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SAFESOC PROJECT NEWSLETTER 1: 10th December 2020

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[SAFESOC](#) launched on 3rd November 2020 through an innovative, cross-sectoral webinar [Reducing Deaths in Prison: learning from lived experience?](#) The webinar was jointly hosted by the University of Nottingham, Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO), Prison Reform Trust and Revolving Doors Agency. Since the project launched, the [SAFESOC research team](#) have been very busy working, focussed on our first research aim - to theorise the (potential) participatory roles of prisoners and the voluntary sector in prison regulation.

SAFESOC

The £1.1m UKRI funded [SAFESOC](#) research project aims to reconceptualise prison regulation for safer societies. This difficult multidisciplinary challenge demands academic innovation. Implementation requires sustained collaboration with local and (trans)national practitioners from different sectors (e.g. public, voluntary), regulators, policymakers, and prisoners. Based at the [University of Nottingham](#), SAFESOC is generously funded through Dr Philippa Tomczak's prestigious [UKRI Future Leaders Fellowship](#), and sits within the '[Prisons, Health and Societies](#)' Research Group. This study runs from 2020-2027.

CURRENT WORK

[Dr Philippa Tomczak](#) has been liaising closely with Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) staff, primarily the Ombudsman [Sue McAllister CB](#), to pilot changes to PPO [Fatal Incident Investigation report](#) structure and recommendations based on a revised theory of change. This project aims to improve prison safety and prevent deaths in prisons for the benefit of prisoners, prisoners' families, prison staff and societies outside. It is hoped that this pilot will ultimately inform prison oversight methodologies around the world.

Philippa has also been finalising her forthcoming article in *Theoretical Criminology*, entitled 'Reconceptualising prison regulation: voluntary organisations and bereaved families as regulators', and proudly managing both her new [UKRI team](#) and new '[Prisons, Health and Societies](#)' Research Group. Over the past six weeks, she joined the British Journal of Criminology [Editorial Board](#), contributed to the [PRILA conference](#) hosted by Trinity College Dublin in November and contributed to the inaugural University of Nottingham [Human Rights Law Centre/ Criminal Justice Research Centre](#) Research Conversation in December. At the latter, Philippa spoke about 'Prisoner Death Investigations', benefitting greatly from expert responses provided by [Prof Dirk van Zyl Smit](#) and [Dr Roisin Mulgrew](#). Two associated journal articles are under review.

[Dr Gill Buck](#) has been scrutinising independent inquiries (primarily the [Woolf Report](#), 1991) to understand the role and implications of 'official' inquiries, examining both the substance of Woolf's recommendations and their translation into policy and practice. Gill has been exploring the utility of actor network theory and

the associated four phase process of translation to examine the role of independent inquiries in informing rates and conditions of imprisonment. She has also been exploring different epistemologies of imprisonment through an innovative partnership writing with former prisoners.

[Dr Rebecca Banwell-Moore](#) has been analysing internal and external prison complaints processes to evaluate the (potential) participatory roles that the complaints process (could) provide prisoners, and to explore barriers to prisoner complaints. This includes an in-depth evaluation of statutory and voluntary sector avenues to raise complaint. Gill and Rebecca are now drafting a journal article theorising prisoner voice, action and participation in prison regulation. We were delighted to welcome Rebecca to the team following a competitive recruitment process.

[Sara Hyde](#) is conducting a literature review to support her PhD on the impact of suicide and self-harm on healthcare staff in prisons, with a particular focus on burnout literature and consideration of contemporary conditions of incarceration. She is supervised by [Dr Philippa Tomczak](#), [Dr Melanie Jordan](#) and [Professor Annie Bartlett](#). Sara is also writing up PPO staff members' experiences of being involved in fatal incident investigations.

Funded by [Dr Philippa Tomczak](#)'s Nottingham Research Fellowship:

[Kaitlyn Quinn](#) has had her article 'Practitioner Niches in the (Penal) Voluntary sector: Perspectives from Management and the Frontlines' accepted for publication in *Voluntas* (coauthored with Dr Philippa Tomczak). Kaitlyn is currently working on another article using symbolic interactionism to inform analysis of emotion, action and power in the penal voluntary sector (in collaboration with Dr Philippa Tomczak and Dr Gill Buck).

[Dr Cathie Traynor](#) is working on a theoretical article exploring actor network theory and assemblages in regulation and governance scholarship, making particular reference to the 18 prisoner deaths at HMP Woodhill between 2013 and 2016.

EVENTS

The team have benefitted from attending multiple events and note their appreciation for the organisers and participants involved, including:

- Families Outside (Scotland) [Health, Human Rights and Hope](#)

- Trinity College Dublin (Ireland) [Prisons: The Rule of Law, Accountability and Rights: Exploring Prison Oversight](#)
- Lyceum Theatre Edinburgh (Scotland) [Lament for Sheku Bayoh](#) (further details below)

On 20th November 2020 the team attended a live online performance of Hannah Lavery's *Lament for Sheku Bayoh*, from the National Theatre of Scotland. Sheku died after being restrained by police in Kirkcaldy, Fife, in May 2015. The Scottish government has set up a [statutory public inquiry](#). The *Lament* reconstituted verbatim media quotes about the event, in the form of spoken poetry. Impassioned performances by three female performers and haunting onstage music from Beldina Odenyo located Sheku's death within a broader context of belonging, racism and injustice. These themes are of crucial importance to anyone interested in custodial environments, safety, and state regulation.

The whole team is very grateful for the administrative support provided by Laura Pecorone and the administrative team in [Sociology and Social Policy](#) during the project launch.

JOIN OUR TEAM

Philippa particularly welcomes inquiries from prospective collaborators, postdoctoral researchers, PhD students and voluntary organisations seeking to analyse the following areas: death in criminal justice detention; (prisoner) death investigations; [the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman](#); Coroner [Prevention of Future Death reports](#) relating to state detention; prisoner safeguarding; intersections between imprisonment, mental health detention and immigration detention; prison(er) health; prisoner healthcare; prison safety.

Overall, it has been a busy first six weeks! The team look forward to providing a further research update in the New Year. In the meantime, the SAFESOC team wish you a very happy Christmas.

To find out more or to be kept informed about the progress of this work, please email Philippa.tomczak@nottingham.ac.uk.

BACKGROUND

What is prison regulation?

Regulation includes any activity seeking to steer events in prisons. The Optional Protocol to the United Nations Convention against Torture signals the growing global significance of detention regulation. Its 91 ratifiers (including England and Wales) are bound to regularly examine detention treatment and conditions. England and Wales have an unusually extensive prison oversight apparatus which includes: local Independent Monitoring Boards (1,500 volunteers); the national Inspectorate, Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (arm's length public bodies), Equality and Human Rights Commission (public equality body) and National Audit Office (scrutineer); and international European and United Nations inspectors.

The research aims

The project aims to reconceptualise prison regulation for safer societies by including a broader range of representatives from multiple sectors – operating across stakeholder groups, from local to global scales. This will enable a step change in prison regulation and boost the potential to improve prison safety. There are three aims:

- i) to theorise the (potential) participatory roles of the prisoners and the voluntary sector in prison regulation
- ii) to appraise the (normative) relationships between multisectoral regulators from local to (trans)national
- iii) to co-produce (with multisectoral regulators), pilot, document and disseminate models of participatory, effective and efficient prison regulation in England and Wales (and then beyond)

Why conduct this research?

Prisons are enduringly problematic, but effective regulation could save lives and tackle the [£18 billion annual cost of criminal reoffending](#) in England and Wales. The cycle of crime and prison creates new victims every day, but higher quality of prison life correlates with lower reoffending rates. This research is of great importance as more than 10.74 million people are imprisoned globally and (at the time of writing) 78,804 people are imprisoned in England and Wales. In England and Wales, [prisons are now less safe than at any point in recorded history – with self-inflicted deaths, homicides and assaults significantly elevated](#). These conditions affect a significant number of staff, prisoners and prisoners (bereaved) families. Deteriorating prison

safety poses a major moral, social, economic and public health threat: the consequences of unsafe prisons are absorbed by our societies.

Despite the extensive body of prison regulation in England and Wales, which has increased since 1999, prison safety has declined. Regulation has the potential to reduce deaths, prisoner and staff distress and reoffending but this potential goes unrealised. The resources and efforts so invested make limited impact. Regulators produce extensive reports, but largely operate in silos and their top down recommendations often struggle to create change on prison landings.



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