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# No Problem (In) Here?: A scoping study of Catholics in Scottish Prisons

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# OVERVIEW

This report presents findings from a scoping study which explored a neglected issue within the Scottish criminal justice system: the overrepresentation of Catholics within prisons in Scotland and prison responses to this group. The Runnymede Trust (2020) reports that Catholics make up 23% of the Scottish prison population, despite comprising approximately 14% of the Scottish population (Scottish Government, 2018, cited in Runnymede Trust, 2020).

### The primary purpose of this scoping exercise was:

- **to examine a range of sources to identify what is known in relation to this issue;**
- **to consider themes previously raised in research;**
- **and to identify needed data and future lines of inquiry to develop a richer understanding.**

The scoping study involved a review of existing literature, including HM Inspectorate of Prisons Scotland reports and a small number of interviews with staff working within the prison service/estate in Scotland, in either Roman Catholic Chaplaincy or equality and diversity-related roles (conducted between May-July 2023).

## REVIEW FINDINGS:

- There is a lack of contemporary and localised academic research, and a paucity of high-quality data by which to understand the contemporary experience of Catholics in Scottish Prisons – and the Scottish Prison Service (SPS) can do more to improve data quality and monitoring;
- According to those we spoke to working within SPS/the prison estate, chaplaincy services provided prisoners with support, pastoral care, and spiritual and religious guidance, attempting to provide a service to all. Access could be affected by limited resources and competing responsibilities for chaplains and the prison;
- They noted some historical tensions between Catholics and Protestants within prisons – sometimes attributed to football or territorially based divisions – and historical practices to demarcate religious groups within the prison;
- They recognised over-representation of Catholics within deprived areas as a driver of overrepresentation within the prison estate;
- They did not express concern about institutional discrimination, although some had heard Catholic prisoners discussing this or had directly experienced/witnessed subtle comments that could be perceived as anti-Catholic. This could be seen as harmless ‘banter’ but needs to be considered in historical context;
- Tensions related to religion or race were not seen as particularly pressing issues within Scottish prisons.

# FUTURE LINES OF INQUIRY:

- Revisiting the research recommendations from the 2010 Wiltshire review;
- Research with people from an Irish Catholic background with lived experience of the Scottish criminal justice system, examining changes over time;
- Research with Catholics from other ethno-national backgrounds, whose experience is likely to be distinct in important ways;
- Scoping existing quantitative datasets that allow analysis of the impact of Catholic/Irish identity on arrest, prosecution, conviction, sentencing, progression, prisoner complaints, access to prison services, and parole/release decisions;
- Archival research and critical analysis of policy and political discourse to understand how racial and religious identifications and divisions have been constructed and practiced within the prison over different time periods;
- Work to address the data (quality) gap relating to racialised and religious groups in the criminal justice system.

Expanding the evidence base on those with a Catholic/ Irish Catholic background is an important strand of work to address wider calls to improve data, research and debate on inequalities, discrimination and racism in the Scottish justice system.

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# INTRODUCTION

**This report presents findings from a scoping study which explored the overrepresentation of Catholics within prisons in Scotland, a neglected issue within the Scottish criminal justice system.**

The Runnymede Trust (2020) reports that Catholics make up 23% of the Scottish prison population, despite comprising approximately 14% of the Scottish population (Scottish Government, 2018, cited in Runnymede Trust, 2020). Current data is unavailable due to reliability concerns; the association of some other religious affiliations with special diets means that Catholic identity is likely under-represented in data (Justice Analytical Services, private communication, 2023).

This over-representation can be partly explained by historically higher levels of poverty and deprivation. The only major contemporary analysis of Catholic overrepresentation in Scottish prisons was a study by Wiltshire, commissioned by the Scottish Parliament following a public petition. Wiltshire (2010: 4) concluded that, although discriminatory attitudes and practices may be present, 'It seems clear that Catholics are disproportionately represented in Scottish jails because of the compelling relationship between deprivation and imprisonment'. While true, we felt that a fuller understanding is required, particularly given historical racialisation and discrimination experienced by this group. Wiltshire also made a number of recommendations for further research but, as far as we can determine, these have not been followed up. In this vein, we conducted a review of the existing evidence, held a roundtable with relevant stakeholders, and conducted a small number of interviews to establish the state of knowledge in this area. The following sections of the report present findings from this and we conclude by suggesting a future research agenda.

# CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

**Though there has been a significant decline in structural inequalities and a shift in social relations between the Catholic minority and Protestant majority (Devine and Rosie, 2020), Scottish Catholics still lag on a range of socio-economic indicators.**

They have been more likely to experience poverty, live in poorer quality housing, and have higher morbidity rates (Law, 2016), although recent data suggests that the gap in relative poverty is closing (Scottish Government, 2024). There is a long history of anti-Catholic discrimination within Scotland, which can be understood as anti-Irish racism linking back to mass Irish migration from the mid-19th century. 'Sectarianism', the dominant framing of this issue within Scottish policy, insufficiently accounts for the impact of historical patterns of inequality and oppression (Bradley, 2006; McBride, 2018). Claims that sectarianism is a 'thing of the past' (Bruce and Glendinning, 2017; Rosie 2015) have been somewhat debunked by a recent resurgence of vocal anti-Catholic and anti-Irish sentiment (McBride, 2022) and rates of victimisation. While Catholics comprise approximately 14% of the general population, they are victims of 42% of religiously aggravated hate crimes according to 2021 figures (Scottish Government, 2021). A particularly extreme manifestation of this was in 2011, when, over the course of several months, many high-profile individuals with links to the Catholic Church, Ireland and / or Celtic Football Club received bullets and letter bombs through the post (Carrell 2014).

Further, there have been several instances in recent years of anti-Catholic and anti-Irish sentiment *within* the criminal justice system. In December 2022, a police officer working for the Civil Nuclear Constabulary unit at Hunterston power station was awarded damages after it was established that he had been subject to religiously aggravated abuse on multiple occasions, including offensive graffiti about the Pope and a pro-Loyalist slogan left in his pigeonhole (McKay, 2022). In October 2023, Kyle Cruickshank, a police officer, pled guilty to

subjecting colleagues to a sustained period of sectarian and racist abuse, including asking for colleagues' surnames so that he could establish whether they were likely to be Catholic. Such attitudes extended to his policing of the general public as he would also 'screen' calls to the police and claimed that if a person's name sounded Catholic, they would be 'getting the jail' (BBC News, 26 October 2023). Another serving police officer was charged with assaulting a woman and making sectarian remarks towards her in 2022 (Gordon, 2023).

Before his retirement in 2023, former Chief Constable of Police Scotland Iain Livingstone issued an apology for the force's historic and ongoing "institutional racism, sexism, misogyny and discrimination". When asked whether he felt these problems extended towards institutional anti-Catholicism and Islamophobia, he replied 'I think there potentially is', an acknowledgement welcomed by the Catholic Church in Scotland (Cairns, 2023). A 2003 Glasgow survey did not find evidence that people felt that Catholics and Protestants were treated differently by the police, and found only one Catholic respondent who felt that they had been treated unfairly by the police because of their religion (NFO Social Research 2003). However, as a survey of Glasgow residents, this survey may not have sufficiently sampled those Catholics (e.g. young men from deprived areas) most likely to have experienced policing directly. We were unable to find more recent data which examined people's experiences of policing. However, newspaper reports demonstrate that police have been accused of not acting sufficiently to target - or even facilitating - overt anti-Irish racism. In August 2021, before a Rangers vs. Celtic match, crowds had gathered in Glasgow City Centre chanting the 'Famine Song', a song ruled to be racist in a court of law. Humza Yousaf MSP, later First Minister of Scotland commented that he was 'disgusted to once again see anti-Irish racism rear its ugly head', and human rights lawyer Aamer Anwar accused Police Scotland of 'facilitating' a racist anti-Irish march, suggesting if 'Irish' had been replaced by 'Pakistani/Muslim', police would have acted (Williams, 2021). Additionally, the police and Glasgow City Council are critiqued for enabling frequent displays of anti-Catholic and anti-Irish sentiment on the streets of Scotland, with one in four Catholic churches in Glasgow experiencing Orange Order marches passing near them during the 2024 'marching season'. The 2024 figures saw a dramatic increase of 65% (compared to 2019) in the number of Orange marches held in Scotland, with 352 taking place across 19 different local authorities (Sullivan 2024).

Thirty years ago, Hillyard observed "there is so little information on the position of the Irish in the ordinary criminal justice system" (1994, p.40), despite good reason at that time to believe that this group may experience discrimination, over-policing, and over-criminalisation. This focus on the ordinary criminal justice experiences of the Irish, has – as far as we can establish – not been addressed in the subsequent years. Research that does exist on the experience of the Irish within criminal justice system(s) in Britain mainly focuses on the experience of Irish people as a 'suspect community' during the period of the Troubles (Hillyard, 1994), particularly when IRA bombings occurred in England (but not Scotland), and associated miscarriages of justice e.g., the Birmingham Six, the Guildford Four and the Maguire Seven. More recently, the construction of the Irish as a 'suspect community' has been considered alongside a similar construction for British Muslims (Hickman et al 2012) – with the suggestion that the latter have replaced the former as the primary suspect community for the state (Pantazis and Pemberton 2009). Constructions of 'criminality' and 'dangerousness' have long been core to racist stereotypes, with Irish Catholics in Britain historically considered to be "feckless, stupid, violent, unreliable and drunken" (Swift, 1992 cited in King 2013).

## PRISONS ARE WELL- KNOWN AS A SITE IN AND THROUGH WHICH SOCIAL INEQUALITIES ARE REPRODUCED.

Many racialised groups are over-represented within UK prison systems (Lammy, 2017; Scottish Government, 2022). Wiltshire's conclusion that the over-representation of Catholics in Scottish prisons could be explained by the relationship between deprivation and imprisonment was repeated in a subsequent examination of the evidence on 'sectarianism'

conducted by Justice Analytical Services (2013) (which relied on 2001 Census data). Additionally, this review suggested that differences in victimisation and imprisonment might also be partially explained by differences in the age profile between the Protestant and Catholic populations. However, while the data they used suggested an older age profile for Protestant communities, the age profile of Catholics appeared broadly in line with that for all religious groups. But over-representation contributes to further financial inequalities experienced by those communities, through the financial cost of imprisonment on families (Jardine, 2019) and the impact on post-release employment prospects (Apel and Ramakers, 2018; Bäckman et al. 2018). Discrimination and victimisation in the community is unsurprisingly also seen within prisons: evidence from England & Wales highlights disparities in experiences of victimisation and use of force within prison for those from BAME backgrounds, such as young black males, prisoners of Muslim faith and traveller communities (HM Prison & Probation Service, 2017; Jolliffe and Haque, 2017; HMIP 2020; Gavin, 2019).

Research highlights that prisons produce ethno-racial divisions, rather than just reflecting or processing these (Wacquant, 2001): it degrades and disqualifies creating racialized criminalised groups with lesser rights and reduced access to resources and opportunities (Alexander 2010, Fassin 2018). Work from the US has also drawn attention to the ways in which "race and ethnicity" constitute "primary organizing features of prison life", for example Goodman's (2008) work on Californian prisons. But much of this work has centred on the racial dynamics at play within the US penal state, with Phillips, Earle, Parmar and Smith (2020) decrying British criminology's failure to attend sufficiently to the specific racial dynamics at play in the UK contemporary context, and with the links to our colonial pasts. This link between the past and the present is critical; writing about antiblackness, Sobande and Hill (2022) have critiqued the tendency in Scotland to focus the (already rare) public and political discussions on race and racism on an analysis of Scotland's past, rather than analysing the interconnected contemporary experiences of oppression.

## DESPITE EVIDENCE OF SOCIAL INEQUALITIES & DISCRIMINATION EXPERIENCED BY SCOTTISH CATHOLICS, LITTLE IS KNOWN ABOUT THEIR PRISON EXPERIENCE.

The 2019 Scottish Prisoner Survey asked about ethnicity, respect for/freedom to practice one's religion, and experiences of victimisation, but did not ask for self-identified religion. 14% of respondents reported that they had experienced discrimination regarding their religion or belief (Carnie and Broderick, 2019), but victimisation data cannot be broken down by religious group. There are again concerns about data quality, with a low response rate and concerns about administration processes. Alongside inadequate quantitative data, there is a notable absence of qualitative studies examining the experience of Catholics within Scottish prisons. In her 2010 review, Susan Wiltshire made recommendations for a range of research, including into confidence and attitudes of Catholic/Irish communities with policing, into the attitudes of sentencers, and into experiences and perceptions of fairness and equality within the prison among Irish/Catholic groups, and into potential disproportionality in sentencing outcomes and conditional early release decisions. As far as we can establish, this important research has not taken place.

# METHODS

This report provides a summary of findings from a small-scale scoping review. This included:

(i) A search and review of existing academic literature

(ii) A review of reports from His Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons in Scotland

(iii) Six interviews with people working within a prison chaplaincy (Roman Catholic) related role, or an equality and diversity-related role within the Scottish Prison Service or within the Scottish prison estate

(iv) A roundtable of academics / researchers working on religion or 'sectarianism', on prisons or on the criminal justice related experience of other racialised groups; Scottish Government civil servants; BEMIS and activists.

A review was conducted of all HMIPS Full Inspection Reports conducted over a five-year time period between May 2018 and March 2023[1]. It should be noted that this period included the COVID-19 pandemic, during some of which a reduced inspection regime was operational[2]. In addition, a key word search[3] was conducted on the HM Chief Inspector's Annual Report in all years from 2001-02 to 2022-23 (excluding the years 2003-04, 2004-05, 2014-15, 2015-16 and 2019-20 which were unavailable online at the time of the review) and relevant passages were reviewed for relevant material. Following this, a small number of earlier inspectorate reports also underwent a key word search (HMYOI Polmont 2012, 2007, 2004 and HMP Addiewell 2015 and 2010) in response to a comment in the 2010-11 annual report.

The scope of the project was restricted by the short time period available to undertake the empirical research, so the original research proposal did not include plans for any interviews with currently or formerly imprisoned Catholics. It was felt that ethical approval and recruitment of this group would not be possible within the time period. Funding was awarded from the Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research in January 2023, with additional funding to support the project provided by Edinburgh Napier University and University of Glasgow, with all funds required to be spent by the end of July 2023. Research access was granted from the Scottish Prison Service in March 2023, and approval was granted from the Edinburgh Napier University School of Applied Sciences Ethics Committee in April 2023. Interviews took place between May and July 2023, and a roundtable was held with stakeholders in July 2023.

Interviews were conducted in person (two) or online (four), and included three in prison chaplaincy-related roles, three in equality and diversity-related roles. No further details can be given about the sample to avoid any risk of identification. Interviewees were recruited through an advert distributed by gatekeepers within the Scottish Prison Service. The original intention was to recruit five of each, but after several attempts to

1 Perth 2018, Polmont 2018, Grampian 2019, Glenochil 2019, Barlinnie 2019, Edinburgh 2019, Dumfries 2020, Kilmarnock 2021, Low Moss 2022, Shotts 2022, Castle Huntly 2022, Inverness 2022, Addiewell 2022 and 2018, Greenock 2023. This did not capture the women's estate well, since it does not include any report on HMP Stirling, HMP Cornton Vale or the Bella and Lilias Centre. As of May 2018, revised 'Standards for Inspection and Monitoring Prisons' were introduced.

2 https://prisonsinspectoratescotland.gov.uk/news/hmips-return-programme-full-prison-inspections

3 Words searched for: 'religion', 'religious', 'faith', 'chaplaincy, 'catholic', 'sectarian', 'sectarianism', 'race', 'racism', 'racial', 'ethnic', 'ethnicity', 'foreign', 'immigration', 'football', disproportion', 'disproportionality', 'bias', 'prejudice'.

recruit further interviewees, recruitment efforts were stopped for ethical reasons, to avoid any perception of gatekeepers putting pressure on potential interviewees.

Following this first phase of work, the final report was delayed while further ethical approval was secured and attempts were made to run a focus group in the community of people in Scotland from a Catholic background who had experience of the criminal justice system to supplement the data we had obtained through the first phase of the project. Unfortunately, we were unable to recruit sufficient numbers of people for this to run within the available timeframe. Consequently, this report does not contain the lived experience of the group most able to shine a light on the experience of Catholics in prison (i.e. imprisoned people themselves). This is a substantial limitation of the report and should be a priority to address in any future research in this area (see discussion of next steps later in the report).

# VIEWS OF CHAPLAINCY AND EDI STAFF

## OVERVIEW OF CHAPLAINCY PROVISION

Within the prison estate, there is chaplaincy provision for Church of Scotland, Roman Catholic and Muslim prisoners. For prisoners of other faiths, attempts are made to secure appropriate religious materials, and there are connections between chaplaincy services and, for example, the Rabbi from the local synagogue. Chaplains must juggle their responsibilities within the prison with those in their parishes, which could take priority. For example, mass within one prison has to be scheduled on a Monday, since priests are in their parishes on Sunday.

***"I never had enough time to do all the work that was needed to be done [in the prison] and, therefore, I could easily take on another few hours, which I did, but I didn't want to take on sufficiently more, which meant another day in the prison, because I've got this parish to run as well"***
(Roman Catholic chaplaincy-related role).

The chaplains noted that compared to mass attendance outside of prison, engagement with mass is "exceptionally high" (Roman Catholic chaplaincy-related role), which was explained in a number of different ways including re-engagement with faith in prison and boredom. Chaplains, while having a specific faith or denominational affiliation, often provide support to people of other faiths or none. They are also available to provide support to staff as well as prisoners.

***"I am a specific Catholic chaplain, so, although being part of the team, which is inter-faith, my area of expertise would be the pastoral care specifically for Catholics. But, of course, as a member of the team we work for everyone, for staff members, for other faiths and no faith as well"***
(Roman Catholic chaplaincy-related role).

Chaplains provide practical support, pastoral care, and spiritual and religious guidance to prisoners: "pastoral care is really about journeying with people through their suffering" (Roman Catholic chaplaincy-related role). This participant added that pastoral care could also include advocacy, although other chaplains differed in the extent to which they viewed this as part of their role:

***"You know, being the named…a named person to hold the guy or girl's hand as they navigate and go through this complex system, the chaplain can do bits of that, or at least at important points. You know, important transition points. Making sure that the person's heard or been part of the conversation"***
(Roman Catholic chaplaincy-related role).

All chaplains highlighted working with other services within the prison and in the community (e.g. charities and councils) to ensure that people receive the support they need: "we link…we link up. Work, kind of, hand in hand" (Roman Catholic chaplaincy-related role). It also seemed that the role of the chaplaincy is in part to "mop up", providing support that other services within the prison do not provide.

Chaplains often bring specific experiences or areas of interest or expertise to the role, e.g., providing support for people with alcohol addictions, or Polish-specific groups. The 2022 HMP Addiewell inspection report flagged the Roman Catholic service delivered in Polish as good practice in demonstrating "inclusivity". Rather than being standardised practice, examples of

good practice appear to have more to do with individual rather than institutional factors. In other words, they are dependent on a Chaplain's personal interests or abilities.

Chaplains also retain contact with some people on release from prison, related to their dual role within the prison and the community.

***"It often happens that…so people come into prison, they come along to church and then they're getting out, and they want to have a connection with the chapel that they're going out to in that area, and so, and the chaplain can do that if the relationship is there"***
(Roman Catholic chaplaincy-related role).

***"A lot of people phone, sometimes pop into my church, you know. Sometimes send a card for Christmas, you know"***
(Roman Catholic chaplaincy-related role).

A chaplaincy representative also plays a role in supporting the development of policy and guidance for prison staff, e.g. around how to respond to requests to attend a family funeral, and helping SPS service development. One interviewee commented on how the chaplaincy ethos aligned with the current prison service policy direction:

***"because the prison service is moving in the direction of, you know, trauma informed, rights based, compassionate, person-centred care. That's where the prison service is going, and that's the language of chaplaincy, you know, so…and that's recognised and so it's tapped into a lot"***
(Roman Catholic chaplaincy-related role).

One participant in a chaplaincy-related role expressed the view that chaplains are generally "held in quite high regard" by the Scottish Prison Service (as reflected in the positive views expressed by the equality and diversity leads). However, the view was also expressed that some prison staff could be 'wary' of the chaplaincy because they may have access to information about a prisoner that they don't, and even in some cases disdainful: 'It's, like, what relevance have you got in here, you know' (Roman Catholic chaplaincy-related role). Another believed that the chaplaincy is not taken seriously by all prison officers, and that the religious, pastoral, and spiritual care delivered by chaplains is not prioritised.

***"a common thing I've heard some chaplains say is that they're not maybe regarded as so important within the establishment… and it's quite easy to dismiss the chaplaincy… oh, we're busy, we've got this, we're doing that, you need to come back again, and they don't see what we're doing as a high priority within their regime"***
(Roman Catholic chaplaincy-related role).

Some comments were made related to the need for more resources, including professional development routes and support for chaplains, as well as greater provision of chaplaincy services since demand often outstrips supply. HMIPS reports similarly revealed that the provision of religious, pastoral and spiritual care had been affected by staff shortages/absences. For example, the 2023 inspection of HMP Greenock identified that there was only one Roman Catholic service per fortnight, alternating weekly between male and female access. This was linked to staff shortages (though a new Chaplain was due to start soon) and regime alterations established during Covid-19 which had not been resolved.

As well as some concern about insufficient chaplaincy cover, a wider issue was the way in which (insufficient) staffing of prisons more broadly could negatively impact the provision of chaplaincy services.

***"The only things that we need is consistency from the prison that, you know, if we have Saturday service or Sunday service that there will be enough staff to cover these services. Because it does happen sometimes that it is cancelled or postponed or [people] collected too late, you know, and then it doesn't really work well"***
(Roman Catholic chaplaincy-related role).

However, the chaplain was keen to highlight that this issue affected other denominational services or groups as well.

HMIPS regularly award the SPS a 'satisfactory' rating for the support given to prisoners in relation to religious observances (Quality Indicator 6.8). At the time of the review, the most recent inspection of the following prisons saw them receive a satisfactory rating: HMP Addiewell, Inverness, Castle Huntly, Shotts, Low Moss, Kilmarnock, Edinburgh, and Perth, as well as YOI Glenochil and Polmont. At the time of the review, the most recent inspection of HMP Grampian (2019) saw it achieve a 'Good' rating. HMP Greenock, Dumfries, and Barlinnie were considered to provide a 'generally acceptable' degree of assistance when assisting prisoners' religious observances.

## WIDER SUPPORT BY THE PRISON FOR PEOPLE TO PRACTICE THEIR FAITH

Discussion with Equality and Diversity leads suggested that prisons (or at least those represented within this study) primarily viewed support for people in prison to practice their faiths in terms of the provision of chaplaincy services. In addition to this, they referenced facilitating periods of religious observance and celebration of religious festivals:

***"If Ramadan was starting […] obviously they go into fasting. So, then the cook house accommodates that, but the staff have to be aware of that"***
(Equality and diversity-related role).

There was an interesting way in which people practicing religion in prison could be viewed as either 'genuine' or 'manipulative':

***"…make sure that those prisoners who are, like, involved in the Ramadan, that they're not manipulating it. They're not then… I'm not being funny; they get given certain food. They get different food, that they're not then obviously still ordering from the canteen and going and having their food, like, their breakfast, lunch and dinner. It's things like that that has to get monitored"***
(Equality and diversity-related role).

This focus on manipulating the system, specifically in relation to food, came up more broadly when we sought to access data from Scottish Government's Justice Analytical Services about the proportion of people of Catholic faith and other faiths in Scottish Prisons. The response (via a private communication) was that this data was not available since prisoners could provide the wrong faith for purposes such as accessing specialist diets (see section on data and monitoring).

Having said this, it was clear from the prison chaplains' discussion of those who attended their services that there was also a substantial 'grey area' in between, which was not acknowledged by this binary. Participants explained that some people attended services out of boredom or a desire to get out of the cell, some then found or re-found faith in prison, and some people of no faith nevertheless come from a particular religious heritage. Another way that prisoners are supported to practice their faith is through support provided by personal officers, who ensure that people receive the services and support that they need. In terms of support for foreign prisoners, consideration is given to how to provide access to religious services in different languages (especially literature):

***"It [the prison] caters very well [to different population's religious needs] […] because we get…we've got all sorts of bibles ranging from Romanian, Chinese, Polish"***
(Roman Catholic chaplaincy-related role).

The Prison and Young Offenders Institutions (Scotland) Rules 2011, rule 83, sets out that an imprisoned person is entitled, as far as reasonably practicable to take their weekly rest day from work/education/counselling on the day of religious observance, and that they will be excused from such activities on their relevant recognised days of religious observance (the days for each religion are specified in The Scottish Prison Rules (Religious Observance) Direction 2024[4]). However, this pertains to individual exemptions, rather than broader celebrations which raise awareness and celebrate diversity. From reviewing inspectorate reports, it is clear that each prison celebrates a few religious and cultural events including Burns Day, Christmas, Remembrance Day and Eid. While this is not relevant to imprisoned people of Catholic faith (whose religious holidays are shared with

4 https://www.sps.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2024-03/The%20Scottish%20Prison%20Rules%20%28Religious%20Observance%29%20Direction%202024.pdf

Protestants), beyond Christian religions it appeared that in some instances prisons could potentially do more to raise awareness through celebrating a more diverse range of religious and cultural events. For example, HMP Inverness had developed a Diversity Calendar for 2021-22 which highlighted key dates in the religious calendar as well as other significant events such as: International Human Rights Day, Disability History Month, Transgender Visibility, and Autistic Pride Day. HMIPS (2022: 103) noted that "This was an excellent resource for promoting awareness of key equality issues across the prison, but it was not clear that its potential was being fully realised." At HMP Dumfries 2020, there was no prison-wide awareness raising campaigns or celebrations to encourage a greater understanding of people with different backgrounds, interests or abilities.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Interviewees talked about historical tensions, which were sometimes attributed to football or territorially based divisions:

***"It was quite significant in our violence as well because the factions would be from the different areas. [….] So, if it was tied into that, as in you had a specific area in Glasgow that was predominantly, like, maybe around about Parkhead, if I was honest, so it would be Catholic, yeah, then I would say that would be an issue. We don't have factions as much nowadays; so, that was more historically I would say"***
(Equality and diversity-related role).

There was a mention of a prisoner who had been in prison for terrorist–related offences related to Ireland, but the participant said that such instances, even historically, have been rare.

Within the prison environment, some participants described historic practices by which people's religious background was labelled by putting 'door cards' on cells which were colour-coded by religion:

***"It would be green if they were Catholics, it would white if it was Church of Scotland, it would be pink, if I remember, if it was any other religion at that time because we wouldn't have had as many, kind of, different religions and everything away back 20, 25 years ago, type thing. So, yeah, that's where it would have been just for your…a wee historical information there. So, you knew the Catholics because they would basically have the green door card. And then you would maybe see it getting graffitied by the other religions putting on it something daft and things like that, but they don't have that these days"***
(Equality and diversity-related role).

One of the interviewees talked about their own personal experiences of anti-Catholic discrimination, including when working within another secure environment in Scotland some years ago. They had been promoted and were approached afterwards when it transpired that they were Catholic, because they had not put 'RC' alongside the name of their school on the application form: "They assumed that I was not catholic, and the guy was raging".

The same interviewee reflected on discrimination as a child too:

***"you had to go past, and walk with, people who were going to the protestant primary school, and one day coming back home from primary we were both getting out at four o'clock, both schools, I got battered by folk from the protestant primary".***

## CURRENT CONTEXT

### Poverty and deprivation - not religion - the key driver of inequality

While participants acknowledged a history of anti-Catholicism in Scotland, this was mostly felt to be in the past. One participant pointed to Scotland being an increasingly secular country as being 'good news for Catholics' (Roman Catholic chaplaincy-related role) because one's religion or where they went to school are increasingly irrelevant. He said the perceived decline in Orange Order marches was indicative of this[5], as well as Catholics having a strong visible identity despite being a minority group. Indeed, this participant felt that the way this research project had been framed was suggestive of a problem that no longer exists:

5 Evidence showing a sharp increase in the number of Orange Order marches across Scotland over the past two years suggests such perceptions are misplaced (Orange Order: How many walks are in your council area in 2024? | The National)

***"Unwittingly, you can be accused for being, you know, let's say, sectarian in looking at problems when there is no problems. Because you actually now indicated that there maybe not so much problems with religion background but that where you live. And if you labelled that as a Catholic problem, that creates those sectarian problems because it is not the Catholic problem, it's a demographic problem of that area"***
(Roman Catholic chaplaincy-related role).

This participant was concerned about labelling overrepresentation as a "problem of Catholic community or church", whereas the key issue is people from a Catholic background having historical disadvantage.

Another chaplain similarly felt that Catholics still being more likely to live in high-poverty areas was significant to their over-representation in the prison system:

***"The demographic of the people that are in prison, whether they're catholic or not, are that they're from places of poverty, and then I would say, and maybe it's to do with what you were saying about there being a higher proportion of Catholics in prison, and it's because there's probably a higher proportion of people who are Catholic living in those communities"***
(Roman Catholic chaplaincy-related role)

***"Most people in the prison are not necessarily because there are…they like what they did. Sometimes they are the, I don't want to also play they do that okay, and just say that they are victims, but, you know, there is much more factors than their own personal choice"***
(Roman Catholic chaplaincy-related role)

It was felt that acknowledging the structural causes of poverty and poverty-related issues can help shape a more compassionate response to offending:

***"we do an induction, and sit down and talk one to one, or in a group, one of the first things I say is, look, this is not really your fault. This was always going to happen. You know, the chances of you getting through your life without coming in contact with the criminal justice system in jail is low because of where you are, where you come from, what happened before, and that's quite a helpful way to start the conversation rather than saying what the hell did you do that for? It's like this, you know, I'm not surprised"***
(Roman Catholic chaplaincy-related role).

### Tensions within the prison

More recent inspection or annual reports did not refer to religious tensions within the prison estate. The only reference to this was in the 2010-11 annual report in which the Chief Inspector Hugh Monro, in relation to the context of young offending in Scotland, states:

***"Most worryingly young offenders reinforce the view that parts of Scotland encourage a culture of violence, a culture that also suffers from the added scourge of religious bigotry. It is this culture that I have seen around prisons and most obviously when I inspected Addiewell in 2010 where I found that levels of violence are high."***

That said, there was no specific reference to religious bigotry in the 2010 Addiewell inspection report. While 'anti-sectarianism' work was not apparent in the reports reviewed over the last five years, however a selection of older inspection reports identified examples of 'anti-sectarianism' work in prisons, relating to a time period where this issue was under the political spotlight. These included the 2010 Iona Community Anti-Sectarianism programme which ran in Addiewell (HMP Addiewell 2010 inspection report), which also ran in Polmont, Barlinnie, Kilmarnock, Glenochil and Greenock (Church of Scotland 2012). SPS took over responsibility for the programme and subsequently confirmed it was not operational (Hamad, 2017). Repeated work appears to have been undertaken in Polmont, including a 10 month project to develop learning materials on bigotry and sectarianism funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and Lloyds TSB referenced in the 2004 inspection report, and an anti-sectarianism programme (at the time described as recently established) referenced in the 2012 inspection report. There also appears to have been awareness-raising work undertaken with imprisoned people and prison staff run by SACRO in 2015-16 (also in Cornton Vale, and which evolved into broader STOP anti-Hate Crime work).[6] We were not able to identify any examples of work centred on avoiding religious discrimination in recent years, although our interviews

6 https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/questions-and-answers/question?ref=S5W-01863; https://www.actiononsectarianism.info/sacro-tackling-offending-prejudices-stop

only covered a very small number of prisons (and even then interviewees suggested that work might be happening which they were unaware of).

Some interviewees felt that remaining tensions were mostly centred around football: "I would say it raises its head typically if, again it's just being quite honest on, like, old firm days" (Equality and diversity-related role). Participants tended to refer to these instances as "banter", a term which was used several times. One chaplain explained: "I've seen personally very little, sort of, sectarian or, kind of, anticatholic comments heading in my direction. There has been some, but nothing that would I go home and lose sleep over" (Roman Catholic chaplaincy-related role).

Another chaplain talked about prison officers sometimes making quite subtle comments of a sectarian nature. He described these as "a wee bit of banter… that's meant to be jokingly, but sometimes I wonder even with the officers, sometimes there's a wee bit of banter that maybe would be uncalled for" (Roman Catholic chaplaincy-related role). However, he acknowledged that officers "couldn't very well be blatant, otherwise if they're reported for it then there could be consequences".

One participant raised the possibility that at least some prison staff could be members of the Orange Order and so could potentially harbour anti-Catholic attitudes. Nevertheless, it was felt that even if this was the case, prison staff would know not to act overtly on any prejudices they held. One participant noted it would be very hard to prove when it comes to accusations by prisoners that they are being bullied by staff on account of being Catholic.

One interviewee suggested that experiences may differ depending on how "vocal" prisoners are about their religion:

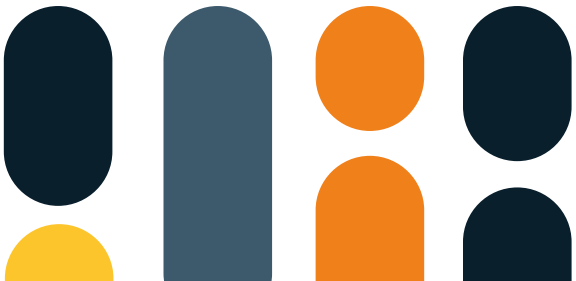
***"I suppose it depends on the individual of how vocal they are about it, if they make it very known that they are Catholic and they happen to be in with predominantly Protestant, then obviously that could cause an issue. If somebody comes in and they are fairly quiet about it then we don't see great issues around it"***
(Equality and diversity-related role).

Quality Indicator 3.2 (derived from the Standards for Inspection and Monitoring Prisons) establishes that each prison must "[take] particular care of prisoners whose appearance, behaviour, background or circumstances leave them at a heightened risk of harm or abuse from others". Within the reports reviewed, it was not always clear what was done to identify whether prisoners with protected characteristics were subject to discrimination, harassment or victimisation. More broadly, HMIPS identified a limited awareness amongst staff of the Anti-Bullying Strategy in HMP Greenock 2023, HMP Low Moss 2022, and HMP Barlinnie 2019.

Issues around discrimination, harassment or other tensions related to religion, and more widely race and other equality and diversity issues, were not seen as a particular concern by one of the Equality and Diversity interviewees:

***"But as far as for me identifying something there's nothing that I can see in relation directly to equality and diversity. And I'm not saying what we're doing is all singing, all dancing, but it's certainly…there's nothing I've seen [from prisoner user involvement groups] as a red flag just now"***
(Equality and diversity-related role).

This participant suggested that religion is a hidden identity: "obviously we wouldn't know who's a Catholic and not, unless you were checking on the computer" (Equality and diversity-related role). Yet one of the chaplains interviewed suggested that there are risks associated with practicing religion in the prison, as attending services can mark a prisoner out as different. He offered one example of a "stronger, older" prisoner taking someone more vulnerable to mass so that he could protect him:



***"He's wanting to express his faith. He wants to go to church, but as soon as he does that, he's in the line of sight of…and everybody else is looking at him saying, look at this, you know, here we go, it's a target"***
(Roman Catholic chaplaincy-related role).

This participant also explained that some prisoners feel they were treated more harshly earlier in the criminal justice system (e.g., in courts) on account of their identity, though qualified these comments as 'anecdotal':

***"Some guys say that, you know, depending who the sheriff is or the judge is, and if they know that you're clearly…especially if there's a, kind of, religious element to the offending, and that judge or sheriff has…maybe holds a particular view on"***
(Roman Catholic chaplaincy-related role).

Another chaplain, when asked if marginalisation is raised by prisoners, explained that it tended to be older prisoners who talked about different treatment:

***"It comes almost every week, every time we have a meeting, but, you know, but this is mostly the older generation of prisoners. Who are for a very long time in the prison and who are 50 and more, yes, older, I would say. And even then, that would be again, stories which they inherited from the generations before"***
(Roman Catholic chaplaincy-related role).

However, this participant suggested that it is hard to differentiate between general prisoner complaints about perceived unfairness and claims of discriminatory treatment based on religion or ethnicity. More generally, they felt that many problems could be attributed to the considerable organisational and operational challenges within the prison estate:

***"a lot of problems are because of that, not because of some institutional discrimination against any particular side"***
(Roman Catholic chaplaincy-related role).

They believed there is no institutional discrimination but did acknowledge examples of individual behaviours from staff and prisoners.

***"Some people were just out of order sometimes, or just silly […] And they may be because I represent the Catholic faith and so I am, my official, you know, Catholic priest, you know, shared clergyship, so you know, so, I am just guessing. But as I said, never, it was never institutionalised discrimination"***
(Roman Catholic chaplaincy-related role).

## DATA AND MONITORING

By mapping the ratings attributed to every quality indicator (QI) in all full inspection reports published between May 2018 and March 2023[7], one persistent area of concern related to QI 8.1, that: "The prison's Equality and Diversity Strategy meets the legal requirements of all groups of prisoners, including those with protected characteristics. Staff understand and play an active role in implementing the Strategy." With the exception of HMP Edinburgh, this appeared lacking across the prison estate at the time the inspections were conducted. QI 8.1 is one of the most poorly rated QI across all Full Inspection Reports published over the time period reviewed.[8] At the time of the inspection, many prisons were yet to develop a local Strategy or Action Plan, and at least in some prisons (HMP Castle Huntly 2022, and HMP Shotts 2022) the Equality & Diversity Manager had not received additional training for their role. It is unclear what additional training was provided for the E&D Managers at other establishments, but the need for comprehensive training for staff in these roles was reiterated in the HMIPS 2023 Annual Report. It should be noted again that inspection reports published after March 2023 were not reviewed, and the interviews suggested that improvement work was ongoing.

The 2023 HMIPS Annual Report also emphasised the need for SPS to conduct "more systematic monitoring of data to avoid unintentional bias with employment, education and discipline, etc" (p.23). Demographic information was collected for practical administrative purposes (e.g., to ensure that prisoners' dietary and religious needs are met), rather than for research or

7 With the exception of HMP Addiewell 2018, as a more recent inspection was conducted in 2022
8 1 'Good' rating (Edinburgh 2019); 7 'Generally Acceptable' ratings (Greenock 2023, Addiewell 2022, Inverness 2022, Castle Huntly 2022, Low Moss 2022, Kilmarnock 2021, and Polmont 2018); 6 'Poor' ratings (Shotts 2022, Dumfries 2020, Barlinnie 2019, Glenochil 2019, Grampian 2019, Peth 2018)

monitoring purposes. The HMIPS reports highlight that SPS does not generally monitor the provision of purposeful activity or healthcare to ensure that those with protected characteristics receive equitable treatment and failures around such monitoring processes is picked up in multiple inspectorate reports, for example in HMP Greenock 2023, HMP Addiewell 2022 and HMP Shotts 2022.

The quality of data emerged as a persistent problem throughout the project, both in its development and in the responses of those interviewed. During the development of the project, we sought up-to-date figures from Justice Analytical Services about the proportion of people of Catholic and other faiths in Scottish prisons. The response (private communication) was that this data was not available because it was not reliable; there were concerns that some people in prison reported being of a particular faith in order to get access to better quality food, and that this would present a misleading impression of the extent to which certain groups were over-represented within the Scottish prison population. This view was also reflected in discussions with equality and diversity leads that were interviewed for this project. However, although this 'manipulation' or instrumental use of religious identities was commonly given as the reason for the poor quality data, the process by which data was collected appeared to substantially contribute to problems.

Along with other demographic information about the person, data on people's ethnicity and religion is collected on admission to the prison on the SPS Prisoner Record System – Version 2 (PR2). Should they wish to declare it, an individual's religion or belief is recorded. This could be updated at a later point if alternative information came to light, for example through a personal officer. There was inconsistency in how this was recorded, with recording decisions resting heavily on the practice and judgment of reception staff, and with the responsibility on the person in prison for correcting any errors or alerting of any changes to their religious identity.

***"a lot depends on the person who interviews. Some of them [the officers] most likely they skip that question […] or answer it for themselves, I don't know, because the amount of incorrect answers or funny answers. […] There are other people who I find who are Polish and who are registered as Scottish, or, you know, or British citizens, which is incorrect. They don't even speak English, some of them. So, that shows you that the quality of that interview is very low. Basically, you know, very quick scanning of the person"***
(Roman Catholic chaplaincy-related role).

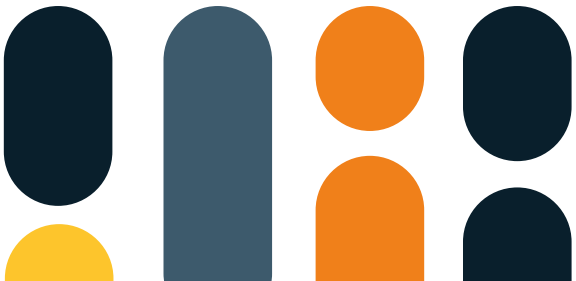
These issues were acknowledged by the prison and there is work underway to improve the quality of data in Scottish prisons at SPS Headquarters, as well as work underway by individual prison-based staff and teams:

***"It's part of what we're doing, it's, like, how we're going to refresh our [E&D] agenda. How do we gather the information? […] I'm saying well I don't really see it [challenges for particular religious groups], but sometimes, you know, how to peel back that onion and you ask the right questions"***
(Equality and diversity-related role).

One of the issues that we enquired about was about complaints data as it pertained to perceived race, ethnicity or religion, in terms of complaints specifically relating to the ability to practice one's religion, to discrimination/harassment/unfair treatment. We also enquired as to whether prisoners of particular religions or ethnicities were over-represented among those making complaints more broadly.

Complaints pertaining to race, ethnicity or religion were not identified as a prominent issue by equality and diversity leads.

***"I definitely can say there is no issues to do with any race related or even any equality and diversity issues through complaints because since I've took over this role, I get monthly stats […] since I've taken over there's not been one complaint in relation to anything relating to equality and diversity […] So, it, kind of, does reflect that what I'm personally seeing, there isn't that, kind of, race…sorry, any equality diversity race related or even going towards religions issues identified"***
(Equality and diversity-related role).



Numbers and details of prisoner complaints are not routinely published by SPS, nor are they detailed in HMIPS reports. However, a Freedom of Information request submitted in March 2022[9] requested details of all official complaints submitted by prisoners from January 2019. This suggested that complaints recorded as relating to 'religion' and 'race issues' are relatively rare, constituting 0.3% and 0.1-0.2% of complaints respectively in 2019, 2020 and 2021.

Nevertheless, the process by which complaints get registered as having an equality and diversity dimension (or not) may have led to some complaints not being appropriately identified as such. It appears that the prisoner making the complaint must themselves identify that the incident was equality and diversity-related and then must fill in an additional equality and diversity form (EDF), alongside the standard complaint form (PCF1 or where confidential PCF2). This same participant did acknowledge that some people in prison might not feel comfortable complaining:

***"prisoners in the main might not be quite as open about saying, oh I'm getting, say for example, bullied or something like that, to do with their race or their colour or their accent or something like that"***
(Equality and diversity-related role).

It is worth noting that the review of multiple inspection reports revealed that in many cases imprisoned people have little confidence in the complaints system itself or in using this (see for example HMP Addiewell 2022, HMP Barlinnie 2019, HMP Castle Huntly 2022, HMP Shotts 2022). HMIPS highlight that this lack of confidence is a problem inhibiting the function of an effective system. While often the inspectorate does not fully share prisoner concerns regarding the process, recurring problems identified by the inspectorate relate to access to complaints forms (e.g. located behind desks), lack of recording of details of complaints that are informally resolved, support for foreign national prisoners and those with low levels of literacy to use the complaints process, and some concern among prisoners about disappearing forms (and in some cases an inability to verify this). On a number of occasions, HMIPS specifically critique the EDF complaint process, which they suggest:

***"did not differ in any clear way, in either process or outcome, from a standard PCF complaint – rendering it without value. HMIPS would strongly encourage SPS HQ to re-examine processes and procedures in place around E&D complaints"***
(HMIPS 2022 – HMP Shotts 2022 full inspection, p.11)

Staff at a number of prisons demonstrated a lack of knowledge in the E&D Complaints process (Greenock 2023, Addiewell 2022, and Barlinnie 2019). Inspectors did not comment on staff knowledge of the process in other reports (positively or negatively).

HMIPS has (on numerous occasions) emphasised the need for prisoner complaints to be systematically monitored to identify any common themes – particularly in relation to ensuring the needs of those with protected characteristics are met. The prisons which we had contact with did not systematically monitor complaints to identify whether any specific group is disproportionately complaining about a particular issue, or indeed undertake wider monitoring around service access in the prison for different equalities groups:

***"if somebody did feel they didn't have access to the same services, for example, unless they were to put that in writing we would be completely oblivious to that"***
(Equality and diversity-related role).

However, this seems potentially possible if data collection processes were tightened, although would currently be impacted by the poor quality of demographic data:

***"We have a lot of data on individual characteristics and religion. Whether I would say we have...I wouldn't like to say 100 per cent I could say to you there was [for example] two per cent were Catholic complaints. I probably could, I probably could"***
(Equality and diversity-related role).

9 SPS reference HQ21322

As well as the complaints procedure, another route by which tension, discrimination, and harassment might be brought to the prison's attention would be through reports written in relation to particular incidents:

***"Dependent on the incident report, if the incident report was written. Plus we also have what is called a duty report. Every day two reports come out, there is a duty report and a night shift report. If the incident was of a racial nature, it would say that in it. It is a really good point, now going forward I would watch out for that and find out if it was specific to Catholic, if it wasn't what religion it was"*** (Equality and diversity-related role).

In addition to the complaints process, another way in which equality and diversity issues might be identified is through work by prison officers/staff to "engage with the prisoners" (Equality and diversity-related role). From the inspection reports, this is done through various forums and committees yet these also suggest a general feeling amongst prisoners that they aren't consulted about issues that concern them. Moreover, attendance at Prisoner Information Action Committees (PIAC) is generally very low. Again, these processes had not led any of the equality and diversity leads that we mentioned to have any particular concerns about issues pertaining to race, ethnicity and religion – although one mentioned a specific desire to better understand the needs of the traveller community in Scottish prisons and suggested that work around this may already have taken place at some other prisons.

Finally, as part of this project, we liaised with academics, activists and people working in Scottish government who came together in a roundtable. At this event the problems of data collection in the context of identifying the experience of people of Irish-Catholic descent were mentioned as an issue more broadly. Some roundtable participants felt that the Scottish Government has been reluctant to recognise the distinct experiences of Irish-Catholics, or take these experiences seriously. This reluctance had permeated data collection and analysis. For example, the 2001 Census was the first time that British citizens could identify their Irish ethnicity. As mentioned above, being Catholic is often used as an indicator of being of Irish descent (although the two are not synonymous), given that only small pockets of Scottish Catholics remained following the Reformation of the Church. The largest numbers of migrants from Ireland arrived prior to 1921, when Ireland was subsumed under British control and during which time all would have had British nationality. When Irish nationality became an option, many will not have claimed this. These historical factors, conflations between nationality and ethnicity, and shifting or multiplicity of identities could mean that people of Irish descent now regularly identify as Scottish. This presents a challenge for the implementation of monitoring processes.

# DISCUSSION AND NEXT STEPS

## KEY FINDINGS

This small study highlighted several key findings. Firstly, the role of the chaplaincy within Scottish prisons is important and multi-faceted, with chaplains often fulfilling a much broader role than solely offering religious guidance, including providing crucial pastoral care and in some cases advocacy for prisoners regardless of their religion. Secondly and relatedly, people in prisons are supported by the wider prison service to practice their faith, though there were hints of scepticism around whether claiming religious identity might be linked to desiring more favourable treatment e.g. time out of cells, access to food. Next, reflections on historical divisions and inequalities included recalling when prisoners' cells used to be visibly categorised by religion, and one interviewee's personal experience of anti-Catholic prejudice.

In terms of the contemporary picture, participants generally agreed that socio-economic disadvantage is a key driver of inequality in the criminal justice system, as opposed to religious discrimination, though it is important in this respect to consider that Catholics are more likely to live in disadvantaged areas. Various examples relating to tensions within prisons (in some cases personally experienced by chaplains) were offered, though these were frequently described as 'banter'. It is important to note that 'banter' can in some cases be positive, used to 'bridge' between different social groups (Billig 2005). It is, however, crucial to view claims of banter in their specific contexts.

Another key theme related to the (in)visibility of religion and religious identity within the prison setting. More work is needed to understand the way in which religious and racial dividing lines do or don't operate within the prison and how this has changed over time. Historical practices demarcated different groups, but interviewees highlighted contemporary ways in which religious lines may become less distinct within the prison environment (e.g. Chaplaincy emphasis on a multi or inter-faith approach), however it is important to consider whether prisoners choose or are expected to suppress their religious identity, so as not to render oneself a target.

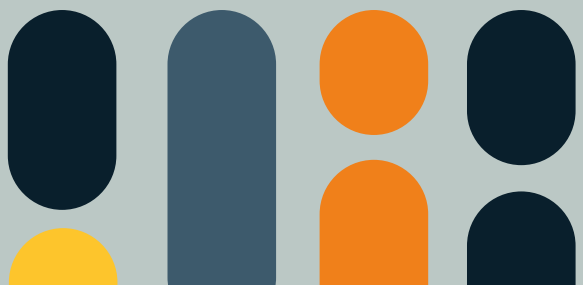
Finally, inconsistency and a lack of quality around data and monitoring were highlighted as presenting barriers to a fuller understanding of the situation (and questions around racialised and religious minorities more broadly), though it is important to acknowledge work being done by SPS to address this.

As a small scoping review, and without the voices of imprisoned people, the findings should be treated with caution. However, they do suggest a need for further research.

## FURTHER RESEARCH

This report contributes to wider calls for more data, research and debate on inequalities, discrimination and racism in the Scottish justice system, in the wider context of concerns about experiences of those from other backgrounds including Muslims, Roma, Gypsy, Travellers and Black people. Expanding the evidence base on those with a Catholic/Irish Catholic background is an important strand of this work.

Since Wiltshire's review in 2010, there has been greater awareness of equality and diversity, but there is a risk that specific Scottish historical issues are subsumed into more generic policies on equalities. Given the small numbers involved of all minoritised groups, there is an urgent need to gather and make sense of the data, identifying divergence as well as similarities. Where less visible, the legacies of historic discrimination for some groups, such as Catholics, may continue to play out in present day inequalities, without adequate data for a full understanding.



This scoping review suggests that there is still a need for the research recommended by Wiltshire in her 2010 review and has identified further areas of research for consideration. Firstly, there is a need for research with people from an Irish Catholic background who have lived experience of the criminal justice system in Scotland, and how this experience has changed over time. There is also a need to explore the experience of Catholics from other ethno-national backgrounds, which is likely to be distinct due to different historical contexts and other factors such as language. Secondly, a scoping review of existing quantitative datasets would illuminate the impact of Catholic/Irish identity on areas including arrest, prosecution, conviction, sentencing, progression, prisoner complaints, access to prison services, and parole/release decisions. Archival research and critical analysis of relevant policy and political discourse would help us to better understand how racial and religious identifications and divisions have been constructed and practiced within the prison over different time periods. A collaborative effort between academics and stakeholders is also required to address the data (quality) gap relating to racialised and religious groups in the criminal justice system more broadly.

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