

Structured Risk Assessment in Improving Public Perceptions of Ex-Terrorist Offender Reintegration Programmes

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Roshini Sashsan-Stock and Dr Tochukwu Onwuegbusi

School of Psychology, College of Social Sciences, University of Lincoln

Contact details: gwynnethe@live.co.uk or tonwuegbusi@lincoln.ac.uk



UNIVERSITY OF LINCOLN

Rationale

- There is very little public support for ex-terrorist reintegration programmes (Clubb & O'Connor, 2019)
- Public support is important because community-based programmes are more successful in rehabilitating ex-terrorist offenders (Webber et al., 2018), whilst punitive strategies and stigmas can increase risk of reoffending (Hettiarachchi, 2018)
- The news media increases fear around terrorism (Kabir et al., 2018), particularly for Islamist terrorism, leading to Islamophobia and hate crimes against ordinary Muslims (Kearns et al., 2019)
- Risk assessment has been trialled for reducing biases in the Criminal Justice System (Skeem et al., 2020), therefore risk assessment could provide a facts-based alternative to the media to reduce fear, Islamophobia, and increase support for successful reintegration

Hypotheses

Considering the literature, we hypothesised:

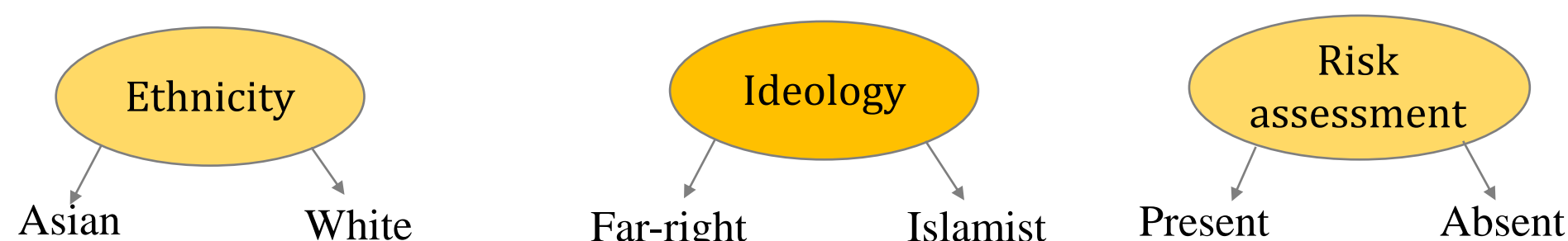
1. Individuals provided with a risk assessment detailing an ex-terrorist offender's low risk of being released would feel more positive about the ex-offender being released into their own community
2. Individuals will present with higher fear and less acceptance of the ex-terrorist being released into their community if the ex-terrorist is of extremist Islamist ideology

Participants

- 232 participants total: 181 female, 49 male, 2 other. Age range 18-67 ($M=25.70$, $SD=7.01$)

Design

- A 2 x 2 x 2 experimental vignette design, with eight conditions
- IVs: Perpetrator ethnicity, perpetrator ideology, presence of risk assessment



- DVs: decision to release on parole, perceived likelihood of reoffending, comfort with release, fear of release

Procedure



Methods

- Media consumption questionnaire
 - Asked participants how they most often accessed news information, with answer options as "friends/family/colleagues"; "newspapers (online or paper copy)"; "radio"; "social media"; "television"
- Risk judgement questionnaire
 - Asked participants questions relating to the five dependent variables
- Hypothetical vignette of a crime
 - A total of 8 vignettes were used.
 - Each vignette detailed an ex-terrorist perpetrator's offence and that they were due to be released after completing a 14-year sentence

Materials

Data Analysis

- Multinomial regression to predict decision to release on parole using perpetrator ethnicity, perpetrator ideology, and presence of risk assessment
- Three multiple linear regressions to predict the perceived likelihood of reoffending, fear levels, and comfort levels, using perpetrator ideology, perpetrator ethnicity, and presence of risk assessment
- News media consumption (newspapers, television, radio, and social media) were treated as covariates in the Multiple linear regressions model

Results

- Figure 1 plots the distribution of responses on decision to release with and without risk assessment. Provision of risk assessment increases the decision to release the ex-offender on parole ($p < .001$).
- Figure 2 plots mean responses for beliefs about likelihood of reoffending, comfort with release, and fear levels with and without provision of risk assessment information (RAI).
- RAI significantly increased comfort levels ($p = .0028$), and significantly reduced perceived likelihood of reoffending ($p < .001$). However, risk assessment did not significantly impact fear.
- Media consumption (TV access) significantly increased fear of the ex-offender being released ($p = .001$), but did not impact decision to release, comfort, or perceived likelihood of reoffending.
- No effect of perpetrator ideology or ethnicity on responses.

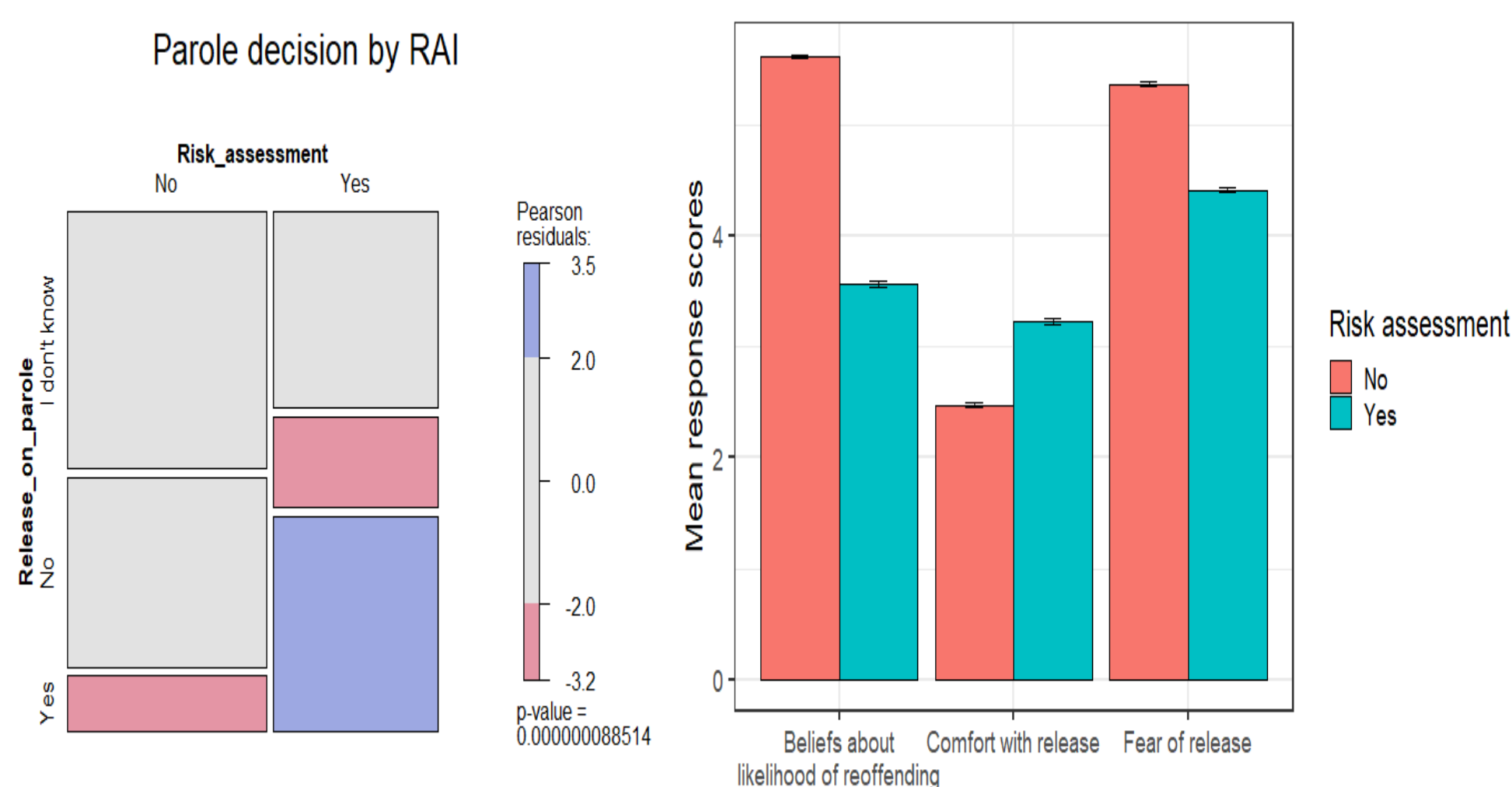


Figure 1

Figure 2

Discussion and Conclusions

- No effect of perpetrator ideology could be related to the largely politically left-leaning participant sample
- Risk assessment does appear to provide an effective facts-based alternative to news media for increasing acceptance of ex-terrorist offender reintegration programmes
- Therefore, risk assessment could increase public support for community-based rehabilitation programmes, maximising the chances of successful rehabilitation and reintegration
- However, fear of the ex-offender's reintegration into the community remains the same, and is increased by news media consumption
- Therefore, further exploration is needed into practical ways to modify news reporting to be more factual and less fear-inducing, in order to further improve chances of reintegration success

References

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