

Psychological perspectives for addressing mental health within the criminal justice system

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GUEST EDITORIAL

This is our first special issue dedicated to “Psychological perspectives for addressing mental health within the criminal justice system”. We commence this special issue with a study examining the effectiveness of a new cognitive skills intervention program - “Thinking minds” in a forensic psychiatric population. The authors; Jane Ireland, Carol Ireland, Maria Atiénzar Prieto and Katie Lambert put forward a novel treatment evaluation approach which focuses on both individual and group treatment effects. The paper offers valuable insights on how changing our approach to treatment evaluation can provide a clearer and more integrated picture of the effectiveness of interventions in such populations.

Following on from the topic of treatment evaluation, our second paper examines Jail to Community Medication-Assisted Treatment (JTCMAT) programs for substance abuse commonly used in the United States. This qualitative study provides a unique and in-depth exploration of the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the program from an end-user and service provider perspective. Examining the lived experiences of end-users and service providers offers a refreshing yet crucial understanding of treatment effectiveness. The authors; Michele Bratina, Michael Antonio, Mary Brewster and Jacqueline Carsello also put forward pragmatic strategies that can inform the development of effective programs and policies targeting substance abuse and recidivism.

Next is a discussion paper by Jonathan Evans, Dusty Kennedy, Tricia Skuse and Jonny Matthew which explores the complementarity of Trauma-Informed practice and Desistance theories when working with children in conflict with the law. This topic will be of considerable interest to practitioners in different jurisdictions. The need for trauma-informed care when dealing with young people in contact with the care and justice systems is becoming increasingly evident in the literature and this paper

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highlights its relevance to practice. The authors provide an excellent preliminary evaluation of the enhanced case management approach (ECM) and provide guidelines to assist practitioners interested in this area.

Moving from treatment evaluations, our next paper by Zoe Cross explores the characteristics of a ‘good quality’ working relationship between practitioners and children within the criminal justice system. This qualitative study provides an initial but in-depth examination of practitioner and child views of what constitutes a ‘good quality’ working relationship and the detrimental impact discrepancies in such views can have on desistance from crime. Practitioners working with children and interested in desistance will find this paper useful. The findings highlight the importance of individual and social factors in the development of a good quality working relationship.

The next paper in this special issue is a critical essay by Stuart Thomas on fatal encounters between police and people experiencing mental illness. This paper offers an important overview of the risk factors associated with the use of fatal police force when dealing with mentally ill individuals. It describes how factors such as perceptions of risk, time, proximity, training, experience and decision making can increase the chances of fatal force. The author uses recent Australian coronial investigations to reflect on the changes in policy and practice based on the recommendations made in these inquests. The essay concludes by proposing a revised approach to de-escalation, limit setting and training.

The concluding paper in this issue also explores the topic of mental illness. However, the focus is on police officer’s mental health. This qualitative study explores the impact of police culture and stigma on police officers with diagnosed PTSD. Saleha Hakik and Kory Langlois examined government documents and a collection of new media articles. The authors concluded that police culture is detrimental to discussions around mental health and help-seeking behaviours of police officers with a diagnosed mental illness. The authors conclude the paper by outlining the implications of these findings for practice.

We hope the special issue stimulates discussion and opens new lines of enquiry to improve and reflect on current practices addressing mental health within the criminal justice system.

Dr Paola Castillo and Associate Professor Andrew McGrath (Guest editors)

ABOUT THE EDITORS

Paola Castillo, PhD, is a Lecturer of Psychology at Charles Sturt University. Her PhD research focused on the detection of deception in cross-cultural contexts. Her current research interests include accent-related effects on judgements of credibility and deception in various contexts (e.g., online), intergroup attitudes, stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination with a focus on minority groups.

Andrew McGrath is an Associate Professor in Psychology at Charles Sturt University. He has a longstanding interest in juvenile delinquency dating to his Honours research on the correlates of offending frequency in a group of young people in NSW, and his PhD research, in which he interviewed 200 hundred young people immediately after their appearance before the NSW Children's Court for sentencing. A journal article based on this research was later awarded the Allen Austin Bartholomew Award for best article published in the Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology in 2009. Since then he has published a number of articles in both Australian and International journals on topics ranging from the impact of custodial penalties on re-offending, the sentencing of young Indigenous offenders, serious and violent offending careers, and juvenile risk assessment.