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Resilience of Dutch probation officers: A critical need for a critical profession

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Abstract

This article presents the first research findings into the resilience of Dutch probation officers. The research has been a part of European-funded SPORE project, that aimed to identify approaches that appear to have a positive impact on probation officers' resilience. The theoretical starting point for the research was the Stress Shield Model, developed and validated in research among police officers. This model views resilience as the capacity to cope with, adapt to, and develop from the demands, challenges and changes encountered as a result of working in a critical occupation. The model describes resilience as an outcome, resulting from the interaction between organizational, peer related, and individual factors.

By means of five focus groups and an internet survey consisting of questionnaires measuring the model factors, the research aimed to identify how the factors in the

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model influence the resilience of Dutch probation officers (POs), what effective or promising practices exist in the Netherlands for the purpose of strengthening resilience of POs, what supporting activities can be carried out by the management, and finally what recommendations can be made for developments at a national and European level.

The survey was completed by 165 POs. Results indicate that for Dutch POs it is not primarily clients who have a negative impact on their resilience. Worker resilience appears to be primarily threatened, but also developed and strengthened, by characteristics of the organization and team, as well as the characteristics of the individual worker himself. As an organization, the Dutch Probation Service appears to effectively build and sustain probation officers' sense of empowerment, which prepares them for future stress. In addition, the research shows the importance of a resilient team and of an organization that provides teams with proper support. Based on these research findings, a set of detailed recommendations is presented that has now been adopted by the management of the Dutch Probation Service.

Keywords
Resilience, stress, probation management, team support, human resources, Dutch probation

> My first case was attempted murder. The client proudly told me the details. That was tough. I thought that I should be able to deal with this; after all I had already done an internship. Everyone thought 'you've already done an internship, so you already know it all'. I can't remember what I was doing back then at the start. Things were not going well, but nobody noticed that. I myself thought that I was obviously supposed to be able to cope with everything. So it was some time before I asked for help. By that point I was afraid to ask for clarification and thought that I would soon have a nervous breakdown. You need to receive proper guidance in the first year. I eventually started to follow courses, started to work more in my own time in order to meet my performance targets and started to ask my colleagues questions. Now, things are going well. I approach my colleagues more often. At some point the work supervisor also started to make more time available for me. (Dutch probation officer, spring 2013)

Introduction: A critical profession

Probation work is a critical profession. It is critical for a safe society, where citizens can live a life without suffering from crime. In this respect, probation work is especially critical for certain citizens: victims, and people who are very vulnerable to becoming victimized. Probation work is also critical for the offender, because it can help him change his criminal life into a crime free life. Both the What Works insights and desistance studies show us that if probation works with the right interventions, with the right intensity, and with the right personal touch, it can be a life changing experience (Durnescu, 2013). Probation work is also critical because probation officers (POs) are sometimes faced

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with serious offences, and with dangerous offenders. Offence details can be gruesome. Clients can be aggressive and manipulative towards the PO, unpredictable and hard to motivate. These job-related dangers make probation work also a critical profession for the PO him/herself.

Finally, in many countries the organization is another possible source of stress for the PO. Probation organizations are under pressure due to ongoing professionalization, high social expectations and, recently, severe spending cuts. Both the infrastructure of these organizations and their organizational culture can be heavily influenced by these developments (Moors and Vogelvang, 2009).

A critical profession needs resilient professionals. Probation organizations need POs who – in spite of many threats and challenges – are willing and able to assist offenders in changing their lives. In contrast to other critical professions, such as the police, medics and fire-fighters, the resilience of POs has not been studied. This is surprising, given the critical nature of the job. The Strengthening Probation Officers' Resilience in Europe (SPORE) research has been developed to fill this gap by doing extensive research into POs' resilience. The project came into being as part of an initiative by the Latvian Probation Service and has been financed by the European Union. It was carried out over the period from March 2012 to September 2013.

The SPORE project was also set up to help to improve practice. The project therefore identified 'best practices' from approaches that appeared to have a positive impact on POs' resilience. These 'best practices' were exchanged between the partner countries on several occasions during the project, to ensure that the probation organization in each country was able to benefit from them. In the Netherlands, the SPORE project was carried out in close collaboration with the Personnel and Policy departments of the Dutch Probation Service. This contribution will focus on the Dutch research results.

Theory: The concept of resilience and the Stress Shield Model

The theoretical starting point for the research was the Stress Shield Model (SSM, Burke and Paton, 2006; Paton et al., 2008) (see Figure 1). This model has been developed and validated in research among police officers (patrolling the streets). Burke and Paton define resilience as the capacity of individuals and organizations to draw upon their own individual, collective and institutional resources and competencies in ways that allow them to render challenging events coherent, manageable and meaningful. This definition views resilience as the capacity to cope with, adapt to and develop from the demands, challenges and changes encountered as a result of working in a critical occupation. In the SSM, resilience is not viewed as a (trait-like) static characteristic, but instead a changeable, learnable characteristic that enables professionals and organizations to prepare themselves for stress and learn from it, instead of simply having to respond adequately 'after the event' (since resilience is about more than just 'bouncing back'). The definition also clearly emphasizes the complimentary organizational and individual responsibilities concerning adaptive outcome.

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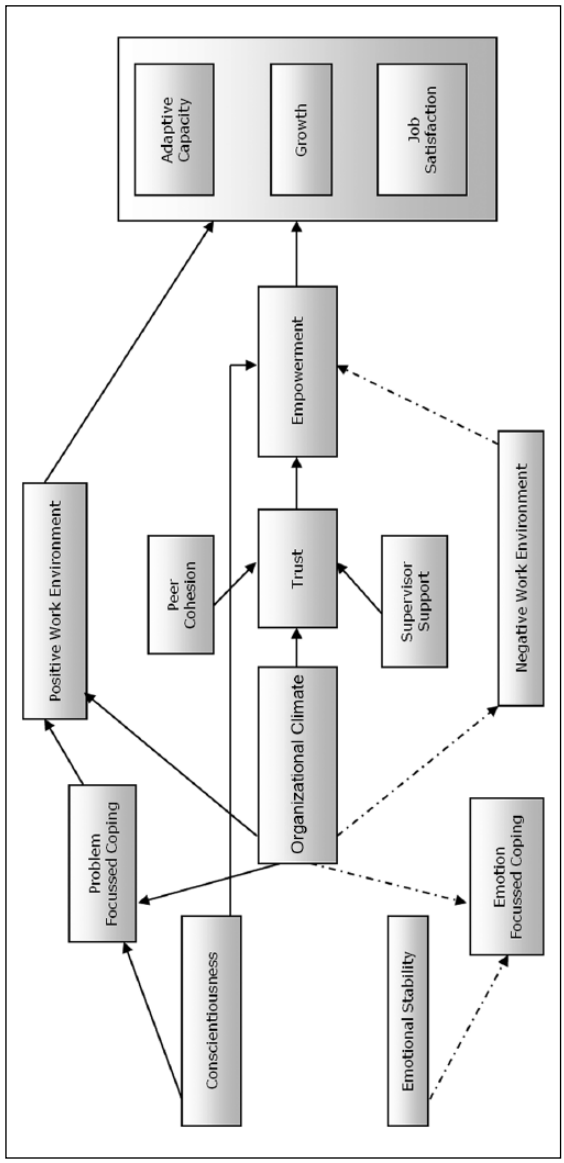

Figure 1. The Stress Shield Model of resilience (Paton et al., 2008).
Note: Solid lines indicate positive influences on adaptive capacity and growth. Dashes indicate pathways with negative influences on empowerment.

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Organizational, peer related and individual factors

The SSM describes resilience as an outcome, resulting from the interaction between organizational, peer related and individual factors.

First, at the organizational level, factors such as workload, confidence in the organization, the quality of supervision and the physical working environment are important. Research shows that the individuals' perception of how their organization functions can provide these individuals with a context in which they can interpret and act during critical situations (Paton, 2006). A positive organizational climate appears to be negatively associated with emotion-focused problem solving (which tends to increase feelings of stress and burnout) and 'hassles' in work experience, but correlated positively with problem focused coping and 'uplifts' work experience (Burke and Paton, 2006). In the latter research, the occupational climate accounted for 44 per cent of variance in job satisfaction (measured by the Job Satisfaction Inventory, Brayfield and Rothe, 1951, 1987).

Second, peer-related factors in the SSM are threefold: (1) supervisory support improves cohesion between groups and facilitates trust and positive reinforcement – all these factors improve self-efficacy and empowerment; (2) peer cohesion facilitates meaning in individual's work, sharing of knowledge and skills lead to competence and resilience, and help in resource acquisition; and (3) trust facilitates competence and allows individuals to experience meaning in their work and encourage teamwork – it therefore contributes to resilience.

Thirdly, at the individual level, Paton et al. (2008) consider three characteristics and skills to be essential for developing and sustaining resilience: problem focused coping skills, conscientiousness and the resulting feeling of empowerment. One influence on resilience that has recently received more attention is the personal characteristic of conscientiousness, which can be interpreted as a combination of carefulness, dutifulness and perseverance. The results orientation and reliability of the worker in particular (both elements of conscientiousness) are related to a stronger sense of meaning and being competent in times of stress and change (McNaus and Kelly, 1999; Thomas and Velthouse, 1990). Individuals who have this personal characteristic are more likely to be 'go-getters' and they appear to be more strongly committed to contributing to collective efforts (Behling, 1998). Conscientious individuals demonstrate greater levels of perseverance (Hough, 1998).

If individual, peer and/or organizational resources are available, and the individual is able to use them, then they will be able to effectively confront challenges (Conger and Konungo, 1998). These resources are amenable to change through selection or assessment procedures, and organizational intervention and change strategies.

Empowerment

In the SSM, the individual, team and organizational factors culminate in a resulting degree of the professional feeling *empowered* for his or her work. Paton regards empowerment as a process in which these various influences on resilience arising from the organization and from the individual are linked. These influences come together in a sense of personal reinforcement, a state of being ready, energized and supported. The

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basic idea in the model is this: An employee who feels empowered is much better able to draw from his resources in ways that render (new) challenges coherent, meaningful and manageable (Antonovsky, 1990). Paton et al. (2008: 98) state that 'several studies have demonstrated that empowerment predicts job satisfaction in individuals and teams (Kirkman & Rosen, 1999; Koberg, Boss, Senjem, & Goodman, 1999)'.

As a consequence of the above, an organization can 'disempower' its employees as a result of constant anxieties, changes and uncertainty (Burrell, 2012; Johnston and Paton, 2003). Empowerment enables the employee to develop two types of positive self assessment; task assessment, being temporal assessment of a specific task or event, which can result in changes to schema (i.e., adaptation to specific task); and global assessment, being generalizing experiences of events to improve ability in dealing with uncertain situations in the future.

Resilience

In the SSM, Paton operationalizes the final result (outcome) in terms of resilience as a combination of adaptive capacity, personal growth and job satisfaction. The first two concepts are clearly represented in their definition of resilience. Paton et al. (2008) acknowledge and address the conceptual problem that the third assumed component of resilience, job satisfaction, may not seem to be strongly inter-related with the other two concepts. They state:

> There is currently no measure capable of capturing the diverse ways in which police officers can experience meaningfulness and manageability in the context of their work. Until such measures are developed . . . the construct of job satisfaction can fulfill this role. . . . Because the job satisfaction construct can capture changes in the meaningfulness and manageability facets of resilience, as well as the implications of the coexistence of positive and negative aspects of officers' experience, it represents a construct capable of acting as an indicator of officers' resilience. (Paton et al., 2008: 2).

This assumption was tested in the SPORE research.

Research questions and methodology

Research questions

The following research questions were chosen for the study by in consultation with the SPORE project board:

1. What factors influence the resilience of POs in the partner countries?
2. What effective or promising practices exist in the various countries for the purpose of strengthening and sustaining the resilience of POs?
3. What supporting activities can be carried out by the management of probation organizations in order to strengthen and sustain the resilience of POs?
4. What recommendations can be made for further or new developments at national and European level?

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In this article, we focus on the results for Dutch Probation Service in the Netherlands.[1]

Methodology

Focus groups allowed us to examine the topics addressed in the questionnaires in greater depth using the SSM. Accounts and descriptions of experiences provide an excellent addition to, and in some cases nuancing of, statistical data.

The three levels within the SSM were retained in the focus group discussions: individual, team and organization. 'Individual' looked at which personal characteristics and skills contribute towards resilience, 'team' examined what colleagues and supervisors can contribute towards worker resilience, and 'organization' addressed what the organization needs to arrange in terms of preconditions in order to sustain the resilience of its workers. In this contribution, the results of the focus groups are presented as quotations, underscoring the conclusions of the survey analysis.

A survey was also developed for the SPORE study that was aimed at a selected group of POs. The survey, which was conducted via a website, consisted of a number of questionnaires designed to measure the factors in the SSM. A distinction was made between independent factors within the organization, within the team and in the case of the POs themselves, and the resilience of the PO was treated as the dependent variable. In imitation of Paton and other researchers, the decision was therefore taken to measure job satisfaction, growth/empowerment and adaptive capacity (Brayfield and Rothe, 1951, 1987; Britt et al., 2001; Hart and Cooper, 2001; North et al., 2002). Details of the tools used are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Instruments used in the internet survey. In the survey, respondents were also asked for background information, some information about the specific details of the work and the type of clients, sickness reports and the reasons behind these, as well as questions about events that the respondents felt had been traumatic in their working or private life. Finally, the respondents were asked to name three things that signify a good working day and three things that signify a bad working day.

Results

Data collection

The survey was sent to 250 employees of the Dutch Probation Service and completed by 162 (a 65% response rate). The selection of 250 respondents was aimed at an equal distribution of men and women, work types (pre-sentence reporting officers, supervising officers and community payback supervisors), ages, levels of experience and workload (average working week and 'heavy' cases), in order to make sure that the complete workforce was well represented. In the end, the average age of the workers in this survey was 39.0 years, with a spread of 10.8 years. The youngest respondent was 22, the oldest 63. Of the respondents, 51 per cent were female, 49 per cent male. This is representative of the age-range in the complete population of the Dutch Probation Service, as was also the case for the following respondent data: The survey was completed by 77 supervisors (48%), 55 assessment and reporting consultants (34%) and 30 employees of community

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Table 1. Instruments used in the internet survey.

Stress shield model section and Name of questionnaire[1]	Selection of scales and subscales (where applicable)	Concept	Number and type of items	Maximum score	Cronbach's alpha
Organization/team					
Climate survey (c-surv)	All scales: Management/ empowerment/workload/ Communication	Organizational climate and bond with colleagues	40 x 4 pt likert	160 (4x 40)	0.95
Organization					
Work environment scale (WES)	No subscales	Organizational culture	9 x yes/no	9	0.66
Physical work environment satisfaction questionnaire (PWESQ)	All scales: Facilities/work and systems/work site	Physical work environment	27 x 5 pt likert	108 (32, 36 and 40)	0.97
Supervision support (SS)	No subscales	Perceived support from supervisors	9 x 7 pt likert	54	0.48
Worker's characteristics					
Interpersonal workplace trust scale (IWTS)	No subscales	Trust in colleagues and the organization	12 x 7 pt likert	72	0.87
Neo personality inventory, revised (NEO PI-R)	Selection of 1 scale, conscientiousness: Efficiency/ tidiness/reliability/ambition/self-discipline/caution	Conscientiousness (carefulness/dutifulness)	48 x 5 pt likert	192 (6 x 32)	0.89
Worker's skills					
Coping styles questionnaire (CSQ)	1 scale: Disengagement	Detached compassion	22 x 4 pt likert	66	0.81
Emotional control questionnaire (ECQ)	No subscales	Emotion-focused coping	18 x yes/no	18	0.81

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Table 1. (Continued)

Stress shield model section and Name of questionnaire[1]	Selection of scales and subscales (where applicable)	Concept	Number and type of items	Maximum score	Cronbach's alpha
Empowerment					
Psychological empowerment instrument (PEI)	Meaning/competence/autonomy/ impact	Empowerment/personal strength	12 x 7 pt likert	72 (4x18)	0.87
Resilience					
Stress-related growth scale (SRG)	No subscales	Stress-related growth	15 x 3 pt likert	30	0.90
Job satisfaction index (JSI)	No subscales	Job satisfaction	18 x 5 pt likert	72	0.76
Resilient coping style questionnaire (RCSQ)	All scales: Acceptance & resources management/situation management/ positive evaluation/seeking social support/positive disengagement	Resilient coping style	44 x 4 pt likert	176 (4 x 36, 1 x 32)	0.90
			291 items		

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service units (18%) . The number of years of work experience of the respondents averaged six years and three months (min. 0, max. 25, spread 6.0 years). In this group, 40 per cent have a work experience of three years or less, 50 % an experience of five years or less. This distribution is somewhat skewed because some probation workers have many years of work experience. The average working week of the respondents is 34.6 hours (min.12, max. 40, spread 4.4). It is common to work for four days or full-time. Working extra hours is not the norm: in the last six months an average total of 3.5 hours overwork was reported. Working with high-risk clients is usually seen as a higher risk of burnout. This group of respondents work with an average of 22.3 per cent offenders customers who are considered high risk by themselves and/or the structured risk assessment used by the organization This percentage is highest for supervisors .

Predicting the resilience of POs

In the SSM, resilience is operationalized as a combination of adaptive capacity, personal growth and job satisfaction. In the SPORE research, the relationships between these three outcome variables were as follows for the Netherlands sample:

- Job satisfaction and adaptive capacity r=.28, p=.000
- Adaptive capacity and stress-related growth r=.26, p=.001
- Job satisfaction and stress-related growth r=.02, p=.82 ns

Higher job satisfaction is significantly associated with both higher adaptive capacity and stress-related growth, but the latter two supposed elements of resilience appear to function independently from each other. A probation officer can have a high adaptive capacity, but at the same time lack the experience of stress-related personal growth, or vice versa, and report high job satisfaction in both cases. These results show us the complexity of measuring resilience as a complex construct.

A hierarchical regression analysis for the Dutch respondents aimed to determine significant predictors of resilience within the SSM. The analysis was carried out under the assumption that the existence of both individual and organizational variables in the SSM precedes the outcome, of resilience, measured by three dependent variables: job satisfaction, (JSI), stress-related growth (SRG) and a resilient coping style (RSCQ). 'Predictors' refer to our effort to test the theoretical SSM model. We realize that for testing the theoretical SSM model, we considered both organizational and individual variables to be a precursor to individual resilience. It could be argued that resilience also allows people to behave conscientiously, but as conscientiousness and emotional stability in the model are considered traits rather than states, it is reasonable to test this.

For the Dutch sample, only age appeared to be significantly negatively correlated with JSI (r=–.16, p=0.41) and RSCQ (r=–.17, p=–.029), and non-significantly with SRG (r=.05, p=.55). For gender and job role, no significant correlations were found.

Job satisfaction (JSI)

Firstly, we examined the predictive value of occupational and personal factors on job satisfaction, while controlling for age and gender. In step one, the covariates did not

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Table 2. Hierarchical regression analyses for JSI.

Source	JSI		
	B	Beta	R^2 change
1. Control variables			.02
Age	–.05	–.08	
Gender	.68	.05	
2. Main effects			.50
Total time in job	.01	.09	
Trauma outside of work	.49	.03	
NEO-PI-R	.12*	.21	
CSQ	.25*	.18	
CSURV	.19*	.42	
PWESQ	3.31*	.20	

*p< .005.

contribute a significant amount of variance to JSI overall (R^2 change = .011, ns). In step two, a significant amount of the variance (50.2%) of JSI was explained the independent variables (R^2 change = .502, p< .001), with the overall model explaining 52.4 per cent of the variance in JSI scores (R^2 = .524, adjusted R^2 = .503, [F (7, 160) = 25.13, p < .001]. NEO-PI-R (B = .12, p< .005), CSQ (B = .25, p< .005), CSURV (B = .19, p< .001) and PWESQ (B = 3.31, p< .001) all emerged as unique predictors of JSI. See Table 2.

Stress-related growth (SRG)

Next, we examined the predictive value of occupational and personal factors on SRG, while controlling for age and gender. In step one, the covariates did not contribute a significant amount of variance to SRG overall (R^2 change = .001, ns). In step two, a small amount of the variance (7%) of SRG was explained the independent variables (R^2 change = .071, p< .05). However, overall the model failed to account for SRG scores (R^2 = .072, adjusted R^2 = .037, [F (6, 161) = 2.08, ns].

Adaptive Capacity (RSCQ)

Finally, the predictive value of occupational and personal factors on POs' RSCQ while controlling for age and gender was examined. In step one, the covariates contributed a significant amount of variance to RSCQ (R^2 change = .046, p< .05), with age making a unique contribution. In step two, a significant amount of the variance (29%) of RSCQ was explained the independent variables (R^2 change = .286, p< .001), with the overall model explaining 33.7% of the variance in RSCQ scores (R^2 = .337, adjusted R^2 = .304, [F (8, 159) = 10.10, p< .001]. The variables CSQ (B = .90, p< .001) and CSURV (B = .13, p< .05) emerged as unique predictors of RSCQ. See Table 3.

The results show that the Dutch JSI scores appeared to be significantly and positively predicted by the *organizational climate* (C-SURV total scores) and the *physical working*

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Table 3. Hierarchical regression analyses for RCSQ.

Source	RCSQ	Beta	R^2 change
	B		
1. Control variables			.05
Age	–.24*	–.22	
Gender	–3.53	–.15	
2. Main effects			.29
Time in job	.02	.11	
Trauma outside of work	1.14	.04	
NEO-PI-R	.11	.13	
CSQ	.91**	.44	
CSURV	.13*	.18	

*p< .05; **p< .001.

Table 4. Predictors of JSI and resilient coping (RCSQ).

JSI	Organizational climate
	Detached compassion
	Physical working environment
	Conscientiousness
Resilient coping (RCSQ)	Detached compassion
	Conscientiousness

environment (PWESQ total score). In addition, the results show that *detached compassion* and *conscientiousness* significantly and positively predict both JSI and RCSQ scores. These predictions are unique contributions to resilience; we found no interaction-effects. See Table 4.

The analysis shows us that for probation workers, the organizational climate and physical working environment can significantly contribute to job satisfaction. *Organizational climate*, measured by the Climate Survey (C-SURV: Roger, 2010), measures four facets including, Management Style, Empowerment, Workload and Communication. The results suggest that the Dutch Probation Service can profit from additional in-depth research at the unit and regional level into the specific working patterns of these four facets.

Management Style is measured by workers' views regarding managers' technical abilities, such as knowledge of their work and ability to delegate, as well as skills in the more people orientated aspects of their role such as being trustworthy, flexible and supportive.

The Empowerment facet is characterized by assessment of being enabled to make decisions, create new opportunities, acquire new skills and develop to full potential as well as feeling supported by colleagues and having the opportunity to be involved in organizational decision making. Workload is characterized by realistic expectations

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about work, high morale, a positive and optimistic attitude, no repeated restructuring and a low stress culture. Finally, Communication is measured by being praised for good work, humour, feeling certain about one's role, open communication channels and responsive management.

The *physical work environment* was measured using the Physical Work Environment Satisfaction Questionnaire (PWESQ: Carlopio, 1996), which assesses satisfaction with Facilities, Work and System Characteristics and Worksite Characteristics. Items from the PWESQ relate closely to the issues frequently raised by respondents regarding good and bad days at work, reinforcing the importance of such matters to probation workers.

The results also show that detached compassion and conscientiousness significantly and positively predict both JSI and RCSQ scores.

Detached compassion was measured using the relevant items from the Coping Styles Questionnaire (Roger et al., 1993). Roger et al. describe detachment as the ability to recognize that emotional reactivity is a choice, to disengage oneself from overwhelming emotion and to keep matters in perspective. This bears resemblance to the concept of emotional literacy, a skill in probation practice that requires knowledge of our own emotions and the ability to recognize and respond empathically to the emotions of others. It includes an awareness of the causes, triggers and expressions of emotions in ourselves and others and requires an underpinning value base of respect, positive regard and a non-judgmental approach towards offenders (Knight, 2012).

Conscientiousness was measured using the NEO-PR-I. Conscientiousness positively predicted resilient coping for the Dutch probation officers, suggesting the higher levels of conscientiousness resulted in higher levels of resilience. Conscientiousness taps into traits such as competence, dutifulness, self-discipline and order, all of which are highly likely to be considered desirable traits by organizations. This is also the case with the Dutch Probation Services, where new workers are explicitly selected on the basis of these traits. The flipside of these finding is that these results, when viewed in the context of the qualitative findings of the focus groups, suggest that highly conscientious staff are more likely to thrive in high-quality organizational climates. If the organizational environment is not conducive to enabling these facets to flourish, the result is likely to be that highly conscientious workers are among the most dissatisfied and stressed staff.

The impact of clients on POs' resilience

The SSM does not take into account the specific impact of client-related events on probation officers' resilience. In order to assess this, questions in both the focus groups and the survey were included about this theme. In the survey, 25 workers (15.4%) reported a traumatic event at work in the last 12 months. In 14 cases this concerned intimidation by a client, in three cases serious reoffending by a client, in five cases a conflict with a supervisor, and in three cases the illness of, or an accident involving a colleague. On a scale of 1 (no impact) – 10 (extreme impact) they awarded this trauma an average rating of 5.5 (men 5.3, women 5.8). There is a significant link between experiencing these traumas at work and traumatic events outside of work (33 instances, 20.4%). This is shown in Table 5 below. The percentage of 30.3 per cent is almost twice as high as the

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Table 5. Trauma experienced by POs outside and at work.

		Trauma outside work	
		Yes (N=33)	No (N=129)
Trauma at work	Yes (N=25)	30.3% (22)	11.6% (15)
	No (N=137)	69.7% (11)	88.4% (104)
		100%	100%

statistically expected percentage of 16 per cent (p=.014). One hypothesis here is that trauma in one context increases vulnerability in the other context.

In the survey, the workers were also asked to name three things that mean to them that they are having a good day at work, and three things that they associate with having a bad day. The results are presented in full in the national report. What is of importance here, is that of the top 10 'bad day' experiences, one is related to the individual PO (tiredness), one to team aspects (bad contact with colleagues), six were organization related, and only two client related: these being problems clients face or pose (leading to PO concerns or worries) and clients who refuse to open up/acknowledge behaviour. These experiences do not appear to challenge the PO's resilience, but rather affect his or her professional approach and possibilities to have an impact. Experiences with aggressive clients and with clients who create emotional discomfort, were also hardly mentioned by POs (3% and 1% of all answers given).

Focus groups results

From the focus groups, the following general conclusions were drawn, underlining the results of the survey. Firstly, both unit managers and probation officers indicate that the problem is not the client, but the organization, when the resilience of an employee is under pressure. Working with difficult people is something they have clearly chosen for:

> Client contact is the cherry on the cake. (Probation officer)

> The budget cuts, doing so much in such a short time, it all impacts our resilience. (Probation officer)

> The management focus on target is extreme. In theory, we can do two client interviews for an assessment report. In practice, this never happens. (Probation officer)

> I don't talk with clients anymore; I talk with numbers. (Probation officer)

Secondly, contact with colleagues is considered very important for resilience of both unit managers and probation officers. It is expressly stated that there should be room for emotional release ('let off steam') and to discuss difficult cases. This is sometimes at odds with production targets and with the new organizational structure encouraging

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employees to work from home with a laptop. It becomes increasingly difficult to meet each other and to receive feedback on the quality of the work being done. Both unit managers and probation officers are thus faced with the dilemma of production targets versus quality.

> In need to be confident that I am a competent professional, that I know what to do, but also take the initiative to ask others for help when in doubt. I don't see my manager a lot. He sometimes sends me an email telling me I did something wrong in the electronic file system. (Probation officer)

> Being loyal towards each other is very rewarding. It is the foundation of my resilience and it determines whether I am happy at my work or not. If this foundation disappears, I am no longer convinced that we are doing this work for a common cause. (Probation officer)

> You need your team so much; otherwise the work will get you. You need a place to tell your stories, or they will just pile up inside of you. (Probation officer)

Both unit managers and probation officers also indicate that there must be room to express and discuss insecurities and vulnerabilities. The employee must feel safe to do this. This is of great importance for the maintenance of resilience.

> The myth that you must be able to everything by yourself all the time does not exist in our organization. As a manager, I am very alert to this, but at the same time I must guard myself against it. (Unit manager)

> I know my people. When they are in a 'motivational dip', I will notice it pretty soon and I will discuss it with them. (Unit manager)

A third result emerging from the focus groups is that task variation, working in projects, and also allowing workers to plan and organize their work by themselves (because daily work always has unexpected events) is considered important for maintaining resilience by both unit managers and probation officers. 'Doing different tasks keeps me alive, they make my work more interesting' (probation officer).

Finally, the way the probation organization handles the balance between work and private life can have a protecting, beneficial effect on resilience. 'Managers and colleagues take care that we do less at work when something needs attention at home' (probation officer).

Conclusions and recommendations

Regarding our first research question (factors influencing the resilience of POs), both the survey and the focus groups led to the conclusion that for Dutch POs it is not primarily clients who have a negative impact on their resilience. This is a striking outcome of the SPORE study. The probation organization's strength lies in the huge commitment of the PO to the client and to the work. POs have chosen this line of work with offenders, often based on strong personal and professional values relating to carefulness and dutifulness.

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Worker resilience, measured in this study as job satisfaction and a resilient coping style, is primarily threatened, but also developed and strengthened, by characteristics of the organization and team, as well as the characteristics of the individual worker himself.

This study also clearly shows that it is important not to get 'hung up' at the psychological level of the individual, but to also examine the influence of the team and organization on resilience.

With respect to our second question (effective or promising practices for the purpose of strengthening and sustaining the resilience), the Dutch Probation Service equips its employees well to deal with specific stressful situations, and the general organizational structure and the structure of the work help workers to keep a grip on their work. Both of these aspects give the workers a sense of empowerment, which better prepares them for new, future stress. Based on the surveys and focus groups, we also must emphasize the importance of a resilient team and of an organization that provides these teams with the proper support. This is also an effective way to tackle the concerns expressed with regard to the culture and structure of the work.

In relation to our third question, about supporting resilience, a set of detailed recommendations were based on the survey analysis and the focus groups. They have been adopted by the management of the Dutch Probation Service as agenda for a National Action Plan on PO Resilience, starting in 2014. From these recommendations, we present the following selection of general points that we regard as important for international readership.

Firstly, to enhance job satisfaction, we recommend to address organizational climate and the physical work environment. Organizational climate and the physical work environment emerged as factors most predictive of job satisfaction. Organizational climate, measured by the C-SURV, measures four facets including Management Style, Empowerment, Workload and Communication. Understanding the features that comprise organizational climate should enable senior leaders to consider the features of their own organization that may require attention to enhance the levels of job satisfaction among the work force. We encourage a detailed assessment of the organizational climate by unit or region.

The physical work environment was measured using the PWESQ and assessed satisfaction with Facilities, Work and System Characteristics and Worksite Characteristics. Items from the PWESQ relate closely to the issues frequently raised by respondents regarding good and bad days at work, reinforcing the importance of such matters to probation workers. Attention to and remediation of physical work environment factors that are under par could have a disproportionately positive impact on workers' well-being and may be regarded as quick wins for senior leaders.

Our second recommendation is to develop a psychological pro forma for probation staff to identify personal areas of strength and vulnerability. Psychometric assessment of resilience characteristics can be helpful in enabling staff to consider their own well-being. Recognizing how different coping styles and other attributes can impact on both emotional health and performance provides opportunities for individuals to develop adaptive coping styles and recognize when and why they may be vulnerable. A resilience pro forma can also provide a focus for supervision, allowing managers and other senior

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staff improved opportunities to support front line workers. Supervisors and managers should also be encouraged to monitor their own well-being.

Thirdly, to enhance adaptive capacity, we stress the importance of training in detachment for probation workers. Detachment was measured using the relevant items from the Coping Styles Questionnaire (Roger et al., 1993). Roger et al., describe detachment as the ability to disengage oneself from overwhelming emotion and keep matters in perspective. Research into the impact of training staff in detachment has yielded encouraging results (e.g. Roger and Hudson, 1995), including significant increases in job satisfaction, reduced absenteeism and reduced turnover of staff.

Next, we recommend probation organizations (and more specific their human resources department) to understand the levels of exposure of staff to potential trauma. This would enable cost-effective targeting of resources to support staff in their efforts to maintain high performance. While it is recognized that the risk of exposure is high, the reality may be different. Information regarding frequency and intensity of trauma exposure can inform a proportionate and tailored organizational response.

Our fifth recommendation is to consider the value of appropriate sharing of personal information in the workplace. Trauma outside the workplace has been evidenced to negatively affect well-being within the workplace. For this reason, there is a case for employers and employees to have an awareness of potentially traumatic events that may impact on well-being and performance. Clearly, this needs to be handled sensitively, but it is proposed that, dealt with appropriately, such procedures can mitigate against potential misunderstandings and enable the implementation of apposite support infrastructures. A number of options are available, such as specialist guidance to supervisors, personal well-being pro formas that are regular updates, training of peer mentors or use of employee assistance programmes.

Our final recommendation for probation organizations is to work towards developing an empowered workforce. Even though empowerment, as measured in this project, did not emerge as a significant predictor of resilience, there is robust and comprehensive evidence of its centrality in critical occupations. Furthermore, the measure of organizational climate used in this study, and so clearly predictive of resilience, contains a reliable measure of empowerment. Therefore, organizations can remain confident that an empowered workforce is a resilient workforce. Below (see Table 6) are a number of actions, gleaned from a range of literature and in many cases supported by focus group data, which organizations can take in pursuit of promoting good psychological health.

Afterword

When POs attempt to make a difference in offenders' lives, they face many challenges and demands. As this research has shown, POs must have the personal and contextual resources to deal with them, in order to render them manageable, coherent, and meaningful. Fewer resources increase the risk of negative outcome, including, increased negative feedback from colleagues or managers. Feeling vulnerable and disempowered, POs might fall back on simple risk management and control, become cynical, look for another job, or get sick (Burrell, 2012). This research shows that this is most likely to happen for older workers, workers who are less conscientious and/or less able

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Table 6. Empowerment in practice.

1. Set inspirational, meaningful goals
2. Express confidence in subordinates together with high performance expectations
3. Foster opportunities for subordinates to participate in decision making
4. Provide autonomy from bureaucratic constraints
5. Appoint leaders that use power positively
6. Introduce reward systems that emphasise innovative and unusual performance
7. Ensure task variety
8. Ensure personal relevance by conducting skills/task audits
9. Allow and encourage appropriate autonomy
10. Keep levels of established routine and rules to a minimum
11. Set progressively more challenging but attainable targets
12. Promote vicarious experience – seeing similar others perform successfully can be highly motivating
13. Use verbal persuasion such as praise
14. Support staff to manage their own emotion through training, having clearly defined roles, reducing information overload and offering technical and administrative assistance

to detach themselves from their work, and for workers who experience a negative organizational culture or physical work environment. These factors can all act as independent causes of worker 'breakdown' and thus all warrant serious attention. Conversely, when available, these factors enhance the feeling of being empowered and result in increased resiliency.

Finally, we note and emphasize the striking similarity in the resilience qualities of POs and qualities of ex-offenders who have chosen to live a crime free life. To become a desister is changing your life for good. To do this, it is essential that the offender has interactions with people that want to make a difference in his life (Maruna, 2001). POs are in such a position and they have chosen their profession to do exactly that (King, 2013). POs must show and use their resilience qualities in their work with offenders. They need to model their own resilience, and promote resilience in their clients as well. By doing so, the PO can use his or her own resilience as a life-changing tool, demonstrating how to overcome difficulties in an adaptive and pro-social way. To become such a role model, POs may need to go through similar processes that offenders who desist go through. POs may need to find agency, generativity goals, experience a cognitive reformulation of their work, and learn to grow as professionals without dismissing their initial 'early years' of experience.[3] Together, the PO and the offender can take their professional and personal development one step further. The interactive nature of resilience and desistance, the essential giving and receiving, the human quality of both, is the ultimate reason we need resilient POs for this critical profession.

Declaration of Conflicting Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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Notes

1. The international comparison study (Vogelvang et al., 2013) can be downloaded at http://www.expertisecentrum-veiligheid.nl under 'publicaties' or at http://www.cep-probation.org.
2. C-SURV: Roger, 2011; WES: Moos, 1994; PWESQ: Carlopio, 1996; SS: Federal Bureau of Prisons, 1995; IWTS: Cook and Wall, 1980; NEO PI-R: Costa and McCrae, 1992; CSQ: Roger et al., 1993; ECQ: Roger and Najarian, 1989; PEI: Spreitzer, 1995; SRG: North et al., 1996; JSI: Brayfield and Roth, 1951; RCSQ: Sojo and Dudgeon, 2011.
3. We thank the reviewers of this article for this important insight. A similar remark was made by McNeill (2014: 169–170).

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