***UK Data Service edit collection: ‘Prison Regulation for Safer Societies: Participatory, Efficient, Effective?’***

**Grant ref** –MR/T019085/1

**Project Title** ‘Prison Regulation, for Safer Societies: Participatory, Effective, Efficient?’

**Project Description**

In May 2019, Dutch courts refused to deport an English suspected drug smuggler, citing the potential for inhuman and degrading treatment at HMP Liverpool. This well publicised judgment illustrates the necessity of my FLF: reconceptualising prison regulation, for safer societies. It seeks to save lives and money, and reduce criminal reoffending.

Over 10.74 million people are imprisoned globally. The growing transnational significance of detention regulation was signalled by the Optional Protocol to the United Nations Convention against Torture/OPCAT. Its 89 signatories, including the UK, must regularly examine treatment and conditions. The quality of prison life affects criminal reoffending rates, so the consequences of unsafe prisons are absorbed by our societies. Prison regulation is more urgent than ever. England and Wales' prisons are now less safe than at any point in recorded history, containing almost 83,000 prisoners: virtually all of whom will be released at some point. In 2016, record prison suicides harmed prisoners, staff and bereaved families, draining £385 million from public funds. Record prisoner self-harm was seen in 2017, then again in 2018. Criminal reoffending costs £15 billion annually. Deteriorating prison safety poses a major moral, social, economic and public health threat, attracting growing recognition.

Reconceptualising prison regulation is a difficult multidisciplinary challenge. Regulation includes any activity seeking to steer events in prisons. Effective prison regulation demands academic innovation and sustained collaboration and implementation with practitioners from different sectors (e.g. public, voluntary), regulators, policymakers, and prisoners: from local to (trans)national levels. Citizen participation has become central to realising more democratic, sustainable public services but is not well integrated across theory-policy-practice. I will coproduce prison regulation with partners, including the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman, voluntary organisations Safe Ground and the Prison Reform Trust, and (former) prisoners.

This FLF examines three diverse case study countries: England and Wales, Brazil and Canada, developing multinational implications. This approach is ambitious and risky, but critical for challenging commonsensical beliefs. Interviews, focus groups, observation and creative methodologies will be used. There are three aims, to:

i) theorise the (potential) participatory roles of prisoners and the voluntary sector in prison regulation

ii) appraise the (normative) relationships between multisectoral regulators (e.g. public, voluntary) from local to (trans)national scales

iii) co-produce (with multisectoral regulators), pilot, document and disseminate models of participatory, effective and efficient prison regulation in England and Wales (and beyond) - integrating multisectoral, multiscalar penal overseers and prisoners into regulatory theory and practice.

This is an innovative study. Punishment scholars have paid limited attention to regulation. Participatory networks of (former) prisoners are a relatively new formation but rapidly growing in influence. Nobody has yet considered agencies like the Prisons Inspectorate and Ombudsman alongside voluntary sector organisations and participatory networks, nor their collective influences from local to transnational scales. Nobody has tried to work with all of these agencies to reconceptualise prison regulation and test it in practice.

Findings will be developed, disseminated and implemented internationally. The research team will present findings and engage with diverse stakeholders and decision makers through interactive workshops (Parliament, London, Manchester, Liverpool and Birmingham), and multimedia outputs (e.g. infographics). This FLF has implications for prisons and detention globally, and broader relevance as a case study of participatory regulation of public services and policy translation.

**Sponsors** –

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**Data Collection Title**

Prisoners on Prisons: Experiences of peer-delivered suicide prevention work

**Data Description (abstract)**

This is qualitative data from a focus group conducted in September 2020 within a study that examined how the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (seek to) effect change in prisons following prisoner suicides and how death investigations could have more impact on prison policy and practice. The study ran from 2019-2021.

Within this project, a focus group was conducted with former prisoners in England and Wales (n=5):

Across jurisdictions, prisoner suicide rates consistently exceed those amongst comparable groups in the general population (Zhong et al., 2021). Deaths in coercive institutions threaten the right to life, which is ‘the most fundamental of all human rights [and a] condition of the enjoyment of other rights’ (Owen and Macdonald, 2015: 121). The high rates of suicide and self-harm in prison are of international concern (Dear, 2006). Prison suicide reduction has been designated a priority activity by the World Health Organisation (2007) and England and Wales’ Ministry of Justice (2016). generating very significant harm and costs (Roulston et al., 2021; Author, 2021). Peer support is part of the (international) response to suicidal prisoners, but too little is known about the experience of these interventions.

For data storage and analysis purposes the transcript has been carefully anonymised with any potentially identifiable details removed. Within the transcript the 5 former prisoners have deliberately not been differentiated between to protect their identity. Because of the sensitivity of this research, transcripts of follow up support and analysis groups have been omitted due to the participants still being identifiable following transcript anonymisation.

Further information about the project and links to publications are available on the University of Nottingham SafeSoc project webpage

https://www.safesoc.co.uk

**Key words:**

prisoner suicide, prison listeners, prisoner mental health; prison oversight, learning, peer support, wellbeing

**Topic classification:** Law, Crime and legal systems

**Temporal coverage:** data collection period September 2020 - January 2021

**Geographical area**~~:~~ England and Wales

**Spatial Unit** – no spatial unit added

**Methodology**

*Data Collection method*

Our methods included i) focus groups (Liamputtong, 2011) and ii) collaborative autoethnography, which uses personal experiences as data and involves sharing accounts to support deeper analysis of sociocultural experiences (Gant et al., 2019). Our initial focus group in September 2020 was attended by all 8 authors, via the Microsoft Teams online platform.

After this focus group, all authors were invited to write reflections. One month later, we discussed these together. Four hour-long online meetings took place between October 2020 and January 2021, to clarify themes as a group and acknowledge distress. This data is excluded from this set to protect anonymity.

Within this project, n=5 former prisoners and 3 academics participated in a focus group exploring peer led suicide prevention work. Our research question came from a former prisoner co-author, who felt that too little criminological literature represented the realities of people’s lived experiences. The former prisoner co-author theorised that writing co-produced by people with experience of prison could lead to new forms of knowledge and suggested a study bringing together academics and prisoners to explore the lived experience of prison peer supporters. The academics suggested ‘participatory action research’ (PAR) methodology, which assumes that people impacted by a topic should be co-researchers (Valenzuela, 2016: 149).

The primary focus group (this data set) was held online via MS teams. The lead researcher prompted discussion with an open question, asking how former prisoner authors learned they could volunteer in suicide prevention and what motivated them to take part. The ensuing 100-minute discussion was ‘unstructured’, to centre those most impacted.

The sample was purposive, as appropriate for our exploratory analysis, however the sample is not representative of all Prison peer supporters in England and Wales.

*Observation unit*

‘individual’

*Kind of Data*

‘text’ (as the interview audio recordings were transcribed into text documents)

*Data sourcing, processing and preparation*

The focus group transcript has been edited by the research team to protect confidentiality. Personal information has been anonymised and where necessary omitted due to identifiable data e.g. previous job roles, names, individual’s offence or sentence details, geographical location; specific details regarding individual HMP establishments. The transcript has been carefully anonymised through a three stage anonymisation process to remove any identifiable details.

Three stage anonymisation process involving a three-person team: first person conducted full initial anonymisation, second person conducted anonymisation scan, third person conducted a dip-check of 10% of total anonymised interview transcripts.

*Type of Data*

‘qualitative and mixed methods’

**Related resources:** [GtR (ukri.org)](https://gtr.ukri.org/projects?ref=MR/T019085/1)