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| Institution: Nottingham Trent University (NTU) | | |
| Unit of Assessment: A04 - Psychology, Psychiatry and Neuroscience | | |
| Title of case study: Enabling pro-social change in people with sexual convictions in custody and community settings | | |
| Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2010-2018 | | |
| Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit: | | |
| Names: | Roles: | Periods employed by submitting HEI: |
| Nicholas Blagden | Associate Professor | 2009-present |
| Belinda Winder | Professor | 2004-present |
| Gayle Dillon | Principal Lecturer | 2000-present |
| Mick Gregson | Professor | 1979-2017 |
| Rosie Kitson-Boyce | Senior Lecturer | 2018-present |
| Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014-present | | |
| Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N | | |
| 1. Summary of the impact <p>NTU research has made outstanding contributions to the policy and practice of national and international bodies acting to rehabilitate people with sexual convictions. Research conducted within the Sexual Offences, Crime and Misconduct Research Unit (SOCAMRU) has underpinned key policy changes including: (1) the creation of more exclusive prisons for men with sexual convictions; (2) changes to the organising principles of accredited behaviour programmes for men with sexual convictions; (3) recommendations which informed Correctional Services Australia's focus on rehabilitative climate and the development of peer-support programmes within custody. Moreover, the Safer Living Foundation and its underpinning research has enabled men released from prison to lead constructive offence-free lives, reducing victimisation.</p> | | |
| 2. Underpinning research <p>The Ministry of Justice reports that there are approximately 13,400 individuals in UK prisons with sexual convictions (19% of overall UK prison population) However, there has been a paucity of research on the impact prison climate can have on the rehabilitation of men with sexual convictions, which is important as the evidence-base for 'sex offender treatment programmes' (SOTPs) remains contested [R3]. Post-release, around 10% of men with sexual convictions are reconvicted of a sexual offence. This figure demands better rehabilitation to reduce reoffending, while also improving community reintegration which is vital for reducing victimisation. SOCAMRU's research has identified and led to meaningful change in three key areas that impact rehabilitation and reintegration of this group: 1) ineffective correctional environments; 2) ineffective focus on disclosure and admittance within interventions, and; 3) interventions that assist with the transition into the community.</p> <p>Rehabilitative climate of prisons for men with sexual convictions (2012-ongoing)</p> <p>It is difficult to pinpoint the reason why some sex offender treatment programmes (SOTPs) show benefits while others do not. Despite evidence arguing that prison climate is a key factor in SOTP success, little previous research has been undertaken to identify what is important for establishing a good rehabilitative prison climate. Blagden has addressed this gap, publishing the first studies to address the significance of prison environments in rehabilitating men with sexual convictions [R1, R2, R3]. Using a mixed-method approach (interviews, psychometrics, and measures of prison climate) Blagden identified operational factors that could be changed to improve prison climate and facilitate a rehabilitative climate. These included a focus on</p> | | |

meaningful constructive prisoner-staff relationships, supporting and facilitating beliefs about change and readiness for change, promoting 'headspace' and peer mentoring. Another key finding was that co-locating men with sexual convictions was beneficial to rehabilitation as it removed prisoners' fears and anxieties regarding other prisoners, which increased cognitive capacity to contemplate psychological change. Blagden's work also demonstrated that "deviance exchange" (the theory that men with sexual convictions will reinforce deviant behaviour in each other) was not a significant feature of prisons for men with sexual convictions and that men were active in distancing themselves from the 'sex offender' label. Linked to these studies, Blagden published the first qualitative longitudinal study of prisoner experiences in a prison exclusively for individuals with sexual convictions [R3]. SOCAMRU conducted further research on activities which characterise a rehabilitative prison, including active citizenship and peer support, and assist with desistance [R4].

Working with men with sexual convictions denying offences (2009-ongoing)

Blagden led the first qualitative research study to understand denial in men with sexual convictions, focusing on the functions of denial and how denial plays an important role in identity management. Traditionally, SOTPs devote significant time to overcoming denial, with most programmes focusing on disclosure and "accepting responsibility". Prior to SOCAMRU's study, denial was seen as maladaptive. However, Blagden et al. argued that denial was a clinically relevant form of sense-making and that relevant treatment targets can be elicited without disclosure [R5]. A further SOCAMRU study linked denial to shame and argued that interventions which are conducive to rehabilitation should aim to reduce shame and do not need to focus on disclosure.

The Safer Living Foundation evaluation (2014-ongoing)

The Safer Living Foundation is the first of its kind registered charity; a collaborative venture between senior academic Psychologists at NTU and HM Prison Service, with Blagden and Prof. Winder co-founders and trustees. The Safer Living Foundation is a charity which supports high-risk men in prison back into the community and helps them lead pro-social, offence free lives. The SLF works with high risk individuals who are at risk of sexual offending or who have been convicted of a sexual offence. This includes those with intellectual disability, who are elderly, have very little or no social support and/or are sexually attracted to children and/or adolescents – including other young people. Blagden co-leads the evaluation of the Safer Living Foundation, which provides the evidence-base and assesses the efficacy of SLF interventions. This research directly feeds into SLF practice and thus impacts on the lives of service-users and the wider community. A published study of the SLF's prison circles found that the intervention helped men transition effectively from prison into the community [R6].

3. References to the research

- **R1:** Blagden, N., Winder, B., & Hames, C. (2016). "They Treat Us Like Human Beings"—Experiencing a Therapeutic Sex Offenders Prison Impact on Prisoners and Staff and Implications for Treatment. *International journal of offender therapy and comparative criminology*, DOI: 0306624X14553227.
- **R2:** Blagden, N., Perrin, C., Smith, S., Gleeson, F., & Gillies, L. (2017). "A different world" exploring and understanding the climate of a recently re-rolled sexual offender prison. *Journal of sexual aggression*, 23(2), 151-166.
- **R3:** Blagden, N., & Wilson, K. (2019). "We're All the Same Here"—Investigating the Rehabilitative Climate of a Re-Rolled Sexual Offender Prison: A Qualitative Longitudinal Study. *Sexual Abuse*, 1079063219839496.
- **R4:** Perrin, C., Blagden, N., Winder, B., & Dillon, G., (2018). "Its sort of reaffirmed to me that Im not a terrible person": Sex offenders' movements toward desistance via peer

support roles in prison. *Sexual Abuse*, 30, 759-780. Doi: 10.1177/1079063217697133

- **R5:** Blagden, N., Winder, B., Gregson, M., & Thorne, K. (2014). Making sense of denial in sexual offenders: A qualitative phenomenological and repertory grid analysis. *Journal of interpersonal violence*, 29(9), 1698-1731.
- **R6:** Kitson-Boyce, R., Blagden, N., Winder, B., & Dillon, G. (2018). "This Time It's Different" Preparing for Release Through a Prison-Model of CoSA: A Phenomenological and Repertory Grid Analysis. *Sexual Abuse*, 1079063218775969.

The quality of this research has been evidenced by rigorous internal and external peer review panels, and via peer review through journals central to this field of enquiry.

4. Details of the impact

Improving prison climate and reorganizing the prison estate

The work of Blagden et al. on rehabilitative and therapeutic climates in prisons for men with sexual convictions has had national and international level impact. Research publications and dissemination to policy makers at HMPPS events formed the evidence-base for the reorganisation of the prison estate to create more prisons exclusively for men with sexual convictions [S1]. As the Head of Evidence for HMPPS, states: "*we are committed to evidence-based policy and on the topic of rehabilitative culture, Dr Blagden is literally the only published researcher. Our evidence base and policy direction therefore draws almost entirely on his research. [...]. His work was instrumental in the reorganisation of the prison estate so that there were more prisons exclusively for men with sexual convictions. This was a huge undertaking for HMPPS, but it was Dr Blagden's work on the benefits of locating such individuals together, along with his consideration of the challenges, which convinced us that the reorganisation was the right approach*" [S1]. This reorganisation of the prison estate allows for a safer, less fearful and anxiety-provoking environment for men with sexual convictions to be rehabilitated and be in a better position upon release to lead offence-free lives [S1, S7]. Blagden's work is also referenced in the HMPPS policy 'Models for Operational Delivery: Men convicted of sexual offences' and in a letter by the Minister of State for Justice in response to a Justice Committee inquiry into the prison population [S10].

Improvements to UK Sex Offender Treatment Programmes and the Safer Living Foundation (SLF)

Blagden's work has influenced policy in England and Wales and changed a core organising principle of intervention for men with sexual convictions. In 2012, Blagden was consultant to the then National Offender Management Service Sex Offender Treatment Steering Committee and consultant to the Scottish Government regarding intervention for men with sexual convictions. Previously 'deniers' were excluded from treatment, but due to Blagden et al.'s work [R5] and advice provided to steering groups for the redesign of programmes and professional practice forums, those who deny their offending are now permitted onto treatment courses [S1, S10]. Moreover, it is not just that deniers are permitted onto treatment, but the whole treatment approach is now based on non-disclosure as per the key arguments from Blagden. As [S1] states "*as a result of your work, we decided to design our whole treatment model around a set of formal organising principles. [...]. One such principal that we removed due to your research was the exclusion of those 'in denial'. It was your research into denial that convinced us to change the policy we have had for the last 20 years to exclude "deniers" from treatment programmes*". The changes to programmes due to Blagden's work means that approximately 30-35% more men with sexual convictions are eligible for treatment. This equates to potentially more than 4,000 individuals with sexual convictions now eligible for treatment. Blagden's research is referenced in the theory manual for the new accredited programmes [S1, S4].

The research and evaluation conducted by Blagden et al. [R6] underpins the programme delivery for every intervention that the SLF implements [S3]. The SLF aims to reintegrate men with sexual convictions and reduce victimisation. According to the Nottingham Crime Commissioner "*research informs SLF practice and enables the organisation to achieve their goal of preventing sexual*

abuse. The research from NTU demonstrates that the SLF's work is increasing well-being, protective factors and decreasing risk... The Safer Living Foundation is an award-winning organisation, which is research-led and making a significant difference to lives of their service-users and preventing future harms" [S6]. This is further supported by SLFs centre manager who describes Blagden's work on "rehabilitative culture, peer support and active citizenship" as "the foundation of the centre" and highlights that Blagden's research, "directly informs our practice and enables us to work constructively with our service users...and to collaborating on the activities that should run at the centre and as a result we run activities designed to help promote personal growth" [S5].

The research-led approach by the SLF, underpinned by the work of Blagden et al, has tangible impacts on their service users as one states "I have taken more steps forward in the last few months since attending the Corbett [SLF] centre than I have in the past 3 – 4 years. I've even stopped smoking so that I can taste the food we have been cooking" [S8].

The success of services offered by the SFL led to awards including *Charity of the Year Award* (Third Sector Awards; 2019), *The Guardian's Social and Community Impact Award* (2016) and *Robin Corbett Award for Prisoner Rehabilitation* (2016). The work of the SLF has also been acknowledged by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons for England and Wales who state in their latest inspection of HMP Whatton that the SLF "were doing valuable work to prepare prisoners for and support them after release. The support and mentoring service in the prison was supporting some of those with the most pressing needs" [S9].

Improvements to national and international correctional institutions

Blagden presented his work at the HMPPS professional-practice forum on three occasions which informed all prison and community treatment managers of his research which underpins the new programmes. These presentations included an invited keynote to the HMPPS Policy and Practice Forum (2017) which addressed 'Denial, Climate, Identity: Three Important Issues for the Treatment and Management of Sexual Offenders'. These presentations to key practitioners and policy makers, coupled with **Blagden's** published papers, led to changes in practice at prisons in the UK [S1, S7, S10]. For example, at HMP Whatton it was noted that different departments had previously worked inefficiently in silos. These departments were brought together in order to work together more effectively.

The Governor at HMP Whatton confirms that Blagden's research "highlighted the importance of prisoner-staff relationships in the rehabilitative process" and that "Dr Blagden's work has been instrumental in helping us develop this locally here at HMP Whatton and nationally across the prison estate" [S7]. Blagden's work (with colleagues) has also had international impact in Australia. Australia's prison population is currently expanding, and they are creating new 'rapid-build' prisons to cope with demands on the service. The culture and climate of these prisons is pivotally important for the work of Correctional Services Australia. Blagden was invited by Correctional Services Australia to disseminate his work and advise policy makers and directors of the new rapid build prisons (February 2017) [S2]. As a direct result Australian prisons will focus on relationships, meaningful activity, and active citizenship. Dr Jayson Ware, who directs the strategic development, implementation, management and evaluation of all offender services in custody and community, states in his testimonial [S2] "As a result of your work on rehabilitative prison climates, five minute interventions, active citizenship and peer support we are putting more resource and training into prisoner-staff relationships. We are going to implement an active-citizenship approach in our new dormitory-style living areas" [S2].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- S1: Testimonial from Head of Evidence for HMPPS*
- S2: Testimonial from Group Director – Lead for Corrective Services Australia*
- S3: Safer Living Foundation Evaluation Report*

- S4: Testimonial from National Specialist Lead, High Intensity Programmes Team*
- S5: Testimonial from Corbett Centre Manager, Safer Living Foundation.*
- S6: Testimonial from Nottinghamshire Police and Crime Commissioner
- S7: Testimonial from Governor of HMP Whatton
- S8: Testimonial from Safer Living Foundation service user*
- S9: Report on a scrutiny visit to HMP Whatton by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons
- S10: Parliamentary response to Justice Committee and Model of Delivery (see pg. 497)

[* participant in the process of impact delivery]