



Substance misuse in prison: A case study approach

Identifying factors linked with substance misuse in custody using observations, interviews documentation analysis & data gathering with both staff and residents in 5 English male prisons.

Themes describing substance use

Epidemic

- Widespread use of psychoactive substances.
- Strong sense of helplessness.
- Residents felt trapped in a cycle of drug use and staff felt overwhelmed.
- Reported increases in violence, self-harm, mental health problems, bullying and debt

Escapism

- Key driver of psychoactive substance use was to 'kill time' and relieve boredom.
- Lack of hope, lack of goals, and loneliness drove residents to substance use.

Prison Type and Population

- Greater levels of substance use associated with:
 - Younger prison populations
 - Those serving shorter sentences.
 - Larger prisons.
 - Prisons with lower staff-prisoner ratios.

Themes relating to rehabilitative response

Hope

- Lack of hope featured in prisons with greater substance use.
- Residents were not hopeful about their future, and felt like no one cared.

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- Staff felt like they didn't matter, and some felt unsupported.

Prison Culture

- Residents felt unsupported in their substance use.
- Punishment not a deterrent.
- Few incentives to change, few rewards and lack of recognition of positive behaviour.
- Where rehabilitative focus, there were fewer substance use issues

Relationships

- Poor relationships, high levels of mistrust between residents & staff.
- Strain between senior management & other staff groups in some prisons.
- Relationships were better in prisons with less significant substance use issues.

Themes relating to enabling an improved response

Prison Regime/Activity

- Lack of activity contributed to boredom and substance use.
- Too much time in cell causing difficulties for some.
- Purposeful and meaningful activity was more present in prisons with lower levels of substance use.

Resourcing

- Poor resources across all prisons.
- Staff resource and time diverted - consequence of substance use.
- Staff sickness, high numbers of new staff and a lack of training were problematic.

Treatment Provision

- Healthcare and Substance Misuse Services isolated from rest of prison.
- Some staff and residents unaware of available services.
- Minimal provision of psychosocial treatment.
- Focus on the recovery journey.

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Implications and Recommendations:

- Continue to build rehabilitative culture across the prison, building positive relationships, and focusing on rehabilitative environments that are safe, decent and fair.
- Support people on their recovery, and disrupt drug use-punishment cycle.
- Building hope by believing that people can change, and helping them find their strengths and talents and a better future.
- Create effective and visible treatment and support systems.
- Adopt a whole prison approach.