched and kicked and then down at the cell block two screws grabbed my feet and two grabbed my arms and pulled me in. I was thrown into the bath and they had what looked like deck scrubbers in their hands and they battered the privates of you and beat you around the head. When they finished doing that they came in with cold water and it was like a detergent that was mixed through the water. When they poured it over you I could hardly breathe. They then cut my hair whatever way they wanted to. You would

¹⁸ Although it should be noted that at the residential, which took place to discuss the draft report, all present (8 individuals) felt they had not mentioned this. This suggests this figure should be as high as 17 of the 21 experiencing severe ill-treatment accompanying cell shifts and forced baths.



have thought they were playing naughts and crosses on your head. At the same time you were being slapped about. I was then thrown into a cell and by that time you would have been freezing. Before I was put back into the van I was given another beating in the cell.

Another interviewee recalled his experience of a forced bath, and for him, he felt, in retrospect there was almost a sexual connotation to the experience for the warders, noting:

I remember being bent over a table naked, I remember have the cheeks of my backside pulled apart...I remember being bent over mirrors...I remember being put into a bath an empty bath with a inch or two inches of disinfectant in it and being scrubbed with a scrubbing brush none of which I realised at the time but I do realise it now, that for some of them people there was a sexual connotation to some of the thing's that they did.

Acts of compassion

Interviewees were asked if they experienced any acts of compassion, particularly from anyone in the prison service, during the protest. Given the brutality of the protest, and the confrontational attitudes between all parties, very few forms of compassion were spoken about. A small number of incidents were identified by interviewees, although the line between calling them acts of compassion or warders simply doing their job is difficult to ascertain. In a context of extreme brutality they nonetheless stuck out in some interviewees' minds because of their difference to normal experiences. One said:

There are two incidents that stick in my mind as far as going acts of compassion from the screws, one was in the Crum when there was an old screw...he use to call me young such and such, and he was a fair enough screw. When stuff that my family had left in went missing he went out of his way to get it. The second one was when we were going back up to the blanket and that screw said to me that I was alright, I don't know if it was because he seen that I was scared or nervous, he said that I would be OK don't worry, he actually walked me down to the wing himself. I would say that that would have been that, as I wasn't being friendly with them, they were screws, maybe them because they treated me with a bit of respect.

And another:

Well there was one incident. I came off the blanket to get medical treatment, went to H8 there were threats made to me from a SO (Senior



Officer) another screw came into my cell I was expecting he was coming to start something. He told me he had heard I had a reputation, I told him I don't have a reputation I look after myself and if anyone comes near me they know what to expect. He told me that was fair enough, so he was the first one to ever show me some respect. He had orders from the SO to sort me out but he was fair, the first one to show me any compassion.

Yet another said:

Yes, there is good or bad everywhere. Some of the screws would give you the odd cigarette and in no way would ever abuse you. Then you have the psychopaths. Most of the time it was controlled violence.

Two others also spoke of getting cigarettes or the odd football score from warders. Two other interviewees also spoke of incidents where warders intervened or did not carry out a beating when ordered to do so.

Abuse by medical personnel

Interestingly, however, none of the interviewees spoke of acts of compassion from any of the doctors who visited them in their cells. Memories of medical staff seemed to be largely negative, from their role in forced baths through to inspections. As one interviewee noted:

A doctor would have opened the door and looked in at you and passed you fit for work without examining you, in order to get attention you would have to put on the uniform.

And another:

I don't recall any compassion from doctors or any medical staff.

Yet another spoke about abuses taking place in the prison hospital after they were hospitalised:

The room was like a dormitory there were three other prisoners also in the room. I was lying in bed sleeping one night when four screws came into the room and pulled me out of the bed and gave me a beating. I was then pulled into a side ward. That beating sticks out in my mind it was probably the fact I wasn't well at the time. I was given other beatings in the hospital. I heard one screw tell prisoners to get his nails cut. The next day the screw cut the prisoners nails down into the skin. There was a lot of violence gone



on in the hospital wing when the door opened you didn't know who or what was coming at you.

Coping strategies

Given the conditions created by the protest, and the abuses catalogued above, the most interesting question—even in a report such as this that aims to outline the longer term impact of the protest (see the next section)—is not just how the protest impacted upon people but how they coped. It is more remarkable, in some senses that prisoners actually coped with situation than that they displayed distress and became symptomatic. Some interviewees struggled to explain for themselves how they had coped. As one said:

At that stage I wouldn't say I hated people, I could always forgive people fairly quick. . I wasn't doing that because I hated screws. I was doing that against the regime. Something there was pushing you on. But on looking back I cannot understand it. Was it because I didn't know anything else? There was these things keep driving you on cause they were new. The movement gave you the choice. The choice was always there. The whole way through the struggle the choice was always there. The movement gave you the choice, to walk away.

Below are *some of the coping strategies* used by the prisoners both on and after the protest.

Resistance

As can be seen from the *Appendix C* when asked how they dealt with the situation, just less than half of the prisoners (at least 9 of the 19 that spoke of coping) interviewed, said that the conditions of the protest and the abuses they suffered actually made them more determined, heightened their political awareness and defiance became a form of strength. This is consistent with studies that show that solidarity, 'active co-ordinated' resistance and collective strategies are excellent coping mechanisms (Sykes, 1958 cited in McEvoy, 2001). The endurance feats that prisoners had to undertaken almost became therapeutic (O'Malley, 1990). In other countries, such as South Africa, coping through resistance has also been shown to be a helpful coping mechanism (Buntman, 2003).

As one interviewee noted:



Well the fact of identity and that everyone else was in the same boat, plus we had a common enemy who was the loyalists, the screws and the government. The government were instructing the prison what to do with us. I am sure even the beatings came from the government it just wasn't a screw deciding to do it himself. There was a criminalize policy in force.

Further evidence of the resistance of prisoners was prisoners' refusal to accept or ask for treatment. Although some received treatment (see *Appendix C*), for example, dental treatment, treatment for cold sores—as well as medication in one case when the interviewee was taken to the hospital with bad depression and another received stitches after a beating from the warders—most of the interviewees however refused to ask for treatment. What is remarkable about this is that despite the desperately unhygienic conditions prisoners seemed to not suffer from an enormous amount of medical problems on the protest (see section on Medical Impacts). Although this cannot be substantiated in this study, it does leave the door open to questioning whether the will of many prisoners and their defiant resistance had an impact on their ability to withstand various psychological and physical ailments.

Unity of purpose and comradeship

As can be seen from the quotation above being “in the same boat” was also a strength for many prisoners. At least five of the interviewees spoke about comradeship and the unity of purpose among people in the prison as being important to their survival. As one interviewee noted:

And another:

Our families supported us because even though I was in gaol Catholics were still being killed, the Brits were still raiding the houses, the brutality was still going on so nothing had changed from I had come into gaol. So our community still felt very strongly for the IRA. The nationalist community was very supportive towards the Prisoners there was a bond there. You have speak to prisoners here today, a lot of them I was in gaol with and there is still that bond there years and years later.



Comradeship also extended beyond the prison walls as the above quote indicates and included both familial (discussed in the next section) and political support.¹⁹ The fact that prisoners were part of a wider political movement and received support on the outside of prison was undoubtedly helpful for many. As one interviewee noted:

I thought the first time I was in prison there was a very strong bond because we were in conflict. It was like before I was arrested there was that strong bond outside with volunteers Republicans and the community.

Familial support

There is little doubt that families played a major role in supporting the interviewees during their time in prison. As a few noted, although their families did not necessarily support their political views prior to imprisonment, once in prison they received support. As one interviewee noted:

My mum was brilliant, she walked the streets of Ireland and all over the world with a blanket, hail rain or snow in bare feet. I had support from my mum but that was a mother's love. But then again she had support the same as what I had in her own way. She was a great church loving person, never hurt anybody. I was her son and she wasn't going to let me down.

And another:

I think it was my family my mother and father. I know the doctors didn't make me well it was family support that helped me and kept me on the straight and narrow. I know myself I wouldn't have got through it with out my family.

Once released, familial support seemed to be the primary support that most of the participants spoke about. Some were very frank about the fact that it was their partners and wives that were critical in their survival following their release and today. As one interviewee noted:

¹⁹ One interviewee felt that the wider political movement was slow in their support noting, "I would say the republican movement were not supportive or at the very least I would say you could say there was apathy at the start amongst them because you just had to come up and visit. It was only when the dirt went on the walls that you actually seen the republican movement come out of their shell", once the protest gained moment support increased dramatically.



I have been extremely lucky in the sense of my wife is the cornerstone of my life and has been very good for me I couldn't exist without her I really do believe that her friendship as well as love and lucky to have a great family there is still part of me that she doesn't know. She knows I was in gaol and all that but she doesn't know the inner workings of my mind and I'm not saying that she should either, that a person should know but some night s I can lie in bed and cant sleep and without a shadow of a doubt I'm insecure and paranoid and I base that solely on gaol.

And another:

I wake up every day hoping but no I owe my life to my partner and she'll be glad I'm up here talking.

Youthfulness

A further coping strategy identified by two of the interviewees was their age. As was noted earlier, most prisoners were in the late teens or early twenties. Two interviewees felt that being young made them stronger and less concerned about the consequences of their actions, as well as not really knowing anything else. As one interviewee noted:

I think because I was so young that it made it so easy. I can understand why people couldn't do it, but I can't understand why it was so simple for me to do found it so easy...I don't know. I mean what I had lost going into jail at sixteen, I had no life. I had no youth. This was all my life.

Religion

Although not stressed a great deal by those interviewed, two respondents spoke about religion playing a major role in their ability to survive the protest.

Humour

Humour was also a key coping strategy. Although only one of the respondents spoke about the importance of humour as a coping mechanism, it certainly played a role. A few of the participants took the opportunity during the interviews to regale the researcher with some more amusing times in the prison. It has been found in research (Campbell et al., 1994) with other Blanketmen that the "craic and camaraderie" was an important part of dealing with their ordeal.



Avoidance

Although it is debatable as to whether it is a coping strategy or not, at least two of the interviewees spoke about not actually speaking about things as way of coping (negative or otherwise). One spoke about the male environment and the way people did not speak, two others spoke about “blocking it out”. Another said they simply cope with it themselves and try not to burden others. They said:

I have read studies of people who were prisoners and even people who were just ordinary class of prisoner had no special circumstances, but the length of time they were in institutionalised them and I can see that...and if you add the brutality to the institution and the regimented ways life works within prison, you, through in the dynamic of time...and you...stir it all around it has to affect you in some way. And like everybody else I have my own defense mechanisms. Even people that have not experienced anything have them and I have coped and can cope and I've proven that I can cope, but sometimes it's a lonely station because I feel that I must cope alone because it would not be right for me to burden for example my wife or my mother or father. It wouldn't be right for me to burden them with what I feel, so I don't talk about it I don't acknowledge it and I don't. It doesn't play any part in my day to day life and anything that impinges on that I deal with it myself, but that isn't all time.

Two other interviewees when asked how they coped with the situation, simply said they go on with it, i.e. it had to be done and they did not think about it too much.

Other strategies

Although not discussed a great deal, two other interviewees spoke of escapism (or thinking about being somewhere else) as a way of coping. One spoke about using their thoughts to imagine themselves elsewhere (when in prison) and another spoke of reading (once out) being “great escapism purely escapism and the more that you read the more that allows you to escape into whatever you are reading about”.

Effects during the protest

It is challenging in a study such as this to establish, at least with some issues, the *specific* causal link between different effects prisoners speak of, either medically and or psychologically, with actions or abuses experienced during the protest. It is also difficult to assess, as the study is based on self-reporting, the severity of



different effects and also to do this in a way that does not pathologise interviewees, bearing in mind that most got through the process and coped at least to a degree. To this end, the researcher has chosen speak about *the effects of the protest* as something separate from *mental health problems* and *medical problems* experienced as a result of the protest. Although there is a thin line between these categories, the distinction is made to try and differentiate more severe impacts (mental health problems and medical problems) from less severe, but nonetheless important and potentially distressing effects of the protest.

Almost all those interviewed, not surprisingly, felt that they were affected by the protest in some way. Some said they tried to block it out (two interviewees), and some said they were not sure—but it is clear from *Appendix C* that most were affected in some way.

Hardening resolve and attitude

During the protest, and linked with the points made earlier about resistance, the most common effect interviewees spoke about was the protest as hardening their resolve and making them stronger (at least 8 interviewees). Some spoke about this as a positive process, in which their general ability to withstand difficult situations increased. At the same time, others spoke about the experience as hardening them, with the result that they have lost some compassion and feeling for others. As one of the interviewees noted:

Now the blocks, like Bloody Sunday really made me angry, the blocks made me really hard, I lost a lot of compassion. I find it impossible to cry. I couldn't even cry at my mother's funeral, you know my family was wondering you know what the fuck is wrong with you.

Other effects

A few other effects were mentioned such as being extremely angry and fantasising about revenge. One interviewee said they had some memory lapses about the protest.

Mental health problems during the protest

“It is inconceivable to try to imagine what an eighteen-year-old naked lad does through when a dozen or so screws slaughter him with batons, boots and punches, while dragging him by the hair along a corridor, or when they squeeze his privates until he collapses, throw scalding water around



his naked body. It is also inconceivable for me to describe, let alone for you imagine, our state of mind just sitting and waiting for this to happen. I can say that this physical and psychological torture in the H-Blocks has brought many men to the verge of insanity” (Bobby Sands cited in McEvoy, 2001, p.90)

No mental health effects

Although a substantial number of the interviewees (at least 6 interviewees or about 29%) felt they had no mental health problems during the protest, the majority did mention some form of mental health impact. A typical response, perhaps highlighting that a large number of people might have been affected but not suffered mental health problems, included:

No I would certainly have been stressed but I can't remember been that low in terms off mental well-being. I think I coped with it all really well. I might have been stressed and heavily stressed at times but I think it was the unified approach to everything. If I was stressed so was everyone else on the wing. I was never on my own feeling pressure. All Republicans felt it.

Anxiety and nervousness

Not surprisingly given the abuses listed earlier in this report, the most common form of mental health problem as reported by a number of the interviewees was feeling nervous, fearful or anxious during the protest. Although others did not say this explicitly, one interviewee spoke of being hyper-vigilant, being jumpy and overly cautious. Being out of ones cell was also said by one participant to be the most anxiety provoking time. This links with earlier points made about wing shifts which several of the interviewees spoke about as particularly fearful and difficult times.

Sleep problems

Three of the interviewees spoke about sleep problems during the protest, although given the conditions alone (no windows in winter, for example) one can image this to be even higher; perhaps routine. Interviewees however did not mention this.

Depression

Three other interviewees spoke of being depressed. One of these reported feeling



“weepy” at times, and the other, by all accounts, became clinically depressed on the protest. This included suicidal ideation and psychotic episodes (hallucinations). The depression and mental health problems in the case of at least two interviewees were so bad they were forced to leave the protest (reportably returning later). The one interviewee described his mental state shortly before he left the protest thus:

I was in a cell by myself I was really bad then with hallucinations with the floor, walls and roof moving, then the depression kicked in then really bad, nothing made sense to me, I couldn't see straight. By this time we had knocked two holes in the wall where vents were and I could talk to the boy next door and he was one of the fellas I was charged with and I was calling to him but he was on the pipe, when I asked him afterwards he said he was on the pipe, he didn't respond. I just wanted someone to talk to, just to bring a bit of reality into it. It was nothing to do with the protest it was the mental condition that I was in and when I called to him I just wanted to hear a voice that I knew, he was one of the fellas that I had been charged with. Then I made a decision then that really messed my head up altogether since it pressed a button, I meant to come off the protest then, it was the biggest regret, not so much at the time because I knew I was in bad shape mentally but only in the aftermath of everything that has happened since then... Well I had bad mental issues then when I left that day, fuck I was really bad then, completely lost the plot then, serious depression, high's, low's, suicidal.

Psychotic episodes

Three interviewees spoke of psychotic like episodes²⁰ (one of them the interviewee mentioned above). The same interviewee above spoke of some form of psychotic episode in this way:

I seen things in the sky, I thought God was trying to talk to me, I was looking for a sign, I wasn't hearing things it was visual, I would see a cloud formation and ask what is that kind of thing, but it was the *deja vu* was the big thing.

And another interviewee noted:

²⁰ Although psychotic-like episodes can be induced by extreme stress, they can also be related to low blood sugar as a result of hunger, as well as sleep deprivation.



... I took a nervous breakdown. I spoke to the medical officer about it. I was shaking and hearing voices in my head. I didn't know whose voices they were but I was hearing them. I was taken to the hospital wing not the one on the blocks but the one over where the men who had political status were held. I was then put on medication... I wasn't feeling well before that. I wasn't sleeping well, my mind was racing and I think I was hallucinating. It was probably a form of escape because by now I was on the no wash protest three years and eleven months... It was the Devil talking to me. One day I was in the cell and I heard a fella calling me I went to the door of the cell to shout and ask what the fella wanted me for but he said he hadn't called me. There were times like that when I thought some other people were calling me or I could hear their voices. The next stage to that was I started shaking and couldn't stop. It scared me, as I knew there was something wrong. When in hospital they tried different drugs on me my eyesight went blurred and I was violently sick this went on for days before I was taken off it. When I was taken back to the blocks I was just a vegetable I was on so many drugs. My speech was slurred and I had put on weight. Many of my comrades wanted to know why I was on so many drugs but the doctor wouldn't allow me to come off any of them.

Suicidal ideation and attempts

Two interviewees spoke about suicidal ideation (one of them the interviewee mentioned above). One of the interviewees did make a suicide attempt while in the prison.

Medical problems during the protest

Not requesting medical treatment and abuse

As was noted earlier, prisoners were incredibly reluctant to ask for medical treatment of any form during the protest. Not asking for treatment was seen as a form of resistance. Some spoke about refusing to even take headache medication. Even outside of the protest, this is not surprising given the role doctors, according to some interviewees, played in forced baths, i.e. observing while interviewees were scrubbed with deck scrubbers. That said, no interviewee said they were refused treatment if they asked for it.

Two interviewees who did ask for medical attention reported being treated very inhumanely, thus discouraging them no doubt (and no doubt others) from ever



requesting treatment in the future. The interviewee related the story as such:

[I had] in-grown toenails on both feet very badly, turned septic and the pain was unbelievable... At one stage they were so bad I agreed to wear the uniform to get them cut out. They didn't give me an anesthetic, three or four screws held me down and they just cut them out. They give me a pair of hob-nail boots to wear to go back to the cell, but no socks. After that I never went back for help, even though the nails grew back and I had that condition the whole time I was there. I believe they took certain delight in it.

List of medical problems

As was noted earlier in this report there seemed to be surprisingly few medical problems given the conditions. Problems which were listed, however, included:

Table 4 Frequency of medical problems on protest

Frequency*	Medical Problems
11	Colds and flu
9	Cuts / bruises
9	Migraine / headaches
9	Swollen feet cold temperature
9	Eating problems
9	Dysentery
6	Dental problems
6	Back problems
4	Cold sores
3	No problems
1	Broken nose
1	Tape-worms / thread worms
1	Bowel problems
1	In-grown toe nails (septic)
1	Asthma
1	No answer

* Interviewees could have listed more than one problem each

This paints a very clear picture of the extreme conditions in which prisoners were living, i.e. the high levels of colds and flu, as well as swollen feet because of the severe temperatures; dysentery and eating problems given the general cell conditions; migraines probably related to stress and lack of food; back problems more than likely connected to living largely on the floor or standing for long



periods; and cut and bruises consistent with the high reporting of physical beatings.

Interviewees were also asked to list medical problems after the protest when still in prison. A range of medical problems were also listed by interviewees, these included:

Table 5 Frequency of medical problems after the protest (in prison)

Frequency*	Medical Problems
8	No problems
8	Bowel / Stomach problems
8	Ulcer / reflux
8	Migraine / headaches
8	Injury from anal searches
5	Dental problems
4	Physically unfit
3	Arthritis
3	Bladder problems
3	Skin problems
2	Heart problems
2	Asthma
1	Back problems
1	Diabetes

* Interviewees could have listed more than one problem each

Once again a range of problems were evident. Most striking is perhaps the number of individuals who listed medical problems related to anal searches that started to manifest after the protest.

Release

Dates of release

The interviewees in this sample were all released from prison between 1980 and 1987. Most of the interviewees were in the prison for the Hunger Strike that followed the ‘No Wash/Blanket’ Protest. However, 5 (about 24%) of the interviewees were released before the end of the protest.

Normal adjustment with socio-economic problems



Only 4 interviewees spoke of having no problems or being OK on release; one of these found the experience to be an anti-climax. A number of interviewees described what they called a normal process of adjustment. Although this might have been the case for a few, some also experienced difficulties getting work. One of the interviewees said they had to travel abroad to get work as opportunities were limited given their prison record.

Not wanting to talk about experiences

Interestingly, although as was noted earlier in this report, many people struggled with and continue to struggle with talking about their experiences, few mentioned this as one of the difficulties on release. One interviewee, however, said he felt this affected him and others. It was only after he participated in a book writing project that he felt freer to being to talk about his experiences. He said:

...I came out I can't really talk about it, its not I couldn't, I didn't really like talking about it, its this thing you know, if I was on the run and somebody came into the bar and brought up the subject about Bobby Sands and the blanket, I didn't want to talk about it, its still an open sore, an emotional wound, I'd say everybody was in the same boat for years, we never really talked about it in-depth for years, until later on in life and the second time I went back to gaol we actually wrote a book about it, you know the blanket men that were there and I think that would have been a sort of release, I felt it anyway. I wrote say something like say 30 A4 pages and I certainly felt it was, in my experience. Out of all of this, there were thousands of pages and the whole thing had to be edited down, but it was the sort of the writing of that book that would have helped too. But mental affects, no, bar not being able to talk about it, but I have seen people who came out and they can't get a job and its there in their lives, whereas to me I think I've moved on because the minute I came out I became active again each time.

Over-stimulation and surreal experiences

Jamieson and Grounds in their study of republican ex-prisoners and their families found that typically on release ex-prisoners experienced three stages, i.e. a sense of euphoria, followed by a period of over-stimulation and then depression (Jamieson & Grounds, 2002). Of course, the experiences of the interviewees did not follow this pattern exactly, but elements of it were certainly visible.



For some coming out of prison was a surreal experience after being locked up for such a lengthy period of time. Some of the interviewees (6 interviewees or 28,57%) spoke of finding the streets noisy, everything felt fast, cars and traffic were strange and loud, and so-called normal activities such as going a bus was difficult for one interviewee. Two reported their house feeling very large and foreign. As one interviewee noted with reference to the stimulation, and a degree the joy of being free (discussed below):

My brother was in the car and put on the radio and I was amazed there was a car radio. On the way home I took every thing in. The green grass, children out playing. The best things in life are free and you don't release it until they are taken away from you. The ability to turn on a radio, to be able to walk out your front door or to walk along a beach. All these things I know.

And another:

Everything looked bigger to me. I was living with my mother and father, but I sort of felt out of place. I asked my mother one night could I go out and make a piece of bread she said this is your home make what ever you want it was then I released I had to get to know my own family all over again. My youngest brother would have been thirteen when I went into gaol and he was now a grown man with a family. My other brother was fifteen he was also grown man with a family. Everything was strange to me I knew they were my family but I had to get to know them again...If I walked up to a door I would have stood for a minute waiting for some one to open it as you were used to the screws doing that. Trying to cross the road to me everything was so fast, this only lasted a while and then you got used to it.

Euphoria, erratic behaviour and alcoholism

Needless to say a number of the interviewees reported being very happy when they were released from prison. This, however, was often followed by a period of elation and "trying to play catch up" as one interviewee put it. At least 4 interviewees (19%) and spoke of elation, and periods of being "mad", erratic, partying, drinking, gambling and womanising. At least 7 (about 33%) of the respondents spoke of problems with alcoholism.

One respondent spoke frankly of the difficulties with alcoholism:



I became an alcoholic, I had posttraumatic stress and drink is the best thing for it. If you have an attack of it take a bottle of something. You don't feel anything, but then it back fires on you. Ten years on you are going to pay the price may be thirty times over for all the times you found relieve in taking a drink. Shortly into my marriage I had to go to AA and I was introduced to a programme the twelve steps I was introduced to a programme of recovery and have been on a programme of recovery ever since...I am off the drink now. I have said to people I went though interrogations I went though the blanket but it was the drink that brought me to my knees but I have learnt better now.

And another:

I was drinking from I got up in morning but I stopped when I went to see my mother because she hated it. [*Researcher: Do you put it down to the prison experience, trying to deal with things?*]. I think so because before I went into gaol I took a drink but not to that extent. Drink just seemed to be the be all and end all. I knew myself even when I was doing it I didn't want to. I think it was a phase I went through. There have been a lot of fellas who came out and did the same thing.

And another:

After that three year period I hit the drink and probably was an alcoholic. I went off the rails for almost ten years. I have been in...twice for alcohol addiction treatment. I stayed three days both times. My memory of this was it was an institution, but I was in control this time.

Social withdrawal, relationship problems and depression

Although not pervasive, a number of the interviewees (about 4 of the 21) spoke about feeling the need to withdraw socially and some described themselves as depressed. A few spoke of having problems with relationships. As one interviewee noted:

I got out people, parents were coming to me and saying our so and so is acting very strange. You know people were institutionalised, were not going out the door or willing to come out of their bedrooms, a mother would make them their dinner and they would walk straight to the bin and scrape it into the bin, something that they had done for maybe ten years and maybe doing four times a week. They were haunting their parents but



maybe not aware of it or that they had actually sat and prepared that for them.

And another:

I stayed in my bed a lot and didn't go out. If I was down the stairs and someone came to the door I would have ran up the stairs. I felt very institutionalised, every thing had to be in its place. My bed always had to be made, I wasn't sleeping that great and I smoked a lot. I got out 1984 I would say it lasted until 1986 or 1987. Before I started going out. My brothers tried to get me to go out and when I did I couldn't wait to get back home... Looking back now the things I was doing were very odd but at the time it didn't seem that way.

Anxiety related problems

At least 5 of those in the sample spoke of anxiety related problems, most typically sleeping problems, being hyper-vigilant, "having the odd nightmare" and two spoke of flashbacks. One interviewee spoke vividly of a panic attack:

The other thing was I actually took two panic attacks, which is why I took them, but which never happened again thank god. One was I went out to a friends house, he was doing 14 years at the time and I wanted to talk to his mother and sister, just to reassure them, I'd been out 4 or 5 days, and a panic attack came on and I could hardly breathe. I was panicking then because I didn't want them two to see the state I was in – this was in their house, I was sweating and she was bringing in water, I was sort of embarrassed at the same time. The second time it happened we were in a car and I took a panic attack on the way to a disco or something – I had to get out of the car but it was just the breathing but after that I didn't have any more bother. They were frightening, terrifying ...but after that it never happened again.

Other studies have found a high prevalence of anxiety-related difficulties on release from prison. After release Shirlow found in a sample of 100 ex-prisoners and 40 relatives of ex-prisoners that:

In terms of age and period of release it was clear that those released in the past 5 years [after 1995] are most likely to suffer from hyper-vigilance, insomnia and feelings of apathy and exhaustion. Whereas those imprisoned prior to the mid 1980s tended to state higher levels of irritability, and the tendency to either freeze, panic run or feel terror



stricken. In relation to flashbacks it is clear that this [is] a common-experience among all age groups and duration of imprisonment (Shirlow, 2001).²¹

Reactions of the community

Interestingly, very few of the respondents spoke about how their community reacted to them when they came out of prison. Perhaps there was an assumption that the community broadly supported them, and thus they were absorbed back into it or continued with their political activity. One interviewee spoke about how the welcome party that was arranged for him he experienced as difficult, he said:

Friends were arriving at the house and saying you can go out for a drink so I went out for a drink that night but I just didn't want any razzmatazz but again somebody, and this is what really put me off; somebody brought a band (who had been out on band practice) down to the door, it was embarrassing because there was a hunger strike on and 6 people had already died and here's a band, but it was just sort of a natural thing you know, and they stopped outside the door and I was saying...Jesus, you know.

That said, a few participants alluded to difficulties with community members. One spoke about some of his friends and family members effectively rejecting them:

One of the things that hurt me most during the war was when I got out... I remember going up to visit some old friends who were our supporters, the back bone of the struggle. They told me I was welcome any time but not to bring anyone else with me, these people had done extraordinary for the republican movement and their volunteers and they were telling me that they were not having republicans back in their house again. That fried my head big time, they were telling me all sorts of things, these are people without whom there would not have been a struggle in Creggan or the Bog, lovely people and they were telling me not to bring these other people to their house. I went home that night and I opened a bottle of whisky and sat and drunk it until my Ma came down and told me to get to

²¹ Available at <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/prison/shirlow01.htm>



bed. I was saying to myself that if these were the type of people we have lost then we have lost the war and that was hard to take.

A few also spoke about being “king for a day” on your day of release or thinking everyone knew you, and then having to fade into obscurity as the conflict continued. An interviewee said:

When I got out there was a big party. I felt like a king for a day but after that there was nothing it was just like I was an ordinary person.

This concurs with other studies. Jamieson and Grounds found that:

Most of the ex-prisoners we spoke to said that they had been warmly welcomed back into their own communities. Some said that they were treated as heroes and accorded a certain status and respect. But despite this goodwill, the welcome tended to be short-lived. After an initial period of solicitude, the men were ‘left to their own devices’ (Jamieson & Grounds, 2002).²²

Medical problems

A range of medical problems were also listed by interviewees, these included:

Table 6 Frequency of medical problems on release

Frequency*	Medical Problems
6	No problems
4	Bowel / Stomach problems
3	Heart attack
3	Ulcer / reflux
3	Arthritis
2	Back problems
1	Dental problems
1	Diabetes
1	Migraine / headaches
1	Bladder problems
1	In-grown toe nails

²² Available at <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/prison/jamieson02.htm>



1	Asthma
1	Muscular Rheumatism
1	Brain haemorrhage
1	Injury from anal searches
1	Skin problems
1	Physically unfit

* Interviewees could have listed more than one problem each

It is interesting to note, that three of the people in the sample (14%) had a heart attack shortly after their release or a few years thereafter, generally before they were 40.

Support following release

Not surprisingly there was very little focus on utilizing support services on release. Most were released in the 1980s when the conflict was still very active and no real support services were in place. As one interviewee noted:

You have to remember I was released in the middle of the hunger strike. There were another six hunger strikers died, after I came out of gaol. I was caught up in it again. I was throwing into the deep end. I was trying to cope with these meetings but in retrospect if you had of said to me that you need treatment I would have told you to take yourself off, but looking back I did.

Another commented that on release and pre-ceasefire:

...Cúnamh, there was no place that you could have sat down and had a chat about it and just talk about there was nothing. It was you came out there was a war going nobody had time it was great stuff to see someone getting out, he's not getting involved, tough lets move on and then they are left by the wayside...But when he got out there was a war going peoples 100% energies where in that direction and I know that's what the problem was people weren't saying what about ex-prisoners they were talking about cops and Brits

Most support would have had to come from families, although the exact nature of this support was not outlined by any of the interviewees in this study.



Current status of interviewees

Age

The average age of the interviewees is 48.14, with the youngest being 45 and the oldest 53.

Employment

As can be seen from *Appendix C* and the table below, two-thirds of those interviewed are currently working and one-third of the 21 interviewees are unemployed, with six being unable to work due to illness. Most work is in the service industry (e.g. taxi drivers, bus drivers, publicans). This would seem to reflect what was described by several interviewees as a need to have flexible working hours due to stress and other health problems.

Table 7 Current employment status of interviewees

Nos	%	Area of employment
7	33.33	Service industry
6	28.57	Incapacity due to illness
3	14.29	Community / political worker
2	9.52	Trade industry
2	9.52	Education sector
1	4.76*	Unemployed

*Percentages rounded to two decimal places

Interestingly the interviewees who formed part of this study seemed to have higher levels of employment than found in other studies. Shirlow’s survey almost seems to be the mirror opposite (Shirlow, 2001). He found that only 33% of respondents were in employment and over a third were located within informal sectors, meaning 66% are economically inactive (Shirlow, 2001). A staggering 42% were registered as unemployed compared to a national unemployment rate of 5.2% and a North Belfast average of 9.2% (Shirlow, 2001).

Education levels, qualifications and financial position

As is evident from *Appendix C* and the table below, the interviewees between them have a range of experiences and qualifications. As is evident from the sample about two-thirds consider themselves to have some qualification, or in fact have degrees. About one-third of the sample report having no qualifications. Interestingly four interviewees reported having commenced



academic study courses but had ‘dropped out’ because they could not handle the pressure.

Table 8 Qualifications and experience of interviewees

Qualifications and Experience	Frequency*
No qualifications	7
Certificates / Diplomas / community studies	4
Retail / service / trade experience	3
O Levels	2
Undergraduate degree	2
Postgraduate degree	2
A Levels	1
NVQs	1

* Interviewees can have more than one qualification / degree

Although it was not clear from the data, it does appear that financially about two-thirds of the sample describe themselves as comfortable or relatively well-off compared to before going to prison; undoubtedly most remain working class.

Marital status

As can be seen from *Appendix C* and the table below, more than two-thirds of the 21 interviews are currently married.

Table 9 Marital status of interviewees

Marital status	Nos	%
Married	16	76.19
Relationship	2	9.52
No relationship	1	4.76
Divorced	1	4.76
n/a	1	4.76
	21	100

*Percentages rounded to two decimal places

Political activity

Of the 21 individuals interviewed, 13 of them (about 62%) claim to still be politically active, and one interviewee said they were politically active to a limited extent. That said, the extent or quality of this involvement was unclear. Certainly, as some pointed out, when they say they are active they mean in



community groups and not only political parties. About one-third of the sample definitely reported no longer being politically active in any way.

Current medical problems

When it comes to medical problems today it is obviously very difficult to draw direct causal links between them and the protest. The average age of the interviews is about 48 as noted above, and as such one would naturally expect a range of medical problems. However, only 3 respondents said they currently have no medical problems and this is evidenced by the table below which outlines a litany of medical problems. In her work on Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), referring to the impact of chronic and prolonged exposure to traumatic stressors, Herman notes that such survivors commonly present with physical or somatic complaints and disorders. One of the populations she refers to as vulnerable to complex PTSD is political prisoners (Herman, 1992).

From the list below of current medical problems, it is striking for example that 11 of the interviewees (or about 52%) say they suffer from arthritis. Although the specifics of each case is not known, this does seem to be significantly higher than what one might expect in the general population. Although there are not precise prevalence studies on arthritis and many different forms, rough estimates in the UK rates are estimated at 15%²³ and in the USA the estimates are that arthritis affects 13,60% of the population.²⁴ The population affected would also generally be older than the interviewees.

Thus, although one cannot be absolutely certain, in a pilot study such as this it is worth noting that there may well be a higher incident of arthritis in the ex-prisoner population and particularly those on the 'No Wash/Blanket' Protest. This could, speculatively, be related to the years of enduring cold conditions and living on the floor. The high incidence of back problems could also be a long-term impact of the protest; especially considering many said they had first experienced back problems directly after it. The prevalence of bowel and bladder problems, as well as poor vision, in the sample would also be worth investigating further as potential long-term impacts of the protest.

²³ Figures taken from http://www.arc.org.uk/about_arth/astats.htm

²⁴ Figures taken from <http://www.wrongdiagnosis.com/a/arthritis/stats-country.htm>

**Table 10 Frequency of medical problems today**

Frequency*	Medical Problems
11	Arthritis
9	Poor vision
6	Bowel / stomach problems
6	Back problems
4	Ulcer / reflux
4	Migraine / headaches
3	No problems
3	Heart problems
3	Bladder problems
2	Asthma
2	Neck pain
2	Leg pain
1	Osteoporosis
1	Diabetes
1	Muscular Rheumatism
1	Brain haemorrhage
1	Psoriasis

* Interviewees could have listed more than one problem each

Broadly the data presented here would concur with other studies that many –ex-prisoners are in poor health. Shirlow in a sample of 100 ex-prisoners and 40 relatives of ex-prisoners, found that 58% of ex-prisoners stated that their physical health was either poor or very poor (Shirlow, 2001). According to ex-prisoners some of the reasons for this could be alcohol abuse, beatings, wounding and poor conditions whilst in prison (Shirlow, 2001).

Coping today

Of all the interviewees who were interviewed as part of this study it was clear that the vast majority were coping and getting on with their lives. Most are married and two-thirds of the sample was currently working. Their socio-economic status suggests that at least half seem to be comfortably off. Eleven of the 21 interviewees report having no mental health problems.

The study did not inquire into how they are coping today specifically, but it can be assumed that for those coping it must a cumulative result of all the other coping mechanisms mentioned earlier in the report both in and outside of prison, i.e. familial support particularly their wives, the political convictions of many of



the interviewees, continued political involvement for some, as well as determination and general sense of resilience.

As will be discussed below, the protest hardened some of the men which they find distressing, it may well have also provided them with ways of dealing with adversity. Three of the interviewees felt the protest still affects them but in a positive way, i.e. for example, you learn from it, it increases your political awareness, gives you courage and strength to overcome other obstacles, see it as something positive.

That said, it would be misnomer to therefore assume that the protest no longer plays a role in the lives of the interviewees. It would be more unusual, given its magnitude, if it did not. Some thirty years on most of the participants felt that the protest still affects them in different ways.

Of the 21 interviewed 16 felt the protest stills affects them largely listing negative impacts, 3 felt it affected them but positively (as mentioned above), 1 said there was no affect and there was no answer for one interviewee. The list of effects can be seen in *Appendix C*, below I have chosen to elaborate on some of the effects listed.

In this sense, its probably more accurate to see most interviewees as coping in spite of and simultaneously with the ongoing effects of the protest. This is perhaps more realistic and healthy, than actually expecting any of the interviewees to be coping in such a way that the protest is fully forgotten or plays no part in their lives. This recognition should not be debilitating but liberating.

Current mental health effects and problems

Earlier the researcher made a distinction between severe mental health impacts of the protest and ongoing (perhaps normal effects) of the protest. Thus when discussing the impact of the protest, in retrospect, the researcher was able to differentiate between effects and mental health problems at that time.

However, in this section, I have not chosen to differentiate between effects and mental health problems, I simply outline them together as it was very difficult for the researcher, based on the interview and because it is here and now, to differentiate between what might be a mental health problem or some sort of lasting effect. Most lasting effects could in some senses be considered a mental health impact.



However, if one was to make some judgment it should be noted that based on interviewees own reference to having a mental health problem and descriptions that were clearly mental health problems (such as taking anti-depressive medication), close to half of the interviewees (10 in total) would fall into this category (see *Appendix C*, Mental Health Problems Today). Importantly, as is evident below, each of the problems and effects listed below only affected perhaps one or two individuals. It is critical that it is not read as a list of problems shared by *all* those on the protest. I list them here however because in a pilot study of this nature it gives a good spread of the type of problems service providers could anticipate in a wider population, even if each issue only effects a fairly small number of individuals.

Hardened and detached

Consistent with what was discussed as one of the effects during the protest, one the interviewees spoke about feeling that even today they remain hardened by the experience resulting in them being detached at times. They noted:

I have become very detached lately, nothing really moves me at all, the tsunami never moved me, 9/11 never moved me, New Orleans at the minute doesn't affect me, I tell a lie there was a couple of incidents with young lads the same age as my young lads and when I stop and think about it there was a young lad murdered in England and another young lad in Cork and when I thought about it that kind of hit me kind of hard but I had to think about it, as putting yourself in their shoes. Then it was more from my point of view and not their families, it was more of what if that happened to me, what would I do, if I hadn't got my wee boy now I wouldn't no what to do, he's what keeps me going now. I have no ambitions, I'm just existing at the moment.

Anger, impulsivity and control

Two respondents spoke of having short tempers or their anger being triggered by small issues. Although not mentioned by many participants those that it did affect found it to be distressing. One interviewee noted:

When they are sitting around me I feel at ease with myself but there are other nights when they're around me that I am like a fucking screw. I'm really rattled, tense. Anything can spark that off. Maggie Thatcher coming on the T.V....you know it's amazing, that just sends me on a spiral, I get wound up and very angry, I get a real surge of anger not towards my



family or anything but to people that are maybe 4000 miles away that I cannot touch, that I can't get at. I know that just for that hour or so I have that urge but then it kind of subdues but it leaves me physically drained. I don't know if that's right with my experiences but I go on a while downer where I'm on the verge of weeping but as I say to you I can't even release them.

And another spoke of being short tempered with their children and this being distressing:

One of the things that gets to me at the minute is how I behave with my children, I can get very angry and shout at them at times. I had no experience of rearing children until I was in my forties. I was used to certain quiet times during the day when you were in your cell locked up and the same at night. At times I find it very difficult rearing children. I love my children and my wife but it is not easy. I find it difficult at times so much so and this is very emotional for me. When I know I am being nasty with my children in terms of voice. I know I am a man and can frighten my children by shouting at them. The minute I shout at my children I regret it. I spend most of my time hugging my children telling them I am sorry and I love them. There are times but I just want to go away and escape.

For this interviewee it appeared that their short temper in this situation was linked with other impulsive reactions, for example:

I do things spur of the moment if I take a notion. I am very very impulsive. I have no control over money. Money is as good as so far that it gets you it can improve your life. In term of actually nursing and looking after money it doesn't mean anything to me. If I had fifty pounds but owned out hundred I would go into the bookies to try and make up the other fifty pound so at times I have gambled a lot. This would only happen once every six or maybe nine months, but I can do it.

Another although not elaborating said that their wife finds them to be "bossy"—perhaps hinting at a degree of needing to control situations for some, this may belie deeper relationship problems.

Relationship difficulties

Interestingly, interviewees in this study did not talk much about relationship problems or their relationships. It is clear from other studies that ongoing



relationship difficulties have been identified in the ex-prisoner population (Jamieson & Grounds, 2002; Shirlow, 2001). In other contexts, difficulties in returning from conflict situations have been highlighted. Research on the Vietnam and Gulf Wars highlight that returning soldiers generally have “an unrealistic, idealised view of the family, and experienced restlessness, irritability, and severe difficulties in restoring intimate relationships” (Jamieson & Grounds, 2002).²⁵ Although there is some evidence for this with the interviewees (certainly when they first came out of prison and section about highlighting irritability), this is less clear now. This might point to the fact that interviewees under-emphasised relationship issues choosing not to speak about them for another reasons, or it may suggest as ex-prisoners age some of the relationship issues start to minimise. This would require substantial further research.

Social withdrawal, depression and claustrophobia / agoraphobia

The need for quiet space and at times totally withdrawing from social activities was identified by a few interviewees as one of the ongoing effects. One spoke of their home as the place they go to feel a sense of security but also outlining a fairly extreme form of social withdrawal, commenting:

That’s my wee nest, the wee place I go to to get a bit of peace. I could sit there days on end and be happy, I might not come outside the door for 2 or 3 days but it wouldn’t worry me, I’d be quite content just sitting there as long as nothing upsets me.

And another (the same interviewee who spoke about being angry with their children) saying they feel they have claustrophobia:

I have been claustrophobic from I got out of gaol. I don’t like waiting rooms. I have sat in doctor’s waiting rooms but I don’t like it I feel very on edge. Too many people in the house get me also on edge. I still feel the need to go up the stairs for an hours break in the afternoon. My wife calls it my lock up because it’s around the time every afternoon when I would have got locked up in gaol. I know there are a lot of things going on in my head. I know I tend to be emotional and fragile but it is the impulsive side of me that can be scary at times. I could do something very stupid if things got too bad for me.

²⁵ Available at <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/prison/jamieson02.htm>



The line, however between social withdrawal as described, and low grade depression is a thin one. At least 5 of the respondents spoke about social withdrawal and depression specifically. Pointing to the possibility that at least about 24% of the sample suffer from some form of depression.

In their study of 11 former republican prisoners Jamieson and Grounds found (using the BDI psychological measurement scale) that three men appeared to be moderately to severely depressed (roughly 27%); seven appeared mildly to moderately depression (roughly 64%), and only one man had a score in the normal range. This suggests levels of depression, based on self-reporting and not using any measurement instrument which could mean lower incidence, was less in the sample of interviewees who formed part of this study. It nonetheless points to the fact that depression remains a problem.

Intrusive thoughts, triggered reactions and trying to repress

Of the 21 interviewees 6 of them spoke of what could be loosely termed intrusive thoughts and being unable to forget the past, i.e. cannot stop thinking about the protest or certain images or events, such as the news, bringing thoughts back to them. This was also often connected to a feeling of trying to repress or block out stimuli that might cause some sort of a reaction in themselves. One the interviewees gave a very clear example of this:

Sometimes it depresses me...sometimes I can be depressed for a day or two days and that does happen and but I can deal with that. What I can't deal with is the emotional side of...because within me I have a well of emotion and sometimes it overflows not all the time it could take years for it to happen something might trigger it of and when it does I'm absolutely inconsolable and that's true. Me and the wife went to see Some Mothers Son, we bought the popcorn and I was a wee bit...I said to her let me sit on the outside cause I was thinking I might need to run, to run up to the toilet and it came on, and she said to me she just felt somebody sobbing beside her and it was me so I couldn't even stay and watch it I got up and left. I didn't even acknowledge her she followed me out and we went across a street to a bar and we had a drink. But, that doesn't happen all the time it would take something to trigger that. I have never lamented or never sympathised with myself or ever wanted any form of approbation for myself, but that for me looking back that might have been a mistake I have never allowed myself to grieve I've never allowed myself to be human in that sense and that's a mistake and...not being able to express yourself is not a good thing. Bottling everything up keeping it to yourself



only speaking to people who and that is not reality is it? I think I'll leave it there.

And another spoke about their difficulty in putting the protest behind them thus:

I'm burnt out, my head is fried, I said I wouldn't be able to do the job properly and from that I've been kind of, like most people say to me to forget the past, I couldn't forget the past. I refuse to forget the past. When they say move on those words to me are like the words sorry. It doesn't solve the problem. You know did you ever get a wain doing something and their sorry and 5 minutes later they are doing it again so for me I know it's going to take a lot of time for me to move on. Because of what I've experienced with the brutality. I couldn't just start now.

Feelings of guilt

Three of the respondents spoke about experiencing feelings of guilt all in slightly different ways. One felt guilty for letting their comrades down by going off the protest, another had a feeling of survivor guilt (presumably relative to the hunger strikers) and another said they felt guilty for their association with some armed activities. They noted:

What really changed me was when [*names a specific event*] happened. I had a prick of conscious. I had never signed up to kill innocent people. I had never been ordered to kill innocent human beings or go into a church and kill innocent people. I did not like what had happened and I didn't want my name associated with this...I had an attack of conscience and also the fact I was now thirty-one and I had to get myself a life and get out of this business.

Anxiety

Five of the interviewees spoke of experiencing feelings of anxiety at different points. This was probably by captured by one of the interviewees who spoke of having what they called bouts of posttraumatic stress:

What I understand now about posttraumatic stress after many years is that it is not a mental illness; it is not a cowardice illness. There is a stigma that has been attached to all this, it means nothing off these things. It is a nervous illness it is like an alcoholic after some many years, alcoholic attacks the nervous system. That is why when soldiers who get the system they are made redundant from the army because after another battle they



are no good. The most major one that gets me all the time is confrontation, when I have posttraumatic stress I can't eat. I need to rest, for at least four or five days, I feel when people take these attacks they should be put in a room given plenty of nourishment and plenty of rest until they come thought it, you need to be given your time to get through this.

Flashbacks

Two respondents spoke of flashbacks.

Sleeping problems

Three of respondents spoke of ongoing difficulties sleeping.

Alcohol problems

Interestingly, in self reporting from interviewees, very few spoke of ongoing problems with alcohol, despite many of them finding this a problem on release. Only one respondent said that alcohol was currently a problem for them from time to time. Needless to say, it is difficult to assess this or whether it the lack of mention of alcohol problems is a self-reporting bias.

Overall mental health assessment

In a pilot study such as this it is impossible to give a definitive view of the overall mental health assessment of the 21 interviewees. The purpose of the study was not to come up with a list of definitive diagnoses, but rather to begin to unpack some of the ongoing problems so as to inform the work of service providers in the field.

As was noted above, of the 21 interviewed, 16 felt the protest stills affects them with some form of negative impact. Certainly the majority of these impacts would probably not need dedicated clinical services. Based on self-description of having a mental health problem roughly half of the interviewees (10 in total or about 48%) said they had a mental health problem of some kind. Based on the interviews and what interviewees said about themselves, it likely that at least half of these in turn (say 25%), need fairly focused and immediate mental health attention both psychiatric and therapeutic, the remainder may need a wider array of psychosocial support or other types of assistance such as self-help groups and a listening ear.



These findings are not that inconsistent with other studies which have found that 60% of ex-prisoners and their relatives generally suffer from poor or very poor emotional well being (Shirlow, 2001). Support workers working with ex-prisoners in Belfast, interestingly, also use the rule of thumb that 25% of ex-prisoners will need focused mental health care, about 25% might need someone to talk to and share difficulties, and the remainder might find other supports, such as recreational services, welfare advice or being involved in commemorations and other group activities, helpful.²⁶

However, from this study, as mentioned in the scope and limitations section in *Chapter One*, one cannot generalise to the entire population of individuals who went through the protest (it only focused on one area and was not a scientific prevalence study by any means). That said this broad pilot assessment suggests that organisations offering support in the catchments area where it was carried out (Derry City) should be targeting specialized mental health and psychosocial support services to a minimum of 25-50% of population who were on the protest in the area. At the same time, as several respondents noted in the interviewees, this can be challenging as there still is reluctance for some to acknowledge and speak out about their current difficulties.

Interviewees views on services needed

Services known to interviewees

Interviewees were asked what services they knew of for ex-prisoners who might need some form of support. Of the 21 interviewees only 9 said they knew Cúnamh and²⁷ 7 said they knew of Tar Abhaile²⁸. One of the interviewees said they knew Coiste.²⁹ Additionally two spoke of the health service and one of their GP, and three mentioned NIACRO.³⁰

Table 11 Services known by interviewees

²⁶ Interview with Carol Ní Chuilin, Project Coordinator, Tar Anall. 11 October 2005.

²⁷ All were contacted by Cúnamh for the interview so perhaps some felt it was obvious that Cúnamh offered support and did not mention them, or they did not know the remit of Cúnamh.

²⁸ A Derry-based ex-prisoner group.

²⁹ An umbrella group for republican ex-prisoners, see www.coiste.ie

³⁰ Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders, see www.niacro.co.uk



Services known of	Frequency*
Cúnamh	9
Tar Abhaile	7
Don't know of any	3
NIACRO	3
None	2
NHS	2
Never looked for any	1
Coiste	1
GP	1

*Interviewees could have known more than one service

From this two issues are evident, firstly, services are not known to the extent possible within the ex-prisoner community, i.e. 5 of the interviewees said there were no services or they did not know of any, and one would have anticipated a greater frequency of mention of other services.

Secondly, there was very little mention of statutory services, which clearly have mental health and other social support services. The three respondents that mentioned NIACRO, for example, all made a point of saying they would not use the service. This reinforces the view (Coiste na n-Iarchimí, 1999) and other research findings (Shirlow, 2001) that ex-prisoners still have little faith in accessing or using statutory services.

Use of services

Given the limited knowledge of services outlined above it is not surprise that most say they are not using any service. However, of the 21, 10 said they used services and one said they sometimes used services, which is fairly high considering a high number have said they currently do not have any problems. This is linked to the fact that people are not merely using the services for psychological support but other support, e.g. for commemorative process or using the gym at Tar Abhaile. Of those that said they used services, one used NHS mental health services and the remainder generally used Cúnamh and/or Tar Abhaile.

The importance of ex-prisoners knowing of services and the availability of them was brought home by one interviewee who recalled when he first had problems he had know where to go, he said:

I've always wanted to shout at somebody that this is what is happening to me, I'm not blaming anybody for it, you know you didn't ask anything of



me and I'm not asking anything of you, but I need help, where can I go, who can help me. I never knew where to go maybe somebody seen me on the street and seen that there was something wrong and that is why I am here.

Services needed for others

When asked what support services might be needed for others, almost every interviewee made a suggestion. Some pointed out that they felt they had dealt with legacy of the protest and their imprisonment, but recognised that others might need support. Perhaps this is one of the clearest indications that there is a need for additional support services, i.e. colleagues and those that know others who went through similar experiences clearly recognise that some individuals have struggled and continue to struggle to cope. Interviewees made a range of suggestions.

Table 12 Interviewees suggestions of what support services are needed

Nos*	Services needed
10	Counselling / specialised counselling and treatment
8	Someone to talk to / understanding / to talk more about problems
5	Economic, employment and social support
4	Rehabilitation and integration / practical training and education
4	Psychological support programmes, diagnosis of problems and better access to mental health services
4	Self-help groups and support from other ex-prisoners
3	Support (unspecified) or general programme of support
3	Support to deal with addiction: alcoholism
3	Deal with political problems facing ex-prisoners, e.g. discrimination
2	Support to deal with addiction: prescribed medication
2	Better access to medical services
1	An ex-prisoner centre
1	Coping skills
1	Deal with community anger
1	No answer

* Frequency of mention, interviewees could have mentioned more than one option

As can be seen from above about half of the interviewees spoke about the need for counselling and psychological services. There was also a general recognition of the need for a “listening ear” in some cases and for those on the protest to talk more about their problems. A range of other suggestions were also made such as dealing alcohol and prescribed medication addiction, as well as the need for general mental



health support programmes and more accessible medical services. Interviewees also spoke about the need for economic and social support, as well as the importance of ending discrimination against ex-prisoners. However, what is most evident from the table above, is that, among those on the 'No Wash/Blanket' Protest, there is a ringing endorsement for the need for more mental health services, if not for themselves then others.

Critically, however, these services need to be accessible and located at community level and offered by those that are trusted. Shirlow's observation in his study with 100 ex-prisoners and 40 families holds true for the interviewees interviewed as part of this study, i.e.:

...it is patently obvious that psychological and other difficulties experienced by ex-prisoners and their families cannot be addressed by conventional support structures. Given the nature of the problems encountered and their unique attachment with the prisoner issue it is obvious that services must be offered by groups and agencies which are trusted by the ex-prisoner community. If anything the rehabilitation of the ex-prisoner community needs to be explore through specific policies and programmes within which trust and reciprocity can be located (Shirlow, 2001).³¹

This not only demands community-based support but also require outreach. One of the interviewees, who appears to have coped well with his experience and is politically active today, feels there is a need to reach out to ex-prisoners who were on the protest from service providers and those within the republican family. He feels above all there should be a clearer place for ex-prisoners in the community, commenting:

Somebody suggested we have loads of ex-prisoners who are respected in the community when not tie them in get them something to do and sort of get them involved and you don't know what might come out of it. Ten per cent of them may flourish and become politically active it's worth a try. I think what happened at the time was there was no life line thrown to them [*after the ceasefire*³²]...I think the reason a lot of them sort of became lost and drifted into the wilderness is because there was nothing there and I

³¹ Available at <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/prison/shirlow01.htm>

³² Emphases added by researcher to keep flow.



don't think the movement really recognised that. [*Some of the support structures that are there*] are more into the politics rather than reaching out to ex-prisoners. I think what you need is an ex-prisoners centre to be established you need something you can't just bring them in, you need something, its difficult. I think you have to personally [*approach*] these people because a lot of them...because if you don't a lot of invites can be sent out, where everyone is welcome, but they are general, so then you really didn't invite these people and I'll be honest because I talk to these people and they say, but didn't invite me, they invited people out of the community and community activists, but they should have came and asked me. I think there should be a forum and someone was saying there may be a discussion after this project.

Interviewees visions of the Future

How ex-prisoners feel about the future is both an indication of their current state of mind, as well as, and assuming that mental health is integrally linked to the context (see *Chapter Four* for a discussion of this), an important variable in how ex-prisoners will understand their past experiences. To this end, interviewees were asked a number of questions about the current context and how they feel about the future.

Views about the peace process

Interviewees were asked about their views of the peace process obviously through their eyes as an individual who had previously been involved in an armed campaign.

Only 17 respondents answered the question. A number interviewees did not answer the question (because time sometimes ran out and the questions were at the end of interview). Of this 12 felt they had no regrets and saw the peace process as an extension of previous activity, 1 respondent said he did not want to answer the question, 2 broadly felt disillusioned or unconsulted about the peace process, and said they had ambivalent feelings, 1 felt they had some regrets.

Thus, we can roughly say about 25% of interviewees (that answered the question) have a somewhat disillusioned view of the peace process or at least feel unsure about it; probably with most of these individuals, interpreting the interviewees, leaning towards feeling unsure and unconsulted on current developments. This ambivalent view was typically expressed thus:



I don't know if I am disillusioned with it. I just don't know where it is going. I have sat with the other ex prisoners and we have chatted in an informal way and none of us know where it is going. We are all saying to ourself well the leadership must know where it is going but no one has sat down and told us, yet we fought this war...The IRA had been talking to the Brits for years but denied it. I felt and still do that the people who fought the war in Ireland are not in the IRA. I look around Belfast and Derry a lot of good volunteers active republicans are not in the IRA, but they fought the war. A lot of people in the IRA now were in Sinn Fein and were never operators they didn't fight this war but they carried the peace process, these are the people who are consulted about what they think about this and that. There has been very few ex prisoners who anybody took the time to ask them what they thought, you know and don't expect delicate matters to be discussed but I think there should have been some sort of conversation taking place that made republicans feel their opinions were respected.

Another said:

I look at it and I think I wouldn't want my children or anybody's children going through what I went through. I would want some sort of a settlement coming out of this process. Leaving what happened in the past to the history books. I don't want another armed struggle or another generation having to go through what I went through because I don't think it is worth it. *[Researcher: If you had to say to your children this is the key lesson I have learnt or this is what I want to pass on what would that be?]* Don't get involved in paramilitaries. I think it was wrong. It was just a human reaction to what was happening at the time but the IRA were not the answer to what was happening here. There is a lot of hurt on both sides.

The future

Similar to the point above, only 15 interviewees answered or spoke about the future. Again the vast majority (11 interviewees) record feeling positive and optimistic about the future. Four interviewees are less sure (roughly 25%). For these individuals, for example, they wondered if everything they had been through was worth it, particularly because a united Ireland has not been achieved. As one noted:

I don't know I look around the North of Ireland today and I don't know that we have anything that was worth killing for. I have killed people I



have blown people up I have destroyed lives. I don't know if that was worth...what I have today. I don't know if I would have done it. I don't know if I can feel any satisfaction over some of the stuff I was involved in for what we have today.

And another:

Life was easier for me when I was fighting Brits than it is lying in the house watching TV. When we are suppose to be at peace. Life was easier when I was fighting despite the conditions. It was such a barbaric time in Irish history because it affected 1000's of people, people outside too.

Notwithstanding the importance of these views above—not to mention the multitude of psychological and social challenges faced by many on the 'No Wash/Blanket' Protest still today—the majority remain optimistic and encouraged about the future.



Chapter Four

Analysis

This section discusses some of the key findings made by the researcher with reference to the available literature, and the data gathered, and draws a range of conclusions.

Individual and contextual differences

As can be seen from *Chapter 2* of this report some fairly consistent patterns are evident. For example it is easy to show from interviewees' reports that most of them came from similar backgrounds and their journeys of progression into the protest were largely comparable. Many experienced parallel situations inasmuch as their incarceration and the abuses they witnessed or were subject to, had an analogous quality, albeit differing in intensity in some cases.

That said, the literature on imprisonment would suggest that the starting point of thinking about the psychological impact of the 'No Wash/Blanket' Protest on those interviewed, and their imprisonment generally, should not be one that is deterministic in its view. The psychological effects of incarceration differ extensively among individuals and it makes "little sense to search for the psychological effects of incarceration without acknowledging that these effects may vary widely" (John Howard Society of Alberta, 1999, p.10). This is self-evident on some levels, but is essential for framing how any of the subsequent points made in this report should be understood.

Furthermore, the differences between individuals are also not simply a matter of differences in individual psychology, but are also part of a dynamic process of interaction between the individual and the environment (or context) in which they find themselves. A report by the John Howard Society of Alberta sums up this complex interaction. I quote at length from this report in order to drive home the importance of thinking about the psychological impact of imprisonment as a dynamic, individualised and psychosocially complex phenomenon. The John Howard Society of Alberta writes:

Two individuals, both of whom are facing a long sentence in the same institution. Both would experience the same environment characterised by restrictions and deprivations and both would likely be confronted with events during incarceration which are beyond their control. However, as a result of individual history, attributes, beliefs and coping capabilities, one



person could interpret the lack of control as the result of personal inadequacy, while the other could interpret it as continuing abuse by others. While the first may sink into depression, apathy and withdrawal, the second might become resentful, angry and rebellious in an attempt to counter the control. The way the two individuals deal with their long sentences could also determine how they are each affected by the environment. While one might cope with the stress of long confinement by avoiding all thoughts of the future, the other may cope by finding a safe and comfortable behavioural niche within the institution. The first could take on the behaviour and values of the other inmates and be seen by outsiders as acting impulsively and carelessly; the second might have much weaker ties to the inmate subculture. The behaviour each exhibits would in turn affect the way each is seen by staff and other inmates, and their subsequent treatment would differ (John Howard Society of Alberta, 1999, p.10-11).

Studies in the 1980s tended to attempt to demonstrate that long-term imprisonment was inevitably psychologically damaging. These have however, more recently, been criticized for their reductionist approach to thinking about the psychological impact of imprisonment and building their findings around the truism that imprisonment *must be* [my emphases] psychologically damaging (McEvoy, 2001). Psychological and sociological studies on the impact of imprisonment have been criticized for underemphasising variances and differences among prisoners (Gibbs, 1991 cited in McEvoy, 2001). Empirically the evidence on the pains of imprisonment, whether prison crowding, long-term imprisonment, short-term detention, solitary confinement, death row, and the health risks associated with imprisonment, is inconclusive (Bonta & Gendreau, 1990). The idea that individuals inevitably deteriorate mentally, physically and emotionally due to long term imprisonment is not substantiated by the literature (Zamble & Porporino, 1988).³³

Based on the literature, therefore, to simply catalogue up the list of stressors listed in this report (e.g. beatings, degradation, living in squalor, etc.) and then assume a psychological outcome such as posttraumatic stress disorder or any other syndrome or disorder, would be deterministic, apolitical and acontextual, and fundamentally undermine a more nuanced, complex and longitudinal

³³ It is important to note that researchers carrying out these studies also point out that generally there are not positive outcomes from incarceration either and do not advocate it as beneficial; some inmates clearly experience emotional problems often because of self-imposed psychological isolation (John Howard Society of Alberta, 1999).



understanding of the impact of the ‘No Wash/Blanket’ Protest. Looking for an all-encapsulating diagnosis could also result in an underemphasis on the coping strategies used by those on the protest, and the different contexts in which individuals found themselves in the prison and on release. At the same time, coping cannot be viewed as some magic recipe for survival; it is not merely the mentally fragile who do not cope, or those with an array of complex coping strategies that do. The inmate's world is socially and psychologically artificial (John Howard Society of Alberta, 1999) and it is difficult to ascertain exactly how individuals will react to it. The prison environment, and if linked with severe abuses, to put it in the language of the interviewees, could break anyone.

Furthermore, there is a difference between a so-called “ordinary” prison experience which is the focus of most prison research, and the extraordinary prison experience many endured in this study. Shirlow found there were higher levels of emotional distress among those who were imprisoned prior to and during the ‘Blanket Protest/Hunger Strike era’, suggesting the context of this period unduly affected individuals (Shirlow, 2001).

There is little doubt that prison affects individuals in some way, if even the research on it is inconclusive. Research on the psychological impact of imprisonment has suffered from a number of shortcomings. Jamieson and Grounds argue that most studies are carried out with prisoners still in prison; there is a lack of substantial longitudinal studies; and there is little correlation between formal experimental psychological research and the difficulties prisoners highlight in qualitative accounts (Jamieson & Grounds, 2002).

Cohen and Taylor (1972) suggest that psychological studies have failed adequately to capture and characterise the kinds of distress experienced by long-term prisoners (cited in Jamieson & Grounds, 2002). Being separated from one's family can cause acute emotional distress and on release, the disruption to normal life, people having moved on, and feeling like your life has been “frozen”, can be distressing (Jamieson & Grounds, 2002). Families also often pay a heavy price for imprisonment, and being motivated by a political cause for the prisoner does not mean the family is protected from the impact of imprisonment (McEvoy et al. cited in Jamieson & Grounds, 2002). Prisoners' families generally face substantial practical and emotional pressures (McEvoy et al. cited in Jamieson & Grounds, 2002). Shirlow in his study of 100 ex-prisoners and 40 relatives of republican ex-prisoners comments:



Without doubt a significant loss of part of ones life, emotional support and family relationships has meant that there is a need for strong programs of emotional support (Shirlow, 2001).³⁴

Individual ex-prisoners therefore undoubtedly face a range of long-term challenges. However, a review of the data presented in *Chapter Two*, even if some similarities are evident, shows that a uniformed set of psychological impacts is not immediately apparent for all interviewees. It is not possible given the data, or prudent given the current theories on imprisonment outlined above, to view everyone who was interviewed as part of this study (or other Blanketmen in Derry for that matter) to be considered to be suffering from “trauma” in the pathological or clinical sense. The picture is more complicated than that. The interaction between each individual’s psychology and the environment in which they found themselves whether in the prison or out, no matter how similar on the surface, is always context specific.

Trauma and the traumatic situation

There is little doubt that all who were interviewed as part of this study were subject to a traumatic situation as evidenced by the catalogue of abuses listed and the general environment created by the protest. However, a *traumatic situation* is not a sufficient condition for *trauma* to always occur (Becker, 2001). Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that some of those interviewed have however gone on to develop fairly serious mental health difficulties (this is difficult to assess specifically, at least 25% of the sample seem to have fairly *severe* problems and another 25% need some sort of mental health and emotional support).³⁵ Furthermore, for the majority (roughly 86%), although severe mental health problems are not evident from what they say, it is clear that many of the interviewees spoke of being affected in some way (only 3 or roughly 14% said they were not) by their experience, whether positively or negatively. Effects here included, among others, feelings of survivor guilt, abuse of alcohol (presumably to dull the effects of trauma as has been found for example with Vietnam veterans), feeling the need to block out thoughts about the past, being emotionally detached, ruminating on the past, emotions being triggered by various stimuli. Three

³⁴ Available at <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/prison/shirlow01.htm>

³⁵ Although as was mentioned in *Chapter Three*, this is a broad estimate based on the data that informed this study, which is not a prevalence study (see *Chapter One*). The only way to achieve exact figures would be to do a more in-depth psychological assessment of each individual individuals.



respondents said they had been affected positively, i.e. had learned from the experience, become stronger, have a greater ability to deal with obstacles in their lives. Given the traumatic situation individuals were in it is perhaps obvious that there would be some effects, but an acknowledgement of these impacts should not be equated with the presence of ongoing trauma. As mentioned above the impact of a traumatic situation does not easily equate with making a simple diagnosis of trauma or posttraumatic stress disorder, and as the literature demonstrates the evidence of a psychological impact does not mean inevitable psychological deterioration.

It is more helpful, at least at this stage and given the pilot nature of this study, to see the list of effects of the traumatic situation as *the various forms of suffering* that have resulted from an extremely traumatic situation. The traumatic process that may or may not have resulted for different individuals (and make no mistake some are clearly traumatised and suffer severe mental health problems) is dependent on the context in which it occurs, as well as the coping strategies of different individuals. Furthermore, it is not possible to separate out the different historical contexts from how the traumatic situation would be experienced by different individuals.

Understanding the traumatic process

The theory of Hans Keilson³⁶ can be useful in thinking about how best to understand the traumatic process on interviewees and the potential long-term impact of this. Keilson argues that the *description of the changing traumatic situation* should be the framework by which we understand any trauma (Becker, 2001) and the best predictor of whether symptoms will indeed develop. He shows, by focusing on Jewish Second World War orphans in the Netherlands, that their traumatising differed relative to different traumatic sequences to which they were exposed. This meant that some orphans who objectively may have had a terrible experience in the war, but a fairly satisfactory post-war situation (say being adopted by a caring family), might have ended up psychologically better off than those who had a relatively better experience during the war but a worse post-war experience (Keilson, 1992).

³⁶ My thanks to Dr David Becker for introducing me to the theories of Hans Keilson and for the hours of discussion and debate about the relevance of his work. I also wish to acknowledge David's comments and helpful guidance in preparing earlier drafts of this section of the report.



What Keilson's study shows us is that different sequences (or contexts or situations) can impact on the development of trauma in different ways. Applying his theory to the experience of ex-prisoners on the 'No Wash/Blanket' Protest means that it is not only the physical or psychological stress they endured that is important, but how this was mediated at different points over time. In this sense, how we analyse coping strategies and what is happening in the individuals environment is important, as well as how we think about different sequences (say being released while the protest was still ongoing, being there for the Hunger Strikes, being outside for the Hunger Strikes, etc.) and their impact on the traumatic situation of the 'No Wash/Blanket' Protest.

Simply put, Keilson's theory would say that having an objectively terrible time in prison is not the simple predictor of trauma and may not result in symptoms. Someone could have an appalling time in prison, but on release be well supported emotionally and by their political structures, resulting in them being less traumatised. Another individual could cope fairly well in prison and have objectively (and relatively speaking) a less difficult time in prison in terms of abuse, but on release finds a hostile environment and lack of support, resulting in them being more traumatised than the person who experienced greater hardships in the prison.

To put this another way, if we apply Keilson's theory to say Vietnam Veterans, we would have to ask what was the mediating variable in their current psychological state: the experiences of the war or the experiences of coming home? Obviously both, but mainstream traumatic stress models often overly focus on the experiences of the war rather than other sequences (say coming home) associated with it.

Obviously, the interviewees in the pilot study presented here, and their needs, are dramatically different to Keilson's subjects, but the theory is important because it shows that trauma is not a linear process, that it continues across time, and importantly he shows that whether the traumatic situation will start a trauma process in an individual is dependent on the context and not merely the stressor experienced (say, violence or abuse).

This challenges the dominant perspective of the posttraumatic stress model as the most appropriate model for understanding long term and complex political trauma (Hamber, 2001, 2003; Hamber & Wilson, 2003; Lykes *et al.*, 2003). Thinking of trauma in relation to the context and more sequentially as Keilson proposes implies that there is no *post* in thinking about trauma (Becker, 2001); there is no universal response to a traumatic situation; there is no logical presumption that everyone in a



traumatic situation will experience trauma; and trauma can only be understood relative to and dependent upon the context in which it is experienced.

The data presented in this pilot study broadly supports this theory. It is evident, for example, that some of the more severe mental health impacts appeared post-release, and for some of those I spoke with these are happening now (30 years later) and were not only present at the time of experiencing different stressors. This is not simply about repressed traumas surfacing after an event, but rather, building on Keilson's theory, we need to understand trauma with reference to the context, i.e. one cannot differentiate what was happening around the individual from how their traumatic situation is experienced, not only for them at an individual level but also more widely.

It is important to ask why are some people coming forward for help now to support structures such as Cúnamh? There can be a number of answers to this question: the political environment has changed, perhaps making it easier to speak out; individuals affected are now into a different sequence in their life (i.e. moving into their 50s and being grandparents); and because perhaps the context which mediated the traumatic situation (the war in the eyes of the interviewees) is over, leaving them questioning their place, their actions and the impact. If we take Keilson's contextual model seriously, this all makes perfect sense. However, his model also implies a responsibility, i.e. we have to continue to think about the changing context and take steps to minimize its impact on different individuals over time. This implies ongoing responsibilities for those with a duty to care for individuals over the long-term, but also *all* those who can change the context (e.g. politicians, the movement that supports ex-prisoners, the wider community, etc.) and thus the variables that have an ongoing impact on the individual.

Trauma and context

Whether a historically traumatic situation will result in traumatic symptoms developing is deeply intertwined with the political and social context. The meaning of ex-prisoners' experiences, from pre-prison through to the current situation, thus becomes critical. The meaning and entire experience of their imprisonment was mediated by their political beliefs, whether one agrees with them or not. If the context is important, as outlined above, then how the ex-prisoner is reacted to—by society at large, by those in authority and by their own comrades at the time of the protest, afterwards and today—will all affect the way they understand the traumatic situation and whether in fact the traumatic situation can lead to trauma in the here and now. It may be important for individuals working with those who are suffering from various effects of a traumatic situation to deal with this through a range of



strategies be that counseling or other methods, but one component of this process also has to be developing the capacity of the individual to derive some meaning from the experience in the long-term (Eagle, 1998). The meaning of the trauma for the individual has to be discovered (Garland, 1998). What Keilson adds to this is that this process is not one that merely applies to thinking about the traumatic situation thirty years ago and the meaning prisoners attached to it at the time, but that the meaning of the protest in the current context is equally important. This is all the more challenging decades later and when the political environment is very different.

Thus, it is not helpful to simply talk about the traumatic situation in the prison and during the protest in isolation, or attempt to try to track any mental health problems individuals have today back to it, in a reductionist or simple linear way. Rather, the individual psychological state of different ex-prisoners will have been mediated by the different contexts they have been exposed to over time both in the prison and outside of it. The period following the protest when some were still in prison, the period of their release, the period after that as they readjusted, and the context today, all have a bearing on how we should understand any impact of the 'No Wash/Blanket' Protest.

The broad contextualized thinking about trauma as proposed here, also fits with coping theory, which shows that the way individuals cope with problems is more important than the frequency and severity of the problems experienced (John Howard Society of Alberta, 1999). Coping theory focuses on the interaction of the personal and environmental factors involved in adaptation to incarceration (John Howard Society of Alberta, 1999). Certainly for the interviewees who formed the backbone of this study, their ability to key into the political context at the time of their imprisonment and feel part of a wider political process, was critical in their survival. That they saw their protest as political, and the resistance this implied, was an essential part of their coping mechanisms.

However, despite the ability of many to cope with the situation, when many of the prisoners in this sample came out of prison the conflict was still at its height and the context would have been different again. Many, as they mentioned, would have been thrown right back into it, while others opted out. Either action would have had psychological consequences. For those who continued, the impact of any traumatic situations to which they were exposed would continually be held up against the political environment at the time. It is not surprising, for example, for some to have talked of survivor guilt, largely in relation to the hunger strikers or feeling embarrassed when friends welcomed them home with fanfare when their colleagues were dying. This was captured by one of the interviewees when he said:



You have to remember I was released in the middle of the hunger strike. There were another six hunger strikers died, after I came out of gaol. I was caught up in it again. I was thrown into the deep end. I was trying to cope with these meetings, but in retrospect if you [*had've*] said to me that you need treatment I would have told you to take yourself off, but looking back I did.

This view, although only expressed so candidly by a few interviewees, in all likelihood is shared by others, i.e. there was no space, nor time to receive treatment during the conflict, let alone the ability or access to resources to set up actual support structures during the conflict. Grieving was also not possible. Many of the ex-prisoners probably also minimised the impact of the protest upon themselves within a context where others were dying as on the Hunger Strike.

For those who left prison and did not remain politically active for various reasons, they too would have been affected by the context in some way. For example, some of the interviewees expressed feeling like they had let their comrades down. The result is an inevitable minimization of their own experiences relative to others (even if the severity of their own problems were perhaps the reason why they felt incapable of continuing with political activity). To this end, in the current context, the question, from a sequential traumatisation perspective, are the actions of different prisoners on the 'No Wash/Blanket' Protest understood and valued, or are they dwarfed, in the eyes of other ex-prisoners or the political movement that supports them, by other events such as the Hunger Strike. Or because as some people said in the interviewees part of the actions associated with the 'NoWash' Protest are still somewhat embarrassing to talk about. Whether objectively the 'No Wash' component of the protest itself played a major or minor role in the entire conflict for those from a republican perspective, the impact on certain individuals cannot be minimized. Furthermore, using the context model outlined here, it is exactly how the protest is perceived that will directly affect the likelihood of various traumas persisting or developing.

The cost of convictions

The contextualised view of trauma as proposed above also demands complexity. This can be a major challenge to any party or individual coming out of a protracted conflict where battle lines between groups are sharply drawn. To expand: although there are many similarities in the stories that form the essence of this study, and there certainly is a uniformity of experiences and responses as evidenced by the table summarising some of the data (see *Appendix C*), an astute psychological



analysis has to also inquire into the silences and gaps hidden by the uniformity. Questions have to be asked about the complexity that may be lost even by a study of this nature that attempts to summarise complex life stories.

If one reviews the table presented in *Appendix C*, it would appear on the surface that most Blanketmen in Derry, or at least in this sample, have been part of a fairly linear process. Many grew up in a poor environment, had a supportive family, many were supported in their political actions by their community although some not at least initially, they were jailed for various offences at a young age (between 16 and 22), served a number of years in prison, were totally supported by their families and their political movement during this time, suffered various abuses which had a range of psychological impacts and then left prison. Some continued with political activity and others did not. Almost all seem to report being affected by their time in prison in some way—some worse than others—but now most are married, about 60% are working, most live satisfactory lives socio-economically, and although a few have doubts about the past and their involvement in it, and about the direction the organisation they supported has taken more recently, almost all seem to have no regrets about the past and feel optimistic about the future.

Furthermore, this research unequivocally shows that the coping mechanisms developed by many of the prisoners helped them deal with imprisonment and their life after it. The number of individuals who spoke of comradeship and unity of purpose being vital to their survival is starkly evident. This finding is consistent, as was noted in *Chapter Three*, with other studies, namely, that solidarity and collective strategies among prisoners was found to assist with coping and the deprivations of imprisonment (Sykes, 1958 cited in McEvoy, 2001). As McEvoy also points out, resistance and coping are also along the same spectrum: ‘active co-ordinated’ resistance, he argues, is an excellent coping strategy to deal with incarceration (McEvoy, 2001). Endurance in the context of the ‘No Wash’ Protest had a therapeutic value (O’Malley, 1990). As O’Malley has written:

Confrontation alleviated boredom and monotony, lessened the sense of isolation and confinement. Hatred gave meaning, forged camaraderie, boosted morale, became a tool for survival” (O’Malley, 1990, p.24).

In South Africa too, for example, it has been argued that resistance to the prison system on Robben Island (and trying to organize it say through attaining education) by liberation forces’ prisoners was critical to their social and mental well being, as well as having a transformative impact outside (Buntman, 2003). As Buntman writes:



...various forms of resistance, which worked to protect the health of the social body as well as the minds and bodies of individual prisoners, helped prisoners develop transformational strategies that sought not only to resist apartheid in and outside the prison but also fundamentally transform South African politics (Buntman, 2003, p.34-35).

However, if indeed many coped because of the group structure and solidarity while in prison, the question has to be asked as to whether the group structure that sustained people on the inside would have been present to the same degree on the outside. Although there is little doubt that there would have been solidarity and a continued sense of common purpose for those who continued with political activity, group structures are by definition weaker within communities than the small, closed, and artificial environment of the prison. Coping strategies developed in the prison often are also not applicable once out. As Jamieson and Grounds noted:

The strategies and modes of coping which prisoners developed inside, and which were adaptive in the prison situation (e.g., non-disclosure, blocking off emotion) may be inappropriate and maladaptive when continued outside prison, for example in a family context (Jamieson & Grounds, 2002).³⁷

The same could probably be said about defiance, resistance and determination, especially in a political context dominated by discourses of peace and accommodation. The deeply ingrained strategy of using defiance to cope with adversity can also affect other parts of ex-prisoners lives. It has been found for example that many struggled to keep employment because they refused to stick to or accept rules within the work place(Jamieson & Grounds, 2002).³⁸

The difficulty many of the interviewees experienced in talking about their experiences can also be associated with the prison experience. In their review of international research Jamieson and Grounds found that it is common for ex-prisoners to mask their own vulnerability, and this is often the result of the fact that in prison there is a lot of self censorship and there is an expectation that prisoners should live up to a certain image (Jamieson & Grounds, 2002). They also found in their research with republican ex-prisoners that there was still a

³⁷ Available at <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/prison/jamieson02.htm>

³⁸ Available at <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/prison/jamieson02.htm>



stigma attached to breaking down or admitting to needing help often caused by a pride and a ‘macho’ attitude (Jamieson & Grounds, 2002). Other research too has found that masking and controlling emotions is a common feature among ex-prisoners whilst in and out of prison (Shirlow, 2001). Fran Lisa Buntman (Buntman, 2003) in her research with Robben Island prisoners in South Africa commented that the scars of imprisonment are generally well hidden, and it took a long time before those with whom she was working to mention the need for support (particularly alcoholism) (Buntman, 2003).³⁹

Thus, coping mechanism such as repressing emotion that enabled many to survive prison can become maladaptive on the outside, where emotional and social support, contrary to stark confines of prison, are often necessary. The challenge is how does one get ex-prisoners in need of care to recognise this need and seek support. This is one reason why, for example, it was found that for prisoners working with mental health NGOs after they came off Robben Island that group therapy, generally in informal settings, seemed to work best (Buntman, 2003). Informal support structures generally work best with war veterans and ex-prisoners because it is fellow ex-prisoners who can be trusted who are offering the support or helping others access services.

This is also why despite the remarkable coping mechanisms many used in prison stand in contradistinction to the lasting psychological impacts of imprisonment and the protest on the lives of individuals who lived through it as outlined in *Chapter Three*. While most interviewees coped, they also describe a litany of medical problems and for a significant number, a range of fairly serious mental health concerns. These stand, at least on some levels, in contradiction to what the sanitised and summarised data presents on the surface.

Although this study shows that about 25% of the sample recognise themselves as needing dedicated and acute medical and psychological support as a result of the protest, at least 80% of those interviewed felt that more support services are necessary in some form or shape for those who went through the protest. Suggestions included the need for counseling in some cases, the need for self-help groups or simply someone to listen, social and economic support, programmes to deal with ongoing alcoholic dependency, and better health care services. Some

³⁹ That said, a number of former prisoners did use therapeutic services when they were available, largely because some psychologists had been very active in the 1980s offering support to detainees and they knew of them (Buntman, 2003).



spoke about ongoing discrimination against ex-prisoners and others simply said that there needed to be greater understanding of what prisoners went through. This clearly highlights, even if the majority of individuals do not feel the need for additional individual support, that there is a need for more support generally. It could also possibly point to a reluctance to report that they themselves have mental health difficulties.

Importantly, however, the point about the contradiction between the need for support, and how well individuals coped, is not made to doubt the authenticity of the accounts by the interviewees. It is also not made to undermine the way individuals coped because this research suggests most did. Rather, this point is made to demonstrate the way a study such as this, and political processes which often demand clear and linear explanations for historical events and their impacts, can invariably diminish the complexity of individual lives and the impact of collective historical and political developments on them.⁴⁰ Prison, and political conflict to degree, often creates a one-dimensional view of the world. As one ex-prisoner noted in another study referring to those who had not been in prison:

It's a gap that can't be filled. They went different ways, lived different lives, had different experiences. I don't know how to live their lives. This was another world to me. They lived in other worlds. We lived in the one world; we lived in the one-dimensional world of prison. There was a multi-dimensional world of normal life experience—going on holidays, getting jobs, settling down, planning a family, that was their world. Our world was the prison, tied into the political situation always—that determined everything (Jamieson & Grounds, 2002).

Psychologically speaking, although it may sound like a contradiction to have coped but also to have suffered a range of ill effects at the same time, there is no contradiction whatsoever. A complex understanding of the human psyche suggests that living one's life, whether in the midst of a political struggle or otherwise, is fraught with ambivalences (e.g. loving one's parents but disliking certain parts of their personality at the same time). Oddly, the human psyche is probably at its healthiest when it can deal with a multi-dimensional world and tolerate ambivalences, about the past, present and future, rather than block them out. To put this another way, recognising the price of your convictions, whether others

⁴⁰ I also make this point, because as McEvoy points out, it is critical if one is to understand the psychological impact of prison to not obscure the complex interaction between the individual and the social setting (McEvoy, 2001).



share them or not, and that you can cope and have suffered at the same time, is psychologically healthier than feeling you either coped unscathed, or are completely damaged as a result.

The need for this more complex view is captured by Mac Maharaj, a long term ANC prisoner who was on Robben Island in South Africa for some 12 years, when he says:

I remember prison as a good experience. I think I have unconsciously learnt to [distill] from that experience all the good aspects, distill them and hang on to them, which is good for me and is good for [other's perception of me]. But at the same time that very process means that in a certain way I don't confront [reality]. I don't want to even speak [of it]; I think it's the first time I am referring to almost two years of ennui, of really grappling with myself and in a state of self-pity which I wouldn't want to reveal to my fellow comrades in prison because I didn't want to be a burden to them. Or, if you put it in sexist language, I didn't want them to make me feel that I was not a man in myself. I didn't want to tell my former wife because I didn't want to worry her and if I worried her about it then I knew that she could do nothing about it...And the normality that we display today should not mislead us into realising that if we ever consign human beings to those conditions then we would have to have some posttraumatic [reactions] (Cited in Buntman, 2003, p.78-79).

Another way of thinking about this ambivalence and complexity is to consider the nature of the process itself. Many people outside of the prison were repulsed by the conditions created through the 'No Wash/Blanket' Protest and would have blamed the prisoners for creating such conditions. To the prisoners, however, in the confines of the cells and with limited options for other forms of protest, their bodies became weapons (Campbell et al., 1994; McEvoy, 2001; O'Malley, 1990). As one commentator put it: "Although their world was reduced to four cramped walls, within their tiny compass self was everywhere" (Ellmen quoted in McEvoy, 2001, p.89). O'Malley captures the idea of the body becoming a weapon when he writes:

At every turn the warders were there to break the prisoners and the prisoners were out to thwart the warders. Every exchange became a confrontation, pitting the authority of the warders against the resistance of the prisoners, and though the prisoners had unequal means with which to resist, they had their own power. They drew the warders into their world, made them work in conditions of unrelieved filth, of putrid smells repugnant to the warders' physical senses and to their psychological sense



of self. They forced the warders to become part of an environment of deprivation, making them, if only psychologically, the targets of excremental assault, so that they, too, became prisoners of the conditions the blanketmen had created. Insofar as the prisoners dictated the environment in which the warders had to work, they were in control (O'Malley, 1990, p.23).

Thus, the actions themselves contained a degree of complexity and ambivalence that a basic or simplistic reading does not capture. During the conflict, tolerating ambivalences is often not possible; people on the outside probably either saw the prisoners as slovenly and uncivilized,⁴¹ or those who supported them promoted and tried to rally around their struggle. The reality of course was more complicated and had a range of multifaceted implications for the individuals involved. One's body might have been a weapon and the actions a form of resistance (integral to coping), but the whole process was grueling, potentially self-defeating, some debated its effectiveness⁴² and prisoners suffered a great deal.

Furthermore, the very nature of the protest touched on usually hidden psychological and physical processes attached to privacy, bodily functions and nakedness. Much of the abuse mentioned in this report involved extreme degradation and humiliation. The fact that the protest was self-inflicted further compounds the picture. The most challenging issue to think about here is the sexual nature of some of the abuse outlined in *Chapter Three*—not only did prisoners know it was wrong and abusive, but because of their convictions, they were forced to endure it. In this context it is no wonder that many interviewees were reluctant, at least to a degree, to talk intimately about the details of the 'No Wash' Protest and that some still feel embarrassed to talk about it today. Thus, in some senses, much about the 'No Wash' Protest particularly is profoundly complicated from a psychological perspective and thinking about it and its long-term implications for those involved demands a nuanced and complex understanding. It is not easy to speak about because it is by its nature difficult to talk about, not only for ex-prisoners but anyone. If one is to come to grips with it, however, it would involve discussing intimate and difficult subject matter—to this end, trust, safe environments and

⁴¹ McEvoy quotes from Peter Robinson, the Democratic Unionist Party, at the time: "If cleanliness is next to Godliness, then to whom are these men close?" (Robinson, 1980 cited in McEvoy, 2001, p.90).

⁴² McEvoy quotes prisoners making this comment (McEvoy, 2001).



changing the culture of what is socially acceptable to speak about become prerequisites.

That said, in combat there is not much room for ambivalence and multiple dimensions to issues. The world over, combatants will resist appearing weak before their enemies—in a context of war this makes sense. This is evidenced in this study by the way almost all the interviewees stressed that they never asked for any treatment during their stay in prison, despite the fact that, given the conditions they were in, and from what they have said, many were suffering a great deal.

However, once a conflict has ended, for ex-prisoners, and soldiers in any conflict, and the political movements that support them, the question is, is it possible to reach a situation where a combatant, for example, can be considered from the perspective of their side to be a hero, but also an individual who has suffered and carries (not necessarily in a pathological sense) some of the scars of war with them. This is again captured by Mac Maharaj reflecting on his time on Robben Island when he says:

You are not prepared to give us the space just to be. I need to be just what I am, warts and all. Neither to show pity, nor to make me a hero (cited in Buntman, 2003, p.77).

Psychologically speaking, it is possible to have coped relatively well with a traumatic situation and at the same time to have suffered and to continue to suffer the after-effects, without diminishing one's political commitment. Put another way, given the price many have paid for their political beliefs, whether others feel that their actions or political beliefs are right or wrong, they have a right to hold a complicated and complex view of the past, and even an ambivalent view of the future. Or as one of the interviewees said, quoted earlier in the report, "get yourself sorted, you're entitled to a life now". From a psychological perspective, reaching a point where these seeming contradictions can be tolerated is a greater milestone than feeling that the past has been fully reckoned with or that closure (which is never fully possible anyway) has somehow been reached.

There is little doubt, based on the interview data, that almost all have suffered in some way as a result of their role in the protest and afterwards. But as the literature outlined above argues, this does not mean that the experience *de facto* has led to massive psychological deterioration or trauma in all cases. Some individuals, however, clearly need ongoing and intensive support. That said, acknowledging suffering does not mean that individuals are mentally-ill or that they all need therapy, but interviewees themselves recognise, if not for themselves then for



others, that a range of different support and mental health services are needed—as well as political and social interventions at a number of levels—to deal with the long term aftermath of the protest.



Chapter Five

Recommendations

Although a range of macro recommendations could be made about the socio-economic, legal and political difficulties faced by those on the ‘No Wash/Blanket’ Protest, the recommendations below—in line with the objectives of this study—are focused primarily on the work of Cúnamh and targeted at dealing with the psychological impact of the protest particularly.

That said, and consistent with the analysis presented in *Chapter Four*, addressing the psychological impact is not only an individual health matter. Wider socio-economic and political needs and issues have to be addressed and dealt with—both within and beyond the political structures that support ex-prisoners who were on the ‘No Wash/Blanket’ Protest—as mental health and the social environment are integrally linked. This, however, is beyond the remit of this report.

Having said that it is also important to bear in mind that addressing individual psychological needs also has a broader social and political relevance, that is in order for ex-prisoners to have confidence in the peace process and feel integrated into a new society their needs, and those of their families and children, require attention.

1. This study was a pilot study. As such further research is needed in a range of areas. On review of this report, Cúnamh, along with other groups working with ex-prisoner issues, should outline a programme of research on areas deemed appropriate and requiring further development. These should have a practical relevance to the development of future services.
2. Cúnamh staff should familiarise themselves with the international literature on dealing with post-war experiences of veterans and ex-prisoners. It should begin a series of exchanges, seminars and conferences with different practitioners in other countries and locally so as to skill themselves and others working in this field and so as to make Cúnamh a centre of excellence for assisting ex-prisoners with their mental health needs.
3. Cúnamh should assess its own capacity, skills and requirements in order to meeting the needs of such groups and individuals. More particularly skill levels in offering psychological support to the ex-prisoners who were on the ‘No Wash/Blanket’ Protest should be assessed. The organisation should take steps to ensure that the highest quality of support is offered. This report suggests that



a number of ex-prisoners who were on the ‘No Wash/Blanket’ Protest (estimates range from 25-50%) might need some form of psychological assistance. Cúnamh should, at a minimum, be prepared to meet this need and to develop the skills necessary to assist personnel to deal with the complex traumas identified in this report, many of which are perhaps unique to the ‘No Wash/Blanket’ Protest. That said given the size of the Derry population involved in the ‘No Wash/Blanket’ Protest, estimated at about 70, services should be scaled to deal with this group initially. Any further outreach should be based on sound strategic planning and an ability to meet additional capacity requirements.

4. Cúnamh should provide or refer identified individuals to specialised psychological and psychiatric assistance if necessary. The study presented here is not an assessment of each individual’s psychological and social need. It provides a guideline as to what the problems might be that appear to require specialised support. Specialised psychological assistance, if needed, should be based on sound assessment, follow-up and referral. These services need to be community-based and non-threatening taking into consideration the lack of trust many ex-prisoners have of mental health support services (this can, in part, be addressed by recommendations 5-8 below).
5. Cúnamh should continue, with the support of those already in the programme, the maintenance and ongoing development of the self-help support group process for those on the ‘No Wash/Blanket’ Protest.
6. The self-help group should continue its activities and build its own capacity, sharing with other local ex-prisoner organisations, as well as considering linking with other ex-prisoners and war veterans in other countries.
7. The self-help group should actively assist in disseminating this report and arranging a series of discussions with the local community and other ex-prisoners about the impact of the ‘No Wash/Blanket’ Protest. The wider needs identified in these discussions, as well as how different individuals relate to the report and its content, should be documented. This process should also be used to begin to cultivate a network of relationships between the self-help group and other community-based structures with the aim of assisting Cúnamh to develop a programme of support for other ex-prisoners on the ‘No Wash/Blanket’ Protest.
8. Cúnamh and the self-help group know—and it was confirmed by this report—that ex-prisoners for a range of reasons do not easily take up offers of mental



- health support services. Thus it is vital that Cúnamh and the self-help group provide avenues for individuals in need of services to make contact with the organisation and to get support if necessary. Two methods are recommended:
- 8.1. Cúnamh should undertake a process of discussion and training to sensitise a range of community-based agencies (social, sporting, recreational, community, etc.) about the need of ex-prisoners who were on the ‘No Wash/Blanket’ Protest, using this report as a starting point. Members of the self-help group should be part of these discussions. Thereafter Cúnamh should train a range of community-based agencies (social, sporting, recreational, community, etc.) to recognise individuals in need and build a network between these agencies and Cúnamh so that services can be offered and accessed.
 - 8.2. Members of the self-help support group, with the guidance of Cúnamh, who feel they have the capacity, should, over time, be trained in a range of skills to begin other self-help groups. It may be useful in line with 2. above to see how this process has unfolded in other countries.
9. Cúnamh should develop and document their approach (as well as the challenges faced) as their work unfolds in this area. Given that so many of the interviewees’ needs were not only psychological but also social and political, attention should be given to international practice with regards to psychosocial methodologies in dealing with post-conflict societies. Cúnamh staff should consider inviting a range of international specialists in this area to offer training and support on psychosocial intervention methods not only to their staff but also others working with ex-prisoners.
 10. Cúnamh should assist those who took part in this study to document and archive their experiences of the ‘No Wash/Blanket’ Protest in as much detail as possible. This was started as part of this research, and the transcripts developed thus far should be expanded and built on by the ex-prisoners themselves. This should be the start of the development of an archive of their stories. The process of writing may also prove therapeutic as evidenced in the Testimony Therapy method (e.g. Luebben, 2003).
 11. This study did not focus on the impact of the ‘No Wash/Blanket’ Protest on families, women ex-prisoners and children. Other studies and projects have



- begun to look at these issues. Cúnamh should review these studies, but also begin to consider support for families and children of the survivors of the ‘No Wash/Blanket’ Protest, as well as women on the protest and the broader ex-prisoner community in their catchment area, in all the steps taken above.
12. At a wider policy and political level there needs to be ongoing advocacy work for the improvement of support services to ex-prisoners and their families suffering from ongoing psychological impacts. Although most ex-prisoners do not trust or use statutory services, Cúnamh should begin, using this report as a basis, a series of discussions with statutory providers to sensitise them to the issues at hand. This should be seen as the beginning of a longer term process of trying, perhaps over years, to mainstream psychological support for ex-prisoners who were on the ‘No Wash/Blanket’ Protest through the provision of accessible and appropriate community-based services.



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Appendixes

Appendix A: Background Information on Cúnamh

Background to Cúnamh (as supplied by the organisation)

Cúnamh was established in 1997 as a community led mental health organisation. It evolved from a two year consultation process involving community activists, local health practitioners, former political prisoners and relatives of people killed on Bloody Sunday. The consultation was aimed at exploring how the local community would address the psychological and emotional scars left as a direct consequence of the conflict. Whilst the IRA cessation of 1994 created the space for local communities to develop opportunities for growth and healing it also give rise to a whole new culture of uncertainty and insecurity. The prevailing mistrust of state led services, particularly in relation to policing and criminal justice has given rise to increased levels of fear and anxiety within nationalist and republican areas. Hence, the challenges for Cúnamh since 1997 have been huge.

Cúnamh's ethos had been and remains community led. This has underpinned the approach it has taken in all aspects of its work to date, and has consequently led to creative and pioneering projects. Throughout the past 8 years the organisation has delivered a range of services and projects. These have included supportive listening, counselling, stress elimination techniques, social therapy programmes, creative remembering programmes and a range of personal development programmes including healthy eating for positive mental health (see www.Cúnamh.org).

The challenges presented by the announcement of the Bloody Sunday Inquiry served to harness the empathy and motivation within the local community and led to the delivery of a four year voluntary support service.

Cúnamh's targeted constituency continues to be the nationalist/republican community. Whilst this community's of the conflict has been mainly shaped by the actions of the state and state forces, we have also had to address the suffering and hurt caused from within our communities. Death, injury, imprisonment, exile, torture, house raids, economic discrimination, unemployment and social neglect have featured in most people's lives at some stage throughout the past 36 years. The impact of these events upon family life and community health is now only beginning to emerge.



Addressing the legacy of the past has and continues to be another site of struggle. Despite the commitments contained with the Good Friday Agreement the outworkings of these continue to be contested ground. The policy discourse pertaining to the needs of victims and survivors of the conflict, for example, has concentrated mainly upon a medical analysis of the conflict and has led to the provision of a wide range of trauma related services. Whilst this is a positive development, accessibility to such services has remained a contested issue and many other issues have been ignored, not least acknowledgment, truth, justice and equality. Victims/survivors of the conflict continue to be defined as those who suffered a bereavement or injury, with psychological injury defined as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (see Victims Strategy, OFM/DFM). For example, the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund which “seeks to promote peace and reconciliation by ensuring that those who have suffered as a result of the ‘Troubles’ in Northern Ireland are remembered, by providing them with help and support in a practical and meaningful way” has excluded former political prisoners from accessing its support.

In Derry City, where Cúnamh is located over 800 individuals have experienced political imprisonment, and many have also been forced into exile. Since 1998 Cúnamh in conjunction with Tar Abhaile has co-ordinated several projects aimed at addressing the emotional and psychological needs of former prisoners and their families. These have included the production of the dramas ‘Teacht Abhaile’ which explored the impact upon family life arising from the release of a prisoner and ‘Wee Buns’ which depicted the experiences of women political prisoner in Armagh Gaol. We also successfully co-ordinated a two year project which explored the experiences and needs of young people who had direct experience of parental imprisonment and exile (see Cúnamh, 2002).

Throughout this period Cúnamh also facilitated a group therapy programme for female partners of political prisoners, some of whom now work for the organisation. Whilst many former male republican prisoners have participated in Cúnamh’s oral history project it has only been in the last year that many former male prisoners are availing of services such as counselling and personal development programmes.



Appendix B: Protocol of Questions

Semi-structured (long) questionnaire

1. Demographics details

1.1 First Name:

1.2 Date of Birth:

1.3 Sex:

Male

/

Female

1.4 Date of Interview:

1.5 Interview by:

2. Expectations

2.1 What are your expectations and hopes for this pilot study?

3. Pre-prison experience

3.1. Can you describe your life prior to going to prison?

3.1.1 Where you working, if so at what?

3.1.2 Where you involved in a relationship?

3.1.3. How would you describe your socio-economic position?

3.1.4 How would you describe your family situation?

3.1.5 For how long had you been politically active?

3.1.6 Why did you become a Volunteer?

3.1.7 Where those around you (e.g. family, friends, community) supportive of your political activities?

4. Imprisonment

4.1 How long had you been a Volunteer before you were arrested?

4.2 Did your first experience of being arrested culminate in your imprisonment that led to the “blanket” protest? If not, explain other activities, involvement, experiences, being imprisoned, etc.?

4.3 In what year where you sent to prison (the time it led to the “blanket” protest)?



- 4.4 Why were you imprisoned?
- 4.5 How old were you at the time?
- 4.6 Can you explain the circumstances that led up to your imprisonment? Do you feel you suffered any forms of abuse during this process?
- 4.7 Where were you imprisoned? (might have been several movements)
- 4.8 Did you share a cell or not? If so with whom? (might have been several movements)
- 4.9 What was life like in the prison for you prior to the blanket protest beginning or where you imprisoned when it was underway?
- 4.10 If you were there before the protest began, can you remember some events that led up to it?
- 4.11 What were your feelings about it at the time?

5. Protest (“blanket” protest / “no wash” protest)

- 5.1 When did you begin your protest?
- 5.2 Why did you choose this course of action?
- 5.3 Describe what happened on the protest?
- 5.4 What for you is your worst memory of the protest?
- 5.5 What for you is your best memory of the protest?
- 5.6 Would you say you were abused during the protest? If so, how and by who?
- 5.7 Would you say you were tortured during the protest? If so, how and by who?
- 5.8 Did you have any experiences of sexual abuse?
- 5.9 Did you know of / or hear about the sexual abuse of others?
- 5.10 If the participant feels they were abused, ask:
 - 5.10.1 Can you remember how you felt during the incidents of abuse you described?
 - 5.10.2 Can you remember how you felt after the incidents of abuse you described?
 - 5.10.3 Where you ever able to talk about these experiences? If so, with whom?
 - 5.10.4 Would you say their was a culture of mutual support between prisoners?



5.11 During the protest did you feel supported by:

- 5.11.1 The movement
- 5.11.2 Your friends/comrades
- 5.11.3 Your family
- 5.11.4 Any other support structures

If not, explain why not?

5.12 Would you say you were ever assisted, supported or received acts of compassion from anyone in the prison system? If so, please tell me more?

5.13 Would you say you suffered from any mental health problems during the protest? If so, please describe these to me?

5.14 Did you receive any treatment at the time? If so, what?

5.15 Where you refused treatment if you asked for it?

5.16 What would you say really helped you get through the experience? How did you cope?

6. After the protest

6.1. When did your protest end?

6.2. Why did your protest end?

6.3. How did you feel about this?

6.4. Did you feel you were supported when the protest ended by:

- 6.4.1 The movement
- 6.4.2 Your friends/comrades
- 6.4.3 Your family
- 6.4.4 Any other support structures

If not, explain why not?

6.5 Would you say you were ever assisted, supported or received acts of compassion from anyone in the prison system? If so, please tell me more?

6.6 Would you say you suffered from any mental health problems at this time? If so, please describe these to me?



- 6.7 Did you receive any treatment at the time? If so, what?
- 6.8 Where you refused treatment if you asked for it?
- 6.9 What would you say really helped you get through the experience? How did you cope?
- 6.10 How much longer were you in prison?
- 6.10. Can you describe some of your experiences of prison following the protest?
- 6.11. What is your worst memory of this time?
- 6.12. What is your best memory of this time?

7. Release

- 7.1 When were you released from prison?
- 7.2. Why were you release?
- 7.3. When you heard about your release what were your feelings at the time?
- 7.4 Tell me about the day of your release?
- 7.5 What did you think life would be like when you got out?
- 7.6 What was life like when you got out?
- 7.7 Did you feel supported by:
 - 7.7.1 The movement
 - 7.7.2 Your friends/comrades
 - 7.7.3 Your family
 - 7.7.4 Any other support structures
- If not, explain why not?
- 7.8 Would you say you suffered from any mental health problems at this time? If so, please describe these to me?
- 7.9 Did you receive any treatment at the time? If so, what?
- 7.10 Where you refused treatment if you asked for it?



7.11 What would you say really helped you get through the experience? How did you cope?

8. Today

8.1. Can you describe your current life situation?

8.1.1 Are you working, if so at what?

8.1.2 Are you involved in a relationship?

8.1.3. How would you describe your socio-economic position?

8.1.4 How would you describe your family situation?

8.1.5 Are you still politically active? If so, in what way? If not, why not?

8.2. Much time has passed since the protest, do you think it still affects you today? If yes, how?

8.3 How do you feel about your involvement in the protest now?

8.3.1 Do you ever regret your involvement in the protest?

8.3.2 What are you most proud of in your own political history?

8.4. Would you say you have ongoing mental health problems? If so, describe these for me?

8.5. Do you receive any treatment for these?

8.6. Have you ever been refused treatment when you asked for it?

8.7. What support services are available to you?

8.8. Do you use these services? If not, why not?

8.9. What do you think you need to help you deal with the aftermath of the protest today?

8.10. You probably know many other former prisoners, do you think any of them need ongoing help? If so, what type of help do they need?

8.11. Do you think the peace process has impacted on how you feel about your involvement in the “blanket”/”no wash” protest?



8.12. What are your feelings about the recent IRA statement?

8.13. Do you think the political developments of the last 10 or so years have had an impact on you psychologically? If so, how?

8.14 Given all that has happened in your life, how do you feel about the future?

8.15 If there was one key lesson from your experience that you would want to pass onto the next generation what would it be?

30 August 2005



Structured (short) questionnaire

Demographics

1.1 Date of birth

Expectations

2.1 What are your expectations and hopes for this pilot study?

Pre-prison

- 3.1 Where did you grow up?
- 3.2 Where you working, if so at what?
- 3.3 Were you involved in a relationship?
- 3.4 How would you describe your socio-economic position?
- 3.5 How would describe your family situation?
- 3.6 How far did you get with formal schooling or education?
- 3.7 Why did you become politically active?
- 3.8 Were those around you supportive of your political activities?
- 3.9 In what year were you sent to prison? How old were you then?
- 3.10 What were you charged with?

Protest

- 4.1 When did you join the protest? Do you remember the date?
- 4.2 What block/s were you in?
- 4.3 Did you experience any form of torture and abuse, if so can you describe it?
- 4.4 Did you experience sexual abuse or rape, or any experiences you would describe as this?
- 4.5 How did you deal with these experiences?
- 4.6 How do you think the protest affected you?
- 4.7 Did you suffer from what you might call any *mental health problems* at this time, if so, can you describe these?
- 4.8 Did you suffer from any *medical problems* at this time, if so can you describe these?
- 4.9 Did you receive any medical or therapeutic support as a result, if so, what?
- 4.10 Were you refused any treatment or support if you asked for it?
- 4.11 Would you say you were ever assisted, supported or received acts of compassion from anyone in the prison system? If so, please tell me more?

After the protest

- 5.1 When did your protest end? Do you remember the date?
- 5.2 Why did your protest end?



- 5.3 Once the protest was over did you feel mentally or psychologically affected in any way?
- 5.4 Did you suffer from what you might call any *mental health problems* at this time, if so, can you describe these?
- 5.4 Did you suffer from any *medical problems* at this time, if so can you describe these?
- 5.5 Did you receive any medical or therapeutic support as a result, if so, what?
- 5.6 Were you refused any treatment or support if you asked for it?
- 5.7 Would you say you were ever assisted, supported or received acts of compassion from anyone in the prison system? If so, please tell me more?
- 5.8 How much longer were you in prison?

Release

- 6.1 When were you released?
- 6.2 What was life like when you got out?
- 6.3 How would you describe your behaviour when you got out?
- 6.4 Did you suffer from what you might call any *mental health problems* at this time, if so, can you describe these?
- 6.5 Did you suffer from any *medical problems* at this time, if so can you describe these?
- 6.6 Did you receive any treatment?
- 6.7 Where you refused any treatment?
- 6.8 What would you say really helped you through the experience? How did you cope?

Today

- 7.1 Are you working, if so at what?
- 7.2 What qualifications do you have and what are your areas of expertise?
- 7.2 Are you involved in a relationship?
- 7.3 How would you describe your socio-economic position?
- 7.4 Are you still politically active? If so, in what way? If not, why not?
- 7.5 Much time has passed since the protest, do you think it still affects you today? If yes, how?
- 7.6 Did you suffer from any *medical problems* at this time, if so can you describe these?
- 7.7 Would you say you have ongoing *mental health problems*? If so, can you describe these?
- 7.8 Do you receive any treatment for these?
- 7.9 Have you ever been refused any treatment when you asked for it?
- 7.10 What support services are available to you?
- 7.11 Do you use these services? If not, why not?
- 7.12 What do you think are the current biggest needs of who have gone through some of the experiences you have?



7.13 What sort of services and support do you think are needed for people who have gone through some of the experiences you have?

Future

8.1 Has the peace process impacted on how you feel about your involvement in the protest?

8.2 Do you think the political developments of the last 10 or so years have had an impact on you psychologically? If so, how?

8.3 How do you feel about the future?

September 16, 2005



Appendix C: Summary of research data

PRE-PRISON EXPERIENCE

	Area Born	Job	Relationship	Socio-economic Situation	Family Situation
1	Bogside	Trade	No	Working class	Poor
2	Bogside	Unemployed	Yes	Poor	Mother died Secure Supportive family
3	City Centre	Factory worker	Yes	n/a	Supportive family
4	City Centre Shantallow	Apprentice	No	Poor	Poor Close family
5	Creggan	Apprentice	Yes	Poor	Supportive family Close family
6	Waterside	Apprentice	No	Poor	Happy go lucky Brother in prison
7	Creggan Shantallow Brandywell	Labourer	No	Poor	Large family Poor
8	Creggan Bogside	Machine Operator	Yes (sort of)	Comfortable	Stable
9	Brandywell	Labourer	Yes	Poor	Supportive family Close family
10	City Centre	Labourer	No	Working class	Stable
11	Creggan	Apprentice	Yes	Working class	Poor Large family
12	Brandywell	Apprentice	Yes	Working class	Satisfactory
13	Creggan	Apprentice	Yes	Comfortable	Happy Parents employed Better off
14	Creggan	Labourer / factory worker	Yes	Poor	Happy
15	Springtown Camp Creggan	Labourer / manual work	Yes	Poor	Large family Poor
16	City Centre Shantallow	Not working	No	Average	Happy
17	Ardoyne	Not working	Yes	Poor	Good community life Happy
18	England City Centre	Apprentice	Yes	Average	Satisfactory
19	Creggan	Manual worker	Yes	Poor	Poor Father alcoholic
20	Creggan	Labourer	Yes	Working class	Satisfactory
21	Creggan	Apprentice	No	Working class	Happy



PRE-PRISON EXPERIENCE

	Education Level	Why joined?	Supported by Family
1	No qualifications	Discrimination	Yes
2	Left school at 16 On the run	Interest in Irish history Bloody Sunday	Yes
3	Left school at fifteen No qualifications	Brother's friend shot dead	Yes
4	Passed 11 Plus Secondary School Technical College	Reaction to British presence Media Bloody Sunday	No Father British Army Family not told
5	Secondary school Technical college	Parents on Civil Rights marches Reaction to British presence Media Bloody Sunday Motorman Witnessed people killed by army	Family not told Brother in prison
6	Passed 11 Plus Secondary School No 'O' levels Technical college	Reaction to British presence Heard of people killed by army Heard of imprisonments	Family not told Non-republican family Supportive once arrested
7	Secondary school Technical college	Bloody Sunday Motorman	Yes
8	'O' Levels	Only way to end British occupation	Yes, friends
9	Left school at 15	Brother shot dead	Yes Not mother
10	Left school at 15	Bloody Sunday Civil rights climate Security force brutality	Family not told Non-republican family Friends supportive
11	Left school at 15	Reaction to British presence Only way to end British occupation	Family not told
12	Secondary school Technical college Paid off early	Bloody Sunday Internment Injustice	No
13	5 GCSE	Joined because of friends Little political awareness	Friends supportive Family not told
14	Left school at 15	Bloody Sunday Reaction to British presence Influence of family Natural decision given circumstances	Yes
15	Left school at 15	Parents on Civil Rights marches Reaction of British presence Influence of family Bloody Sunday Natural decision given circumstances	Yes
16	Training College	Brother's involved	Yes Father ex-Navy
17	Left school at 15	Father killed Discrimination	Non-republican family Family aware
18	Left school at 15 Technical College	Bloody Sunday	Family not told Father in Navy
19	Left school at 15 Now studying further	Influence of family Bloody Sunday Family member killed	Family supportive Family members active Father in British Army
20	Left school at 15	Discrimination Bloody Sunday Person close killed Family political	Father ex-British Army Father against violence Family still republicans
21	Left school at 15	Harassment Influence of family	Yes

**SENTENCING**

Nos	Age at time of Imprisonment	Year of Imprisonment	Charge
1	25	1975	Possession
2	18	1976	Membership; Possession
3	20	1977	Possession
4	17	1976	Attempted murder
5	18	1976	Causing explosion
6	17	1976	Membership; Possession
7	17	1976	Membership; Possession
8	18	1976	Possession
9	18	1977	Membership; Possession; Conspiracy
10	22	1978	Membership; Possession; Conspiracy; Attempted murder
11	18	1976	Membership
12	20	1977	Possession
13	18	1976	Membership; Possession
14	20	1977	Attempted murder
15	20	1977	Attempted murder
16	16	1976	Membership; Attempted murder
17	21	1978	Attempted murder
18	18	1976	Membership; Causing explosion
19	22	1976	n/a
20	20	1976	Membership; Possession
21	19	1976	Possession; Hijacking a car

Average Age 19.14

Year of Imprisonment	Nos	%
Imprisoned 1975	1	4.76
Imprisoned 1976	13	61.90
Imprisoned 1977	5	23.81
Imprisoned 1978	2	9.52
	21	100

Charges	Frequency
Membership	10
Possession	12
Causing explosion	2
Conspiracy	2
Hijacking a car	1
Attempted murder	6
No answer	1



EXPERIENCE OF PROTEST

	When joined protest	Blocks	Abuse an Severe Ill-treatmentd
1	1976	H3	Boards Isolation Mirror searches
2	1977	H2,H5	Physical beatings Beaten unconscious Mirror searches W arder taking pleasure in searches
3	1978	H4	Physical beatings Mirror searches No reaction from authorities to beatings Mirror searches (akin to sexual abuse) W arder taking pleasure in searches W itnessing mirror searches
4	1977	H4	Physical beatings Soakings Sleep deprivation: Noise at night Lim ited food Food tampered with Forced washes Cell shifts Akin to sexual abuse Mirror searches Verbal abuse about your body
5	1977	H2,H5	Physical beatings Authorities allowing abuses to continue W ithholding food W ithholding water W itnessing beatings Mirror searches W itnessing forced baths Scalding forced baths Scrubbing with scrubbing brushes Towels pulled from body
6	1976	H5,H3	Forced to walk about naked Sleep deprivation: white noise W ithholding food W itnessing beatings Mirror searches Internal anal searches W arder taking pleasure in searches
7	1976	H2,H3,H4	Body searches Physical beatings Hearing beatings Cell shifts Mirror searches Internal anal searches
8	1977	H2,H3,H5,H2	Physical beatings Body searches Forced washing
9	1978	H4,H3	Mirror searches Physical beating
10	1979	H4	Physical beatings Cell shifts W ithholding food Mental torture: told mother was dead when she was not Forced baths Scrubbed with scrubbing brush Soaking: scalding water
11	1977	H3	Physical beatings Forced washes Scrubbed with scrubbing brushes Tampering with food
12	1977	H4	Physical beatings Loss of remission Mirror searches Cell shifts Towels pulled from body Mirror searches Internal anal searches



13	1977	H3,H5	Physical beatings Hearing beatings Mirror searches Verbal abuse about your body
14	1977	H3, H6, H4	Physical beatings Tampering with food Withholding food Mirror searches Hearing beatings Warders finger in prisoners mouth after anal search Anal searches
15	1979 Left 1979 Rejoin 1980	H4,H5	Physical beatings Anal searches Mirror searches Forced baths Solitary confinement Anal searches
16	1976	H3	Physical beatings Verbal abuse Waiting for beatings
17	1980	H5	Physical beatings Waiting for beatings Hearing beatings Mirror searches Maggots in cell Family intrusively searched
18	1976 Off 1977 Rejoin 1980	H1,H2,H3,H4	Physical beatings Hearing beatings Maggots in cell Mirror searches
19	1976	H1	Physical beatings Soakings Hearing beatings
20	1977	H2, H5	Physical beatings Boards Forced washes Wing moves Maggots in cell
21	1977	H5	Physical beatings Forced baths Mirror searches



EXPERIENCE OF PROTEST

	How dealt with abuse	Affected by Protest	Mental Health Problems during Protest
1	Angry More determined	Blocked it out Others tried suicide	Stress
2	More determined	Made me stronger	No
3	Resignation Seeing warders as enemies Being young	Saw it as part of the struggle	Anxious Sleep problems
4	Did not speak about it: male environment Comradeship Unity of purpose Defiance a strength	Suspicious of authority Wanted revenge, but not now	Nervous Sleep disturbances Hyper-alertness Jumpy Cautious Fear of being alone
5	Defiance as strength Religion	Made me stronger Comradeship	Optimistic Nervous Just deal with it
6	Comradeship Developing political consciousness Being young	Made me stronger Strengthened political beliefs No trauma	Anxious Nervous Fear of unknown Eating problems
7	Just carried on	Made me stronger Hardened me Made me want to learn more Angry	Depression Weepy Escapism through dreams
8	Just carried on	Positive	Nervous especially out of cell
9	Defiance as strength	Fine although wife says not	Nervous Anxious Fear of unknown
10	Humour Talk to cell mates	Made me stronger	Psychotic like episode
11	Knew would get out Comradeship Unity of purpose Many on the protest	Not sure	No
12	Political purpose	Flashbacks Block it out	No
13	Keeping fit Education Singing Religion	Always took action Did not understand all the politics at the time	Aggressive
14	Defiance as strength	Hardened Lost compassion Periods I cannot remember	Depression
15	Reading Family support	n/a	No
16	Family support	n/a	n/a
17	n/a	n/a	No
18	n/a	Mental health problems	Psychotic like episodes Depression Withdrawal Suicidal
19	n/a	Hardened	Anxious Anxiety Attempted suicide: Wrists cut with razor blade Feels they have post-traumatic stress disorder (undiagnosed)
20	Defiance as strength Irish language a weapon	No	No
21	Family support	Mental health problems	Psychotic like episode Sleeping problems



EXPERIENCE OF PROTEST

	Medical Problems during Protest	Treatment during Protest	Ever Refused Treatment	Assisted / acts of compassion from those in the system
1	No	None	Didn't ask for any	None
2	Cuts Broken nose Migraine headaches	Stiches following beating	Refused medication for headaches	Overhead screws intervene ito stop beating
3	Back problems	No	Didn't ask for any	Asked if alright by a warder once
4	Colds and flu Tape-worms Thread worms	Medical bath (forced)	Didn't ask for any	Warders have odd conversation with you
5	Swollen feet cold temperature	Did not ask for treatment	Didn't ask for any	Warder gave the odd football score
6	Dental problems Colds and flu Eating problems	No	Didn't ask for any Doctors never examined you properly	Priests and chaplains supportive A few warders did not take part in beatings or just did their job
7	Dental problems Bruises	Dental treatment	No	Warders gave an odd cigarette
8	Colds and flu Cold sores Dysentery	Treatment for burst cold sore	No	Some warders did not like what was going on Odd word of sympathy Friendlier warders after protest
9	No	No	Didn't ask for any	None
10	No	n/a	n/a	None
11	Dental problems	No	No	Warders more human after protest
12	Asthma	No	No	One of ten got you something
13	In-grown toe nails (septic)	Toe nails cut out by warders without anaesthetic	Yes	Warder did not carry out a beating as ordered
14	Bowel problems Dental problems Colds and flu Cuts and bruises Back problems Migraine Swollen feet Cold sores Eating problems Dysentery	Tablets	Didn't ask for it	n/a
15	Colds and flu Cuts and bruises Back problems Migraine Swollen feet Eating problems Dysentery	No	No	n/a
16	Colds and flu Cuts and bruises Migraine Swollen feet Eating problems Dysentery	Didn't ask for it	Didn't ask for it	n/a
17	Colds and flu Cuts and bruises Migraine Swollen feet Eating problems Dysentery	n/a	n/a	n/a



18	Colds and flu Cuts and bruises Back problems Migraine Swollen feet Eating problems Dysentery	No	No	Asked if all right by a warder once Warder who helped recover stuff that was taken from the prisoner
19	Dental problems Colds and flu Cuts and bruises Back problems Migraine Swollen feet Cold sores Eating problems Dysentery	No	n/a	n/a
20	Colds and flu Cuts and bruises Migraine Swollen feet Eating problems Dysentery	No	No	n/a
21	Dental problems Colds and flu Cuts and bruises Back problems Migraine Swollen feet Cold sores Eating problems Dysentery	Psychiatric medication	Yes	None



AFTER PROTEST (IN PRISON)

	End date of Protest	Why did it end	Affect after Protest	Mental Health Problems after Protest	Medical Problems after Protest
1	1979	Released	n/a	n/a	n/a
2	Aug-79	Released	Difficulty to talk about Survivor guilt	Sleeping problems Flashbacks Survivor guilt	No
3	1982	Protest ended	Grieve for those who died	Sleeping problems	Back problems
4	1981	Protest ended	Not much Anxiety Hypervigilance	Sleepng problems Trouble relaxing	No
5	1981	Protest ended	No	No	Unfit Knees seized after exercise
6	1981	Protest ended	No much	No	Dental problems Acne
7	Dec-80	Released	Blocked it out	No	Run down
8	1981	Protest ended	No	No	No
9	1981	Protest ended	Felt better	No	No
10	1981	Protest ended	No	No	No
11	Aug-80	Released	No	Sleeping problems Strange being out	No
12	1981	Protest ended	No	Felt guilty being out	No
13	1981	Protest ended	No still supported each other	No	No
14	1981	Protest ended	Depression	Depression	Bowel Problems Ulcer Arthritis Back pain Dental problems Diabetes Migraine Bladder Problems Asthma Unfit Anal problems
15	1980	Mental difficulties	n/a	Depression Anxiety	Bowel problems Heart problems Ulcer Back pain Migraine Anal problems
16	n/a	Other	n/a	n/a	Bowel Problems Ulcer Back pain Migraine Anal problems
17	1981	Protest ended	n/a	No	Bowel Problems Ulcer Back pain Migraine Skin problems Anal problems



18	1980	Mental difficulties	Guilt for leaving the protest	n/a	Bowel Problems Ulcer Back pain Migraine Bladder Problems Skin problems Unfit Anal problems
19	1981	Other	n/a	Feels they have post-traumatic stress disorder (undiagnosed)	Bowel problems Ulcer Arthritis Back pain Dental problems Migraine Bladder problems Anal problems
20	1981	Released	No	No	Bowel Problems Ulcer Back pain Dental problems Migraine Anal problems
21	1981	Protest ended	Ongoing psychiatric problems	Ongoing psychiatric problems	Bowel Problems Heart problems Ulcer Arthritis Back pain Dental problems Migraine Asthma Skin problems Unfit Anal problems



EXPERIENCE AFTER RELEASE

	When Released	Describe Life Outside	Describe your Behaviour Once Out	Mental Health Problems on Release
1	1979	Everything was strange, listening to tv, stairs etc. Hard to get a job, go abroad because of record.	Relationship problems Hyper alert Jerking to noises, especially slamming doors and gates	Alcoholism
2	1983	Pace, TV, noise strange, surreal	Erratic Promiscuity	Alcoholism
3	1984	Normal, bit of a do when I got out, and life became very normal. Anti-climax	Ordinary adjustment	No
4	1988	Changes in the city Traffic strange then OK	Happy	Hard to trust people Odd nightmare A loner Sleeping problems Need to check all doors and windows Stubborn
5	1984	Good, family were very supportive and helpful. I got a job and things were good.	I felt happy with my own progress	Sleeping problems Noise trigger feelings
6	1983	Well received by community Little money Unemployment	Adjusted Break from struggle then back	Felt warders should be exposed for actions
7	1980	Great Traffic and noise strange	OK	Depression after heart attack
8	1986	Strange Then OK	I had no problems	No
9	1984	Difficult to forge relationship with children Getting on buses difficult	OK	No
10	1983	Great Drinking Girlfriends	"Mad" Erratic Partied	Sleeping problems Flashbacks Affected by father's death
11	1985	Great Novelty having own bathroom	Time lost Felt guilty for those still in	Never talked about it
12	1984	House was big Noisy Traffic strange	Received familial help	Flashbacks
13	1983	Straight into relationship	Married Alcoholism Partied Infidelity	No
14	1986	Isolating oneself Anger	Anger Flashbacks	Agoraphobia Clinical depression Anxiety attacks
15	1987	n/a	n/a	Depression Anxiety
16	1984	n/a	n/a	n/a
17	1986	n/a	n/a	n/a
18	1982	n/a	Alcoholism Gambling Infidelity Separated from wife	Psychotic episodes Depression Anxiety
19	1981	n/a	Playing catch up Alcoholism	Feels they have post-traumatic stress disorder (undiagnosed) Felt like crying at small things
20	1981	Reinvolved politically fairly soon	Alcoholism	Alcoholism Panic attacks
21	1984	House was big Traffic strange Isolating oneself	Alcoholism Social withdrawl (2 years)	Treated for psychiatric problems Alcoholism



EXPERIENCE AFTER RELEASE

	Medical Problems after Release	Treatment Received on Release	Ever Refused Treatment after Release	Coping mechanisms
1	No	n/a	Never sought any	Stubborn Resilience
2	No	n/a	n/a	Alcohol Being politically active Sense of belonging.
3	Back problems Injury from anal searches	Yes	n/a	Family
4	Arthritis In-grown toe nails Reflux problems	Yes Tablets for reflux	No	Comradeship Belief in struggle Unity of purpose
5	No	No	No	Strong faith and strong family ties
6	No	No	No	Strength of my conviction
7	Heart attack	By-pass CBT for depression	No	Talking to mental health team
8	Tonsillitis	Yes	No	Politics and belief in struggle
9	Arthritis	Yes	No	Thinking about my wife and child
10	Bowel problems Infection Muscular rheumatism	Yes	No	Family Friends Alcohol
11	Dental treatment	Yes	No	Comradeship Belief in struggle Unity of purpose
12	Ulcer Asthma	Yes	No	Knowing there was a better future
13	No	Alcoholism	No	Used own strength to pull myself back from the brink
14	Arthritis Bowel Problems Diabetes	No	No	Just got on with it
15	Neurological problem Heart attack	Yes	No	Reading as escapism Supportive wife
16	Stomach/bowel problems	No	No	n/a
17	No	n/a		Family Comrades Unity of purpose
18	Bowel problems Bladder problems	n/a	No	Comradeship Singing Learning Irish Humour
19	Ulcers	Alcoholics Anonymous Medication	No	Religion Family
20	Skin problems Physically unfit	No	No	Participated in book project about experiences Being politically active
21	Headaches Back problems Heart attack	Psychiatric medication	No	Family



TODAY

	Age	Working	Qualifications / expertise	Relationship
1	53	Trade industry	Retail / service / trade experience	Married
2	48	Service industry	Postgraduate degree	Married
3	48	Community / political worker	No qualifications	Married
4	47	Education sector	Postgraduate degree	Married
5	47	Service industry	O Levels	Married
6	46	Service industry	No qualifications	Married
7	46	Incapacity	Certificates / Diplomas / communtiy studies	Married
8	47	Education sector	Certificates / Diplomas / communtiy studies	Relationship
9	46	Service industry	No qualifications	Married
10	50	Trade industry	Retail / service / trade experience	Married
11	50	Community / political worker	Community / political experience	Married
12	48	Service industry	No qualifications	Married
13	47	Service industry	Undergraduate degree Retail / service / trade experience	Married
14	48	Incapacity	No qualifications	No relationship
15	48	Incapacity	No qualifications	Relationship
16	45	Incapacity	A Levels	Married
17	50	Incapacity	n/a	n/a
18	47	Service industry	NVQs O Levels	Divorced
19	51	Incapacity	Certificates / Diplomas / communtiy studies	Married
20	49	Community / political worker	Certificates / Diplomas / communtiy studies Undergraduate degree	Married
21	50	Unemployed	No qualifications	Married

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Working / employment

1	Unemployed
2	Trade industry
7	Service industry
3	Community / political worker
2	Education sector
6	Incapacity

Qualifications and Experience

No qualifications	7
A Levels	1
O Levels	2
NVQs	1
Retail / service / trade experience	3
Certificates / Diplomas / communtiy studies	4
Undergraduate degree	2
Postgraduate degree	2

Marital status

Married	16	→	76.19
Relationship	2	→	9.52
No relationship	1	→	4.76
Divorced	1	→	4.76
n/a	1	→	4.76
	21	→	100



TODAY

	Socio-economic status	Politically Active	Does Protest still Affect You	Mental Health Problems Today
1	Comfortable	Yes	Triggered (by murals) intrusive thoughts Try block it out Alcohol (at times)	Agitation Sleeping problems Alertness
2	Comfortable	Yes	Guilt (survivor)	None
3	As before gaol	Yes	Intrusive thoughts and memories	None
4	Much better	Yes	Sleeping problems Difficult making decision Stubborn	None
5	Well off	Yes	No	None
6	More than comfortable	Yes	Don't talk about it No trauma	None
7	Poor	No	Everyone affected Increased political awareness	Flashbacks Avoid stress
8	Satisfactory	Yes	Remember positive times Remember hard times	None
9	Satisfactory	Yes	Reuminating on memories Authoritarian Does not like closed doors	None
10	Comfortable	No	Intrusive thoughts Can get emotional and sad	Sleeping problems
11	Working class	Yes	Feels unresolved	None
12	Satisfactory	No	Block things out Feel could not cope in acknowledged	n/a
13	Well off	Yes	Stronger	None
14	n/a	No	Social withdrawal Reuminating on memories Flashbacks	Anxiety attacks Agoraphobia Clinical depression
15	Comfortable	Yes	Depression (at times) Triggered emotional responses (crying)	Depression Anxiety
16	n/a	Yes	Struggles to understand how he survived	None
17	n/a	No	Unsure if actions achieved goals Gambling (at times) Social withdrawal Agitated if too many people around Constantly thinking	Claustrophobia
18	n/a	No	Emotionally detached Emotionally vulnerable Codine addict Guilt (letting down others)	Anxiety Depression
19	n/a	No	Eating problems Felt guilty Social withdrawl Anxiety Shaking	Anxiety Feels he has post-traumatic stress disorder (undiagnosed)
20	Comfortable	Yes	No	None
21	Working class	Limited	Flashbacks Sleeping problems Nightmares	Initially diagnosed schizophrenia, then depression and anxiety Feels he has post-traumatic stress disorder (undiagnosed)



TODAY

	Medical Problems Today	Receiving Treatment	Refused Treatment Today
1	Osteoporosis Arthritis	Painkillers (ineffective)	No
2	Arthritis Poor vision	Natural remedies (arthritis)	n/a
3	Back problems	n/a	Yes
4	Reflux Arthritis	No	No
5	No	No	No
6	No	No	No
7	Heart problems	Yes	No
8	No	No	No
9	Arthritis	No	No
10	Muscular rheumatism	Yes, painkillers occasionally	No
11	Ulcer	No	No
12	Arthritis Asthma	Inhalers & Tablets	No
13	Psoriasis	No	No
14	Arthritis Bowel problems Diabetes Ulcer Back problems Migraine Bladder problems Poor vision Asthma Neck pain	Medication	No
15	Brain haemorrhage Heart problems Arthritis Bowel problems Ulcer Poor vision	n/a	No
16	Arthritis Stomach problems Poor vision	No	No
17	Arthritis Bowel problems Back problems Migraine Poor vision	n/a	n/a
18	Arthritis Back problems Neck pain Bowel problems Bladder problems Leg pain Migraine Poor vision	Psychiatric medication	No
19	Arthritis Bowel problems Ulcer Back problems Poor vision	Medication	No
20	Bladder problems Poor vision	No	No
21	Heart problems Arthritis Bowel problems Back problems Migraine Poor vision Leg pain	Yes	No



TODAY

	What services are available	Do you use Services	Biggest need of other Blanketmen on the protest, services needed
1	None	n/a	Counselling
2	Don't know of any	n/a	Socio-economic support
3	Tar Abhaile Cunamh Coiste NIACRO (would not use them)	No	Support (unspecified) Someone to talk to
4	NIACRO (would not use)	No	Rehabilitation and intergration support
5	Never looked for any	n/a	Alcoholism support Support to deal with prescribed medication addiction General programme of support
6	Tar Abhaile	Tar Abhaile (for commemorative purposes)	Project to help those who psychologically suffer Alleviate trauma
7	NHS	Yes	Someone to talk to Specialised counseling Treatment for sensory deprivation
8	Tar Abhaile Cunamh	Tar Abhaile (for the gym)	Employment Socio-economic support
9	Don't know of any	n/a	Support (unspecified)
10	GP	No	Alcoholism support Support to deal with prescribed medication addiction
11	Cunamh	No	Treatment for posttraumatic stress disorder
12	GP	Yes	n/a
13	Don't know of any	No My support service was going back into education.	Alcoholism support Establish a model to help ex-prisoners Counseling Deal with political problems facing ex-prisoners
14	Cunamh Tar Abhaile	Yes	Deal with community anger Socio-economic support Employment
15	Cunamh NIACRO (would not use them)	Cunamh	Better access / more medical / health services Counselling Practical applications Self-help groups
16	None	n/a	Better access / more medical / health services Social support Care and understanding
17	Cunamh Tar Abhaile	Yes	Coping skills Counselling Understanding
18	NHS	GP NHS mental health team	Someone to talk to Better access / more to medical / health services Instant medical help Self-help groups Counselling Support from other ex-prisoners
19	Cunamh	Yes	Talk more about their problems Recognition of posttraumatic stress disorder
20	Cunamh Tar Abhaile	Sometimes	Someone to talk to Training and education End ex-prisoner discrimination Strategy to end discrimination Reach out to ex-prisoners Ex-prisoner centre Get ex-prisoners involved in activities
21	Cunamh Tar Abhaile	Yes	Economic and social support Therapeutic care and understanding

- 2 None
- 3 Don't know of any
- 1 Never looked for any
- 9 Cunamh
- 7 Tar Abhaile
- 1 Coiste
- 2 NIACRO
- 2 NHS
- 1 GP



THE CURRENT CONTEXT & FUTURE

	Impact of peace process on you	Psychological Impact of Peace Process	Feelings about the Future
1	Did not want to answer	No	Optimistic
2	No regrets / worthwhile	Better quality of life. Less Stress. More 'normal' life.	Optimistic
3	Fully support peace process	No since the ceasefire I have been fully involved and see this as the way forward.	Final push now Need ex-prisoners back on board
4	No regrets /worthwhile Fully support peace process	I think there is still unfinished business but I see it as a process.	Will be peace Work to be done
5	No regrets / worthwhile Peace process part of same process	Positive Good to work with people from other communities	Optimistic
6	No regrets / worthwhile	I like to think I'm ok and understand the policy of the leadership, support the leadership	Hopeful will lead to better society
7	Accept it Sometimes ambivalent	Mixed feelings	Pessimistic and optimismtic
8	No regrets / worthwhile Peace process part of same process	End of IRA campaign had an emotional impact on me.	Fairly optimistic
9	No regrets / worthwhile	No	Positive Moving forward
10	No regrets / worthwhile	No	Optimistic
11	No regrets / worthwhile Some people unsure	No , maybe some people have regrets	Fairly optimistic
12	No regrets / worthwhile	Think we will be better off.	Positive
13	Peace process part of same process	It has made me far more positive, I feel it has empowered me.	Positive Still have to deal with alienation of ex-prisoners
14	Disillusioned	Violence in homes and street	Concerned about the future
15	No regrets / worthwhile	n/a	n/a
16	n/a	n/a	n/a
17	Unsure Unconsulted about peace process	Feeling emotionally vulnerable "Prone to breakdowns" Angered easily Impulsive	Unsure about the future British still in Ireland
18	n/a	Still treated for mental health problems	n/a
19	n/a	n/a	n/a
20	Politcally active No problems	n/a	n/a
21	Regret loss of life on Hunger Strike	Not sure if it was all worth it	n/a