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Teenager Jailed For 18 Months After Fight Still In Prison 18 Years Later

Amy-Clare Martin, Independent: A desperate mother has spoken of her anguish after her teenage son was jailed for 18 months but is still trapped in prison 18 years later under a cruel indefinite jail term. Luke Ings was handed a controversial imprisonment for public protection (IPP) sentence for robbery and a fight in McDonalds aged just 17. The jail terms were scrapped in 2012 amid human rights concerns, but not retrospectively – leaving almost 3,000 people languishing in prison with no release date. His devastated mother Samantha, 57, said Luke, now 36, is trapped with "monsters" inside maximum security HMP Wakefield, which is home to some of Britain's most serious criminals, having spent his entire adult life inside. She fears unless the government takes urgent action he will not survive amid soaring rates of suicide and self-harm among IPP prisoners.

IOPC to Re-investigate Death of Lewis Skelton After Family Judicial Review

Doughty Street Chambers: The Independent Office for Police Conduct ("IOPC") announced that it is to re-investigate the police shooting of Lewis Skelton. This follows nearly eight years of campaigning by his family for accountability for his death. Lewis died on 29 November 2016 after he was shot twice in the back by an armed officer known as B50. In 2017, the Independent Police Complaints Commission ("IPCC") concluded there was no indication of any criminal offence or any behaviour requiring disciplinary procedures. Lewis had a long history of mental health problems and had been spotted on the streets of Hull carrying a small hand axe. Officers attending were instructed that he had not threatened anyone. After he was tasered 4 times; B50 fired the lethal shots.

On 15 October 2021, an inquest jury concluded Lewis had been unlawfully killed. B50 then sought to challenge that conclusion in the Divisional Court, unsuccessfully. Lord Justice Stuart-Smith and Mr Justice Fordham confirmed in January 2023 that there was sufficient evidence on which the jury could reach that conclusion. The IOPC was asked by the Skelton family to re-investigate the matter. Despite concluding that there were flaws in the original IPCC investigation, in November 2022, the IOPC went on to determine that there was no compelling reason to re-investigate (pursuant to s13B Police Reform Act 2002).

Earlier this year, Lewis's family successfully challenged that decision in the High Court. In April, Mrs Justice Hill said of the material flaws in the original IPCC investigation: "The effect of both the flaws was, potentially, that the investigator had been working on the basis that Mr Skelton posed a greater threat than was justified: if he was not in fact running, and had not in fact engaged in earlier threatening behaviour, it was reasonable to regard him as of less of a risk than if he had in fact done either of things" [183]. She added: "it must follow that if the flaws had not occurred, the decisions taken in the investigation might have been different." [184] (R (Glenn Skelton) v Director General of the IOPC and (1) Officer B50 and (2) The Chief Constable of Humberside Police [2024] EWHC 983 (Admin)). The IOPC accepted the decision of Mrs Justice Hill and did not pursue any appeal. Announcing the re-investigation, the IOPC Regional Director indicated that the organisation would be reviewing its re-investigations policy "to ensure it more accurately reflects the original intent behind it". She expressed an appreciation that the decision would be "concerning for many of the armed officers who put their own safety at risk to protect the public". She continued: "it benefits nobody to have key questions unanswered so long after Mr Skelton's death." The IOPC stressed that any investigation now would be independent.

Burglar Stabbed in Prison Kitchen Awarded £5m

Lewis Adams, BBC News: A burglar who suffered "life-changing" injuries after he was stabbed while working in a prison canteen has been awarded more than £5m in damages by a High Court judge. Steven Wilson, 36, was attacked by a fellow prisoner armed with a 9in knife as he carried out kitchen duties at HMP Chelmsford, in Essex, in July 2018. A risk assessment of Mr Wilson's attacker, who was serving a life sentence for murder, said it was "unknown" if he could be left unsupervised prior to the attack. He suffered lacerations to his liver and stomach, penetrating wounds to his abdomen and chest wall, and an incomplete spinal lesion during the attack.

Mr Wilson sued the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) which admitted liability over the incident but challenged the level of his claim for damages. In a ruling on Friday 20th September, Judge Melissa Clarke awarded Mr Wilson £5,404,559 in damages. "There is no doubt that Mr Wilson's life has been radically and permanently affected by the physical and psychiatric/psychological injuries caused by that terrible attack in the prison kitchen," she wrote. The judge said as a result of his injuries, Mr Wilson needed a wheelchair, a walking stick and a frame.

During a trial in April, the claimant described how he "felt very vulnerable in prison" and was fearful of his vulnerable state if attacked again. Mr Wilson, who had 31 previous convictions between 1999 and 2018, had been on remand for aggravated burglary at the time of the stabbing. He was later convicted and sentenced to nine years, discounted to six-and-a-half-years imprisonment on account of his injuries, and was released in June 2021.

'*Ready Access to Knives'* - Judge Clarke said the MoJ "very quickly accepted liability" over the attack, but disputes arose over Mr Wilson's condition, the level of treatment he would require and the impact on his future loss of earnings. The judge said a prison risk assessment about Mr Wilson's attacker showed staff were unsure if he was "sufficiently trustworthy" to be left unsupervised. Nonetheless the defendant had deployed him to work in the prison with ready access to knives," she added. Mr Wilson would "likely require 24 hours support" by the time he was 60 years old, Judge Clarke said.

War on Rodents at HMP Wandsworth Costs £100,000

Inside Time': More than £100,000 has been spent tackling rats and mice at failing Wandsworth prison – with only partial success. Following years of complaints about vermin, the Prison Service hired a pest control company to carry out a blitz in the Victorian jail. When HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) published its verdict on Wandsworth in August, it reported: "Vermin such as pigeons, rats and mice continued to be a problem at the prison. However, a recent period of intensive work with an outside pest control provider had led to some improvement. We found rodent faeces and urine across residential units, although prisoners and staff told us that sightings of rats and mice were now less common because of the prison's recent efforts." Justice Minister Nicholas Dakin told the House of Commons this month: "HMP Wandsworth pays £16,238 per annum for a contracted weekly pest control service. The cost of additional pest control work during the last 12 months totals £99,900.92. This work is being carried out as part of our wider efforts to improve living conditions at the prison, which also includes additional specialist staff, to ensure immediate action is being taken." Another watchdog, the Independent Monitoring Board (IMB), published its annual report on Wandsworth prison in August, saying that the past year "has been as bad as any in our memory". It said management of the jail was "once again restricted by staff absences and hindered by underfunding and lack of support from the prison service".

Report Highlights Need for Holistic Defence Model in the UK

Holistic defence, most common in the United States, is an integrated model of legal and social support, combining both criminal defence and a focus on the social causes of crime. The report, entitled ‘Justice+: Why England and Wales need Holistic Defence in the Criminal Justice System’, by specialist criminal defence law firm Commons, argues that it can address the crises facing the criminal justice and prisons system.

A new report advocates a ‘holistic defence’ model for the criminal justice system, arguing this would lead to less prison time, less recidivism, and cost less money. The findings of the report reveal that a holistic defence model can address a range of issues: preventing criminalisation of people experiencing a crisis, reduce incarceration costs, avoid wrongful convictions, reduce recidivism, and increase productivity and efficiency in the criminal litigation process. The report is bolstered by evidence from a pilot Crisis Navigation service, introduced in 2020 This service provided support in accessing services, advocacy for clients, writing mitigation reports, liaising with family and coordinating care, and a ‘Crisis Navigator’ who provided emotional support. The report advocates for integrating holistic advocacy into the United Kingdom criminal justice system by establishing community-based and regional legal offices to offer holistic support. These physical centres would provide legal aid and information beyond the criminal case, and address legal aid deserts by focusing on tailored regional needs and promoting collaborations between existing local services.

The Independent Criminal Legal Aid Review stated ‘In the criminal legal aid context, the availability of additional funding for the defence solicitor to engage, pre- or post-conviction, with the relevant support services, including the probation service or the local Youth Offender Team, would seem worthy of serious consideration and perhaps piloted as necessary’. Among the problems the report identified are the 75% decline in the number of not-for-profit legal advice centres between 2005 and 2015, accompanied by an 80% increase in the prison population since 1990, with high recidivism rates. It also highlights the 67% of prisoners with mental health problems, and 27% with a learning difficulty or disability.

Northern Ireland - Court Rules Legacy Act Gives Government too Much Power

What is the Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act? The act was passed by the Conservative government in September 2023 despite opposition from Labour, all Northern Ireland parties, several victims' groups and the Irish government. It created a new legacy body known ICRIR to take over all Troubles-era cases from 1 May 2024, including those on the desk of the Police Service of Northern Ireland. The act shuts down all historical inquests. The act's most controversial element, the offer of conditional immunity to suspects, has been disapplied following legal action by bereaved families. The court ruled this part of the act was incompatible with human rights' legislation and the Windsor Framework. In late July, the Labour government wrote to the Belfast courts abandoning an appeal against the striking out of the amnesty clause in the legislation.

Chris Page, BBC News: The Troubles Legacy Act gives the UK government too much veto power over the disclosure of material to a new commission which is investigating killings, senior judges in Belfast have ruled. The Northern Ireland Court of Appeal gave its judgement in a case brought by a number of bereaved relatives, who argued the commission was not sufficiently independent. The case focused on whether the legislation passed by the previous Conservative government fulfilled international human rights law. The Labour government has said it will repeal key aspects of the legislation, including a controversial measure to give a conditional amnesty to suspects who gave accurate information.

However it has said it wants to retain the Independent Commission for Reconciliation and Information Recovery (ICRIR) which was set up to take over most investigations. Several victims’ groups want the ICRIR to be scrapped. Lady Chief Justice Siobhan Keegan said the legislation gave the Northern Ireland secretary “the final say” on disclosure of sensitive state information to the ICRIR. She said this would risk undermining public confidence in the body. She was one of three judges who ruled that the disclosure arrangements were incompatible with the European Convention on Human Rights.

Let the Truth Finally Come Out' - Outside court, Martina Dillon – whose husband Seamus was shot dead in a loyalist attack at the Glengannon Hotel in Dungannon, County Tyrone, in 1997 – said the ruling marked a “brilliant day for victims”. Ms Dillon called for the chief commissioner of the ICRIR, Sir Declan Morgan, to resign. “We’re asking him to now step down and for the government to give us back our inquest and give them as soon as possible. Let the victims speak. Let us be heard. Let the truth finally come out.”

Daniel Holder, the director of Belfast-based human rights group the Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ), welcomed the ruling but stressed doubts remained about the ICRIR’s independence. “We have repeatedly raised concerns about the national security veto over information to families and that the ICRIR could not operate in a manner comparable to inquests. The Court of Appeal, also like the High Court, left open the questions about ICRIR independence to individual cases. This should not be spun or misrepresented as some sort of endorsement of ICRIR independence." Mairead Kelly, whose brother Patrick was one of eight IRA men shot dead by soldiers in Loughgall, County Armagh in 1987, said it was time for an inquest to be held into the deaths. “The ICRIR was never acceptable to our families. It’s a government initiative, it doesn’t matter what way it is dressed up."

Government Spent Record Figures Fighting Immigration Judicial Reviews

Bethanie Shoy-Bell, Justice Gap: The Conservative government has spent over £80 million fighting legal challenges against the Home Office on immigration, exceeding the total spent in 3 previous years combined. It was reported last year that the Conservative government spent £79,603,815 on legal challenges against the Home Office in 2023, surpassing the £77 million spent against the Home Office between 24 July 2019 and 21 September 2021. The expenditure resulted from the government’s pledge at the time to ‘stop’ small boats from crossing the Channel. Specific immigration-related policies, such as the implementation of the Nationality and Borders Act, the Illegal Migration Act, the Rwandan deportation scheme, and the use of airfields and barracks to accommodate asylum seekers, were key policy decisions that contributed to the increase in litigation against the Home Office.

Other litigation arose from ‘just generally bad practice in the Home Office, including the performative cruelty of a lot of its policies and conduct, and delays in decision making and poor administration’, according to Jo Wilding, an asylum barrister who lectures at the University of Sussex. Home Office spokesperson Nick Beales stated that the costs were linked to decisions made by the previous administration. A potential reason for the rise in litigation was the lack of communication between the Conservative government and professionals in the immigration and asylum sector.

Concerns raised by the sector were reportedly ignored, with Beales noting that procedures and practices ‘would be far easier, cheaper, and more efficient’ with better cooperation. However, he also suggested that the government prioritised appearing ‘tough on immigration’, regardless of the cost, explaining the increase in legal challenges and associated costs.

Barriers to Legal Representation for Immigration Detainees in UK Prisons

Bail for Immigration Detainees (BID) has published its latest Prison Legal Advice Survey, raising ongoing concerns about the lack of legal representation for individuals held under immigration powers in UK prisons. BID's report is based on surveys distributed to 110 individuals detained in 12 different prisons across the UK. Of the 21 responses received, a significant majority (85%) reported that they did not have legal representation for their immigration case, underscoring the ongoing barriers to accessing justice faced by detainees in prisons. Respondents reported difficulties in contacting solicitors and delays in accessing legal aid. Several respondents said they, or their friends and families, had unsuccessfully tried to obtain representation.

A key issue highlighted in the report is the disparity in legal support between immigration detainees held in prisons and those in Immigration Removal Centres (IRCs). While detainees in IRCs have access to free legal advice under the Detention Duty Advice (DDA) scheme, those in prisons have historically lacked equivalent access. In response to a 2021 High Court ruling, the government introduced the Telephone Legal Advice Scheme (TLAS), aimed at addressing this gap. However, BID's survey indicates that 71% of respondents had not received the 30 minutes of free legal advice promised under TLAS. BID argues that the TLAS falls short of providing adequate legal support, with individuals facing barriers and delays in getting their required PIN codes approved, obtaining updated lists of numbers to call, and getting lawyers' numbers approved.

Unlike IRC detainees, those held in prisons rarely receive in-person visits from solicitors, creating additional hurdles obtaining immigration legal advice. The report states: "In person trips are costly to the lawyers themselves, compounded by the fact LAA will not fund potential casework unless there is a 50% chance of success. As such, people held in prisons under immigration powers (and those faced with immigration matters while serving a criminal sentence) continue to be disadvantaged by the lack of potential in-person visits to discuss their immigration case." BID says the problems obtaining immigration advice are especially concerning for those who are served deportation orders during their criminal sentence, as it is imperative that potential deportation orders are accompanied by opportunities for individuals to seek advice and representation.

The report emphasises: "Delaying such access until after individuals have finished their criminal sentences and are detained under immigration powers not only often creates unnecessary distress and injustice for the individuals concerned but also leads to further delays and additional legal costs further down the line. As individuals contest their cases as deportation becomes a more distinct prospect. The failure to enable proper advice at the outset leads to requests for extensions of time, late claims, fresh claims and, applications for the revocation of deportation orders that have been served upon individuals. Additional legal arguments arise with out of time appeals and challenges to the certification of cases. All in turn compounding the distress, sense of injustice, delays and, the costs caused by the failure to provide advice at the outset when a deportation matter was initially raised."

BID campaigns for an end to immigration detention in the UK and believes detention in prison must be ended as a priority. It argues that the use of the prison estate as a component of detention effectively punishes people after they have completed their criminal sentences, solely because they are not British. According to BID, its latest report serves as further evidence as to the inappropriate use of prisons for the purpose of immigration detention. The findings highlight the urgent need for reform, as individuals detained under immigration powers continue to face significant challenges in securing the legal support necessary to navigate the complex immigration system.

BID makes several recommendations to improve detainees' access to legal advice. These include expanding the provision of legal advice in prisons to match that available in IRCs, restoring legal aid that was cut under the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012, and ensuring that detainees receive timely access to legal representation upon detention. Additionally, the report urges the government to address the delays in providing telephone legal advice and calls for greater awareness among prison staff and detainees regarding the legal processes for individuals held under immigration powers.

2,287 Fires in Prison Cells

*'Inside Time': T*he number of fires in prison cells leapt last year, raising concerns over the lack of fire safety equipment in jails. Figures from the Ministry of Justice show that there were 2,287 cell fires in 2023 in England and Wales, an increase of 62 per cent on the previous year's figure and the highest annual total since records began in 2016. Separate figures from the Home Office show that fire services attended 1,892 incidents in prisons and young offenders' units in England in 2023/24, a rise of 82 per cent on the previous year.

The fire service expressed concern that in four out of five cells to which they were called there were no sprinkler systems installed, and whilst there were only three fatalities between 2016 and 2023, there were almost 900 injuries from such fires. The findings were uncovered by researcher Rob Allen, who pointed to a Prison Service Instruction making clear to staff that "a fire occurring anywhere within custodial premises could have serious consequences in terms of life, safety, business continuity and security".

The Prison Service has embarked on a programme to increase fire detection and suppression measures in its establishments. The aim is to bring all accommodation up to modern fire safety standards by the end of 2027, a commitment made to the Crown Premises Fire Safety Inspectorate (CPFSI) which enforces the standards in government buildings. However, in a blog post, Allen casts doubt on whether, at the current rate of progress, this will be achieved – suggesting that with the prison capacity crisis adding to the problem, even 2030 may be unlikely. Bringing cells up to modern fire safety standards requires them to be taken out of use whilst the work is carried out, but the latest annual report from HM Prison and Probation Service states that "prison capacity pressures have restricted our ability to take places out of use for refurbishment and compliance works". MOJ figures for numbers of cell prison-by-prison show that in 2023, HMP Lowdham Grange suffered the most cell fires (126), followed by HMP Woodhill (101).

Blood Transfusions Administered to Jehovah's Witness Against Her Will Violation of Article 8

Chamber judgment in the case of Pindo Mulla v. Spain (application no. 15541/20) the European Court of Human Rights held, unanimously, that there had been: a violation of Article 8 (right to respect for private and family life) of the European Convention on Human Rights read in the light of Article 9 (freedom of thought, conscience and religion). The case concerned blood transfusions administered to the applicant, a Jehovah's Witness, during emergency surgery, despite her refusal to undergo a blood transfusion of any kind. The Court found in particular that the authorisation to proceed with that treatment had resulted from a decision-making process that had been affected by the omission of essential information about the documenting of Ms Pindo Mulla's wishes, which had been recorded in various forms and at various times in writing. Since neither the applicant nor anyone connected with her had been made aware of the decision taken by the duty judge authorising all treatment, it had not been possible to rectify that omission. Neither this issue nor the issue of her capacity to take a decision had been addressed in an adequate manner in the subsequent proceedings. The national system had therefore not responded adequately to her complaint that her wishes had been wrongly overruled.

Questions for Wallace Over War Crimes Bill Change That Would Have Protected SAS

Hannah O'Grady and Joel Gunter, BBC News: Former Defence Secretary Sir Ben Wallace is facing questions about a change made to a draft bill that would have protected the SAS from prosecution. At the time the changed bill was presented to Parliament, Sir Ben was already aware of war crimes allegations against the elite regiment, senior government sources told BBC Panorama. The Overseas Operations Bill had originally proposed British troops be protected from war crimes prosecutions relating to alleged offences more than 10 years ago. But under Sir Ben, the 10-year clause was halved to five years. The change had the effect of pushing war crimes allegations against the SAS outside the cut-off period for bringing a prosecution under normal circumstances. Government sources close to the bill told the BBC that Sir Ben took personal charge of its passage and no changes were made without his approval.

'Troubling' - The allegations against the SAS are now being investigated by a public inquiry chaired by Lord Justice Haddon-Cave, which was launched following a BBC Panorama investigation. Panorama revealed that an SAS squadron killed 54 people in suspicious circumstances on one six-month tour. The former Conservative Attorney General, Dominic Grieve, who expressed serious misgivings about the bill when it was introduced, told the BBC the change to the timeframe "certainly raises questions" in light of the allegations against the SAS. "If ministers knew there were potential prosecutions that were likely to arise from operations in Afghanistan, if you knew about the allegations regarding special forces during that time period, it strikes me as troubling that you would seek to make that change. The public inquiry may wish to look at this as part of their work examining the government's handling of the allegations in question," he added.

Lieutenant Colonel Nicholas Mercer, who was the army's top lawyer during the invasion of Iraq, told the BBC the change raised serious questions about the bill's intent. "Ministers appear to have known about the allegations against the SAS all along," he said. "So was this a deliberate attempt to cover up those allegations under the guise of dealing with so-called vexatious claims? It's a very serious question." In response to questions about this article, Sir Ben told the BBC it would be "wholly inappropriate and indeed disrespectful to Lord Justice Haddon-Cave to provide any comment whatsoever in respect of your questions only a day or so before I give evidence to the inquiry". The BBC asked the former defence secretary if he disputed knowing about allegations against the SAS before the bill was changed but he declined to answer our questions at this time. In a separate post on social media, he characterised our questions as "leading and inaccurate".

The Overseas Operations Bill was designed to prevent what the government has characterised as "vexatious" legal claims against troops serving abroad. But the bill drew severe criticism from both former senior members of the armed forces and human rights advocates, who said it gave soldiers effective immunity from prosecution. The original bill proposed a "triple lock" of protections after 10 years: a statutory presumption against prosecution; a requirement for prosecutors to give weight to the "exceptional demands and stresses" on service personnel operating overseas; and a requirement to obtain the consent of the attorney general for any prosecution to proceed. The only offences exempted from this triple lock were rape and sexual violence. Other alleged war crimes, including extrajudicial killings and torture, were to be afforded the presumption of these legal protections.

During the passage of the draft bill, the 10-year clause originally proposed by the Ministry of Defence was halved to five years, bringing the entire time period of the allegations against the SAS in Afghanistan under the protections offered by the bill. At the time the bill was introduced, Sir Ben was aware the Royal Military Police had already investigated several SAS squadrons for murder on night raids in Afghanistan – scrutinising more than 60 deaths in total. Sir Ben had also been briefed by then-defence minister Johnny Mercer about serious concerns around the adequacy of the RMP investigations, which had resulted in no prosecutions. The Ministry of Defence was also being sued at the High Court at the time for an alleged failure to adequately investigate the allegations against the SAS. And Mercer had informed Sir Ben that video footage of the SAS operations under scrutiny, which should have been captured by drones and stored, had apparently disappeared.

Addressing parliament during scrutiny of the bill in 2020, Stephen Morgan, then shadow defence minister, noted the change to a five-year timeframe "meant that operations in Afghanistan, which ended in 2014, fell outside the time limit unless the circumstances for prosecuting any new alleged offences were deemed exceptional. "That raises questions about the government's reasons, and about the evidence or advice that they received, for changing the deadline to five years," he said. "Five years seems to be an arbitrary figure, with no clear evidence for why that timeframe has been selected." Mercer argued in parliament that responses to a public consultation had supported a reduction of the initial 10-year timeframe. Though according to the published consultation, 90% of respondents described themselves either as serving military personnel, veterans, or a relative of either.

Tessa Gregory, a partner at the law firm Leigh Day, which represents the bereaved Afghan families at the public inquiry, told the BBC that Sir Ben was "well aware of serious concerns surrounding UK Special Forces operations" at the time the Overseas Operations Bill was introduced. Our client's judicial review was under way and [Sir Ben's] own minister was raising the alarm that something had gone gravely wrong. In such circumstances, it would be a matter of real concern for the bereaved families we represent if it was [Sir Ben] who personally decided that the presumption against criminal prosecution in the bill should apply to all offences more than five years ago, rather than the 10 years recommended by his department." The bill was voted on several times by the Conservative-controlled House of Commons but repeatedly sent back by the House of Lords over concerns from peers the UK could end up subject to intervention by the International Criminal Court, if it was seen to be unwilling to prosecute its own forces for war crimes. The bill was subsequently amended to exclude war crimes, torture and genocide, alongside rape and sexual violence, from the presumption against prosecution. Sir Ben was still secretary of state for defence when it passed into law in April 2021.

Prison isn't Working for Women - Labour Unveils Plans for Alternatives

Shabana Mahmood, the justice secretary, has declared that "prison isn't working" for women as she announced a package of measures to reduce the number of females in the prison estate. Plans to treat more women in the community, resolve cases involving women before they get to court and drive down the number of young women self-harming will be drawn up by a new body of experts, the justice secretary said in a conference speech on Tuesday.Alluding to the phrase popularised by the former Tory home secretary Michael Howard, who said in 1993 that "prison works", Mahmood said the system had failed female offenders and pledged to cut the number of women's jails.

She added: "For women, prison isn't working. Rather than encouraging rehabilitation, prison forces women into a life of crime. After leaving a short custodial sentence, a woman is significantly more likely to commit a further crime than one given a non-custodial sentence. The shameful fact is we have known this for two decades. In 2007, Baroness Jean Corston – another pioneering

Labour woman – undertook a landmark review. It was clear then, and it is clear now, that if we change how we treat women in prison we cut crime, keep families together, and end the harm that passes from one generation to the next. For that reason, I am today announcing that this government will launch a new body – the Women's Justice Board. Its goal will be clear: to reduce the number of women going to prison, with the ultimate ambition of having fewer women's prisons."

She pointed to evidence that about two-thirds of women are imprisoned for non-violent offences and that most (55%) are victims of domestic abuse. She described women's prisons as "desperate places" that are "hurting mothers and breaking homes" and "forcing women into a life of crime" rather than rehabilitating them. The board will publish a new three-pronged strategy in the spring, she said. "Firstly, how we intervene earlier, looking at how to resolve cases before they go to court. Secondly, how we make community support – such as residential women's centres – a viable alternative to prison. And, thirdly, how we address the acute challenge of young women in custody, who are less than a 10th of the population, but who account for over a third of all self-harm," she said.

Earlier on Tuesday 24th September, , the prisons minister, James Timpson, told delegates at a fringe meeting that he sees "lots of very ill women" when he visits prisons and will drive down the numbers incarcerated. We need to decide as a society what is the best way to help these women. And when I was younger, my parents were foster parents and my mum specialised in looking after the babies of women who were inside the prison. So we spent hours and hours waiting outside of the prison while my mum went in. And even then, it felt wrong, and it feels wrong now," he said.Community orders should be "trusted more by the courts" as an alternative to jail, Lord Timpson suggested, signalling a potential change in approach to dealing with lower-level crimes. The government has ordered a sentencing review, which is expected to begin this autumn and come forward with proposals in the spring. Mahmood was forced to announce an early release scheme for prisoners just days after taking office following warnings that the prison system was at breaking point.

Prison Reform Trust: Justice Secretary Makes Historic Commitment on Women's Justice

Commenting on the justice secretary's speech at Labour party conference, Pia Sinha, chief executive of the Prison Reform Trust, said: "The justice secretary's commitment to establish a women's justice board tasked with the aim of reducing the number of women in prison represents a historic moment for women's justice reform. For more than 25 years, PRT has advocated for separate oversight of women's justice and to reduce the numbers of women in prison. These recommendations are based on the incontrovertible evidence of the distinct needs of women, which are ill-served in a justice system where men make up 96% of the total prison population. The majority of women sent to prison are convicted of non-violent offences and receive short sentences of six months or less. Rates of self-harm in women's prisons are more than eight times higher than in the male estate. Many women are primary carers for children, which means prison can have a devastating impact on those left behind on the outside as well as on the women themselves. Mental ill health, trauma and drug addiction are often at the root of women's offending. In order to be effective, a women's justice board must provide a framework for better use of liaison and diversion services and community alternatives for women. This will ensure women get the treatment and support they need to address the underlying issues that often drive their offending. After decades of advocacy on this issue by us and others, we are delighted by today's announcement and look forward to working with the government to turn the promise of a fair and effective justice system for women into a reality."

In Criminal Justice People/Organisations Take Clear Positions Strongly Made.

Clarity is often vital. We expect the police to treat suspects with dignity and respect. We take for granted that defendants should receive good quality legal representation and a fair trial. We take it as read that prisoners should be held in decent conditions, and not be subjected to unduly punitive or long sentences. That in all three of these examples the justice system often falls short of our expectations is an argument for being that much more insistent and vocal about their importance, rather than accepting their unattainability. Criminal justice policy development, and the ideas that feed it, is, though, an inexact science. Some of the best ideas come from unusual places, and can easily be dismissed in the rush to certainty. At the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies we prize intellectual openness and are comfortable with the uncertainty that comes from not always having the answer. Intellectual curiosity, an openness to new ideas, even if they are unfinished, is part of the antidote to the current stuckness of criminal justice policy-making.

Government Pledges to Introduce 'Hillsborough Law'

Bethanie Shoy-Bell, Justice Gap: The government has pledged to introduce a new 'Hillsborough Law' by the anniversary of the disaster in April 2025. This announcement follows the report by the Joint Committee on Human Rights earlier this year, which supported the implementation of a law to impose a duty of candour on public bodies to assist legal proceedings. This would be supported by legal aid for victims, and an independent Public Advocate to support them. This announcement was described as 'a huge step' by INQUEST, one of several organisations campaigning for such a law. The campaign group Hillsborough Law Now were 'heartened' by the commitment to deliver accountability across all public bodies'.

INQUEST have criticised the present system stating there is an 'institutional defensiveness from public authorities and private corporations' regarding the impact of their actions on victims. They argue that the lack of accountability creates a risk of these actions being repeated. Furthermore, INQUEST highlights flaws in the existing law, noting that while there is a common law duty, it is not clearly defined to require state bodies to be transparent about events involving public servants. These circumstances have caused significant emotional and physical distress for bereaved families who have had to engage in various lengthy litigation, investigations, and inquiry processes. The law is inspired by the deaths of 97 football fans at Hillsborough. In the aftermath, police, politicians and the media falsely blamed football fans for the disaster. Only after intense scrutiny, including private prosecutions and an independent panel report, was the falsity of that narrative shown.

Inmates Could do Classes to Cut Prison Time Under Texas-Style Reforms

Texas-style prison reforms that would allow inmates in England and Wales to reduce their sentences by earning points through participation in courses are being considered by ministers, it has been reported. Labour is drawing up plans to replicate the model used in the US state where prisoners can cut their jail time by taking part in classes aimed at tackling the root causes of offending such as drug use, according to the Times. The courses will include education and vocational workshops, and drug or behavioural rehabilitation sessions. The reforms have contributed to the prison population in Texas falling by 15% from 152,661 in 2007, when the scheme was first introduced, to 129,653 last year. Reoffending rates over the same period have fallen by about 30%. Shabana Mahmood, the justice secretary, is expected to visit the US later this year to look into the prospect of a similar scheme being adopted in England and Wales to reduce the swelling prison population and rate of reoffending.

New Campaign: Lea Rose Cheng

On 14th March 2022, 25-year-old, Lea Rose Cheng met her grandfather in the Old Swan area of Liverpool for a drink. After being suddenly and violently sick, she began to walk unsteadily towards home. On CCTV, an older man (Dylan Bacon), who had been in the pub and was known to Lea Rose, can be seen following her several steps behind. She is seen entering a street near her house. She should have emerged just minutes later but instead it is 90 minutes until she is again seen on CCTV. No witnesses have come forward. Where she went and what happened to her is unknown. She then appears dishevelled, again with Bacon behind her. They go up to her flat. A couple of hours later Bacon emerges from the building with a fatal stab wound. Lea Rose is subsequently arrested, charged, and found guilty of murder. On 25th October, the Court of Appeal will decide whether her conviction was safe.

Why Does Social Research Matter

Katelyn Owens: Social Research – as it is applied in fields like criminology, human geography and sociology – plays a crucial role in examining the social world. The social world is made up of complex relationships between people and things. Broadly speaking, social research aims to understand human behaviour and its interactions with the world around us. It investigates the relationship between individuals and groups, and social phenomena like power, poverty and politics (amongst others). Just as individuals may influence social practices, social practices may influence individuals. The use of CCTV is a prime example. Just as surveillance mechanisms may be implemented in response to criminal activities, it may also be implemented in order to deter criminal activities. With that said, certain people and groups are more subject to surveillance than others, as well as other socio-legal mechanisms of control (e.g. policing, prison sentences, etc). It's important that social research sheds light on these inequalities in order to dismantle stereotypes surrounding membership to stigmatised and/or marginalised groups.

Giving a Voice to Those at the Margins - Creating space for unheard voices can be done through qualitative research – or, non-numerical studies about the social world – particularly well. While quantitative research is also important, qualitative research sheds light on that which cannot be quantified. For instance, a qualitative study may use in-depth interviews about people's experiences of prison overcrowding, whereas a quantitative study may analyse the numbers associated with prison overcrowding.

Developing qualitative techniques, such as visual and sensory methods, are becoming more and more practiced in social research. While visual methods may include the use of photography or illustrations, sensory methods include mobile interviewing, or interviewing 'on the move' in order to capture people's experiences of particular areas and how they change. The rise of creative research techniques is largely thanks to the recognition that there are limitations around what can be spoken or written. Body language, for example, is another means of communication. Just as the body language of a researcher may influence interview outcomes, the body language of a participant can speak volumes. That said, one of the main challenges faced by social researchers is accurately conveying the message their participants want to get across. Researcher interpretation dominates qualitative research, meaning researchers attempt to make sense of participants' understandings of their own social worlds. So who is the knowledgeable subject? The researcher or the individual with lived experience?

Making a Difference - Both researchers and participants carry biases. Thus, knowledge that

is discovered and shared needs to be as objective as possible in order to make a difference. In particular, researchers must be transparent and reflexive in their studies. This means researchers should be honest about their intentions and reflect on the role that their own backgrounds play in the production of knowledge. Even when this is accomplished, research makes the biggest difference when it is widely accessible to different groups. All too often, new knowledge is circulated between academics and (sometimes) policy makers without reaching a wider audience. Only when research is ethical, reflexive, and more widely accessible to different populations can it begin to make the difference it strives to. On its own, filling gaps in existing knowledge and inspiring future research is not enough, to improve social conditions and implement change.

'Unsustainable Fees' 'Burnt Out' Lawyers: Remote Advice No Solution for Legal Aid Deserts

Jon Robins, Justice Gap: Charities are warning against the use of 'remote' legal advice for refugees and people seeking asylum as a response to 'legal aid deserts' and the crisis in legal aid exacerbated by 'unsustainable fees' and 'burnt out' lawyers. A new report by the Public Law Project (PLP) argues that the Government has been rolling out remote – as opposed to face to face legal advice – without sufficient research or any best practice guidelines.

Between 2012 and 2022, the number of legal aid firms and advice agencies collapsed by 40% as a result of the 2013 legal LASPO (Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act) cuts, resulting in more people being forced to travel further to receive publicly funded legal help with immigration advice. According to the new study from PLP, with A & M Consultancy, Helen Bamber Foundation and Asylum Aid, the 'poor geographical spread' of in-person advice, particularly in dispersal areas, has left two-thirds of the population (63%) without access to a lawyer. 'Those that do live near one of the remaining providers face significant barriers in accessing legally aided advice even then, as a result of saturated provider capacity precipitated by years of unsustainable legal aid fees, heavy administrative burdens and burnt-out practitioners,' the report says. 'Research has shown that the provision of immigration and asylum advice in England and Wales is 'not even adequate for first-time adult asylum applications, with a deficit of at least 6,000 for asylum applications and appeals'.' In the face of the 'crisis in access to justice', both providers and the Legal Aid Agency have explored the use of remote advice to bring together providers who have capacity to take on referrals outside of their contract area with clients struggling to find a legal aid provider near them.

'While remote advice could be more convenient in some scenarios, it's not a one-size-fits-all solution to the immigration legal aid crisis. Wherever possible, refugees and people seeking asylum need to have a say in how they speak to their legal representatives,' says PLP's Dr. Jo Hynes. 'Remote advice might not be appropriate for sharing difficult or traumatic details, especially when so many people in the asylum system already feel so isolated and struggle with trusting strangers. If they're in an environment with no privacy, they might not want to share crucial information on the phone.' The research draws on interviews with people with experience of remote and in-person advice. 'I want to stress that for people who are seeking asylum and were in the mental state that I was, face to face is crucial,' one interviewee said; adding remote advice 'has a very negative impact on [the] mental health of people'. Hynes said remote advice was 'not a safe harbour in an ocean of unmet need, but one intrinsically connected to the wider systemic issues facing the legal aid sector'. According to PLP, there is 'no evidence on its impact on clients' outcomes' and 'no clear data' on what makes remote advice accessible or beneficial 'or which groups would find it completely inaccessible'.