

SAFESOC NEWSLETTER - SPECIAL ROUND UP

March 2024



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 2020-2024.

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Summary of key achievements

- **Engagement, data collection** and dissemination with the [Prisons and Probation Ombudsman](#) (PPO)
- **14 journal articles [published so far](#)** plus more under review and in train

- [Thematic reports](#) - 'Improving prisoner death investigations and promoting change in prisons: A findings and recommendations report' (February 2023), 'Investigating deaths in prison, A guide to a human rights based approach' (September 2023), 'Deaths in prison, examining causes, responses and prevention of deaths in prison worldwide' (December 2022), 'The wide-ranging harms of prison suicide (and investigations) across multisectoral stakeholders (October 2022), 'Prisoner death investigations: improving safety in prisons and societies? Summary of findings (October 2021)
- 'Improving death investigations to promote safety, Case study: Prisoner deaths [policy brief](#)', September 2023 - draws on research and offers recommendations to investigative bodies and policymakers for improving prisoner death investigations and promoting change.
- 'Reducing deaths in prisons' ([November 2020](#)) and 'Prisoner Death Investigations: Improving Safety in Prisons and Societies?' ([November 2021](#)) **webinars** - delivering initial PPO findings
- 'Woodhill' - **Film** commissioned for 2021 webinar, produced by LUNG Theatre, the product of the creative strategy built into the project
- 'Death in Prison' [Conference](#), Oxford, November 2022
- Policy brief presented at the [House of Lords](#): 'Improving prisoner death investigations and promoting prison safety' event, October 2023
- **United Nations** 'Death in Prisons' [thematic report](#). Our output Tomczak, P., & Mulgrew, R. (2023). Making prisoner deaths visible: Towards a new epistemological approach. *Incarceration, 4* was explicitly incorporated into Section D of the first United Nations report emphasising the number of prisoners who die globally from unknown causes.

Spotlight - Dr Gill Buck's highlights



What was your personal original goal or understanding of what your contribution would be?

I had been working on lived experience involvement in criminal justice (i.e., how people draw on experiences of criminalisation to design, deliver and influence criminal justice practice). I was originally excited by the opportunity to examine ways that prisoners, former prisoners and their families regulate – or could regulate – prisons.

What were the challenges involved?

A huge challenge was the Covid pandemic. We had originally planned lots of in person fieldwork including drama-based ethnography, but this became unsafe as lockdown happened. In response, we rapidly redesigned fieldwork and arts practices to include online focus groups, collaborative authorship and a verbatim film, which was screened online (and in person once restrictions were lifted). We have supplemented this collaborative work with desk-based documentary research and critical co-reflections with lived experience partners.

What was your personal highlight?

I loved working with the experts by experience. First as critical co-authors reflecting on [peer-led suicide prevention in prisons](#), then as film and theatre co-creators, who took important messages about prison suicide to a broader audience, including parliamentary decision makers.

What have you learned?

I have learned the value of documentary research, for example, how the [successes and failures](#) of regulatory efforts can often be found in historical documents, and perhaps as criminologists (and social workers) we too often overlook these treasures. I have also learned that professionals in other disciplines (e.g., the arts) have a range of skills and techniques that we can learn as social scientists to enhance our own ethical and engagement practices.

What are your feelings about the project coming to an end?

I am really sad. I have loved working with the team and having protected time to focus on and analyse the potential of participation. I am also grateful to have had this opportunity and am motivated to continue with participatory forms of research.

'Improving prisoner death investigations and promoting prison safety' event, October 2023



The [Improving prisoner death investigations and promoting prison safety](#) event was hosted at the House of Lords by Professor Philippa Tomczak and the University of Nottingham SAFESOC team, on the 24th October 2023. The event showcased a verbatim film documenting the lived experience of a family bereaved by prison suicide and facilitated reflections and provocations from the Woodhill Families' Group – a collective of families who have lost loved ones in prison. Drawing on research by Professor Philippa Tomczak into prison death investigations, the event also launched a short policy brief to inform prison regulators and policymakers. The event was attended by over 70 representatives including parliamentarians, policymakers, the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman, Inspectors and Coroners, prison staff, health and social care staff, voluntary organisations, academics and people who have been personally impacted by deaths in prison.

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; intersections between imprisonment, mental health detention and immigration detention; prison(er) health; prisoner healthcare; prison safety.

Contact Us

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