Prisoners left 'In the dark' on indeterminate sentences, says Sainsbury Centre report

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People sentenced to imprisonment for public protection (IPP) have high rates of mental ill health and are getting inadequate help to put their lives back on track, says a major report published today by Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health.

In the Dark: the mental health implications of imprisonment for public protection finds that IPP prisoners are much more likely than other prisoners to have mental health problems. Being on IPP appears to be making this worse because of the uncertainty and hopelessness it creates.

IPP is a sentence for people whose crimes are not serious enough for life imprisonment but whom the courts think are dangerous. They cannot be released until the Parole Board thinks they are no longer dangerous. There are now 4,600 prisoners on IPP in England and Wales.

In the Dark finds that IPP prisoners with mental health problems are often unable to participate in offending behaviour programmes, without which they are unlikely to be able to show they...
are no longer dangerous. Only 31 of the 880 people who have been considered for release have actually left prison.

In the Dark also finds that prison health services are struggling to offer the help IPP prisoners need. Many IPP prisoners are distressed because they do not know how long
they will be in prison and they find it hard to maintain relationships with their families and children.

Sainsbury Centre prisons and criminal justice director Sean Duggan said: "An indeterminate prison sentence is likely to cause mental distress to anyone. But this is being made worse by the lack of accurate information prisoners and their families are getting and by delays in the provision of offending behaviour programmes."

Prison psychiatrist Dr Ian Cumming, a co-author of In the Dark, said: "Prison mental health teams have felt overwhelmed by the influx of IPP prisoners. Some IPP prisoners are concealing mental health problems in case they are barred from offending behaviour programmes."

In the Dark calls for changes both to the IPP system and to health and social services. People on IPP and their families must be given accurate information about their sentence. Prisoners with mental health problems should not be discriminated against in getting access to help to reduce the risk they may pose. And both probation and community mental health services need to be geared up to offer the support IPP prisoners will need when they are released on life licence.

Sainsbury Centre chief executive Angela Greatley said: "The number of people given IPP sentences has risen beyond what anyone expected. We are concerned that some offenders with severe mental health problems are being sentenced to IPP instead of being detained in hospital.

"Recent changes to the law should prevent people who have committed minor from being put on IPP. But we also ensure that offenders with severe
problems are not placed on IPP if they be treated in hospital. And we must people are not kept in prison beyon just because they cannot get access offending behaviour programmes or support isn’t available for them in the community.”

Imprisonment for Public Protection is a sentence for offenders in England and deemed by the courts to be dangerous. Prisoners receive a minimum prison (‘tariff’) at the end of which the Parole Board decides whether they are ready to t. Released IPP prisoners are on life lists and can be recalled to prison at any time.

Facts and figures about IPP:

- There are over 4,600 people in IPP and 150 people are now being sentenced to IPP each month. The Government says the total could reach 12,000 by 2014.
- Half of IPP prisoners have mental health problems severe enough to put them at risk of further offending.
- But only one IPP prisoner in 10 gets help from mental health services.
- One-fifth of IPP prisoners have had psychiatric treatment and 1 in 10 has been detained in hospital.
- By July 2008, only 31 of the 88 prisoners who had been considered for release had been granted it.