

Counselling in Prisons Network

Workshop

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Summary

Presentation – *30 minutes*

Women making meaning... ***Building resilience: Insights from women who have experienced trauma***

Group exercise 1 – *45 minutes*

Aims – To consider vulnerability (and paradoxes)

Group exercise 2 – *45 minutes*

Aims – Exploring ways of knowing, feeling, interpretation ...

Introduction

- My perspective, past experience
- Interests in contextualised understanding
- Why women?
- Traditionally male-centric perspective and neglects the experiences and insights of women

Women making meaning... The perspective of women offenders

What are the understandings of women offenders, in relation to interventions and approaches which support them?

Approach for Workshop is to embed the discussions within service user and practitioner insights – Counselling in prisons

Women making meaning... Profile of Women Offenders

Gender differences and comparison with the non-offending population:

- Women in prison are more than three times as likely to be identified as suffering from depression as women in the general population (65% and 19% respectively).
- More than half (53%) of women in prison report having experienced emotional, physical, or sexual abuse as children, compared to 27% of men in prison
- Women accounted for more than 26% of all self-harm incidents in prisons throughout England and Wales despite representing only 5% of the prison population.

Source: Prison Reform Trust, 2015

Women making meaning... Pan- London Research

- **“What was it about services, practitioners and approaches that made a difference”?**
- Using the narrative from interviews
- Measuring impact holistically from a service user perspective / Meaningful change
- Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
 - What is important to know, is what people experience and how they experience the world.
 - Hermeneutics, or, interpretation which is central to the analysis of meaning making (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 21).

Women making meaning... Pan- London Research

- The sample comprised 47% Black and Minority Ethnic participants (n=7) and 53% White British: English/Scottish/Welsh/Northern Irish (n=8) participants.
- Ages ranged from 28 – 55 years old with an average age of 39 years.
- There were a total of 134 convictions across the group for 329 recordable offences.
- The majority of the offences constituted acquisitive crime, violence against the person and firearms/offensive weapons (15 recorded offences).

Women making meaning... At the time...Offending and the context of Risk ...

Criminogenic Needs - “Dynamic” or changeable risks that when changed are associated with a decreased likelihood of re-offending

Women have higher levels of need for these specific areas:

- Mental health, Drug Misuse, Relationships
- Drug Misuse
- Relationships

Hollin & Palmer, 2006

“Criminogenic Need” in Probation services assessments
(OASys)

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The Way of “Making Meaning”

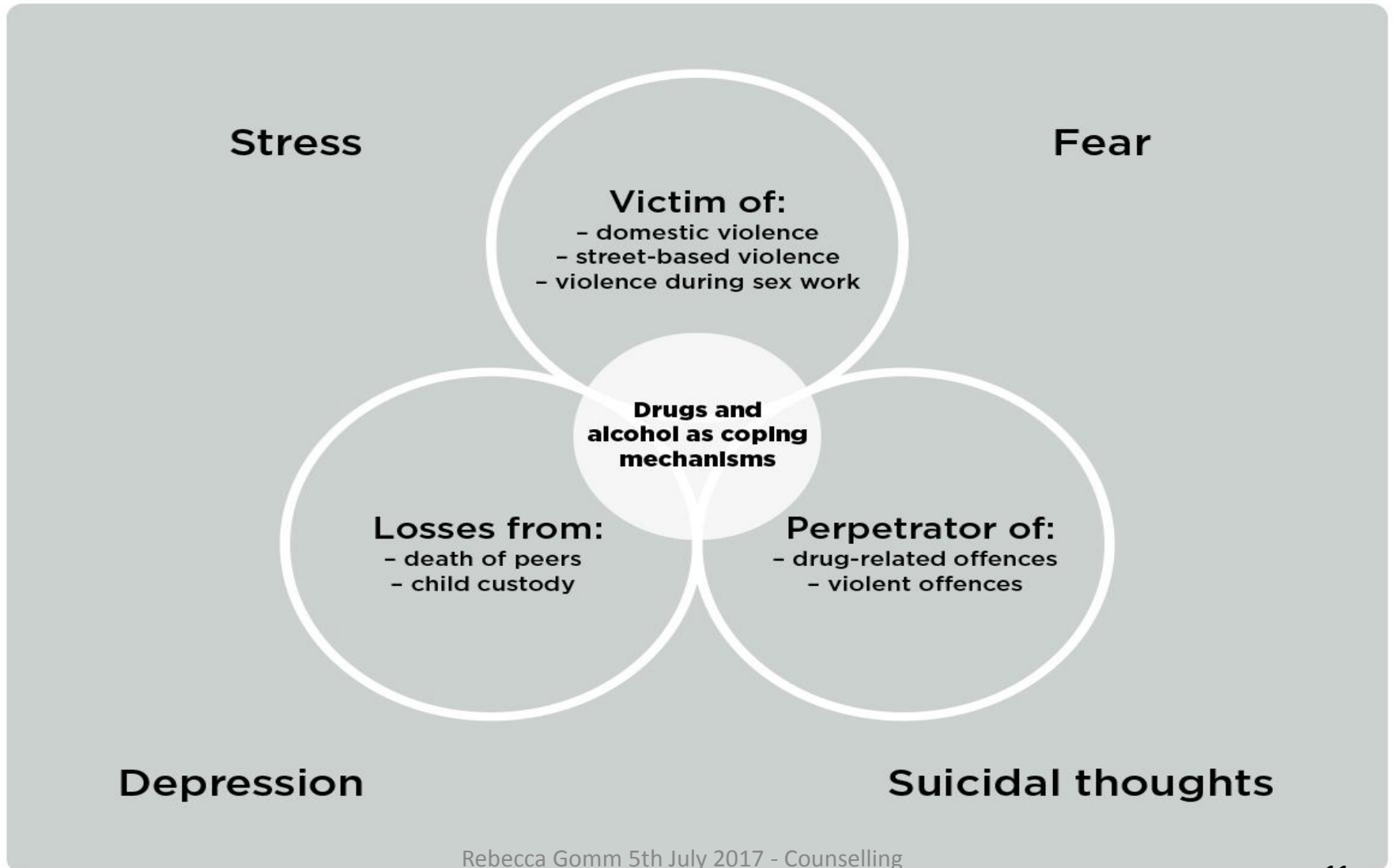
- Violence, adversity (adulthood and childhood) and “Coping” through drug and alcohol misuse
- Managing **REAL threats** and risk – **BOTH** experienced internally, stress response (hypervigilance) **AND** risks of violence (extremely precarious) e.g. “he’s been on the roof with a gun”, threats to rape..
- The **REALITY** of it (e.g. the need to keep moving...managing access to children (violent partners) – dynamic “risks” to the women
- Intrapsychic and the social contexts – are there are barriers between the two (artificial barriers)?

Women making meaning... Resilience

- ‘Human resilience refers to the processes or patterns of *(positive)* adaptation and development in the context of significant threats to an individual’s life or function’.
- Masten & Wright, 2010, p. 215

The “Meaning Making” context

Violence, coping, drug and alcohol use...



Women making meaning... Many Layers – Specific to women

- “I lost my last girl to social services, I was suicidal. I overdosed and when I woke up I started crying...”
- “I found a cup with powder in it and it was crack and I didn’t know – and I washed it. He beat me so badly I thought I would die. That was when I started using crack....”
- “...and I told him everything that happened in my childhood and he didn’t do anything with it...”

“C” Black African Caribbean, 47 years old, experiences of homelessness.

13 convictions for 44 offences: fraud, acquisitive/drugs, firearms)

Women making meaning... Many Layers – Specific to women

- Cumulative chains of effects and layers of support need
- i.e. child sex abuse and neglect, rape, homelessness, domestic violence, prostitution....
- NOT one single type of abuse of adverse experience
- COMPLEX and not possible to isolate – interconnected meanings

Women making meaning... Insights from women offenders: Resilience

- “Hurdles”, “conflicts and traumas”, “stuck in scary places” “I’ve been stuck in scary places and I can’t move”.
- MANY near misses and hitting lowest points (e.g. Violent drug overdose, wanting to die)
- *Hidden* resilience and survival strengths within an adverse or abusive context

Women making meaning... Building resilience...

“Resilience rests, fundamentally, on relationships. The desire to belong is a basic need, and positive connections with others lie at the very core of psychological development; strong supportive relationships are critical for achieving and sustaining resilient adaptation”.

Luthar, 2006, p. 780

Women making meaning... What didn't work...

“You have to want to do it, cause it was easy for me to lie down at home and be in my bed, and like every day of the week - and going to psychiatric meetings, you know? Just to say “I’m down”, and then leaving meetings because I know what my problem is! I know what I need to do to get myself together, but I don't feel that you're helping me, you are not telling me what I want to hear, you are telling me what protocol tells you to tell me”

“J” Black African Caribbean, 45 years old

Women making meaning... Insights into effective practitioner approaches

“I can’t say that people go there and find strength, because that is always in you, but to find the right person to bring it out of you, is something new again, and that in itself is a new, a new strength, do you know what I mean? To be able to be uplifted by words, or motivated by actions - and you know what I mean? So it definitely enhanced the strengths that I had before, and made me even *stronger*”.

“J” Black African Caribbean, 45 years old

Women making meaning...

Observations...

- Navigation towards the resources ...
- Choice to engage (NOT “treatment” resistant)
- Engagement with services and trust in services (bearing in mind the nature of past relationships)
- **Relational Resources - in relational space, safety:**
 - -In relation to similar others
 - -Practitioner as enabling resource of choice

Women making meaning... and Vulnerability

The service users described experiences of challenge and times when they were particularly vulnerable. This included A LOT of near misses – e.g. “he beat me so badly I thought I would die”

“he has been on the roof with a gun”

“I ran through a window, fear makes you do the strangest things”

Violent assaults, childhood rape, adult rape, domestic violence

Exercise 1: Vulnerability and Resilience

- This part of the workshop will consider vulnerability and paradoxes..

Vulnerability

- Philosophical perspective – moral notions of responsibility
- Political perspective – structural determinants that disadvantage people
- i.e. How do we make decisions with regard to vulnerability?
- Bioethical framing - Vulnerability can imply that the scope of individual decision making is limited – lack of capacity (within the individual as a “failed” autonomous subject
- Bioethics / economically vulnerable and unfair distribution
- **IMPORTANT** to engage with critical analysis of vulnerability and protection (e.g. specific populations – and the distribution of the benefits and resources)

Vulnerability and Therapeutic engagement

- Vulnerability from the perspective of individual autonomy
- Vulnerability is a relational concept: Reciprocal and connected
- To share weakness is to make someone vulnerable –
- Mutual respect and recognition of that vulnerability
- Vulnerability and resilience
- Vulnerability and trust

Exercise 1: Vulnerability and Resilience

“It's like being hunted. He sat up trees for days outside properties, he's been on the roof, in the woods with a gun - he even sat in the foyer of a police station, I mean who would look for him there? He was really clever”.

“It's really scary to run away from someone and know they could catch you and kill you”.

“I would run through plate glass windows - fear makes you do the craziest things”.

“A lot of the time I never made it, a lot of the time - because, my one, he used to lock the door and beat me up”.

“And it gets like this - you think if you're gonna kill me, just do it (emphasis), I ain't running any more - you get too tired of it”.

(CD was a 41 year old woman of English heritage convicted of violent offences)

Exercise 1: Vulnerability and Resilience

“You have to keep running away, you don't make any friends - you don't make any friends in case they find out, cut yourself off from the world. You don't want anyone to find out, it's horrible”

“Still now, I am really nervous of people, who they are...”

“I've started to make a few friends and trust a little bit, but it takes all your trust away - you know, you don't know, you don't know who to trust, who not to trust”.

“It's because when you meet a friend you can't tell them anything. You can't discuss your past, because it's all bad. They think there's something wrong with you because you can't tell them anything, it's hard”

“I'm not a liar - but you have to be a liar a little bit to swerve around these questions”.

Exercise 1: Vulnerability and Resilience

- **Health: Clots on lungs as a result of the extreme violence experienced. CD's ribs had been broken "a few times" and the fragments of bone from previous injuries had broken off and started collecting in her body. CD had plates inserted into her pelvis.**
- **CD described that she was locked in by her abuse partner and violently assaulted and that she tried to run away.**
- **CD also described "And it gets like this – you think if you're gonna kill me, just *do it* (emphasis), I ain't running any more – you get too tired of it"**
- **Incidents of being stalked by CD's ex-partner.**
- **He had hidden outside the police station after she had been arrested and there were instances when her ex-partner would find her in her new location and threaten her. CD described how he had hidden outside before with a gun.**
- **CD's mother used to scald her with hot water when she was a child and had put bars on her window.**

EXERCISE 1 – TRUST AS PARADOX

- To consider duality – in terms of trust (or connection)
- An example from your experience of counselling / supporting a service user:
 - 1. When it is protective not to trust
 - 2. When it is a barrier
 - 3. Any insights on why? Is it important to consider both?
- 1. When it is protective not to trust

Trust as paradox: REAL threats – Experiences of violence and CD was stalked and threatened by a violent ex partner (who had networks). Highly protective not to trust. Can't tell anyone who you are. Safety.
- 2. When trust is a barrier

Trust as paradox – SHAME (self-blame) in relation to violence and abuse. Not protective, as isolates and stops connections.

Exercise 1: Vulnerability and Resilience

Prompts - Adaptation and resilience *broadly* within:

- Recovery and drugs
- “disorder”
- Violence
- Sexual abuse

Feedback

- To consider duality – in terms of trust (or connection)
- An example from your experience of counselling / supporting a service user:
 - 1. When it is protective not to trust
 - 2. When it is a barrier
 - 3. Any insights on why? Is it important to consider both?

Exercise 2: Exploring ways of knowing.. Relevance?

- Challenge - There have been debates around “what counts”, success etc.
- How did we not know? Where is the tangible “something”?
- Absence of knowledge, can lead to mistrust – e.g. “issues” around what we don’t consider..

Exercise 2: Exploring ways of knowing.. Relevance

- Outcomes (cherry picking directed by services?) versus impact (broader, less defined)...
- Is it possible to measure prevention? i.e. suicide prevention? (Near misses?)
- Not appropriate?
- High levels of vulnerability and need for engagement can be resource intensive (e.g. for women who have offended.
- Recent critique of the SOTP
- ... criticises the manualised, group based directive approach to treatment and suggests that the lack of individual focus may be an explanation for the findings – Quality and if something is effective

Exercise 2: Exploring ways of knowing..

- Exploring ways of knowing, feeling, interpretation ...

Some prompts

- **Therapeutic relationship** (e.g. from service user or counsellor's perspective..)
- **Autonomy / agency** of the service user (e.g. choosing to engage, help seeking behaviour)
- **Quality of environment / space / place** (e.g. feelings of safety)

Exercise 2: Exploring ways of knowing..

- As a counsellor, expert by experience, ex-service user, researcher...
- Worksheet is a discussion / prompt, broken down into: Therapeutic relationship, context (space or place)...
- To explore...Is it possible to measure, how would you know it? Is it important...

Exercise 2: Exploring ways of knowing..

- 67 % of clinicians in Australia expressed concern that they would not be willing to implement outcome measures, regardless of improved care (Walter, Cleary, & Rey 1998)
- UK study clinicians and service users found concerns about use of measures (Moran et al 2011)

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