

Research Paper

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

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Executive Summary

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Background

The Criminal Justice Act 2003 brought about substantial changes within every aspect of the criminal justice system from an offence being uncovered, to sentencing of the offender and to the offender's reintegration into the community. One significant change was the introduction of the Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) sentence and since implementation in April 2005 it has become the fastest growing custodial sentence option in the UK.

The IPP sentence is currently available for adult offenders assessed to be dangerous and who have been convicted of a specified sexual or violent offence. But unlike 'normal' custodial sentences, IPP sentences do not have a specified date of release. The threshold for the imposition of the new sentence is the equivalent of a 4 year sentence of imprisonment, of which the tariff is 2 years before the offender is eligible to apply to the Parole Board for release. The Parole Board then decide whether *'it is necessary for the protection of the public that the prisoner should be confined'* and if not, they are also satisfied that *'The lifer's level of risk to the life and limb of others is considered to be no more than minimal'*. If the IPP prisoner is able to meet these criteria then they can be released.

However, this is not as straight forward as it looks. It has become apparent that large numbers of IPP prisoners have become stagnant in the prison population, as they are unable to reduce their risk sufficiently and progress through the penal system (Owers 2008 and Rutherford et al 2008). For example, in March 2011, 6,550 offenders, of whom 150 are female, had received an IPP sentence. Out of this 2,393 IPP prisoners were passed their tariff date however, only 86 male and 7 female IPP prisoners had been released into the community (Ministry of Justice (2011), www.justice.gov.uk). Despite this, few studies have explored risk in relation female IPPs and how this relates to public protection.

Research

The aim of this research is to explore perception of risk as it applies to female prisoners sentenced to imprisonment for public protection (IPP).

This research was conducted using semi structured interview with ten female prisoners serving a sentenced to imprisonment for Public Protection, two Legal Advisors and one Senior Member of the Parole Board.

Findings

The aim of this research was achieved. The research was able to explore perception of risk from the viewpoint of the female IPP prisoners, Legal Advisors and the Parole Board.

Through exploring these viewpoints the research found that there was a clear difference in the perception of risk from the female IPP prisoners and the Parole Board.

Although this is a small-scale study, it was able to highlight a number of areas where the 'perception of risk' had been influenced for both the IPP and Members of the Parole Board (MPB).

The research has suggested a number of recommendations that could be used to target areas where a misconception of risk can occur. This would enable professionals in the CJS and IPPs have consistency in the perception of risk.

Recommendations

- IPPs 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.
- IPPs should have on-going training on risk factors and how they apply in individual circumstances. (A suggested method is through practical application of a training framework equivalent to the National Vocational Qualification, which enables the IPP to measure their level of risk against their ability to reduce risk. The framework would include modules that the PB want addressed in all cases, such as risk management plans. Furthermore this framework would provide a baseline of information which would assist IPPs, Offender Managers, Legal Advisors and MPB to evidence progression and levels of readiness for release).
- Staff who support the implementation of Sentence Plans should have the same mandatory training as PBM, 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 MPB should all have training on gender differences in criminality so that they can calculate risk accurately and understand what appropriate intervention is for the female IPPs.
- External Offender Manager 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.
- IPPs 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 highlighted at Her Majesties 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 of services that outline what services are available in the establishment, how they can support risk reduction and the criteria for accessing them.
- MPB should be given further training on barriers to risk reduction including lack of provision.

ENDS

