

Seeking Feedback on Draft Surveys in relation to Interactions between Autistic people and the Criminal Justice System

Irish stakeholders in the autistic community and the criminal justice system are invited to provide feedback on draft surveys for an international study - “Autism and the Criminal Justice System: Policy Opportunities and Challenges”. The international study is being led by the Policy and Analytics Center, A.J. Drexel Autism Institute, Drexel University, Philadelphia in partnership with the Philadelphia Police Department Training and Education Services Bureau. To date, eight nations are participating in the international project. Dr. Áine Roddy, specialised in the economics of autism and project lead for the Irish phase of the study is inviting stakeholders to provide their expertise and insight on the draft surveys. The current survey drafts for (1) autistic adults (2) carers of autistic people (3) all staff working in the criminal justice system are available online and feedback can be provided by commenting on the surveys and returning them to Áine at the contact details provided below by the 31st of May 2020. Ethical approval is not required for seeking feedback on the surveys, but will be obtained by the Drexel IRB prior to the international pilot survey and final international online survey in the summer.

Background

Those on the autism spectrum are particularly vulnerable when they have contact with the criminal justice system, typically as victims or witness of abuse, as offenders or suspicious persons, or lost or missing persons. Specific measures must be taken to improve communication and to avoid misinterpreting communication impairments. Although we have seen an increase in awareness and the prevalence of autism over the last two decades, unfortunately, criminal justice policy and practice to meet the needs of this group have not consistently kept pace.

Aim of the study

To allow members of the autistic community and their parents/caregivers to describe their experiences with the criminal justice system in traffic-related matters, as lost/missing persons, and/or as victims, witnesses, and offenders in criminal matters. All members of staff working in the criminal justice system (An Garda Síochána, legal and judicial system and prison/probation services) will be asked about their experiences interacting with autistic people in the same circumstances listed. This information will allow a better understanding of what aspects of the criminal justice system are helpful in supporting those on the autism spectrum and what aspects need improvement. The goal of this project is to improve the interaction and meet the specific needs of those on the autism spectrum when they encounter police and other criminal justice system professionals. An international policy brief based on the findings from the international survey will be used to promote change.

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