

The sequencing of interventions with offenders:

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THE SEQUENCING OF INTERVENTIONS WITH OFFENDERS: VIEWS OF OFFENDER MANAGERS AND SUPERVISORS

Abstract

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to explore the views and opinions of Offender Supervisors and Offender Managers regarding the sequencing of interventions for prisoners in England. More specifically, the research aimed to gain an understanding of any barriers to implementing desired practice.

Methodology

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten participants located across four HM prisons in the West Midlands. Questions were designed to gather information and views regarding: current practice in the area of sequencing of interventions; opinions on the potential importance of coherent sequencing of interventions; views on how interventions should be sequenced; and what, if any, issues impacted upon coherent sequencing. Thematic analysis was used to identify, analyse and report themes within the interviews.

Findings

Participants discussed current practice regarding the sequencing of interventions and made suggestions regarding tailoring the sequence of interventions to the individual offender. The issue of *readiness* to change was emphasised (i.e. engagement with interventions will increase where offenders are able to participate in an intervention when they feel *ready* to do so). In addition, participants commented that they felt there to be insufficient resources at their disposal which led to barriers to the coherent sequencing of interventions (e.g. waiting lists for treatment programmes).

Practical implications

Suggestions were made by participants regarding the coherent sequencing of interventions. For example, providing prisoners with experience of a generic group intervention prior to an offence specific intervention, prioritising motivation to change, and being responsive to the needs of individual offenders.

Originality/value

The study provides insight regarding the sequencing of interventions from the perspective of offender supervisors and offender managers who are involved in the planning of treatment programmes across the course of an offender's sentence.

Keywords: Treatment readiness; Sequencing; Treatment; Offender; Intervention; Prison;

Qualitative

Article classification: Research paper

Introduction

The National Offender Management Service (NOMS; replaced in April 2017 by Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service) introduced the offender management model in 2005. The model focuses on the end-to-end management of offenders, i.e. management spanning their whole sentence across prison and in the community (NOMS, 2006). The offender manager is responsible for offender assessment, sentence planning, ensuring the plan is implemented, reviewing/re-assessing the plan and, finally, evaluation. As it is not feasible for offender managers to have regular contact with offenders, offenders are allocated to an offender supervisor (NOMS, 2006). The role of the offender supervisor is to implement the plan put forward by the manager. In custody each offender will be allocated a supervisor who will aim to meet them on a frequent basis in order to assist an offender in the process of behavioural change. The end-to-end process incorporates selection, sequencing and delivery of interventions across an entire sentence. More recently, the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) Practice Framework (2015) notes the need for the coherent sequencing of interventions based on “manageable steps for the offender and those working with them.” (p. 22). The term *intervention* in prison most commonly refers to accredited Offender Behaviour Programmes (OBPs; aimed at addressing thoughts and behaviour to reduce reoffending) but could also refer to programmes to address issues such as literacy skills deficits and alcohol misuse.

In a review of the literature (Stephenson *et al.*, 2013), it was suggested that certain assumptions can be made as to how interventions should be sequenced based on theoretical models (e.g. The Multifactor Offender Readiness Model (MORM), Ward *et al.*, 2004; The Transtheoretical Model (TTM) of behaviour change, Prochaska and DiClemente, 1983; and the Good Lives Model (GLM), Maruna, 2001). The MORM (Ward *et al.*, 2004), posits that there are certain internal (e.g. motivation, attitudes, beliefs) and external (e.g. programme

availability, waiting lists) factors which will impact upon an offender's *readiness* to change; such factors need to be taken into consideration when tailoring the type and timing of an intervention to an offender. The Stages of Change (SOC) construct within the TTM (Prochaska and DiClemente, 1983) suggests that people pass through five stages of change (precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, and maintenance; Prochaska *et al.*, 1992). The SOC suggests that it would be necessary to match an offender's intervention to their stage of change, and that interventions should aim to address the needs of the particular offender at the time. Lastly, with reference to the sequencing of interventions, the GLM (Maruna, 2001) would suggest that, following an assessment of an offender's life goals, it is necessary to make decisions regarding the most effective sequence in which an offender will address issues to help them meet their pro-social goals.

Concurrent with the above theoretical assertions, the importance of prioritising motivation to change when sequencing interventions has been noted by those working with an offending population (Andrews and Bonta, 2010; Beyko and Wong, 2005; McMurran and Ward, 2010; Pelissier, 2007; Sellen *et al.*, 2013). In addition, research in the field of offender rehabilitation has highlighted the need to consider the process of behavioural change when sequencing interventions (Bennett, 2015; Taxman and Caudy, 2015; Stephenson *et al.*, 2017).

Offender managers are required to consider how the sequence of interventions can map onto the process of change within an offender and help the offender progress through stages of behavioural change to a point where an offender can desist from offending (NOMS, 2006). As it is not feasible for offender managers to have regular contact with offenders, offenders are allocated to an offender supervisor (NOMS, 2006).

In order to form a coherent sequence of interventions, it was thought by offender managers that "the sequencing of interventions needed to be fluid and responsive to the offender's changing needs, circumstances and risk factors." (Turley *et al.*, 2011, p. 13).

However, in the most recent aggregate report on offender management in prisons (Criminal Justice Joint Inspection (CJJI; 2013), it was found that in only 46% of cases were treatment plans coherently sequenced. However, there were some exceptions such as HMP Drake Hall (a women's closed prison) where they were commended for reviewing the needs of prisoners at monthly sequencing meetings.

The low percentage of coherently sequenced plans was found, in part, to be resulting from a lack of resources meaning that participation in courses was largely dependent on course availability rather than prisoners' individual needs. As a result of a lack of course availability, where prisoners are required to participate in a particular treatment programme, there is the need for prisoners to be transferred to different establishments where courses are available (CJJI, 2013). However, in some cases it was found that prisoners were unable to get a transfer to a prison where the programme was available.

In addition, the Ministry of Justice (2013) highlight the issue of sentence length as a barrier to effective treatment; where an offender is serving a short sentence, it is recognised that they will have very little opportunity to participate in programmes due to waiting lists and, in some cases, the length of programmes (MoJ, 2013; National Audit Office, 2010).

In a qualitative study exploring the delivery of cognitive skills programmes in prison (Clarke *et al.*, 2004), interviews with prison staff revealed that access to cognitive skills programmes was largely dependent on parole date to ensure prisoners had an opportunity to participate prior to release. However, prisoners who were motivated to participate but who were not near the end of their sentence were often denied access to the programme and placed on a waiting list during which time motivation to participate levels dropped.

Furthermore, in a qualitative study exploring the views and experiences of offenders regarding the sequencing of interventions, offenders reported that they felt consideration should be given to the coherent sequencing of interventions. More specifically, they noted the

importance of desire to change when sequencing interventions and being responsive to the needs of the individual (Stephenson *et al.*, 2017).

Assertions and guidelines notwithstanding, there remains a dearth of research into the impact of the sequencing of interventions with offenders. By exploring the opinions and experiences of offender managers and supervisors, the current study sought to gain further insight into issues impacting upon the coherent sequencing and timing of interventions.

Method

Participants

Purposive sampling was used in order to select participants. The sample consisted of offender supervisors ($n=8$), one offender manager, and one head of an offender management team. Staff had experience of being part of the decision-making process for the types of interventions recommended for an offender to participate in, as well as, potentially, the sequence in which the interventions are delivered. Contact details were provided by the MoJ (West Midlands). Potential participants were located across four HMPs in the West Midlands.

Measure

Semi-structured interview questions for the telephone interviews were developed by the main researcher (a Doctoral student at the University of Birmingham) and comprised of eighteen questions. Participants were also given an opportunity to make any further comments. Questions were designed to gather information and views regarding the following: current practice in the area of sequencing of interventions; opinions on the potential importance of coherent sequencing of interventions; views on how interventions should be sequenced; and what, if any, issues impacted upon coherent sequencing. Minor changes were made to the wording of the questionnaire following a pilot study. Prompts were used during the interview to allow participants to elaborate on, or clarify points.

Procedure

E-mails were sent to potential participants outlining the nature of the study, highlighting the importance of their views and experiences, and giving assurance that the study was commissioned by the MoJ and had gained ethical approval. An information sheet and consent form were attached to the e-mail. Participants were invited to take part in the study. They were assured that their participation and responses given in the interview would remain anonymous. Staff who returned consent forms were contacted to arrange a convenient time for the telephone interview to take place.

Data analysis

The recorded interviews were transcribed and inputted into NVivo software for analysis. Thematic analysis was used to identify, analyse and report themes within the interviews. Although thematic analysis is viewed by some as being the foundation for other qualitative data analysis techniques rather than a specific method, Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that thematic analysis should be viewed as a method in its own right. It is believed that “through its theoretical freedom, thematic analysis provides a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of data” (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 78). Initial codes were developed through analyses of the data. Codes were organised into sub-themes and overarching main themes.

Results

[Insert Table 1 approximately here]

*Theme 1: Sequencing**1.1. Current practice*

Participants explained that the Offender Assessment System (OASys) is designed to identify criminogenic risk factors which need to be addressed with interventions prior to release. They expressed views on whether the sequence in which risk factors will be

addressed through interventions is considered. The majority of participants commented that consideration was given to sequencing. One participant made specific reference to their thoughts regarding sequencing of the Thinking Skills Programme (TSP; focusing on cognitive skills necessary to help offenders modify their offending thought and behaviour patterns) and the Sex Offender Treatment Programme (SOTP; aiming to increase an offender's motivation to change sexual offending behaviour, identify and modify attitudes and beliefs held, and to provide strategies to reduce the risk of re-offending):

...a great deal of thought does go into it in terms of what is the appropriate way to access or sequence the events, in interventions...for instance, we would probably have TSP as the main starter programme, then we'd probably put them on the SOTP starter programme... (P10).

However, other participants felt that coherent sequencing of interventions is not something that is currently put into practice:

...in terms of interventions now, erm, I don't think there is any specific sequencing as far as I'm aware (P3).

All participants expressed the opinion that current practice in the sequencing of interventions is largely determined by the availability of programmes.

1.2. Readiness to change

The majority of participants highlighted the importance of prisoner motivation to take part in interventions. Motivation was viewed as an indication of whether an offender will engage with a treatment programmes and the likelihood that their level of risk will be subsequently reduced, as such offenders should participate in interventions when they are motivated to take part:

...while their motivations high, er, get a grip of them, because that's when they do well on the courses (P1).

In addition, a readiness issue highlighted was whether an offender has the necessary skills to participate in an intervention. Literacy skills were identified as a factor which needs to be addressed prior to certain interventions:

...obviously if a prisoner comes in and he's identified as needing TSP, CALM [aimed at help offenders in managing emotions by providing them with the skills necessary to avoid conflict and control their tempers], whatever programme he needs, he's got to have a reasonable level of education first...before they're even considered for the courses... (P1).

The ability of an offender to participate in and benefit from group work was also highlighted by participants as an issue that will impact upon the sequence in which interventions are delivered. It was felt that placing an offender who was not *ready* for group work into a programme delivered in a group setting would have a negative impact upon the prisoner's ability to benefit from the programme:

I've had a few of my offender group before, go into the group environment, maybe be plunged straight in at the deep end with TSP because that's what everyone feels they need and within three days they want to withdraw from that group...just because they've felt so overwhelmed and daunted being put straight into the group environment (P8).

Approximately half the participants felt that it would be preferable for prisoners to participate in shorter or more general offender behaviour programmes prior to offence specific programmes in order for prisoners to feel at ease. Lastly, one participant went further to suggest that the sequence in which interventions are delivered can impact upon an offender's engagement with a particular programme:

...it [sequencing] would impact more in terms of the individual offender's engagement with other, equally important but obviously non-accredited interventions such as basic

skills work, their attention and attainment in education, their involvement in other non-accredited programmes that other partner organisations are doing in terms of employability opportunities, employability work, again their engagement there (P7).

1.3. Coherent sequencing suggestions

It was felt that TSP was a useful course to participate in prior to further offender behaviour courses:

... I think that's [TSP] the most effective course, so I do tend to prioritise TSP. In an ideal world, if I could do that, that's what I would do (P8).

It was further commented that prisoners may need to adjust to prison life prior to participating in interventions and that this should be considered when sequencing. In addition, it was felt that, by coherently sequencing interventions and making a prisoner aware of the sequence, levels of motivation can be increased:

...the first bit of time will be to get them used to being in custody, and then the second part will be to give them some skills, so you'd look at perhaps educational skills to begin with, um, and then your vocational training and things like that afterwards, and then as you're getting towards a stage where it's possible for them to move on in terms of release...prisoners are quite fearful when they come in to custody...focus on sequencing would actually help them to actually see light at the end of the tunnel if you like, on release, so I do believe that sequencing is the right way to go and can be a real motivator for them (P5).

The suggestion was also made that it would be beneficial to address general cognitive issues in programmes such as TSP prior to vocational courses and further offender behaviour programmes. The idea that a structure for a prisoner's interventions could be beneficial was expressed:

...if you get them early on, and keep them, so you've got a structure to work to: TSP, we'll do you TSP then we'll do vocational work and then perhaps victim awareness, and structure it throughout the sentence, not cram in everything at the end (P1).

...perhaps if you frontloaded that [cognitive work] and then started addressing things like basic skills and employability skills, that would be a better way round because of course some of that thinking skills work would help with motivation to change...

there's a lot of the area's regime work is very dependent on an individual's motivation to change... (P7).

1.4. In an ideal world

In addition to comments on barriers to coherent sequencing (see Theme 2), participants had views on what would need to occur in order for interventions to be coherently sequenced according to the needs of the offender:

In an ideal world, you know, where we had a whole range of interventions we could pick from like, sort of, pick them off a supermarket shelf, um, it would be great to say, 'right we'll do this one first, and then this needs to be done and then that one, that one', erm, in the real world unfortunately, it's a case of you know, what does the prison need to do to address his risk areas, and where can we access those interventions...in an ideal world, where we had certain amount of interventions available, we could slot people in and move them round. Or we could run, you know, a whole battery of courses here, it would be great, but because of resources, we only have some that we can actually deliver, so that does sometimes get in the way of things unfortunately (P10).

1.5. Individual differences

The importance of considering the specific needs of individual offenders was highlighted by the majority of participants. Attention was drawn to the need to tailor the type

of intervention proposed and the sequence in which they should be delivered to the individual prisoner's needs. For example, the age of a prisoner was highlighted as a factor to be considered.

Participants felt that recommendations for interventions and the sequencing of interventions should be based on the individual needs of an offender as ascertained from assessments and contact with staff rather than making generalisations based on offence type:

...it's fine to generalise in saying that everybody has cognitive issues, therefore to resolve those [first]. I think that is too general, there will always be individuals where there might be very specific needs that aren't necessarily cognitive. So yeah it would be wrong to say that that would be a broad brush that you could paint on everybody (P7).

One participant went further to comment upon the current situation in prison and how changes have occurred over time:

...it's very much been a cultural shift to the prison service; a move away from everyone's the same, to that everyone's unique with their own unique needs and their own unique care plans having to be brought into place and so it's getting there, but it's a slow process (P2).

Theme 2: Constraints

2.1. Resources

All participants outlined barriers to accessing interventions and the subsequent impact this has on coherent sequencing of interventions. Participants highlighted the restricted availability of programmes and subsequent long waiting lists resulting from a lack of resources/funding in each prison:

...we've got too many lads but not enough courses...there are restraints on us. We only have a set amount of lads that can go on particular programmes...this last year we've

had a lot of courses cancelled and we've had a lot of courses that geared up and were scheduled to start but never did just purely because we haven't got the staff in place (P4).

The majority of participants went further to comment on the impact that lack of resources has upon prisoners. A decrease in motivation as a result of having to wait long periods of time (over three years in certain cases) was cited as a psychological response:

...if he really regrets his crime when he first comes in, and he's highly motivated to make sure it never happens again, then the courses should be available to him, because he can get in with the wrong crowd and then when the time comes for his course, he doesn't care, because he's lost interest, his motivation's gone (P1).

A need to provide interventions at a time in which a prisoner feels *ready* to participate was identified as being necessary in order to increase the efficacy of programmes. All participants believed offender behaviour programmes to be effective for some prisoners in reducing the likelihood that they will re-offend upon release. They therefore expressed concern regarding the current lack of programmes running in prisons and the impact that this would have upon re-offending rates and expressed frustration at not being able to meet the needs of prisoners in their care:

...it's a mismatch between what we are able to provide and what does the prisoner actually need... at the end of the day it comes down to a combination of, you know, what's available and what's possible and how we can access those interventions at the right time...prisoners sometimes feel ready to do a programme but the programme isn't available or there is quite a waiting list to get on these things and they have to wait, um, a fair bit of time to be able to access it, and during that time, some of them do lose, obviously, the umph, the motivation to carry on with it (P10).

All offender supervisors and managers felt that, in order to offer prisoners treatment

programmes relevant to their needs and in a coherent sequence, it would be necessary to have more courses running in each prison enabling prisoners to participate in programmes without being made to wait.

2.2. Prison transfers

Where courses are not available at a certain prison, participants drew attention to the need to transfer prisoners to establishments where a course is delivered. However, logistical difficulties in transferring prisoners to different locations were noted.

Participants mentioned a lack of knowledge as to what each prison offers as a barrier to transferring prisoners to an establishment at which they can receive the advocated programme. In addition, where certain criteria need to be met by a prisoner in order to participate in a course, it was suggested that prisoners should be assessed prior to a transfer in order to make sure they will be able to participate on the recommended programme. A need to move prisoners seamlessly between prisons if the desired sequence of interventions is to be delivered was expressed.

Furthermore, comments were made regarding the length of time it takes to transfer prisoners and therefore how long it takes a prisoner to enrol on the relevant programme:

...the time scale involved from identifying prisoners who need to move to actually getting them moved can drag on to the point that by the time we get them to move, that motivation factor has decreased quite considerably (P6).

The issue of communication between prisons was highlighted with reference to knowing where programmes are available and transferring prisoners:

...Rather than prisons working in isolation they should work in a joined-up way where we have a regional approach on interventions on space availability, and we can move people in, you know, quite seamlessly in between different establishments to

complete different programmes...it would be good to have some real choices to provide the prisoner population with (P7).

2.3. Time constraints

Some offender supervisors commented that their workload was such that they were not able to spend sufficient time with each prisoner, and expressed concern as to the impact this would have upon prisoners:

The case loads are very high. Mine personally is over 30. It's very, very difficult to get around everyone, you know, some you don't get around to for quite a while. So there is the case of possibly people are missed (P9).

2.4. Sentence length

Participants commented that whether an offender can participate in a programme will be largely dependent on whether a space becomes available prior to their release. In response to this issue there is an attempt to prioritise prisoners who are near the end of their sentence; however, participants commented that this results in other prisoners being placed further down the waiting lists:

...lads that have got a considerable length of time, say ten years or more, tend to get pushed to the bottom of the list...the belief is that their risks don't need to be addressed until they're nearer to release, whereas they need to be addressed now, because obviously sometimes it affects their behaviour in the custodial setting (P4).

One participant felt strongly that short sentences were ineffective due to difficulties in enabling prisoners to participate in potentially beneficial programmes:

...you need a prisoner who's serving a decent length of sentence in the first instance, so you know, the short sentences are really useless...there's no time to do any work, so all we're doing is warehousing them for that period of time (P5).

Theme 3: Job role

In responding to questions regarding the sequencing of interventions, participants made reference to the issue of motivation to change and changes in pro criminal thinking patterns. They commented on the part they feel they play in encouraging these changes in offenders both through input into decisions regarding the sequencing of interventions and through one-to-one interactions with offenders under their supervision.

3.1. Motivation

Participants commented on what they feel their role is as part of the process of rehabilitating offenders under their care. Motivating prisoners to participate in programmes and to change their behaviour was cited by the majority of participants as being one of their key roles:

...you're going to be 'Big Brother' to a prisoner, and you're going to motivate him to do whatever he can to reduce his risk... (P1).

One participant added that, where it was recognised that an offender would have a gap between intervention programmes, he would try to ensure an offender could participate in another intervention in the time gap in order to maintain levels of motivation.

3.2. Cognitive change

In addition to increasing/maintaining levels of motivation and encouraging prisoners to participate in programmes, participants commented that part of their role is to do some one-to-one work with prisoners to try to change their views about their offence and address prisoner's pro-criminal thinking patterns:

...we can offer sort of 1:1 work with offender supervisors like myself trying to engage them on a 1:1 basis, um, you know challenge their thoughts and behaviours to challenge them to education and things like that (P8).

Discussion

There appeared to be unanimity amongst participants that coherent sequencing of interventions across the course of a prisoner's sentence is necessary to assist in the process of behavioural change. Furthermore, in accordance with the offender management model (NOMS, 2006) and the MoJ practice framework (2015), participants highlighted the need to address the needs of an offender and risks they may pose to themselves or others (as assessed through the initial OASys assessment) in order to form a sentence plan for an offender involving potentially multiple interventions delivered in a coherent sequence. In accordance with readiness literature (Ward *et al.*, 2004), many participants believed it is necessary to consider whether an offender is *ready* to participate in a particular programme; as such, knowledge of an offender's level of readiness would inform the sequencing of interventions.

Many participants highlighted the issue of motivation to change amongst offenders. The general consensus was that it is preferable for an offender to participate in an intervention when he or she feels motivated to do so. This view corresponds with previous studies which offer evidence for the importance of prioritising motivation to change (Beyko & Wong, 2005; McMurren and Ward, 2010; Pelissier, 2007; Sellen *et al.*, 2013). Participants felt that where necessary, a lack of motivation to change be addressed prior to participating in other offence related programmes; where offenders lacked motivation to change it was felt that offenders were less likely to engage with a programme. It was felt that, where prisoners may have to wait to take part in a particular programme (due to a lack of programme availability or long waiting lists), levels of motivation would decrease possibly due to feelings of abandonment by the prison service or prolonged exposure to other prisoners' negative attitudes towards programmes.

In accordance with the responsivity principle (Andrews and Bonta, 2010), the majority of participants highlighted the need to treat prisoners as individuals when devising a treatment plan and sequencing interventions. It was believed that the delivery of programmes

should be tailored to the individual needs of a prisoner. As prisoners differ in terms of their needs and attitudes towards programmes, participants felt that individual differences need to be taken into account when devising treatment plans. A further readiness issue identified by participants and in previous literature (Ward *et al.*, 2004) was prior experience of group work. Some participants highlighted the usefulness of experience in taking part in a general group programme (e.g. becoming accustomed to sharing feelings in front of others) prior to offence specific programmes. For example, some participants felt that participating in the TSP prior to the SOTP would be beneficial.

The juxtaposition between what was felt to be good practice in the sequencing of interventions and what is viable given certain practical issues was highlighted by all participants. In short it was felt that the sequence in which interventions are delivered should, in part, be guided by identifying and addressing barriers to participation in programmes (such as lack of experience of group work, low literacy levels, lack of motivation, and general cognitive deficits) prior to participating in offence specific programmes. However, all participants outlined a range of obstacles to enabling prisoners to participate in programmes in a coherent sequence as outlined at the treatment planning stage. The root cause of such difficulties was cited by participants as being insufficient resources.

Despite the efforts and opinions of offender supervisors and managers, the lack of course availability, long waiting lists, and difficulties with transferring prisoners to different establishments were highlighted as having a major impact upon the ability to coherently sequence interventions. All offender supervisors believed the sequence in which interventions are delivered was largely dictated by course availability; prisoners were allocated to a programme from their sentence plan when a space became available rather than at an appropriate time (e.g. when motivated or following the correct sequence). Participants felt that, in order to allow a prisoner to participate in programmes in a coherent sequence, a

full range of courses needed to be available at each establishment, and said courses needed to run frequently to reduce time spent on waiting lists. However, all participants believed this to be an unrealistic prospect.

Problems with course availability were compounded by some prisoners having short sentences. Where a prisoner has a short sentence, their release comes before the opportunity to participate in a programme or set of programmes. One participant explained how prisoners with short sentences (who would otherwise leave prison without participating in any programmes) would be prioritised above those with longer sentences. He felt this led to prisoners who may have felt motivated to participate in a programme being denied access. The issue of short sentence length has been identified as problematic by the MoJ and a new system has been implemented whereby offenders who serve a sentence of less than one year will receive a minimum of twelve months supervision in the community to allow for participation in rehabilitative interventions (MoJ, 2013).

A further issue that participants felt had a negative impact on the prisoners was that of the time available to them to spend with prisoners under their supervision. In accordance with the offender management model (NOMS, 2006), participants believed their role involved motivating and supporting prisoners, however, some experienced a lack of available time for one-to-one contact with prisoners under their supervision and felt this negatively impacted on prisoners.

Limitations

The sample group comprised of offender managers and supervisors from the West Midlands area of the UK and, as such, can only be considered to reflect experiences in that region. However, the Offender Management Model (NOMS, 2006) is used in all HMP establishments across England and Wales; as such offender supervisors and managers in other establishments may experience similar issues. As no single prison in England or Wales

offers a full range of interventions it is therefore possible that staff in other establishments will experience similar issues regarding a lack of course availability, waiting lists and subsequent difficulties in the coherent sequencing of interventions.

Conducting interviews over the telephone could be viewed as being a limitation of the study, with telephone interviews generally viewed as being inferior to face-to-face interviews. However, in a review of research, Novick (2008) found little evidence to substantiate such views and highlighted positive aspects of conducting interviews over the telephone such as an increase in willingness to disclose sensitive information and increased access to participants.

Conclusions

The findings of the current study are consistent with previous literature and research in terms of offender management guidelines and barriers to implementation. All participants recognised the potential benefits of coherent sequencing of interventions, however all participants highlighted resource issues (e.g. lack of course availability and waiting lists) as being the greatest obstacle to coherent sequencing. Having the ability to enrol a prisoner on a specific programme when it was felt by staff and the prisoner that they were *ready* to participate was cited as the ideal situation, however, beliefs that this was not always achievable were evident. The findings emphasise the need to strive to implement practices thought to be beneficial to prisoners in terms of increasing the efficacy of a set of interventions.

Implications for practice

- Increase the availability of interventions for offenders to make the coherent sequencing of interventions a more achievable target (i.e. reduce the need for prison transfers and waiting lists).

- Increase the amount of time offender supervisors and managers have with offenders under their care thus allowing for increased communication regarding the coherent sequencing of interventions.
- Improved communication across prisons for 'seamless' transfers.
- Increase in the amount of consideration paid to matching resources to the specific needs of individual offenders.
- Conduct further research to explore the coherent sequencing of interventions in relation to the impact on recidivism rates.

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