

RESEARCH NOTE: DEVELOPING ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH ON PROBATION

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Abstract

Huge cultural changes are underway in probation. At the heart of those changes lie the frontline practitioners who have the daily task of working with offenders. Yet, amidst the plethora of research on probation practice, much of it officially sponsored, the life experiences and motivations of practitioners seem on occasion to be virtually invisible. Some research has been carried out on practitioners' experience of specific areas (for example, OASys), but very little broad ethnographic research has been undertaken on UK probation practitioners. While much of our academic and criminological knowledge about probation is filtered through officially funded research on particular types of intervention, little is known of probation's occupational culture. It is argued that ethnographic research with practitioners would substantially enhance our understanding of that occupational culture and help develop our understanding of probation.