

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

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Abstract

Indeterminate Public Protection (IPP) was introduced in 2005. Unlike other prisoners, those subject to an IPP order do not have a specified date for release — release will only be granted by the Parole Board (PB) when it is considered that risk has been significantly reduced.

The aim of this research was to explore perception of risk from three different perspectives: female prisoners under an

IPP order; PB members; and legal advisors who have experience in representing female IPP prisoners at parole hearings.

The research was conducted using semi-structured interviews with ten female prisoners, two legal advisors and one senior member of the Parole Board (PB).

Findings

- The concept of risk for the PB and the IPP prisoners derived from different sources. For the PB, understanding comes from training, whereas the IPP prisoners get their understanding from discussions with prison staff and other prisoners.
- Gender-specific differences in criminality were not taken into account during sentence planning or at the Parole stage although the literature suggests that lack of acknowledgement to gender gives rise to false calculations of risk (Martin et al, 2009).
- There were barriers that denied the IPP prisoners the opportunity to reduce their risk. The main barrier was the lack of resources but other barriers included the IPP prisoner's willingness to engage in identified activities in order to reduce risk. Willingness to engage was itself influenced by how the IPP prisoners conceived risk to apply them. For example, one woman was reluctant to undertake counselling as she felt it would not reduce her risk, as it was not relevant to her circumstances.
- The concept of 'risk' has various dimensions. It was apparent that the IPPs and to some degree Offender Managers who undertook sentence planning boards, viewed risk to be confined to specified risk factors and offences, whereas the PB perceived risk to include wider factors — long term provision to assist in risk management and availability of external support to manage risk on release.

Recommendations

- IPP prisoners should be given mandatory training on risk. This training should be similar to the training given to the PB and should cover relevant areas pertaining to the evaluation of risk, such as risk assessment tools, procedures, guidelines and risk management.
- Staff who support the implementation of sentence plans should have the same mandatory training as PB members, so that they are able to bridge the gap between the IPPs perception of risk and that of the PB.
- Offender Managers, Offender Supervisors and PB members should all have training on gender differences in criminality so that they can calculate risk accurately and understand what interventions may be appropriate for female IPP prisoners.
- External Offender Managers should have training to enable them to prepare appropriate release plans which take into account risk management and wider issues.
- Sentence Planning Boards should take place within 3 weeks of the prisoner being sentenced to IPP.
- IPP prisoners should have their progress reviewed every 3 months. Any barriers, such as lack of provision, which have prevented them from reducing their risk should be identified and reported to Her Majesty's Prison Service (HMPS) Area Office.
- The HMPS Area Office should keep a record of all barriers that have prevented risk reduction and these factors should be addressed in the HMPS strategic plan.
- Each prison should have a directory that outlines what services are available in the establishment, how they can support risk reduction and the criteria for accessing them.
- PB members should be given further training on barriers to risk reduction including lack of provision.