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MANAGING LIFE IN PRISON

An exploration of the sentence management of people serving life sentences in the Irish Prison Service

Anna Flynn¹, Dr Eimear Spain², & Dr Emma Black³

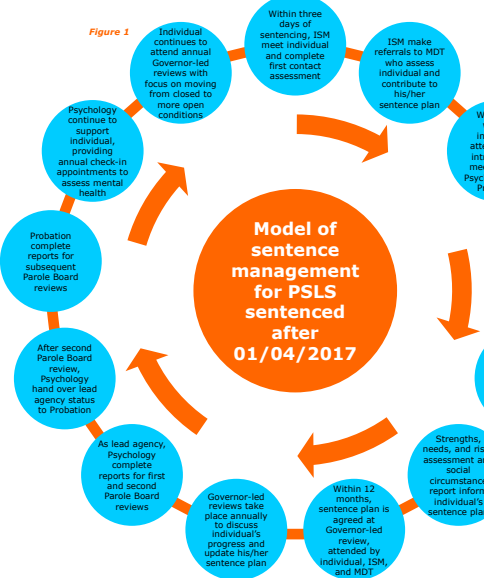
¹PhD Student, University of Limerick & Irish Prison Service; ²Senior Lecturer in Law, University of Limerick; ³Head of Psychology, Irish Prison Service

Introduction

- In 2017 the Irish Prison Service (IPS) proposed 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.¹
- 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.

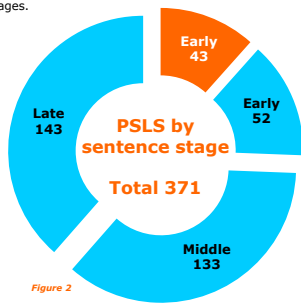
Aims & Objectives

- 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 studies 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.² 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.
- Study 1:** A systematic review of research on life and long-term sentences
- Study 2:** An examination of data obtained from the IPS Prisoner Information Management System (PIMS) in relation to PSLs
- Study 3:** A mixed methods study of the sentence management of PSLs sentenced before 01/04/2017
- Study 4:** A mixed methods study of the sentence management of PSLs sentenced after 01/04/2017
- Study 3 participants will be divided into three groups based on sentence stage (i.e., early, middle, and late). All Study 4 participants will be in the early sentence stage.
- Study 3 and Study 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 Ireland² and this research is the first to evaluate their sentence management.
- Effective sentence management contributes to safer custody and subsequently to safer communities. It ensures 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.

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Anna Flynn
PhD Student
Email: aflynn@irishprisons.ie
Twitter: @AnnaTFlynn1994