

Violent and Disruptive Behaviour in the Irish Prison Service: A Four-Year Research Project

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1. Background

Current Management of Violent and Disruptive Prisoner (VDP) Behaviour in the Irish Prison Service (IPS)

How do the IPS currently define VDP behaviour?

The IPS VDP policy defines violent and disruptive prisoner behaviour as that which:

- (a) involves serious repetitive violence towards staff and/or other prisoners
- (b) poses a significant risk of violence towards other
- (c) poses particular operational issues for the prison system

How do the IPS currently manage VDP behaviour?

- A small cohort of prisoners with behaviour meeting the above criteria ($n = 5$) are currently managed under the IPS VDP policy, first implemented in 2014.
- These prisoners are managed separately from the general prison population in highly secure locations with restrictive regimes and minimal association with others.
- A designated panel of Prison Officers are involved in managing these prisoners. These Officers are highly trained in Control & Restraint (C&R) procedures, and must use Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), such as body armour and recording equipment, for all interactions with prisoners.
- An estimated 15-25 prisoners in the IPS, at any one time, are engaged in serious, repetitive violent and disruptive behaviour. Those prisoners who are not managed under the VDP policy are managed similarly.

Future Management of VDP Behaviour in the IPS

- The IPS are currently developing a designated unit for the assessment, management and treatment of VDP behaviour.
- The unit is largely informed by existing models of care in the UK; primarily the Close Supervision Centre (CSC) System, but also Enabling Environments (EEs) and the Offender Personality Disorder (OPD) Pathway.
- The unit will be small, with 4 assessment cells and 6 intervention cells, and located within the Midlands prison.

How will the new unit be different?

The new unit will differ from current management in the following key ways (Figure 1):

1. Psychologically Informed	
Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-managed by operational and clinical leads • At senior and local levels
Physical environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designed to look and feel therapeutic • Colours, furnishings, daylight, greenery
Staff training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To develop psychological knowledge and skill • Working with personality disorder, mental illness and violence risk
Staff supervision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual and group • Facilitated by Psychologist
Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Violence risk • Personality • Cognitive
Intervention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primarily individual, potentially group • CBT, DBT, MBT, Schema Therapy, Motivation & Engagement
2. Relational Security	
De-escalation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary method of dealing with incidents
Staff-prisoner engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plays a core role in the daily regime
Pro-social modelling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reinforced by positive staff behaviour
Personal Officers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Officers with strong relational skills • Assigned to each prisoner for regular engagement
Joint interventions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitated by operational and psychology staff
3. Purposeful & Meaningful Regime	
Individualised	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Catered to individual risk and needs
Goal-driven	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based on goals established in care & management plans
Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education, health-care and chaplaincy services
Facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gym, library, multi-purpose room, horticulture

Figure 1. Key Differences in Management of VDP Behaviour in New Unit

What does the unit aim to do?

- Ultimately, the unit aims to progress prisoners along a risk management continuum (Figure 2).

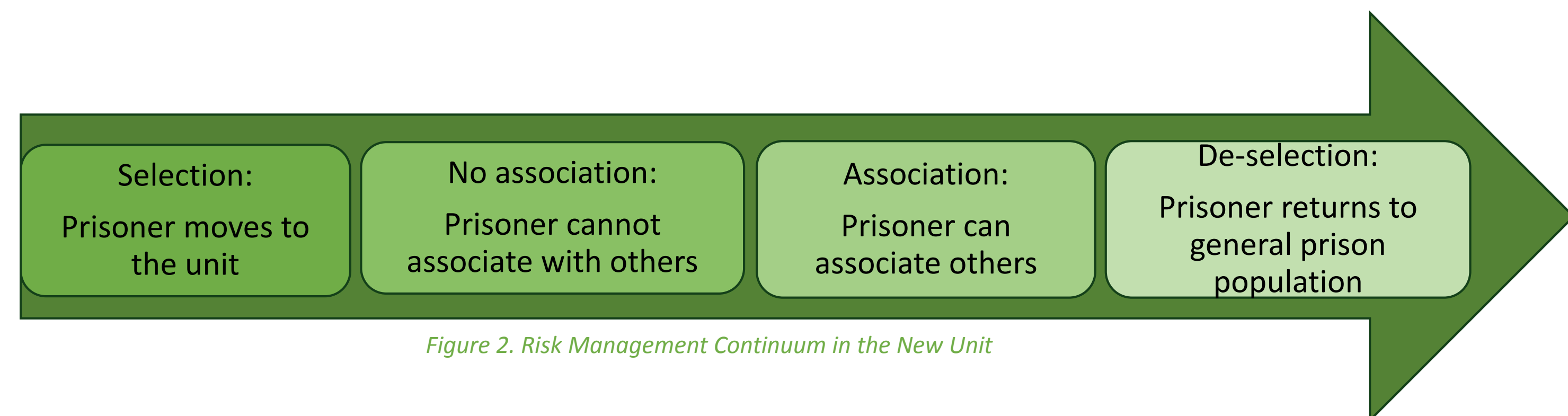


Figure 2. Risk Management Continuum in the New Unit

- Also, in line with the OPD pathway strategy³, the unit aims to:

1. Reduce repeated serious violent and/or sexual offending
2. Improve psychological health, well-being, pro-social behaviour and relational outcomes
3. Improve competence, confidence and attitudes of staff working with complex offenders who are likely to have a severe personality disorder
4. Increase efficiency, cost effectiveness and quality of management

2. Aims

- The IPS have funded a PhD student to conduct a research project, examining VDP behaviour in the IPS.
- Through multiple studies, this project aims to:
 1. Describe and compare the current and future management of VDP behaviour in the IPS
 2. Develop an evidence-base to inform best practice and policy in the IPS, particularly the new unit

3. Design & Methodology

- The project comprises of four studies (Table 1).

Table 1. Four Studies of the Research Project

Study	Aim	Source of Data	Methodology	Analysis
Study 1	Examine current management of VDP behaviour in the IPS	Two groups of participants: 1. Prisoners engaged in VDP behaviour 2. Prison Officers managing VDP behaviour	Mixed methodologies: 1. Qualitative component > semi-structured interviews 2. Quantitative component > scale measures	Thematic analysis of qualitative data Statistical analysis of quantitative data
Study 2	Examine management of VDP behaviour in the new unit	Two groups of participants: 1. Prisoners managed in the unit 2. Prison Officers managing prisoners in the unit	Mixed methodologies: 1. Qualitative component > semi-structured interviews 2. Quantitative component > scale measures	Thematic analysis of qualitative data Statistical analysis of quantitative data
Study 3	Identify and compare factors related to incidents of VDP behaviour in the IPS, before and after the implementation of the new unit	Incident reporting data obtained from the IPS Prison Information Management System (PIMS)	Mixed methodologies: 1. Quantitative component > quantitative incident data (e.g. frequencies & types of incidents) 2. Qualitative component > qualitative incident data (e.g. written Officer reports)	Statistical analysis of quantitative data (e.g. frequencies, trend analyses, root cause analyses) Content analysis of qualitative data
Study 4	Systematically review a specific component of the relevant literature	Published literature identified from multiple relevant databases Unpublished literature obtained by contacting authors	Systematic review adhering to PRISMA guidelines	If data in the identified literature permits, a meta-analysis of effect sizes

- The four studies will be conducted over a four-year period.
- As the research is being conducted in an applied and dynamic setting, the timeline of the project is flexible.
- However, the project begins with Study 1, which is influential in the development of the overall project, in various ways:
 - > Study 1 generates essential baseline data, to be compared with the follow-up data of Study 2 to establish any change due the implementation of the new unit.
 - > Study 1 is explorative, and it's results will inform which variables are important for measurement in Study 2, and in the future as the unit continues to develop
- Study 2 will be conducted when the unit is open for a sufficient amount of time to allow for accurate follow-up data to be collected.
- Study 3 and Study 4, in utilising secondary data, are not time sensitive and will be continually conducted throughout the duration of the project.
- Taken together, these four studies contribute to an in-depth examination of VDP behaviour in the IPS.

4. Results, Conclusions & Feedback

- Results of the project will be presented in two major ways, to serve two major purposes:
 1. In a thesis submitted to University College Dublin (UCD), for the purpose of a PhD research degree:
 - > The four studies will be written in a publishable form, and submitted in an alternative thesis format with additional chapters
 2. In regular feedback to the IPS, to provide an evidence-base to inform best practice and policy:
 - > The researcher attends and contributes to monthly unit implementation group meetings
 - > The researcher submits quarterly reports to the IPS, documenting the progress of the project
- As such, integral to the project is joint collaboration between UCD and the IPS.
- This is achieved in various ways:
 1. The project is jointly supervised by a supervisor in UCD (Prof. Gary O'Reilly) and a supervisor in the IPS (Dr Emma Regan), both of whom sit on the researcher's Doctoral Studies Panel (DSP) at UCD
 2. The researcher works from offices in both UCD and the IPS, remaining integrated in both organisations

5. References



6. Acknowledgements

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