

Staff's Perceptions of deliberate self-injurious behaviour among female forensic psychiatric patients

Background. Examining staff attitudes and perspectives about deliberate self-harm behaviour is an important yet often neglected source of information to the management of trauma-informed and gender-sensitive approaches to this problematic behaviour (van Wormer, 2010; Walker et al., 2017). The prevalence of self-directed violence is long known to be particularly high among female forensic psychiatric patients and women offenders (Selenius & Strand, 2017; Zinger, 2017). From the point of the staff who frequently deals with these incidents, it has been reported that they are at a higher risk of experiencing negative emotions, including anxiety (Taylor, Hawton, Fortune, & Kapur, 2009), burnout, and to suffer from secondary traumatic stress (Power & Usher, 2014). These negative emotions may have a negative impact not only on their psychological well-being, but also on the quality and the consistency in the way they intervene (Marzano, Ciclitira, & Adler, 2013). Knowing more about their attitudes and perceptions would hence allow the identification of less optimal attitudes and emotions experienced towards their patients. This will better guide the forensic mental health teams in the development of interventions that would address these attitudes and perceptions that may negatively interfere with their therapeutic responses (Marzano et al., 2013, Walker, Shaw, Hamilton et al., 2016, Walker, Shaw, Turpin, et al., 2016). **Research objective:** The goal of our study is to better understand staff's attitudes and perceptions towards female forensic psychiatric patients who engage in self-injurious behaviours. **Method:** A convenience sample composed of front-line workers such as nurses and, psychiatrists, psychologists and criminologists will respond to the Deliberate Self-Harm Questionnaire developed by McAllister et al. (2002). This will be followed by a semi-structured interview in which the participants will be invited to elaborate on their perceptions and attitudes towards a self-harm incident that they have witnessed in their career. We will present the results of our preliminary data collection (n=15) with at least one staff member among the various professional groups targeted for this study. **Anticipated results:** In line with data reported in previous research, we expect to find more positive perceptions of self-harm among mental health professionals than in front-line workers. **Anticipated benefits:** Several practice implications will be drawn from our preliminary data collection, particularly in regard to the identification of attitudes and perceptions that may interfere with a less optimal intervention in cases of self-harm involving female forensic psychiatric patients. The preliminary data collected will also be explored in terms of the improvements that they will allow in regard to this ongoing research project.