A QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION OF OFFENDERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF THE UPCOMING SMOKING BAN

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BACKGROUND

• The offending population is a group associated with multiple complex health needs (Condon et al., 2008).

• The prevalence of offender smoking in particular, is estimated at 80% (Cropsey et al., 2010).

• Aside from the health concerns associated with smoking, offenders report reasons for smoking related to stress management and use as a social aid (Butler et al., 2007; Richmond et al., 2009).
• However, in 2016, although appeals for a complete smoking ban were not sustained, it was announced that prisons across England and Wales would gradually introduce smoking bans across these establishments (Selous, 2015).

• Many countries have already introduced full smoking bans within their prisons, including Canada, New Zealand and the Netherlands. However these have been met with mixed reactions (Action on Smoking in Health, 2015).

• Despite this legislation directly affecting offenders, there is a scarcity of available literature investigating offenders’ perceptions of the smoking ban.
AIM

• This information may provide insights into the perceptions and beliefs of offenders as to how the smoking ban will affect them. This can inform guidelines around the safe and effective implementation of the ban.

• The aim of the research was to explore offenders’ perceptions around the proposed implementation of the smoking ban in prisons in England.
PARTICIPANTS

- Offenders were recruited from 4 prisons across the North of England.

- White British
- 26-35 years old
- Single
- Secondary school (HEL)

N = 26
N = 21
PROCEDURE

• Respective focus groups of smokers and non-smokers were conducted to gather qualitative data. Focus groups of up to 8 offenders were facilitated by SD and supervised by a member of prison staff.

• A semi-structured interview schedule guided the sessions.

• Focus groups lasted for an average of 46 minutes and were recorded using a Dictaphone.

- How do you think the smoking ban will affect offenders and staff?
- What can be done in preparation for the smoking ban?
DATA ANALYSIS

• Thematic analysis was used to explore the data (Braun & Clark, 2006).

• Transcripts were coded line-by-line, using NVivo software to generate ‘nodes’.

• Nodes were searched for similarity and merged using the software, to generate themes.

• Themes were reviewed against the transcripts to ensure they accurately described the data, and were then defined.
FINDINGS – FREEDOM AND RIGHTS

Participants felt that being told that they have to stop smoking was a punishment...

“It's gotta be against your human rights to tell you that you can't smoke.” [non-smoker]

“Our only punishment is supposed to be having our liberty taken away, our freedom... Punishment is being taken out of society, that is your punishment.” [smoker]

...as it stripped them of their rights.

Perceptions as to why this was happened centred around others trying to control them.

“I think they're just trying to control you a bit more. What's next? Are they gonna start taking away your canteen sheets...you're a prisoner, you're a scumbag, you shouldn't be allowed any of that stuff!” [non-smoker]
FINDINGS – FREEDOM AND RIGHTS

However, participants were already planning ways to re-gain control, by rebelling against the ban.

“There were people saying, ‘Just give it up now, so they can’t take it off him in sixteen weeks.’” [non-smoker]

“…and others who wanted to give up sooner, so it was on their terms.”

There was a difference between offenders stockpiling supplies...

“I know there’s people stocking up on burn for when it happens and they’re going to charge a hill for it.” [smoker]

Participants even mentioned smuggling tobacco.

“When you were a kid and your parents said, don’t do that, you’re not allowed to do that, the first thing you go and do is that.” [non-smoker]

“They won’t be bringing drugs in, they’ll be bringing bacci in on visits.” [smoker]
FINDINGS – THE PRISON ENVIRONMENT

“What’s going on with lifers then? […]. They’ve got nothing to lose. A lot of them are doing multiple life sentences.” [smoker]

Participants considered the impact of the smoking ban on different types of offenders.

“I do think it’s gonna impact the rights of the people who are on remand. Like you say, they’re not convicted, are they?” [non-smoker]

Also discussed were current difficulties within the prison, and the implications this would have on the implementation of the smoking ban.

“It’s gonna cost more policing the non-smoking ban than it is actually smoking in your cell, 'cause officers' time, nickings, visits, everything.” [smoker]

“If you want smoke free, and you want to quit smoking, we'll give you support, but support wasn’t available to them at the right time, because of the lack of facilities, or the lack of staff.” [non-smoker]
FINDINGS – GUIDING SUPPORT

“ones that are in the canteen, people say that it says 300 vapours or whatever and people are getting like 20 minutes, half an hour use out of it.”

Participants mentioned improving the nicotine replacement therapy on offer.

“Look at reducing the price of them.” [non-smoker]

“If you're gonna take smoking away, do in another way, like, send a message out: we'll put the treadmills on the wing, we'll put rowers, stuff like that.” [non-smoker]

Many asserted separating smokers and non-smokers instead of continuing with the ban.

“Like they've got a no-smoking wing down there. If you wanna smoke they should have a smoking wing, and have the officers who do smoke working on that wing.” [smoker]

Participants also suggested providing extra replacement activities.
SUMMARY

• Offenders felt that control was being removed from them. Although plans were being made to regain control, offenders were generally anxious about the repercussions of this.

• Offenders were concerned that the smoking ban had not been thought through properly. They identified existing challenges to the prison environment, and were unsure of the smoking cessation support that they could receive.
IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

• Offenders need to be made more aware of the smoking ban and how this affects them – at the time of data collection, only one prison knew the date that the ban was being implemented and shared this with offenders.

• The interviews were co-facilitated by a member of prison staff. This may have influenced offenders’ motivation to discuss certain matters.

• Interviews were only conducted in Category B and C prison establishments. It would be of interest to explore those in Category A prisons.
FURTHER RESEARCH

• It would appear that support, such as nicotine replacement therapy, can be expensive on an individual level, and difficult to implement larger scale (Condon et al., 2008).

• Furthermore, prisons may differ in the use of trained staff and smoking cessation specialists; with frequent changes to commissioned services, and funding cuts, also affecting the implementation of smoking cessation services (Eadie et al., 2012).

• One way to overcome potential difficulties with smoking cessation support within prisons may lie with computer-assisted interventions.

• The data from this study has been used to inform the development of an online smoking cessation intervention for offenders: Breaking Free from Smoking.
REFERENCES


THANK YOU FOR LISTENING

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