Building bridges: living group climate in forensic care

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Why climate? We are dominant (inside) because we fear them outside

- We can lock ‘m up securely and even restrain them
- If they still don’t behave we can put them in solitary confinement (US 84.000 humans: ‘that will teach them to behave’)
- Spellman 2000: criminogenic; Van der Helm 2011: first, do no harm.
- Brandon, a boy with a mental disability chained to the walls for 3 years
Nothing works in secure forensic care?

- Recent research (for an oversight see: Soeverein et al. 2013) shows forensic care can work!
- In adult Forensic Care specific recidivism is low: only 4% but not in Youth Prison (75%): work in progress

- Living group climate quality is essential for recovery, growth and rehabilitation (Schubert ea, 2011)
De Waal e.a. 2014: structures in the brain

- Dominance behavior (Dopaminerg) in man and animal is related to aggression and competitiveness and leads to anxiety, reduced self-control and moral behavior, less human conscience and empathy.

- Moral behavior evolves from the need for cooperation (Serotonerg) and is related to problem stabilization and empathy.

- Tom Leherer: I could have told you so, ‘life is like a sewer, what comes out of it depends on what you put into it’
Leiden University of Professional Sciences
9 years of Climate research in forensic care

- Development of PGCI (Van der Helm, Stams & van der Laan, 2011) questionnaire assessing living group climate quality in correctional youthcare and forensic care
- Translation and validation in English, German, French, Russian, Turkish, Papiaments, Hindi, Tamil, Swahili, Xhosa
- Questionnaire is free as a matter of principle: science and practitioners work together

http://www.hsleiden.nl/lectoraten/residentiele-jeugdzorg/
http://www.hsleiden.nl/lectoraten/residential-youthcare-english/
Main climate properties in forensic care

Construct validity was supported in a Confirmatory factor analysis ($N=150$), accounting for the nested structure of the data (M+)

2. + Growth and learning, outside direction!
3. - Repressiveness (Goffman, 1957)-dominance
4. + Atmosphere at the group (structure, safety & peer relations)

Validated group climate list (36 items also MID)
(van der Helm, Stams & van der Laan, 2011: The Prison Journal)
Results are encouraging tough:

A positive group climate is associated with building bridges:
- more empathy
- stabilization of personality problems and aggression
- Internal locus of control & active coping
- More treatment motivation
- Less aggression
- Less thinking errors end negative Social Information Processing
- May 2013: Dutch correctional youth centers and Dutch Prison service declare a positive living group climate as one of their two main goals (the other: psychiatric treatment) (Van der Helm et al. 2011 in: Int. J. Of Forensic Psychology and Psychiatry & Int J. Of Offender Therapy).
Climate research main outcomes 2013

- Over 150 reports on climate in facilities the last few years, sometimes measurements 1-3 times a year: it gives inmates a voice
- In All Dutch Youth Prisons living group climate research was performed in the entire facility on the initiative of the Governors
- Results show a marked improvement in climate over the years since 2008 (National News Headlines)
- But we are not yet there: huge differences between departments on the 4 scales point to improvement possibilities
- First results: giving staff and inmates feedback about the results has a ‘therapeutical’ effect, it is possible to improve climate drastically (cohen’s d > 1), but providing no feedback does not change anything
New Directions: Youth Prison 3.0 bringing down recidivism (Andrews & Bonta, 2010)

- YP 1.0 was the old ‘prison’, 2.0 the living group climate where we are now. But a good living group climate is not enough
- YP 3.0 focusing on better education is also not enough
- Perspective matters: research at Amsterbaken YP after (De Jongh & Eltink at Amsterbaken, 2014 and Pascal vd Berg at Hartelborgt, 2013) shows after years inmates loose hope and when release is imminent they are getting demoralized and afraid: ‘there is nothing out there for me’
- So we need to restore burned bridges: restore contact with parents or meaningful others, provide outside treatment, reconnect with the old school, provide for housing and job possibilities. No rocket science but doing nothing is not enough.
Sounds great but society is not happy with 3.0, because we fear them outside

- ‘not in my backyard’
- ‘we have 4000 honest students waiting for housing’
- ‘My mother does not want me back’
- VOG (declaration of good behavior) stands in the way of many jobs

We need to do more to prevent ongoing recidivism and to provide a minimum of human service at our work (Perlin at this conference). But sometimes we fail, even in the Netherlands.

**Warning:** the next slide contains shocking information!
Current research lines at Leiden University of professional sciences and Amsterdam University (forensic youthcare)

- Dominance behavior: psychopathology & Empathy (Eveyn Heynen & Andries Korebrits this session)
- The work climate (Anna Dekker & Veronique van Miert this session)
- The learning climate (special education Marjorie Beld & Jack de Swart, this session)
- Daily Activities (Petra Schaftenaar this session)
- Putting climate into practice (Inge Breukel this session)
- We have only one session: lacking are Social Information processing and aggression (TOPS), Treatment motivation, Mild intellectual disability climate is different (vd Linden, 2014), Girls experience climate different (Sonderman, 2014)
A sobering thought

- Living group climate research is no rocket science nor brain science
- Its principles are derived from human beings living together (hunter gatherers) for nearly 7 million years (Boem, 2014)
- It is intrinsically linked to cooperation and moral behaviour (De Waal, 2014)
- And when Forensic Mental Health Care for the years to come is based on dominance instead of restoring bridges, despite FMRI, Risk Assessment, Cortisol measurements, Mental Health Services, Guidelines, numerous therapies etcetera (this conference)
Maybe the most difficult work in the world: if we don’t change our professional ways and keep failing to make contact with our clients, except for the Shackles the Chains, the Therapy, The FMRI, the Cortisol or The Risk Assessment, nothing will comes out of the sewer but more dominance, suffering, fear, aggression and violence.

Thank you for listening