

Report into well-being and inclusion of former politically motivated prisoners

March 14 2011

The first major study of the wellbeing and inclusion of former politically motivated prisoners in Northern Ireland will be launched by Queen's University today (Monday 14 March).

Ageing and Social Exclusion among Former Politically Motivated Prisoners in Northern Ireland and the border region of Ireland investigated the well being and social and economic inclusion of loyalist and republican former prisoners (aged 50 and over) as older people in Northern Ireland. The report will be launched at Parliament Buildings at Stormont this afternoon.

The research was led by Ms Ruth Jamieson and Dr Peter Shirlow at Queen's School of Law, along with Dr Adrian Grounds of the Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge.

Researchers surveyed 190 former prisoners (117 republican, 26 of whom were women, and 73 loyalist), aged 50 and over, and conducted in-depth interviews with 25 of them (15 republican, three of whom were women, and 10 loyalist), in Belfast during 2008-09. The aim of the study was to investigate their wellbeing and social and economic inclusion as older people in Northern Ireland.

The study reported the following, for former politically motivated prisoners aged 50 years and over:

- Over half of those surveyed said they had been denied employment because they have a conflict-related conviction.
- One in four of the research participants were unemployed. The rate of unemployment for politically motivated former prisoners was over four times the [unemployment rate](#) for Northern Ireland at the time the research was conducted.
- Less than one third of politically motivated former prisoners in this group were in full-time paid employment.
- Politically motivated former prisoners have a far greater risk of poverty in older age than others in Northern Ireland. This is a combined effect of low pay, intermittent or insecure employment, and lack of occupational pension.
- Politically motivated former prisoners are twice as likely as others in Northern Ireland to suffer from psychological difficulties.
- Over one in three of the politically motivated former prisoners who took part in the research had been prescribed sedatives and tranquillisers. The rate of prescribed sedatives and tranquillisers for males in this group is well over four times that of their Northern Ireland age peers.
- Almost one in three of the research participants had been prescribed anti-depressants. The rate of prescribed anti-depressants for males in this group is five times that of their Northern Ireland age peers.
- Many of those who reported experiencing conflict-related relationship and psychological difficulties said they were not

getting the help they need.

- A significant number of both the men and women surveyed reported misusing alcohol (68 per cent) or being alcohol dependent (53 per cent).

The report also makes a number of recommendations, which include:

- Policy makers should explicitly recognise that older former politically motivated prisoners constitute at 'at risk' group of older people in Northern Ireland, for both social exclusion and mental ill health.
- Measures are needed to prevent employment discrimination on the basis of age and or having a conflict-related conviction.
- Dialogue should be established between the former politically motivated prisoner community and the relevant bodies taking forward the developments arising from the Bamford Review of [mental health](#) services in Northern Ireland. The aim of this dialogue should be to adopt a model of mental health care for former politically motivated prisoners similar to the Community Veterans Mental Health Service scheme established by Veterans UK and the Personnel and Veterans Agency of the Ministry of Defence, which is currently being piloted in the UK.
- Greater representation of former politically motivated prisoners as service users is needed on relevant advisory or advocacy bodies, for example, regarding [age](#) discrimination and mental health and addiction services.

Ageing and social exclusion among former politically motivated

prisoners in [Northern Ireland](#) is available online on the Changing Ageing Partnership website at www.changingageing.org/

Provided by Queen's University Belfast

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