



PRISON OFFICERS: UNDERSTANDING AND KNOWLEDGE OF AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER IN THE PRISON ENVIRONMENT

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Knowledge and Understanding of ASD Amongst Prison Staff

- Scarce research, other than Myers in Scotland (2004) has even touched on the issue surrounding the knowledge and understanding of ASD in prison staff, or indeed lack of.
- Important that prison staff have at least an adequate understanding of ASD particularly given that many individuals with ASD struggle to communicate their needs and given their increased vulnerability in prison to bullying, etc (Jordan, 1999).

Extensive literature search of studies investigating knowledge and understanding of ASD in prison staff

- An extensive literature search returned only one study which investigated this important issue (McAdam, 2012).

Summary: Autism Spectrum Disorder in Prison

- Many people with ASD face life being misunderstood and having their intentions misinterpreted.
- Those with AS may be vulnerable and open to victimisation and abuse by fellow inmates (Burdon & Dickens, 2009).
- Current evidence in support of satisfactory outcomes for offenders with ASD is not encouraging (Milton et al., 2002, Murphy, 2010).
- Very little to guide service design to develop autism support services for people in prison (Cashin & Newman, 2009).



Why it is important to explore

- Impact on the prison can be significant – prison officers struggle to identify ways to support autistic prisoners
- Autistic prisoners are known to choose extended periods of time in the Care and Separation Units (segregation)
- C&S Units are quieter environments in the prison and there is minimal contact with other prisoners

Sensitivity

- Prisons are noisy, busy and at times chaotic environments
- Strong smells – cleaning products, food at mealtimes, spice
- Lack of natural light
- Night time observations



Autism Accreditation

- Prison staff working alongside the National Autistic Society
- Implement standards developed specifically for prisons to improve the identification and support of autistic prisoners
- Raising awareness and understanding of autism among staff
- Making reasonable adjustments to the prison environment (allowing autistic prisoners to use communal areas at quieter times)

Prison Routine

- Prison life is very structured
- Rules, routines and regulations
- Breaking the routine – staff shortages, staff changes, unannounced cell searches, incidents, lockdowns – sudden disruptions to the daily routine can happen
- Support from prison officers



Autism and Increased Vulnerability

- A lack of staff knowledge can lead to vulnerabilities (Allely, 2015)
- Friends or acquaintances?
- Pains of imprisonment (Sykes, 1958)
 - Deprivation of security
- Lack of awareness around personal security
- Easily manipulated by other prisoners
- Vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse
- Lack of understanding of prisoner hierarchies

Occupational Culture

- Culture... *“the commonly shared beliefs, values and characteristic patterns of behaviour that exist within an organisation”* (Williams et al, 1993: 12)
- Prison officer culture
- Traditional culture associated competence with masculinity, physical strength and emotional toughness (Crawley, 2004)
- Security and control
- Jailcraft – utilising on the job experience
- Challenging the occupational norms
 - care and compassion

Prison Officer Power

- **Legitimate power** – officer has a right to exercise control and has a legitimate right to be obeyed
- **Coercive power** – repeated, unannounced cell searches, use of segregation
- **Reward power** – officer's distribution of privileges
- **Expert power** – officers perceived as having special knowledge base and skills, easy going manner
- **Referent power** – fair and consistent with their personal approach, manner and show respect
- (Liebling, Price & Shefer, 2011)

Staff-Prisoner Relationships



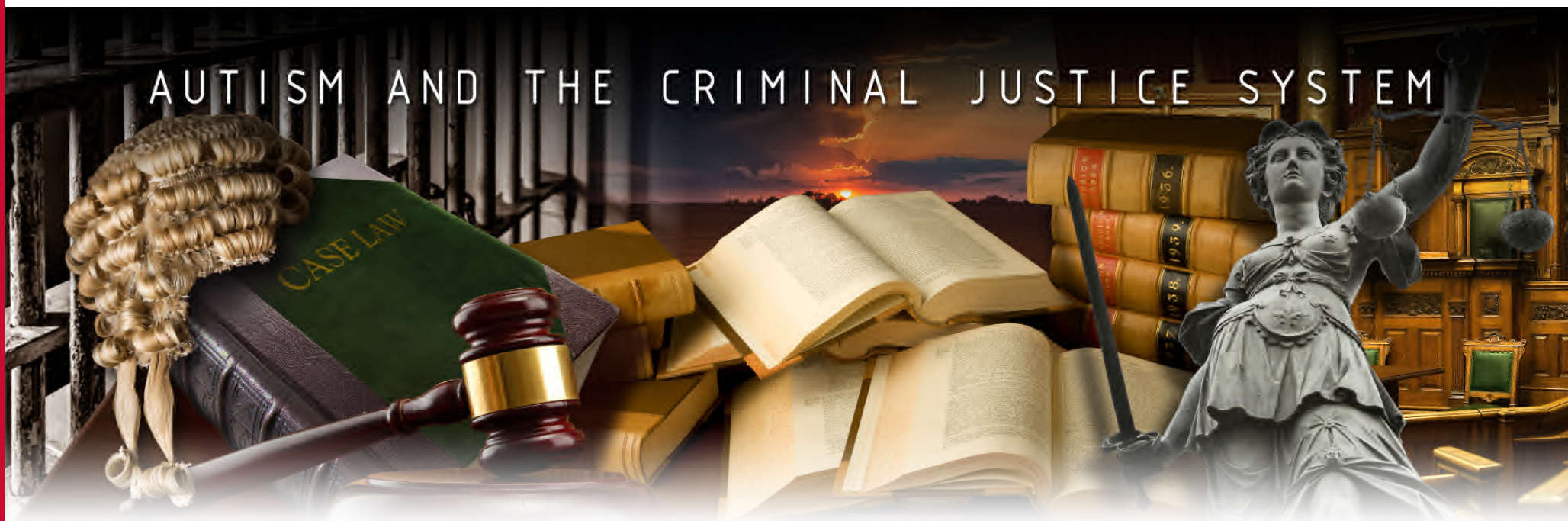
Staff-prisoner Relationships

- Central to the smooth running of any prison (Sparks et al, 1996)
- Building trust will encourage communication
- Prison officers should use basic communication and allow time for the autistic prisoner to process what they have heard
- Alternative and Augmentative Communication (AAC) – using written or visual forms of communication for prisoners who are non-verbal
- Personal officers

Prison Officer Training

- POELT – prison officer training
 - Training content
 - Security and control
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- Difficulties to delivering training in prison
 - Possible options
 - Posters or leaflets placed in staff areas





Project Objectives

- To explore the knowledge and understanding of ASD in prison staff.
- To derive knowledge which will contribute towards 'Developing a Toolkit for Prison Staff to Increase Identification, Recognition and Understanding of ASD within the Prison Environment'.
- To evaluate the effectiveness and utility of the Toolkit developed at Stage 3.
- To derive knowledge which will contribute towards career professional development events for prison staff about ASDs and how the behaviour symptomology of ASD may be exhibited within the context of the prison environment.
- To increase awareness and support for the Autism Accreditation system for prisons across the UK.

Projects 1 and 2: YOI and Adult Female and Male Prison

- P1: **Adult male prison**
- P2: **Female and YOI prison**
- Understanding the Experience of Individuals with Autism in the Prison and Prison Staffs Understanding and Knowledge of Autism.
- Development of toolkit.



Stage 1: The Questionnaire: Prison Staff

Prison Staff Questionnaire

- Informed by previous published medical studies questionnaires (McAdam, 2009; Arnold & Liebling, 2011). Arnold and Liebling (2004) developed the 'MQPL' (Measuring the Quality of Prison Life) survey.
- The survey is a 'tick box questionnaire' for prisoners designed and refined over several research projects aimed at improving our understanding of prison life and its effects.

Some example questions include:

- *"In your opinion do you think that individuals with an ASD within the prison would benefit from being managed in a different way to other prisoners?"*
- *"Do you feel you have adequate skills/knowledge to work with the difficulties and needs of those individuals with an ASD?"*
- *"Would you like more training on autism spectrum disorders?"*

Stage 2: Interviews: Prison Staff

- Building on the information gained from the questionnaires we would be seeking to interview a minimum of 10 prison staff
- We will be conducting analysis of the data gathered from the semi-structured interviews with prison staff based on thematic analysis.



Stage 3: 'Developing a Toolkit for Prison Staff to Increase Identification, Recognition and Understanding of Autism Spectrum Disorder within the Prison Environment'

- Primarily based on the information derived from Stage 1 and 2.
- Case studies (examples)

Stage 4: Evaluation of the Toolkit developed at Stage 3

- Evaluating the usefulness of the Toolkit following its publication & use within the prisons for a minimum of 6 months.
- We would develop a short questionnaire seeking the opinions of the perceived useful of the toolkit & any suggestions for improvements.

Stage 4: Evaluation of the Toolkit developed at Stage 3

- Evaluating the usefulness of the Toolkit following its publication & use within the prisons for a minimum of 6 months.
- We would develop a short questionnaire seeking the opinions of the perceived useful of the toolkit & any suggestions for improvements.
- Feedback on the findings from Stage 4 will be delivered in a manner which the prison feels would be most beneficial.

Innovative Routes for Dissemination



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