

R072: An examination of the health, mental health and post-release mortality risk of prisoners in Northern Ireland – QUB

The health of prisoners, particularly their mental health (and including substance abuse problems), is a major global public health concern. More than 30 million people pass through prisons and various post-release arrangements across the world every year. The majority of prisoners have pre-existing vulnerabilities and disadvantaged circumstances and the experience of prison tends to impact negatively on their mental health. According to the UK Public Accounts Committee Inquiry into Mental Health in Prisons, there is an urgent need to identify and assess mental health need and provide appropriate services and supports. Furthermore, there are particularly sensitive periods of vulnerability such as the transition into, and out of, prison.

The exponential rise in drug related deaths (DRD) is a significant United Kingdom public health issue, with a 5-fold increase in Northern Ireland (NI) in the last decade, especially in males aged 25-44 years, and with most DRD involving two or more substances. Prisoners often have a mix of health and care needs, and substance use disorders are common. Preventing DRD amongst the prison population is a major concern for the criminal justice system and public health.

The project aims are:

- i) to examine health and mental health in prison
- ii) to quantify all-cause and DRD mortality risk post-release from prison
- iii) to characterise those most at risk
- iv) to determine if this is moderated by or specific to those with mental health problems.

The results of the study will improve understanding about the health, mental health, and service use and mortality risk of prisoners during the vulnerable period immediately following post-release. In particular, the results of the study will address the limited understanding about the rising trend in drug related deaths. This study may also help to inform policy and practice guidance that will contribute towards the goal, stipulated by the criminal justice system and public health, of preventing drug-related deaths in the prisoners and former prisoners.