PhD Former Prisoner Topic Guide

Before interview starts ask if they have seen the information sheet and whether they have had a chance to read it. Go over key content including limits of confidentiality. Ask the participant if they have any questions.

***Participants Background:*** *Short/simple questions that will help with the analyses.*

Tell me about yourself:

* How old are you?
* How long did you serve?
* Where did you serve?
* Have you been in any other prison?
* Was it your first time inside?
* Country of Origin

***Prison Life****: Aim is to ease the participant into the interview as well as getting a general view of the person’s prison experience.*

* Thinking about your time in [specified prison] can you tell me what a typical day was like for you?

Probe:

* *Programmes*
* *Gym/exercise*
* *Education*
* *Work*
* *Peers*
* *Covid-19*
* *Visits*
* *Support*

***Prison Environment:*** *Aim is to get an understanding of what their prison is like.*

* *What were the conditions like in prison?*

*Probe:*

* *Old or new?*
* *Walls*
* *Gates*
* *Cells*
* *Overcrowding*
* *Good places and bad places*
* *Greenspace/nature*
* *Do you think the conditions impacted your experience in anyway?*

*Probe:*

* *How do prisoners respond to poor conditions?*
* *Do poor conditions lead to some prisoners acting violently in your opinion?*

***Prison Goals:*** *Aim is to find out whether the participant feels as though they were being impeded from achieving their goals/needs. If they had any goals.*

* Do you think there is enough to do in prison?

Probe:

* *What did you enjoy doing in prison?*
* *What did you dislike? And why?*
* *What does the prison need to improve upon when it comes to activities/programmes?*
* *Do you think that a lack of activities leads to misbehaviour?*
* Did you have any set personal goals that you would like to achieve whilst in prison? (Or a possible rephrasing: Is there anything about your life/situation that you would like to improve? That you can possibly improve?’).

Probe:

* *Why had you set those goals?*
* *Did you believe there is anything stopping you from achieving those goals?*

***Prison Safety:*** *Aim is to find out whether the participant considers the prison to be a safe environment.*

* Did you feel safe inside prison?

*Probe:*

* *Did you think other prisoners feel safe?*
* *What do you think makes prison an unsafe place for some prisoners?*
* *Are there areas inside the prison that feel safe?*
* *Which areas feel the least safe? Why?*
* *In what ways does the prison try to keep people safe?*
* *Is the prison doing enough to make prisoners feel safe?*
* *What types of violence were most common in your experience? Which types of violence do you think is most harmful?*
* *Do fights happen often in prison?*
* *What causes fights/violence?*
* *Where do acts of violence most often take place?*
* *How do prisoners avoid getting into violence in prison?*
* *What types of people are committing the violent acts in prison?*
* *Is gang related violence a problem in prison?*
* *Do prisoners fear violence in prison?*

***Prison Strain and Coping:*** *Aim is to see what parts of prison life is stressful and causes a negative emotional reaction inside prisoners. And what ways they cope with that stress?*

* What parts of prison life made you feel angry or stressed?

*Probe:*

* *Did you get along with other prisoners?*
* *What type of prisoners do you get along with?*
* *Why did you not get along with some prisoners?*
* *What did you find difficult about prison life?*
* *How would you cope from heated confrontations with other prisoners or staff members?*
* *Did you find others being upset or stressed upsetting?*
* In times where you felt stressed or frustrated inside prison how would you deal with that?

*Probe:*

* *Do you deal with stress well?*
* *What makes you feel less stressed/angry?*
* *Are there people that you were able to confide in?*
* *Did you feel like you could seek help with prison staff if things are not going well?*
* *What ways can the prison service help prisoners deal with stress and anger?*
* *Is mental health a concern in prison?*

*Probe:*

* *Is it treated properly by staff members?*
* *Do you think violence in prison is linked to poor mental health? Can you think of examples?*

***Life before prison:*** *Aim is to find out how a prisoner’s life before prison has potentially affected their experiences in prison. In other words, how their values and experiences have been imported into the prison environment.*

* Before you went to prison what did you like doing?

*Probe:*

* *Work*
* *Friends*
* *Activities*
* What parts of life did you find difficult?

*Probe:*

* *How did you deal with those difficulties?*
* *Did you have any support?*
* *Has any of this affected your life in prison?*

***Prisoners and Prison staff:*** *Aim is to get a sense of how prisoners view their relationships with other staff members. And what ways can these relationships be improved.*

* Do you consider prison officer treatment of prisoners to be fair?

Probe:

* Can you think of any examples of fair treatment?
* Can you think of any examples of unfair treatment?
* Do officers respond to confrontations between prisoners fairly?
* How well did the key worker scheme work for you?
* In what ways can prison officers improve their treatment of prisoners?
* Are there types of staff members that you found more approachable than others? Why is that?

***Prison Incentives:*** *Aim is to find out whether prisoners view incentives positively and does it contribute to good behaviour.*

* Do you think that the incentives offered to prisoners are helpful?

Probe:

* Which incentives did you find important?
* Do you think incentives help improve prisoner behaviour? What do you think is better at improving behaviour?
* Do incentives cause problems?
* Can you think of any examples?

***Life after Prison:*** *Aim is to find out what the prisoner feels about life after prison. And how prison has prepared them for that transition into the community.*

* Did you feel ready to be released?

Probe:

* Is there anything about leaving prison that worried you? Or still worries you?
* What kinds of things had you done in prison that have helped you?
* Do you feel that the prison service had done enough in preparing you for release? Do you think they could have done more?

***Final Questioning:*** *Consider everything that has been said and check back to see if there are any questions that have not been answered. Furthermore, ask if the participants have any concerns or questions of their own.*