

Is there a difference in perception of risk: between IPP prisoners and members of the Parole Board

By

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Abstract

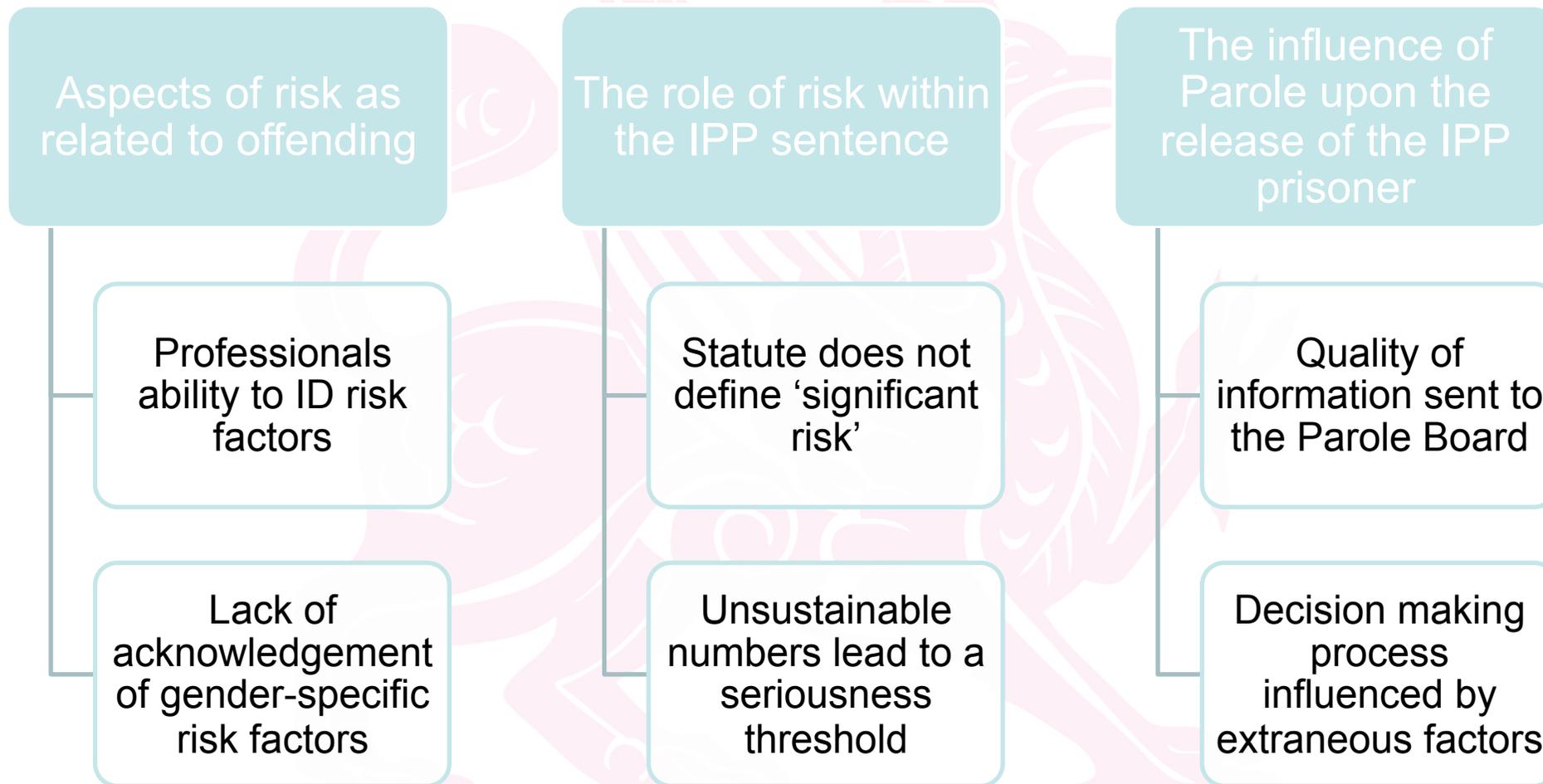
Background: The IPP sentence is the fastest growing sentence in the UK. This growth in the population is due to large numbers of offenders being sentenced to IPP sentences and then becoming stagnant in the prison population, as they are unable to reduce their risk sufficiently and progress through the penal system. Despite this, few studies have explored risk in relation to female IPPs and how this relates to public protection

Aim: The aim of the research is to explore perception of risk as it applies to female prisoners sentenced to imprisonment for public protection

Method: This research was conducted using semi-structured interviews with then female prisoners serving an IPP sentence, two Legal Advisors and one Senior Member of the Parole Board

Conclusion: The research found that there was a clear difference in the perception of risk from the female IPP prisoner and the Parole Board. These differences potentially have a profound effect upon the identification of risk factors and the way in which they are reduced.

Key themes in the literature



Questions raised

- ❖ What is the role of 'risk' in the IPP sentence?
- ❖ How is 'risk' identified within the female population?
- ❖ How is 'risk' addressed?
- ❖ Do IPP prisoners understand what they need to do in order to reduce their risk to satisfy a parole hearing?
- ❖ What risk factors are taken in to account when considering release for IPPs?

IPP

Sample

- 10 individual interviews
- Age between 24 – 50 years
- Section 18 wounding with intent, accounted for 70% of the total index offence
- Tariff lengths ranged between 1 year 206 days and 3 years 61 days.
- 7 IPP were over tariff
- 4 had experienced a parole hearing

Interviews

- Perception of 'risk'
- Appropriateness of the IPP sentence
- Index offence
- Individual circumstances and risk factors
- Steps taken to reduce risk
- Perceptions of the Parole Board

le Board

Sample

- 250 members which may give inconsistent versions of policy and practice
- Opinions expressed may be taken out of context and it is impractical to screen all participants
- Reduce ambiguity and confusion

Interview

- Formal policies, procedures and guidelines for decisions relating to IPP prisoners
- Training pertaining to risk
- Effectiveness of sentence

Legal Advisors

Sample

- Specialised in offering legal advice to female prisoners serving indeterminate sentences
- 15 years experience
- 18 months experience

Interview

- Identifiable risk factors
- Demonstrated risk reduction
- Perception of Parole Board
- Barriers to risk reduction

Themes discovered

Meaning of the concept of risk

Application of risk factors

Sentence plan

Relationships between risk factors & reducing risk

Barriers to reducing specific risk factors

Managing risk

Wider issues

Meaning of the concept of risk

“There s very detailed training on risk assessment and risk management and how to manage risk, so that members understand the concept of how to assess risk, to familiarise themselves with some of the standard risk assessment tools and approaches that are commonly used in practice”(MPB)

“Don’t know, it’s your behaviour isn’t it?”(Sinead)

“I honestly don’t know, in here it means a lot of different things”(Helen)

Application of risk factors

- MPB reluctant to give specific examples of risk factors it was stated that all IPPs are perceived as individual and therefore the risk factors they present are unique to their case
- The Legal Advisors supported this view
- IPPs identified 29 risk factors (7 themes) relating to their character and circumstances

Application of risk factors

Theme	Initial code	Total
Substance misuse	Alcohol Drugs	22
Unable to deal appropriately with emotions	Angry Being young Feeling betrayed Inability to deal with emotions Use violence to deal with emotions	12
Impact of negative relationships upon behaviour	Domestic violence Feeling scared Lack of confidence Negative childhood experiences Peer group/ family influences Poor relationships Self defence	16
Nothing constructive to do in the community	Board No accommodation No day structure No employment No life goal	6

Application of risk factors

Theme	Initial code	Total
Short term goals take precedence over long term impact of action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attention seeking Finding violence fun No respect for authority Unable to foresee impact of actions upon others Unable to weigh up pros and cons 	9
Poor communication skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No one to talk to Poor communication 	3
Impact of health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mental health Physical health Self harm 	8

Sentence plan

“that [sentence planning board] is the only means where an offender can actually have a proper discussion with the prison staff and managers about what their risks are and what they need to do in order to address them. I think that is a very important mechanism in place” (MPB)

6 IPPs were of the opinion SPB are imperative in identifying their risk factors

“[Offender Manager] selected the course that he felt was best for me. I was under the influence when I committed the offence, so he asked me to do the PASRO course. Then because I didn’t show any remorse, they wanted me to do a victim awareness course” (Jacky)

Sentence Plan

“I have had it happen quite a lot is that the Offender Supervisor may look from one narrow perspective in terms of risk and then the PB may come in and think there are some other risks that maybe have not been fully explored. I would say often that maybe they do mirror each other but there may be times where they are out of sync” (Legal Advisor 2)

4 IPPs were not confident in their Offender Managers ability to identify their risk factors

“They [Offender Managers] treat us all the same. They think we need the same therapeutic correction. We need the same chip implemented to put us right, like we are robots. Each person is individual, we need to tackle our own individual problems” (Tracy)

Gender specific provision

“when we are training members we do acknowledge that as a group women offenders can have quite different life experiences and challenges in terms of abuse and those sorts of things. I think that the reality is that when we are making decisions about a prisoner we are not making it on the basis of what we now about that group we are making it on what we know about that individual” (MPB)

“I am sure lost of offender supervisors and managers are used to dealing with males and there are different issues that women face or IPPs with mental health problems, yes, I think they are not always addressed and that can be quite heart breaking sometimes”(Legal Advisor 1)

The relationship between risk factor and reducing risk

Theme	Initial code	Total
Addressing substance misuse	Abstinence from alcohol and drugs Alcohol awareness CARATS PASRO	11
Enhanced skills to deal with emotions	Able to forgive Bereavement counselling Control behaviour Growing up Psychology Stress management Understanding triggers Understanding why angry	17
Addressing issues related to negative relationships	Assertiveness Confidence Counselling Learnt to deal with past abuse Not frightened anymore	11

The relationship between risk factor and reducing risk

Theme	Initial code	Total
Resettlement plans	Employment Goal in life Having a goal Housing Open conditions Qualifications/ certificates	15
Enhances communication skills	Communication skills listening	6
Improved health	Mental health under control Self harm under control	2
Attending courses	ETS or TSP course Complete sentence plan	12
Valuing others	Personal awareness Respecting other peoples differences	3
Change in attitude	Motivation Want to change	3

The relationship between risk factor and reducing risk

Factors that contributed to offending

Factors identified to reduce risk

	Drugs	Alcohol	Both drugs and alcohol	No substance misuse
Drugs			Jackie	
Alcohol		Maura Sinead	Nicola	
Both drugs and alcohol		Helen		lisa
No substance misuse	Tara		Tracey Barbara Margaret	

Barriers to reducing specific risk factors

1. Lack of provision

“...during the last two years, I have accessed everything apart from psychology. They told me back in September that I am at the top of the list but I am still waiting”(Tara)

“In terms of trying to get them [IPPs] through the system is it quite a difficult one, because if someone has a very short tariff, often only two years, the process just isn’t quick enough because it is set up for people with really 15 years” (Legal Advisor 1)

Barriers to reducing specific risk factors

2. Inability to access offender behaviour courses

“the reality is that we don’t make any assumptions on the fact that just because a person has been on a treatment programme, doesn’t automatically show that their risk has been reduced. Actually what we need to see, putting aside whether or not they have accessed a treatment programme or not, actually if they have got a risk factor around criminal attitude, poor anger management or substance issues....is there evidence to say that they are better at managing their anger? So if they are provoked by somebody in the wing or is there evidence to say that they are no longer getting positive drug tests. We are looking for the evidence for a change in behaviour” (MPB)

Barriers to reducing specific risk factors

3. Willingness to address subjective risk factors

“I am sitting my parole in March and no one is recommending me for it cause I self harmed at Christmas....I didnt get sentenced for that; I didnt get sentenced against myself. I got sentenced for being at risk to other people” (Tara)

“I have to do work around weapons, which I don’t understand ‘cos I never have used weapons” (Tara)

Managing risk

“...the other significant shift that has happened not just within the PB but the CJS in thinking about risk is that we think about how far risk can be reduced by change of the individual but also about how the risk can be managed by external control” (MPB)

“often the women struggle with that in terms of that unless they have done some sort of problem solving work they can struggle with anticipating the same sort of management of risk” (Legal Advisor 2)

“like probation [in prison] say one thing and outside probation say another thing, psychology say one thing and prison services say another. They don’t see the same” (Margaret)

Wider issues

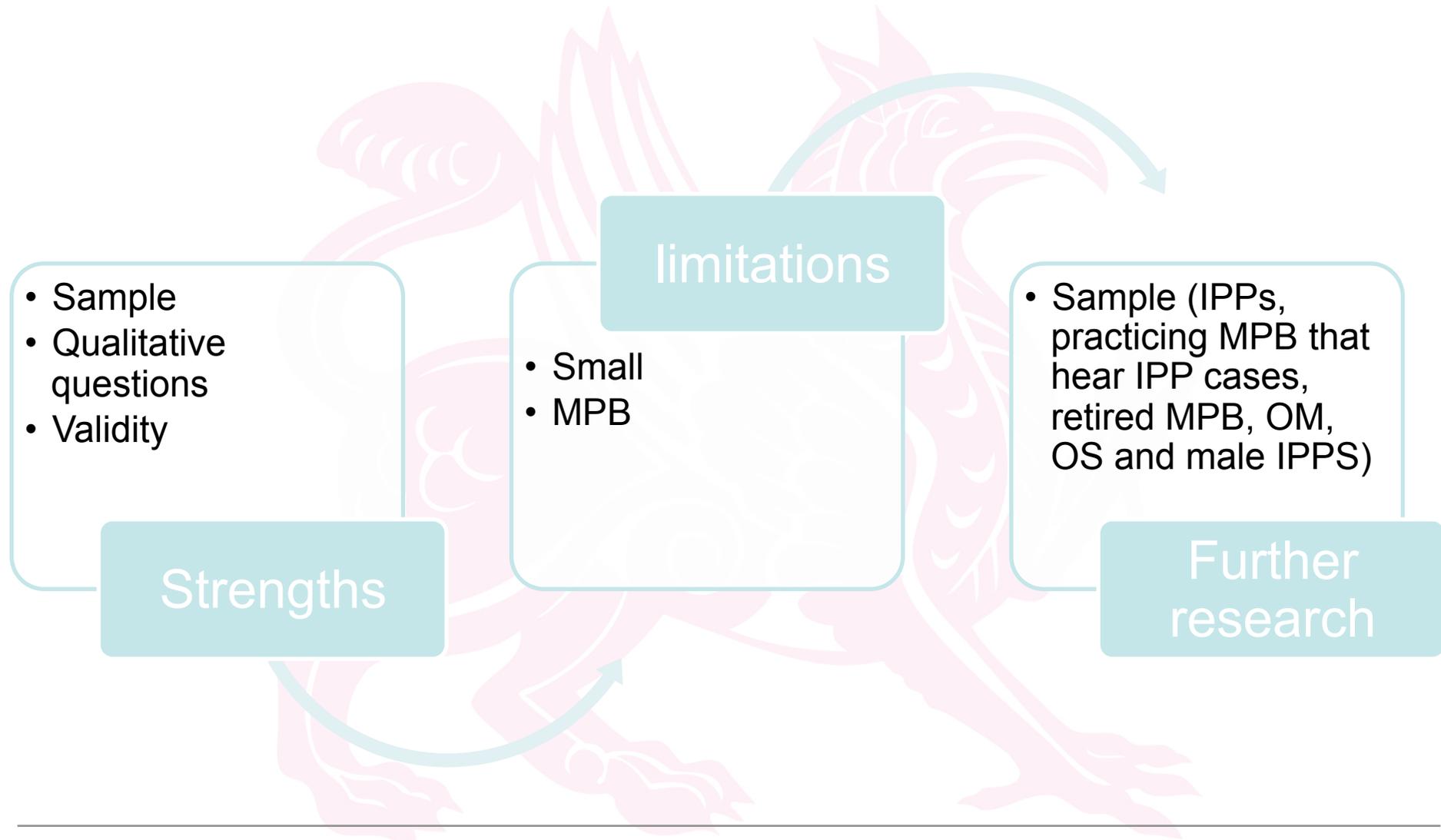
“There may be some mental health issues.....there may be a good risk management plan that the probation has put into place but if they are unwell in terms of mental health then there might not be a deliberate action to undermines the put poses of the plan but they may struggle with the requirements intended to keep them safe. So we take this into account when assessing whether or not they can be managed in the community” (MPB)

“I don’t know them [external Probation Officer], but yet I am expected to work with this person for a minimum of ten years. I think there should be some kind of relationship beforehand” (Lisa)

Discussion

- It was clear that the female IPP prisoners and the Parole Board do have different concepts of risk and how they apply this to public protection
- Dimensions of risk many unseen by the OM and IPP
- Concept of risk derived from different sources
- Disjunction between risk factor and reducing risk
- Subjectivity of risk by SPB, BP and IPPs
- No gender- specific differences in criminality taken into account
- Lack of resources despite Court of Appeal (2007 R (James) v Secretary of State for Justice)
- Barriers inc 'Willingness to engage'

Strengths and limitations of the research



Recommendations

- Mandatory training for IPPs, OM and OS on risk which mirrors the PB programme.
- Ongoing evidence based training for IPPs (National Vocational Qualification)
- Training to include gender differenced in criminality
- SPB to take place within 3 weeks of sentence
- Review every 3 months and barriers highlighted to HMP Area Office
- HMP Area Office to monitor barriers and address them within the strategic plan
- Each prison to have a directory of services which includes criteria
- MPB training on barriers to risk reduction including lack of provision

Conclusion

It is apparent throughout the research that risk factors are considered by the PB to be unique to the individuals' circumstances and character, but without a similar understanding of the concept of risk, how can IPPs being to reduce their risk? Without understanding what MPB want from them in terms of risk, how can IPPs demonstrate what is relevant?