



Trinity College Dublin

Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath

The University of Dublin

Perceptions of oversight through inspection among senior prison staff

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15 September 2020



Research Objectives



Accountability Culture within IPS



Explore Purpose of Accountability



Attitudes towards Accountability Mechanisms



Research Methodology

Interview Method



35 Participants



Semi-Structured



Chiefs, Governors, HQ Staff



Nov 2018 – May 2019

Survey Method



$n = 369$, RR = 11.6%



Online & Postal Modes



All Grades



Jun 2019 – Nov 2019

Importance of Prison Oversight

“I think it’s important that we’re more accountable, I suppose, like in some elements, **given the power differential between the people in our care**. Unless we hold people accountable for their actions it could become a dark place very quick, you know? [...] the big walls that keep prisoners in keeps the public out. **And unless we are subject to external scrutiny, there is a danger we could slip to doing what is convenient for the organisation rather than some of the people in our care, you know?”**

Counterbalance Power Differential

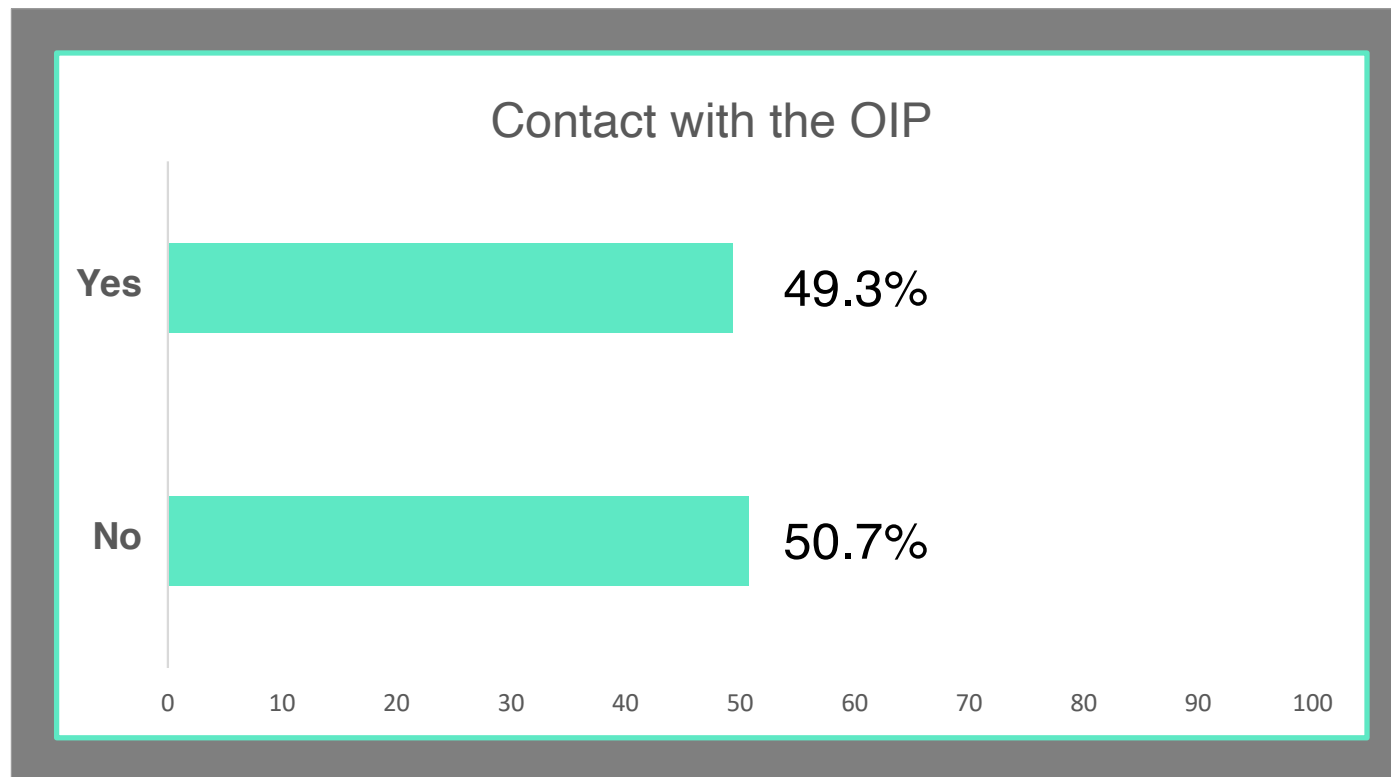
P22

Learning & Best Practice

P02

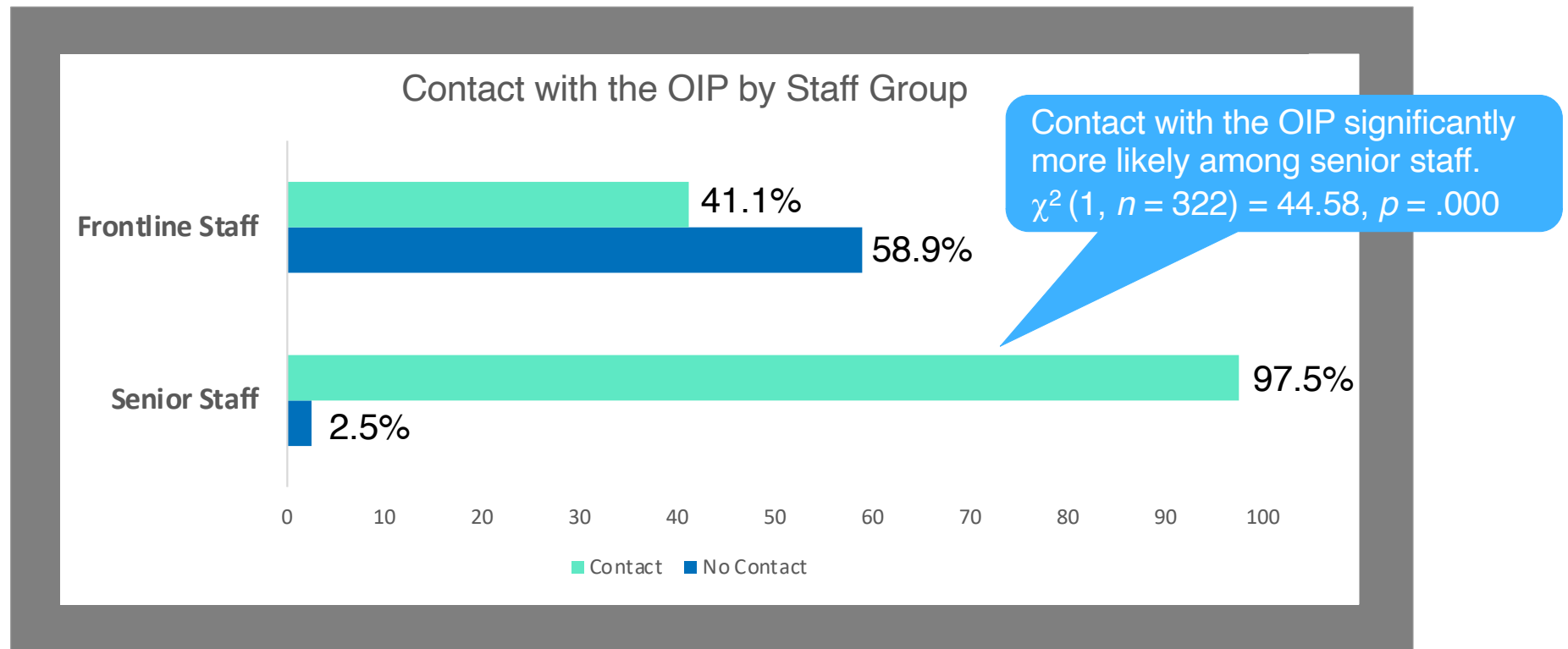
“...that we can never become complacent. And that’s a good thing, not to be complacent. **But to keep actually trying to improve**, and to keep trying to make things better. **So [oversight bodies have] given us that impetus to actually make our actions meet our rhetoric.”**

Contact with the Office of the Inspector of Prisons



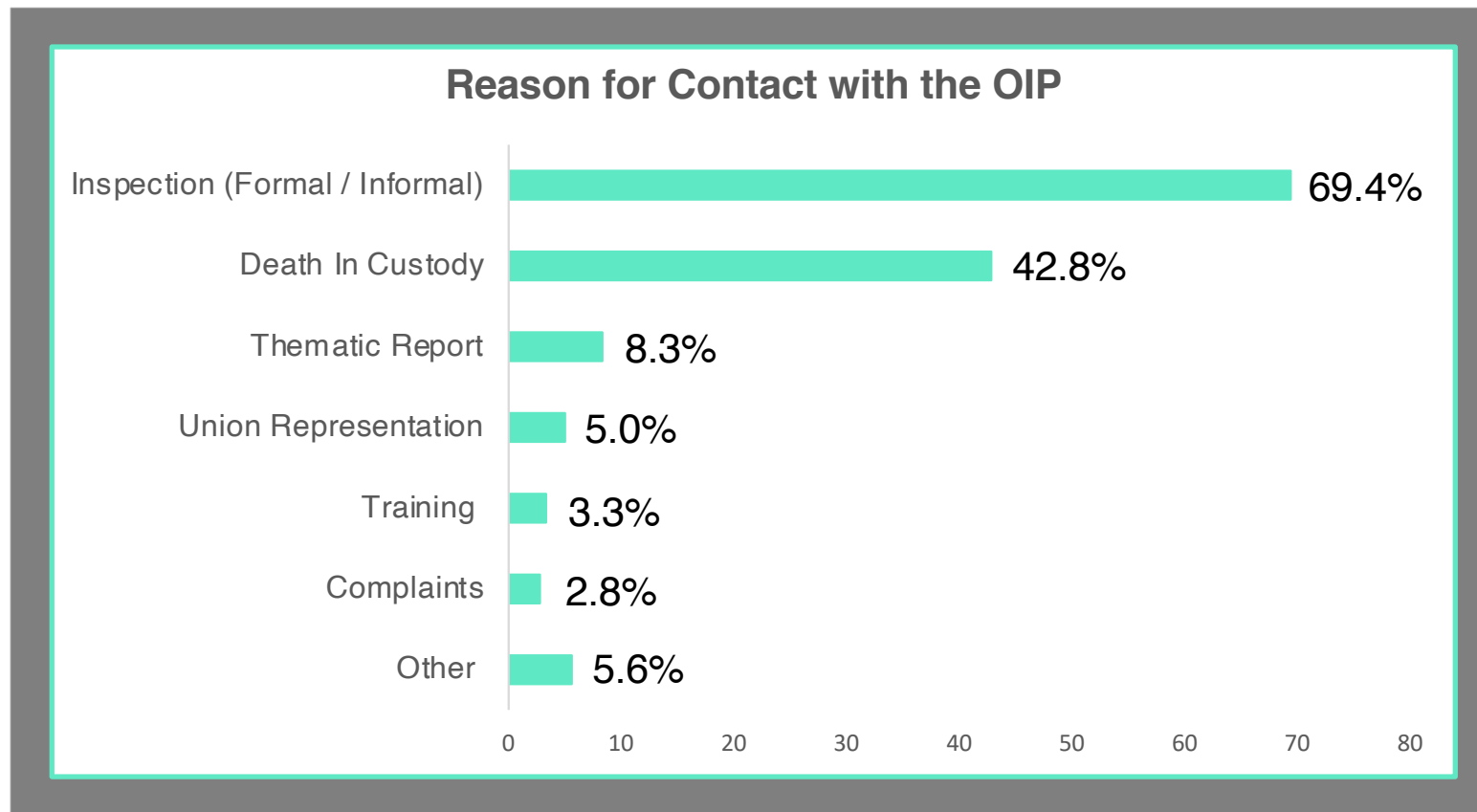
Sample Size, $n = 365$

Contact with the Office of the Inspector of Prisons



Sample Size, $n = 155$

Reason for Contact with OIP



Sample Size, $n = 180$

What is important in terms of a
good inspection process?

OIP Inspection Process

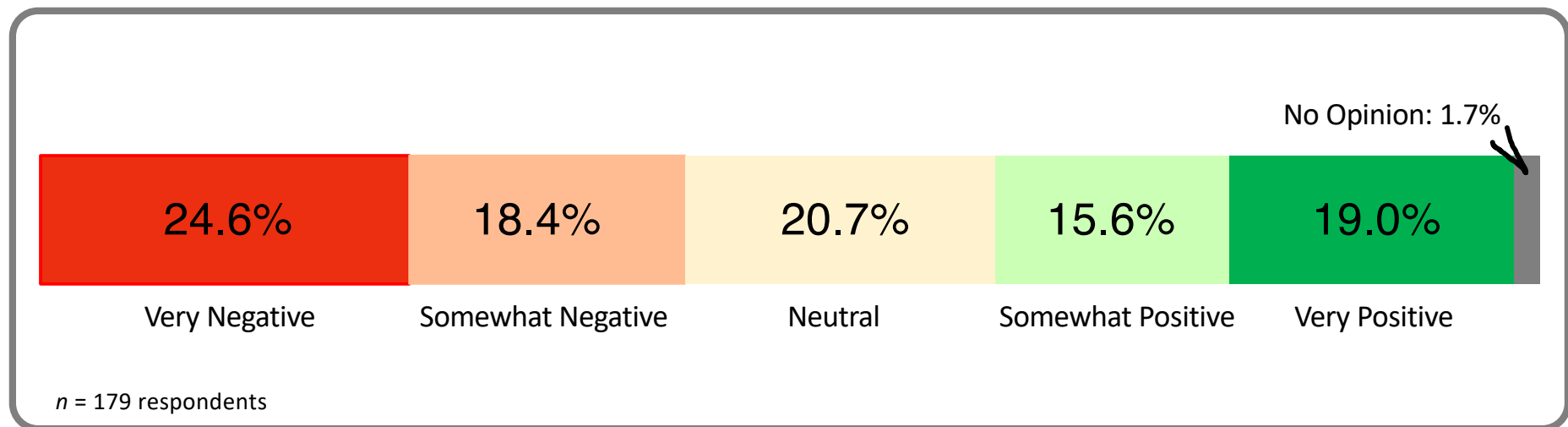
Q20) Would you consider your opinion of the OIP's inspection process to be:

- ☐ Very Negative
- ☐ Somewhat Negative
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Somewhat Positive
- ☐ Very Positive
- ☐ No opinion



OIP Inspection Process

Q20) Would you consider your opinion of the OIP's inspection process to be:



What matters for an inspection process?

Q21) To what extent would you agree or disagree with the following statements:

- ☐ I think that the OIP has sufficient contact with our prison.
- ☐ The process by which the OIP arrives at its findings is clear to me.
- ☐ The OIP does not understand the realities of prison work.
- ☐ I would be happy to approach the OIP with a concern I might have.



What matters for an inspection process?

Q21) To what extent would you agree or disagree with the following statements:

- ☐ Reports from the OIP accurately represent the prisons they visit.
- ☐ The recommendations arising from OIP reports are reasonable.
- ☐ I am made aware of recommendations arising from OIP reports.
- ☐ The work of the OIP has led to improvements in Irish prisons.



What matters for an inspection process?

Table 1: Correlation of inspection feature items with general opinion of OIP inspection process.

Feature	Correlation (ρ)	p-value	Confidence Interval
Sufficient Contact	0.168	.027	(-0.039, 0.340)
Clear Process	0.650**	.000	(0.487, 0.769)
Understanding of Prison Work	-0.491**	.000	(-0.659, -0.297)
Approachability	0.615**	.000	(0.455, 0.736)
Accurate Representation	0.565**	.000	(0.389, 0.719)
Reasonable Recommendations	0.609**	.000	(0.464, 0.735)
Awareness of Recommendations	0.418**	.000	(0.236, 0.591)
Leads to Improvements	0.643**	.000	(0.498, 0.760)

n = 175 respondents

What matters for an inspection process?

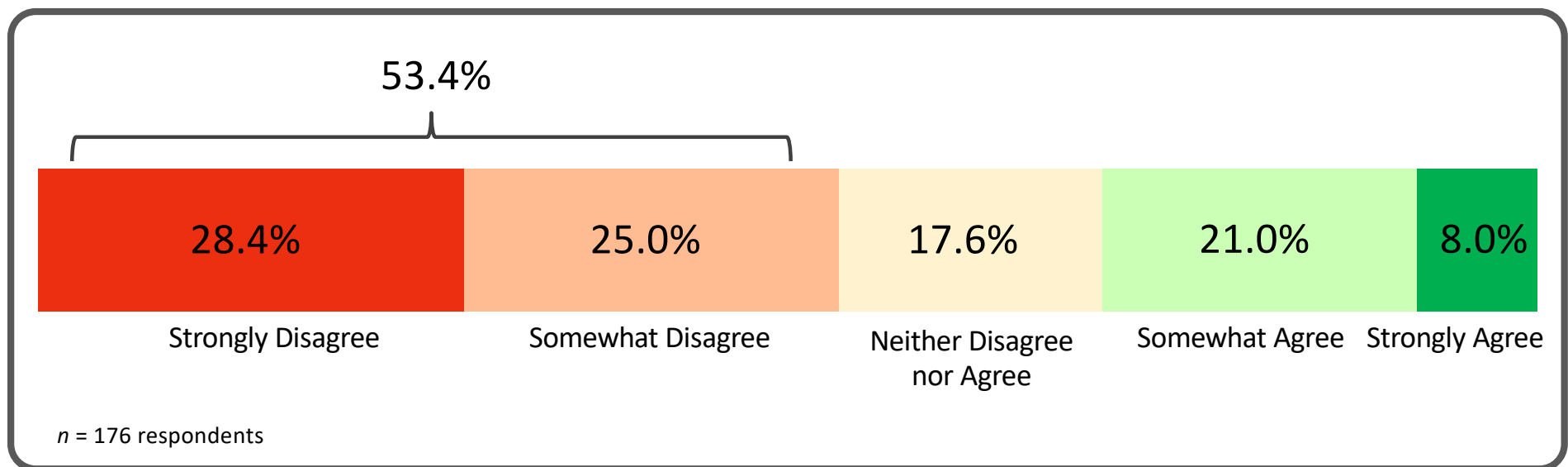
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Clear Process

**Q25(ii) To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement:
the process by which the OIP arrives at its findings is clear to me.**



Clear Process: The Importance of Methodology

Clear Process



Transparent methodology

- Lack of understanding about how the office conducts its work.
- Lack of clarity about how findings are established and become recommendations.

"I don't think it's clear **how they arrive at their findings**. But I think, you agree with them most of the time, to be honest."

P16

"For most reasonable people looking at it, it absolutely is about the process. **How do you conduct it?** And is it *fair?*"

P06

Clear Process: The Importance of Methodology

Clear Process

- ➡ Transparent methodology
- ➡ Clear standards of assessment
 - Establishing clarity regarding the parameters of the inspection process.
 - Awareness of areas to continually monitor for improvement.

“[The previous approach] seemed to kind of be a bit haphazard, to be honest, at the time. Now, I know the new Inspector has, has, has a kind of a plan to formalise the inspections. **And to give us a kind of a guideline as to what she will be inspecting.** Do you know? And, like, standards that we are to achieve. And, like, she will, you know, inspect on the basis of those standards. **Which hasn't been the case up until this point.**”

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Optimism Regarding New Framework

“I think the new system will be better because everyone knows where they’re coming from. And **people will have time to look at it, to audit it themselves.**”

P18

“The [new model] is very, very, much **exactly what’s required,** in my humble opinion.”

P30

“I have spoken with the new IOP. I’m happy with her new style. She’s going to stay with us for a few days. And I think that’s welcome because **people do forget that you’re there, and she can kind of see, culturally, how we work.** And I think that will be very positive”

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Conclusions

- ➔ Recognition among staff of the importance of oversight through inspection.
- ➔ Staff contact with the OIP mainly in relation to inspection / deaths in custody.
- ➔ Understanding prison work, approachability, awareness of recommendations, accurate representation, and reasonable recommendations are all positively associated with opinions of the inspection process.
- ➔ A clear inspection process is highly valued among prison staff.
- ➔ Optimism among staff regarding the new approach of the OIP.



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Thank You!

For further project info:



www.tcd.ie/law/research/prila



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