**Introduction**

In 2017 the Irish Prison Service (IPS) Psychology Service and the Probation Service developed a new model of sentence management for people serving life sentences (hereinafter PSLS), incorporating early multi-disciplinary assessment and annual Governor-led reviews in order to develop individual sentence plans. These sentence plans encourage active engagement with a range of services including Addiction, Chaplaincy, Education, Healthcare, Probation, Psychology, Resettlement, Training and Employment, and Work Training. These services constitute much of the prison-based Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT).

Facilitated by the IPS Psychology Service, the Probation Service, and Prison Officers designated as Integrated Sentence Management (ISM) Coordinators, the model provides a clear pathway for PSLS and is applicable to those sentenced after 01/04/2017 (see Figure 1).

Critical to the model is early assessment, engagement, and sentence planning rather than delaying intervention until the first Parole Board review at year seven.

**Aims & Objectives**

- The aim of the research is to explore the sentence management of PSLS in the IPS. The primary objectives are to:
  - Describe and compare the sentence management of PSLS sentenced both before and after the implementation of the model on 01/04/2017
  - Identify the strengths, needs, and risks of PSLS at different sentence stages (i.e., early, middle, and late)
  - Provide evidence-informed recommendations to the IPS to facilitate ongoing development of the model
  - Develop an evidence base to inform best practice and policy in relation to the sentence management of PSLS

**Design & Methods**

- The project comprises of four inter-related phases and adopts a cross-sectional mixed methods design, facilitating in-depth exploration of the experiences of PSLS at different sentence stages.

- The IPS defines the early stage of a life sentence as the first seven years before the first Parole Board review. The middle stage includes years seven to 14 and the late stage encompasses 14 years plus.

- See Figure 2 for the number of PSLS in each sentence stage. Blue represents PSLS sentenced before 01/04/2017. Orange represents PSLS sentenced after 01/04/2017.

**Phase 1**: A systematic review of research on life and long-term sentences

**Phase 2**: An examination of data obtained from the IPS Prisoner Information Management System (PIMS) in relation to PSLS

**Phase 3**: A mixed methods study of the sentence management of PSLS sentenced before 01/04/2017

**Phase 4**: A mixed methods study of the sentence management of PSLS sentenced after 01/04/2017

- Phase 3 participants will be divided into three groups based on sentence stage (i.e., early, middle, and late). All Phase 4 participants will be in the early sentence stage.

- Phase 3 and Phase 4 will involve semi-structured interviews and self-completion measures.

- Qualitative and quantitative data will be categorised according to the sentence stage to which they refer, and will be thematically and statistically analysed respectively.

- This will enable comparisons between the experiences of PSLS in the early, middle, and late sentence stages, and between the experiences of PSLS sentenced before and after 01/04/2017.

**Results & Conclusions**

- Only five studies have considered PSLS in Ireland and this research is the first to evaluate their sentence management.

- Effective sentence management contributes to safer custody and subsequently to safer communities. It anticipates that if released PSLS will have the necessary skills to reintegrate successfully and become law-abiding members of their community.

- With significant theoretical and practical implications, the ultimate aim of the research is to achieve the best possible outcomes for PSLS, victims/victims’ families, and wider society.

**References**


---

This research is funded by the Irish Research Council Employment-Based Programme and the Irish Prison Service.

Anna Flynn1, Dr Eimear Spain2, & Dr Emma Black3

1PhD Student, University of Limerick & Irish Prison Service; 2Senior Lecturer in Law, University of Limerick; 3Head of Psychology, Irish Prison Service