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What aspects of staff, prisoner and systemic attributes have been found to reduce or increase the likelihood of sexual boundary violations in prisons?
– A Rapid Evidence Assessment

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Abstract

Purpose: Sexual boundary violations can have significant implications in any environment, including that of a prison setting. Conducting research on a sensitive topic in prison services can be difficult to achieve, however, understanding why sexual boundary violations (SBV) occur can support the development of proactive policies and effective management strategies.

Design: The aim of this Rapid Evidence Assessment was to collate information relating to why SBV occur through a structured review.

Findings: 12 studies were found to meet the inclusion criteria and were quality appraised. Narrative synthesis was used to review the data and identify common factors. Two overarching themes emerged from the data which included factors that increase the likelihood of SBV to occur in prisons and personal motivators. Most studies included in the review were qualitative and all were based in the USA, which may limit the generalisability of the findings to other countries.

Originality: This review helps build on the current understanding of sexual boundary violations which pose a risk to the safety and well-being of both staff and prisoners. Recommendations for practice are provided in terms of how SBV can be reduced and how people can be best supported.

1. Introduction

Within the UK Prison Service, staff are required to adhere to a range of policies and codes of conducts which detail acceptable behaviour and those which could lead to dismissal (NOMS, 2010). Despite these policies and codes of conduct, boundary violations still occur (Kelly & Potter, 2023). Boundary Violations refer to behaviours that blur, minimise, or disrupt the professional distance between prison staff and prisoners (Marquart et al., 2001) and can incorporate a wide range of behaviours, from those considered minor infringements to those that constitute criminal behaviour (Kelly & Potter, 2023). The Conduct and Discipline Prison Service Instruction (PSI 06/2010) sets out mandatory policy requirements for those working within the service. In relation to professional relationships, this PSI states, "*staff must exercise particular care to ensure their dealings with prisoners, former prisoners and their friends or relationships are not open to abuse, misrepresentation or exploitation on either side. Staff relationships with prisoners must remain professional*" (NOMS, 2010). It explicitly states staff must not have any sexual involvement with a prisoner. Despite this, according to information available requested through the Freedom of Information Act suggested in the year 2017/2018, 12 prison staff members in England and Wales

were subject to disciplinary action for having an inappropriate relationship with a prisoner or ex-prisoner.

Central to the safe and effective running of prisons, is the relationship between staff and prisoners (Liebling, 2011). Prison safety not only depends on physical security such as bars, gates, and high walls (Snacken, 2005) but also requires 'dynamic security' stemming from positive interactions and mutually respectful relationships between staff and prisoners (Snacken, 2005). Research indicates positive relationships help reduce prisoner misconduct (Reisig & Mesko, 2009) and enhances prisoner well-being (Slotboom et al., 2011). As such, staff are required to spend sustained periods of time with prisoners and develop relationships characterised by fairness, respect, and justice (Liebling, 2011).

However, time spent together and pressures to develop these relationships may place both prisoners and staff at risk of transferring emotions such as affection or a need for interpersonal control into day to day relationships, thereby increasing the risk of Sexual Boundary Violations (SBV). This transference of emotions /feelings has been conceptualised outside of the prison setting through psychological mechanisms known as transference and countertransference typically seen in therapeutic relationships (Cooke et al., 2019) where blurred boundary roles lead to role violations between clients and professionals (Marquart et al., 2001). For example, a normally assertive person may suddenly assume a passive and complying role when they interact with a person assuming a controlling and dominant stance (e.g. a judge in court or a police officer wearing a uniform). Thus, the person and the judge adopt reciprocal roles of passive versus dominant which occur due to transference. As noted by Worthington (2016) staff working in forensic settings may be unintentionally and unwillingly drawn into re-enacting unhelpful and polarised roles. This can include re-enacting the early care-giving experiences of prisoners as well as being drawn into re-enactments which reflect aspects of the prisoner's offending (Mitzman, 2010). As a result, transference could lead to one person (the staff member or prisoner) adopting a childlike, vulnerable or passive role leading the other (staff member or prisoner) to counter-transfer these feelings and adopt a caring, protective or dominant role in response. In addition, prisons by their very nature, may also support prisoners who have developed antisocial ways of meeting their needs and relating to others (Manson et al, 2017) and in some more extreme cases psychopathy. It is argued that in forensic therapy settings this can be exhibited through forensic clients adopting not only controlling/dominating reciprocal roles but also those that may involve manipulation and seduction (Manson et al, 2017).

Furthermore, these reciprocal roles take place in environments with close physical proximity and it is noted that staff and prisoners are often required to spend prolonged periods of time together (Cooke et al., 2018; Crawley and Crawley, 2008) which may result in a shared social identity with a lack of clear boundaries differentiating staff from prisoners. Consistent with social identity theory, it is postulated this may result in staff struggling to differentiate their identity to be different to prisoners instead developing a collective identity based on their membership in a group (Tajfel & Turner, 2004) who share the same environment and mutual hardships which are difficult to describe to others existing outside of that context (e.g. family) thus further fostering closeness between staff and prisoners (Cooke et al., 2019).

What specifically leads to the transference and countertransference of roles and subsequent SBV in prisons is unclear. However the consequences of SBV in prison have been noted to include the potential to threaten the safety of those inside and outside of the organisation in which they occur (Cooke et al., 2019). Cooke et al. (2019) detailed a list of potential implications of boundary violations within prison settings and identified four main areas: decreased safety in the organisation, decreased safety outside the organisation, potential criminal activity, and professional and legal ramifications. There are notable cases in which inappropriate relationships have led to staff conveying contraband and conspired to support prisoner escape attempts (Worley et al., 2021). Staff members who engage in these violations may lose their livelihood and freedom (Rembert & Henderson, 2014) and may be placing their colleagues at increased risk (Worley et al., 2018). SBV not only affects staff but may also lead to lasting effects of victimisations for prisoners which can continue beyond release (Fedock et al., 2021). In terms of organisations, SBV can have financial cost due to the need to investigate, discipline or dismiss staff, which can have wider implications in terms of recruitment needs, legal challenges, and victim compensation (Kelly & Potter, 2023). Media attention relating to these cases can cause embarrassment for organisations and reduce public confidence in services intended to protect them (Stewart, 1998).

Thus, in order to try and avoid the risk of role violations the Boundary Seesaw Model (Hamilton, 2010) proposes that to effectively work in forensic settings staff need to achieve a balance or synthesis between on the one hand offering care (treatment) and on the other needing to maintain control (security). Without this they either risk adopting too much of a control role acting like a security guard who is rigid and controlling or on the other hand adopting the role of a super-carer who is over-involved and overly trusting (Hamilton, 2010). It is recommended that the ideal position

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is in the middle where staff adopt a negotiator/mediator role which is a synthesis or balance of both care and control.

However, navigating when and how to balance each side of the seesaw is difficult and there are no definitive lines separating boundary management roles, instead there is a gradual transition along the care and control continuums (Hamilton, 2010). Managing boundaries through care with explicit limits ensures reasonable balance, however 'tipping the seesaw' to either the control or caring side too far can lead to boundary violations unless the seesaw is rebalanced (Hamilton, 2010). It is hypothesised in the literature, that staff who engage in sexual boundary violations (SBV) often begin with non-sexual violations prior to progressing into a 'slippery slope' of boundary violations leading to sexual contact and relations (Marquart et al. 2001). In these cases, it is likely the boundary seesaw was initially slightly tipped, however, not rebalanced leading to further violations.

What leads to an imbalanced 'seesaw' and SBV specifically in prisons is unclear. Research more generally outside of prison settings has postulated that a range of typologies and dynamic risk factors are implicated in SBV which vary according to profession (Hook & Devereux, 2018). However an overlap appears to exist between these, whereby it is noted that SBV is perpetrated in situations in which the professional has control or superiority over another in reciprocal relationships and where they hold personality traits associated with insecure attachment, entitlement, emotional inhibition and beliefs related to being superior (Hook & Devereoux, 2018). Furthermore, research outside of prison settings suggests that the function of SBV may not be solely related to the sexual act(s) but instead relate to complex psychological needs and processes which can be enacted between the professional and the service user. This may include the enactment of reciprocal roles and counter-transference whereby the professional adopts a parental/authority role with a need for others to meet their high standards resulting in a misuse of their power over the client who adopts a child/vulnerable role. This may extend to more significant personality traits associated with predatory behaviour and focussing on their own needs over the needs of others (Hook & Devereux, 2018). However, they also noted professionals may also engage in SBV due to attachment difficulties, naivety and/or a lack of self-esteem suggesting the functions of SBV may vary. This was supported by Gabbard (2016) who found that professional sexual boundary violators from a therapeutic setting fall into four categories: lovesickness, masochistic surrender, predatory psychopathy and paraphilias and psychotic disorders.

Rationale and Current Review

SBV have significant implications wherever they occur, in particular when there is greater power asymmetry (van Baarle et al., 2023). The literature base into SBV appears considerably larger for other forensic settings such as secure hospitals and the police. Despite the significant implications for SBV in a prison setting, it remains an under-researched area (Jones, 2015). This may be due to the general difficulties in conducting research within a prison environment, where it can be difficult to obtain access (Cislo & Trestman, 2013), or due to the sensitive nature of the topic. Whilst the literature into SBV in other forensic settings may have some relevance to prison settings, it is important to understand these violations in this specific setting. Whilst both prison settings and secure hospitals are considered restricted environments in which there is a power imbalance between staff and service users (Edgar, 2005; Goodman et al., 2020), those in prison may be considered less vulnerable and may even be seen to play an active role in the occurrence of SBV (Worley et al., 2003). A recent literature review completed by Kelly and Potter (2023) focused on professional boundary violations more generally in prison settings and recommended future reviews seek to evaluate the quality of evidence. To the author's knowledge there are no reviews synthesising the evidence focusing solely on understanding why SBV occur in prison settings between staff and prisoners.

An awareness of why SBV occur in prison settings may help to inform policies and strategies that can support the prevention and management of such behaviours and help direct future research in this area.

The current review aims to contribute towards the knowledge gap on SBV in prison settings through a rapid evidence assessment (REA) of the current literature base. It aims to address the following research question:

What aspects of staff, prisoner and systemic attributes have been found to reduce or increase the likelihood of sexual boundary violations in prisons?

2. Methodology

Search Strategy

The Cochrane Library was initially searched determining no previous reviews on the topic had been completed. It was decided a Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) would be the most appropriate review method to use, as it offers a rigorous process for locating, appraising, and synthesising

evidence in a timely manner (Varker et al., 2015). The standards set out by the Centre of Evidence-Based Management (CEBMa; Barends et al., 2017) were followed during the completion of this review. A PICo (Population, Phenomenon of Interest, Context/Language) research protocol was completed to support the development of relevant search strings and a pilot review conducted to assess content before selecting the most appropriate databases. The databases selected included: Scopus, ProQuest Central, ProQuest Dissertation & Theses A & I and PsychInfo. A search was also conducted on Google Scholar; no additional papers from this search were identified. As part of the pilot search a range of search string combinations were trialled. The final search involved two separate search strings in which studies from both searches were cross referenced and combined. The first search string was: (staff OR employee OR officer OR worker OR professional) AND ("sexual boundary violation" OR "sexual misconduct" OR "sexual boundary breach" OR "prison rape") AND (prison OR forensic OR correction* OR jail OR custod*). The second search string was: (staff OR employee OR officer OR worker OR professional) AND Sex* AND (boundary OR misconduct) AND (prison OR forensic OR correction* OR jail OR custod*). This aimed to ensure as many relevant articles were reviewed as possible. Throughout the process to reduce the potential for publication bias, reference lists of included articles were reviewed.

Study Eligibility

Whilst completing the PICo research protocol an inclusion and exclusion criteria was developed to ensure only studies addressing the research parameters were included (Table 1).

Study Selection

The systematic searches retrieved a total of 783 articles; no studies from additional sources were added. Duplicates were identified and removed following a comparison of the titles and abstracts. A title review of each study then took place to assess whether they immediately met the inclusion or exclusion criteria. Those which did not meet the inclusion criteria were excluded. A similar review was conducted using the abstracts of the remaining articles; those that did not meet the inclusion criteria were also excluded. For the studies where it was unclear whether they could confidently be excluded and for those which appeared to meet the inclusion criteria, a full review of the article took place. Throughout the screening process each stage was also completed by a second reviewer to enhance inter-rater reliability. Figure 1 outlines the stages of the selection of studies.

Quality Appraisal of Studies

Eight qualitative, three descriptive quantitative and one mixed method study using semi-structured interviews and a descriptive quantitative method made up the final studies included in this review. Consideration was given to the most appropriate quality appraisal tool. Due to the different methodologies and the incorporation of descriptive quantitative designs in several of the studies, the decision was made to use the Mixed Method Appraisal Tool (MMAT; Hong et al., 2018). The MMAT is a critical appraisal tool which permits the appraisal of all methodologies used across the studies. Appraisals were completed by the lead author before being shared and reviewed by another author. This helped ensure a more accurate assessment of the quality of the articles. All studies were retained in the review to reduce bias, however, the quality assessments were considered when interpreting and weighting the findings drawn from particular studies.

Data Extraction

Due to the number of studies included in the final sample (n=12), each study was assigned a reference number (e.g. [1]). This allowed for easier identification throughout the data extraction. The reference numbers can be found in Table 2 and will be used throughout the remainder of the review. Each study was individually reviewed on multiple occasions by the author to help ensure all data relevant to the research question was extracted.

Analysis

The characteristics of the studies were tabulated to include examination of their content and any other relevant characteristics. The studies were then grouped based on characteristics using a matrix to determine similarities worthy of grouping. This was then used to synthesize the characteristics of the studies contributing to each comparison. Studies addressed a variety of research questions, and employed a heterogeneous range of measurement approaches and analytic techniques. As a result, meta-analysis was not feasible. Hence, a structured reporting of the effects (rather than statistical synthesis) was adopted based on the Cochrane Guidance that if the data is heterogeneous and cannot be synthesised using mathematical procedures then a narrative synthesis should be adopted. This was conducted following the MECIR standards for reporting of reviews using narrative synthesis and the Guidance on the Conduct of Systematic Reviews in (Popay *et al.*, 2006).

3. Results

Key Characteristics of the Studies

A total of 12 studies met the inclusion criteria. All studies within the final sample were conducted in the USA. One study took an auto-ethnographic approach [11] whilst the remaining studies

incorporated sample sizes ranging from nine [1] to 7825 [9]. Studies were published between 1996 and 2022, with only two studies [3,7] being published in the last five years. All studies except two recruited participants from a prison setting. One study recruited participants from a community centre which supported people who had recently been released from custody [3] and another recruited females who had previously been employed in a correctional facility [12]. Seven studies gathered data focusing on prisoner perspectives [1,3,4,7,8,9,10], two studies gathered data from both prisoners and staff perspectives [5,6] and two studies gathered information relating to staff only [2,12]. Four studies included data relating to female prisoners only [1,4,5,7], one study included data relating to male prisoners only [8], whilst five studies included data relating to both male and female prisoners [2,3,6,9,10]. Two studies [8,9] used the same data set for the male prisoner sample; these studies had varying aims and analysis approaches. Of the studies which included staff as participants, two included both male and female staff [5,12], one included female staff only [12] and one did not report this information [6]. The study which used an auto-ethnographic approach [11] focused on the author's own experience as a former correctional officer.

Quality of Studies
Eight of the 12 studies used a qualitative study design [1,2,3,4,7,10,11,12]. Each of these studies had clear research questions, collected data which addressed the research question, used an appropriate qualitative approach, and had coherence between data sources, collection, analysis, and interpretation. Most of these studies used adequate collection methods to address the research question [1,2,3,4,7,12] and the interpretation was sufficiently substantiated by the data [1,2,3,4,7,10,12]. Two studies raised questions regarding the accuracy of information recorded due to handwritten notes being made during interview [10] and quotes being used when the author reported not to have made notes or having a good memory when using an auto-ethnographic approach [11]. All studies were given a quality rating of 'E'.

Three of the 12 studies used a descriptive quantitative design [6,8,9]. Strengths in these studies included the data collected being appropriate to address the research question. Two of these studies [8,9] used inclusive methods to help ensure the sample was representative of the target population such as making the study available in both English and Spanish and offering direct interviews for those who were intimidated by computers or located in different units. These studies also used pre-existing measures and the variables were clearly defined. One of these studies, however, [9] lacked information relating to how participants were invited to engage in the study. Another study which utilised a quantitative design [6] did not provide information relating to the characteristics of their

participants, it was therefore not possible to determine whether the sample used was representative of their target population. This study also had limitations relating to data analysis due to a lack of information regarding data analysis techniques and a lack of statistical analysis taking place. One study was given a quality rating of 'D' [8] whilst the other two studies were given a quality rating of 'E' [6,9].

One of the 12 studies used a mixed methods approach [5]. The rationale for a mixed methods approach was not clearly defined and there were limitations in terms of representation of sample, and data analysis. No differences were found between the qualitative and quantitative data. This study was given a quality rating of 'E'.

Narrative Synthesis

The narrative synthesis resulted in two overarching themes being identified: facilitators, and personal motivators. These themes were broken down into subthemes (see Table 3).

Theme 1: Factors that increase the likelihood of SBV to occur in prisons

This theme represents the factors which increase the likelihood of SBV to occur between staff and prisoners. This theme is broken down into four sub themes: personal vulnerabilities, prison culture, us and us thinking, and lack of supervision. 10 out of the 12 studies produced information relating to this theme [1,2,3,4,7,8,9,10,11,12].

1a: Personal Vulnerabilities

This sub theme from eight studies [1,2,3,4,7,10,11,12] relates to personal experiences and circumstances which may make a person more vulnerable to SBV. One study states prisoners who did not have the ability to refuse or report perceived harassment from staff were more likely to be victims of sexual misconduct [1]. This sub theme appears to be closely related to sub theme 1b prison culture in which prisoners feel they are unable to say no to staff due to fear of repercussions. Findings from two studies [1,3] highlighted experiences and circumstances which may reduce a prisoner's ability to refuse staff's sexual advances. These included previous victimisation [1], "boundary issues" [1], drug addiction [3], mental health difficulties [3,4] cognitive deficits [3] and being younger [3]. Findings from two studies [3,7] stated staff exploited prisoners who had experiences which could be perceived as vulnerabilities. This sub theme also appears to be closely related to sub theme 2a power and sexual gratification. The data from the studies suggest some staff

are using their power and position of authority to exploit prisoners who present with vulnerabilities such as those listed above [3,4,7].

Information obtained from four studies [2,10,11,12] suggest staff who are or have experienced difficulties in their personal life are more likely to engage in SBV. Whilst some studies suggest staff exploit prisoner vulnerabilities to engage in sexual contact [3,4,7] other studies report prisoners targeting and exploiting staff who appear personally vulnerable [2,11,12]. Personal experiences which could increase staff vulnerabilities were found to include having a turbulent family [11], experiencing a catastrophic traumatic event [2], experiencing domestic violence [2], experiencing marital strife [2], experiencing sexual frustration [2], being bored [2], "having ruptured dreams" [2], experiencing separation from spouse [2,12] and feeling at a loss due to children leaving home or someone close to them passing away [2]. Most of these experiences were linked to staff whose motivation related to love and emotional connection [2]. Most of the findings relating to staff experiences were reported in one study only. This study included a review of 508 personnel files of staff members who received punishment for violating rule 42 employees' general rules of conduct, and interviews of 12 supervisors. Whilst this study was found to have methodological strength, it raises questions relating to the strength of these conclusions.

1b: Prison Culture

Information obtained from six of the 11 studies [1,2,4,7,8,9] relates to this subtheme. The data from these studies suggest SBV are more likely to occur when there is a prison culture in which prisoners feel they are unable to say no to staff due to fear of repercussions [1,4,8,9] and when staff are not held accountable for their actions [2,4,7]. Two studies [1,4] reported prisoners felt threatened and fearful of staff if they did not comply with sexual advances made. Other findings stated prisoners complied with sexual contact to achieve protection [1,8,9]. This appears to be true for both male and female prisoners [1,8,9]. It is not clear from these studies whether this protection relates to repercussions from staff or protection in terms of the general prison environment. These findings suggest prisoners fear staff will not fulfil their roles in terms of care and safety should they refuse to engage in sexual contact. These findings may be explained by the inherent power imbalance as stated in one study [1] between staff and prisoners and could relate to theme 2a power and sexual gratification which suggests staff use their power and position of authority to coerce prisoners into engaging in sexual contact.

In addition to a culture in which prisoners are fearful of saying no to staff, the data suggests a culture in which staff are not held accountable for their actions also contributes to the occurrence of SBV [2,4,7]. Two of these studies [4,7] focused on female prisoners' experiences only. These studies were found to have methodological strength during the data appraisal stage. Findings from two studies suggest reports of staff sexual misconduct are not investigated properly; one study reported this was the result of supervisors not wanting the publicity and scandal associated with this [2]. Another study found reports from prisoners were not believed or taken seriously and as a result were ignored [7]. This study reported a culture in which prisoner sexual victimisation by staff is often 'masked' and 'covered-up', due to staff adherence to a 'culture of brotherhood' [7]. These findings suggest staff are protected against reporting and therefore consequences for engaging in sexual misconduct. When staff sexual misconduct is reported, studies found staff were rarely held accountable [4] or the consequences were minimal [7]. These findings indicate a lack of deterrent to staff behaviour and a feeling of protection. A fearful culture and lack of consequences appear to play a reinforcing role.

1c: 'Us and Us' Thinking

This sub theme represents how the presence of over-identification and over-familiarity between staff and prisoners resulted in them seeing each other as a cohesive group which is more similar than different. The presence of this 'us and us' identity as opposed to 'us and them' was found to increase the likelihood of SBV [1,2,7,10,11,12]. Studies report boundary violations are often not isolated events and tend to develop from minor transgressions to larger ones [1,2,12]. The requirement to engage in social duties and manage the contradiction between authority and helper whilst working with emotional prisoners and those who wish to manipulate can make maintaining boundaries more challenging [1]. As part of social duties and being a helper, the distance between 'them' and 'us' may be reduced between staff and prisoners due to them relating and interacting with each another differently [2]. For example, seeing each other as just males and females [2] instead of as staff and prisoner. It is reported the aim of this is to overcome "deprivation as a result of a lack of heterosexual relationships" in prison settings [10]. A work environment which is sexually charged and full of sexual innuendos [1] may make this more likely and lead to some believing sexual relationships between staff and prisoners are consensual [7] thus further reducing the 'us and them' thinking. Interacting in a more personal way and sharing information may influence prisoners and staff to draw parallels and similarities between their lives, increasing us and us thinking [1,10,12].

According to one study [2] the most important aspect of SBV from staff was recasting a prisoner as a non-prisoner or as a person who just happens to be in prison [2]. As a result, staff tended to disregard prisoner personal histories and can become "infatuated" with prisoners [2]. The job role requirements in terms of work hours and responsibilities are reported to reduce staff's time and ability to meet their social needs outside of work [1]. This may result in staff viewing prisoners as their 'surrogate family' [1], leading to the development of friendships and inappropriate relationships [11,12]. This appears to be closely related to data from theme 1a personal vulnerabilities which indicates staff who experience personal difficulties are more likely to engage in SBV. Personal vulnerabilities [10,11,12], deprivation of emotional and social connections [10,11,12], ongoing proximity to prisoners [10], manipulation by prisoners [10] and feelings of professional inadequacy leading to isolation from colleagues [11] are reported to enhance staff boundary violations [10,11]. This is likely enhanced when staff are working in an organisation which does not provide adequate support [1] or one in which asking for help following minor transgressions does not feel possible [12]. This theme appears to operate as a risk and reinforcing factor whereby a lack of relationships and social connections may take individuals closer towards SBV whilst the desire to have connection and a sense of belonging appears to reinforce individuals' engagement in SBV.

1d: Lack of Supervision

Information from three studies suggest lack of supervision can influence SBV [2,10,12]. Some studies found sexual contact was more likely to occur away from supervisory staff and where supervisory contact is reduced [2,10]. The data reported prisoners who have a romantic interest in staff tended to have trusted positions and were able to have more mobility around the establishment and therefore reduced supervision [10,12]. As a result, the perception was SBV were unlikely to be discovered [12]. This theme appears to play a reinforcing role for SBV, making them easier to occur under these circumstances.

Theme 2: Personal Motivators

This theme relates to what the literature suggests are the personal motivators for SBV occurring between staff and prisoners. This theme includes three subthemes: power and sexual gratification, contraband, favours, and disruption and love and emotional connection. Eight out of the 12 studies [1,2,4,5,6,7,10] reported information relevant to this theme.

2a: Power and Sexual Gratification

Information from eight studies incorporated into this subtheme [1,2,4,5,6,7,10,12] suggest power plays a role in the occurrence of SBV. Studies found staff use their power [1,2,4,5,6,7] and position of authority to obtain sexual gratification from prisoners [2,4,6,7]. Four of these studies focused on female prisoners' experiences only [1,4,5,7]. It is difficult based on the literature to separate whether the main motivation for these staff members is to exert power or to achieve sexual gratification. Some data found staff used their position of authority to achieve sexual contact and gratification [2,4,5,6,7]. Other data, however, found staff's motivation was related to power [1,4,5]. One study reported a female prisoner stating they were "singled out" by a staff member as he wanted to "prove he was tougher than she was" [5]; this study was found to have more methodological limitations during the data appraisal stage in comparison to other studies. Information from one study refers to staff members who engage in SBV for power and sexual gratification as 'predators' [2]. The idea of staff taking advantage of and 'preying' on prisoners is discussed in other studies [4,7]. All three studies reporting these findings were found to have methodological strength. Information obtained from one study suggests male staff were more likely to engage in SBV due to power and sexual gratification [2], whilst another study reported both male and female staff members 'forced' prisoners into sexual contact [5].

Two of the eight studies [10,12] indicated power obtained by prisoners played a role in SBV occurring. These studies suggested prisoners recognised weaknesses in staff and exploited those who presented with vulnerabilities [10,12]. One study [10] reported prisoners tended to exploit staff of the opposite sex, with most of the prisoners being male. The same study found some prisoners thrived on putting staff into compromising positions [10]. All these prisoners were male and expressed attitudes relating to females who work in a prison setting 'wanting to find a man' [10]. One study [12] reported how prisoner's power increased as boundary violations progressed, impacting on staff ability to report violations or seek help. This finding was based on one participant's experience. This theme appears closely related to 1a, personal vulnerabilities as these appear to be exploited by others to facilitate sexual contact. Power and sexual gratification may serve as both risk and reinforcing functions with a feeling of powerlessness and inadequacy pushing some towards SBV to achieve sexual gratification and a feeling of power.

2b: Contraband, Favours, and Disruption
Information obtained as part of this subtheme suggests some prisoners who engage in sexual contact with staff do this to obtain contraband, preferential treatment and to cause disruption for prisons [1,2,4,10]. Some data suggest prisoners actively seek to encourage staff to engage in SBV

with the aim of procuring contraband for profit and dominance, or to cause trouble and embarrassment for staff and the establishment [10]. Other data indicates prisoners engage in sexual contact with staff to obtain personal contraband, soften their time and to avoid punishment [1,2,4]. It is unclear from these studies whether prisoners proposed sexual contact with staff in exchange for contraband and favours or whether staff initiated sexual contact offering contraband and favours as an incentive. The information suggests prisoners who were motivated by "causing trouble" and "embarrassment" were more likely to try and develop inappropriate relationships with staff members in other job roles than correctional officers [10]. This, however, was reported in only one study. The studies incorporated into this theme demonstrated higher levels of methodological strengths during the data appraisal stage.

2c: Love and Emotional Connection

Three of the 11 studies [1,2,10] suggested SBV occur between staff and prisoners due to a desire to find love and an emotional connection [1,2,10]. These studies were found to have higher levels of methodological strength. Information from the studies suggested both staff [2] and prisoners [10] are motivated by love and a desire for an emotional connection. In relation to staff, the information suggests staff who engaged in SBV due to love and wanting an emotional connection desired a soul mate, were consumed by romantic love, and wanted post prison commitments [1,2]. Information from one study suggests female staff were more likely to be motivated by love [2] and were drawn to male prisoners as they wanted to "straighten them up" and "tame a rowdy man". In terms of prisoners, information suggests they aimed to form an emotional bond with a staff member due to a romantic interest [10]. These relationships appear to be fostered by both staff and prisoners and develop over time [2,10]. This theme appears to serve as both a risk and reinforcing factor for staff and prisoners due to the ability to obtain love and connection from SBV.

4. Discussion

This review aimed to enhance understanding of why SBV occur between staff and prisoners. A total of 12 studies met the inclusion criteria and were synthesised into two main themes as part of this review. The themes identified in this review suggest understanding SBV is complex and influenced by a range of factors which do not occur in isolation. Below is a hypothesised model of the factors which contribute towards staff and prisoners engaging in SBV (see Figure 2).

Staff Vulnerability Factors

Factors which were associated with an increased likelihood of staff engagement in SBV included personal factors such as: having a turbulent family life; experiencing trauma; intimate partner violence or other marital difficulties; sexual frustration; boredom; loss of social connectedness due to a family member no longer residing in the home (e.g. due to death, children leaving home, spouse separation); feeling socially isolated from colleagues; and being naïve to manipulation. Functions of staff engagement in SBV included: sexual gratification; power; connection; a sense of belonging; to offset loneliness; emotional intimacy; and rescue schemas of wanting to 'change' prisoners. The findings were consistent with the categories and functions of SBV outside of a prison content proposed by Gabbard (2016) suggesting staff engage in these behaviours due to a need for power, sexual gratification and/or emotional connection. The findings also support the hypothesis that staff engaging in SBV appear to struggle to achieve the correct balance in the boundary seesaw (Hamilton, 2010) through adopting reciprocal roles (Manson et al, 2017) which are either overly controlling and dominating or through adopting an overly involved, admired or seduced role.

The two primary personal motivator subthemes; power and sexual gratification and love and emotional connection appear to provide partial support for the typologies of professionals who engage in SBV proposed by Gabbard (2016). Gabbard (2016) suggested professional sexual boundary violators from a therapeutic setting fall into four categories: lovesickness, masochistic surrender, predatory psychopathy and paraphilias and psychotic disorders. This review indicates support for the predatory psychopathy and paraphilias and lovesick typologies in a custodial setting. Staff who fall into the predatory psychopathy and paraphilias typology typically take advantage of relationships with service users to gratify sexual needs (Faulkner & Regehr, 2011). This review suggested staff may engage in SBV through abusing their power and position of authority by "preying" on prisoners (Marquart et al., 2001; Pogrebin & Dodge, 2001; Surrell & Johnson, 2020). In this instance staff adopt the authoritarian/dominating and controlling role and prisoners are forced into a reciprocal childlike vulnerable role where they are controlled, dominated and manipulated through the mechanisms of transference and countertransference. Whilst it is not clear from the studies whether paraphilias were present as suggested by Gabbart (2016), there is evidence to suggest sexual gratification was a primary aim in a small number of the studies (Pogrebin & Dodge, 2001; Struckman & Struckman, 2002).

In relation to the lovesick typology, Gabbart (2016) suggested if professionals' emotional and sexual needs are not met in the home environment, they may begin to look elsewhere to meet these needs. Staff in the lovesick category often have impoverished personal lives or have recently experienced a personal crisis such as a relationship breakdown or loss of a loved one (Cooke et al.,

2019; Gabbart, 2016). A finding which was supported by the love and emotional connection, and personal vulnerabilities subthemes of this review. In custodial settings, the lovesick typology may be exacerbated by the work hours and job responsibilities as suggested in the 'us and us' thinking subtheme. It has also been postulated that personality traits associated with naivety (Hook & Devereoux, 2018) can take professionals closer to engaging in SBV which was also consistent in the current review of prison staff. Dial and Worley (2008) found people in prison targeted staff who acted as if they were afraid of the environment and presented as vulnerable (Cooke et al., 2019). Vulnerabilities often associated with the lovesickness typology may become apparent due to inappropriate staff self-disclosure (Peternelj-Taylor, 1998). As a result, the exchange of information relating to personal problems may blur the lines between professional and personal, particularly when those in prison take on the role of confidant (Epstein & Simon, 1990) likely resulting in countertransference. This may tip the boundary seesaw (Hamilton, 2010) leading to it becoming unbalanced and staff adopting an overly involved or overly trusting position of childlike vulnerability and the prisoner adopting the adult reciprocal role of power, care and protection.

Prisoner Vulnerability Factors

Factors which were associated with increased likelihood of prisoner SBV victimisation included personal factors such as: previous victimisation; drug addiction; mental health difficulties; cognitive deficits; and younger age. This placed them at risk of being exploited by staff who sought to use power and authority to exploit their vulnerabilities. Prisoners cannot consent to relationships with staff due to the power imbalance and the findings of this review were consistent with previous research that has found victims of childhood abuse were at risk of also being victims of SBV (Pope & Vetter, 1991) as are individuals with intellectual difficulties (Tomsa et al, 2021). This was also consistent with psychological concepts of transference and counter-transference and the Boundary seesaw with staff adopting a controlling role over prisoners who were forced into a childlike dominated and vulnerable role.

The findings of this study (that younger age was associated with a greater risk of SBV) were also consistent with research exploring sexual exploitation outside of prisons which indicates that adolescents are more vulnerable due to development characteristics such as poor judgement (Reid & Jones, 2011).

However, other personality qualities such as: being 'manipulative'; exploitative of staff vulnerabilities; obtaining enjoyment in compromising staff; or being sufficiently skilled to be

awarded trusted positions within the prison facilitating reduced supervision; and increased mobility around the prison were also noted as risk factors for prisoners engaging in SBV with staff. Functions of engagement in SBV in these cases were to: obtain contraband; 'soften' prison time through being given 'favours'; causing staff embarrassment; and a desire for sexual and/or emotional intimacy. This is consistent with research outside of prison settings in relation to sexual exploitation which is defined as when a person exchanges food, accommodation, drugs, gifts, money or anything of value in return for performing sexual activities (Reid & Piquero, 2014). Research in this field has also shown that traits associated with a propensity for engaging in offending (such as impulsivity and psychopathy) may also place a person at risk of victimisation (Reid et al, 2021). This was consistent with the findings of this review and with literature also suggesting prisoners, in particular within male establishments, are often the instigator of inappropriate interactions with staff (Worley & Worley, 2003; Worley 2016). The intention of these interactions is to encourage staff to violate boundaries including obtaining contraband and granting favours (Worley & Worley, 2003; Worley 2016). This is supported by the power and contraband, favours, and disruption subthemes of this review which suggests prisoners may also be motivated to engage in SBV for their own gains. Hence, it would seem that in these instances prisoners adopted similar roles to those reported by Manson et al (2017) in forensic therapeutic relationships consisting of the admiring, seducing and manipulating reciprocal roles.

In summary the potential reciprocal roles and functions which may contribute towards staff SBV in prisons appear to fall into two subtypes: power and sexual gratification (Figure 3); and love and emotional connection (Figure 4). However, it should be noted that it is likely that understanding the precise function of SBV in prisons may also be limited due to the difficulties both staff and prisoners may have in discussing these after they have occurred. This may be particularly relevant if court proceedings are initiated or the staff member leaves their job prior to the relationship being discovered. In such instances it is highly possible that other risk factors, functions and reciprocal roles would likely be identified.

Systemic Vulnerability Factors

Systemic Factors which were associated with an increased likelihood of SBV in prisons included: a prison culture which does not support reporting of SBV due to fear of repercussions; staff not being held to be accountable; prisoners feeling that SBV will protect them from a lack of safety; reports of SBV not being investigated properly; staff cohesion resulting in 'cover-ups'; staff experiencing difficulties navigating the boundary seesaw of care and security resulting in over-familiarity with

prisoners; a prison culture where sexual language is normalised; increased frequency and proximity of contact with prisoners due to work hours leading to prisoners being seen as family; lone working or working with limited supervision.

The subtheme of us and us thinking may be explained by social identity theory. This theory suggests people experience collective identity based on their membership in a group (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). This leads individuals to categorise their own and other groups into "us" versus "them", influencing their values and behaviour in line with the group identity (Zepp et al., 2013). In a prison setting these groups may be 'staff versus prisoners' (Dolovich, 2017). Despite the differences in group identity, staff and prisoners are often required to spend prolonged periods of time together (Cooke et al., 2018; Crawley and Crawley, 2008) and experience mutual hardships due to sharing the same environment (Cooke et al., 2019). This in addition to relative deprivation due to a lack of support and understanding from family (Worley & Worley, 2016) and limited opportunities to consult with others (Cooke et al., 2019) may break down barriers and reduce the social distance between the two groups. Crawley and Crawley (2008) suggested these factors can make it difficult to sustain an 'us and them' mentality. This can be especially true when a staff member becomes disillusioned with the work they are doing or start to feel it is not valued (Jones, 2013). When this occurs, the values, norms and actions of the organisation start not to matter, and the rules no longer seem relevant or applicable (Weber, 2003). The identity of staff may then shift and the idea of 'them' and 'us' has been reconceptualised with the 'us' including the staff member and those in prison (Jones, 2013). This can be further influenced when staff and prisoners share commonalities such as coming from the same communities or having shared experiences (Calhoun & Coleman, 2002; Crawley & Crawley, 2008), which could potentially lead to SBV.

Staff who work with people who pose a risk to themselves and others, have also been found to prioritise relationships with colleagues over reporting responsibilities. This is due to a need to depend on the wider team for their own safety (Fisher, 1995). Staff who face this dilemma may feel especially vulnerable (Peternelji-Taylor, 2003) and experience divided loyalties (Wilmot, 2000). They may fear repercussions for reporting a fellow staff member (Worley & Worley, 2011), thus deciding whether to report a colleague for SBV may lead to a host of ethical and moral dilemmas (Peternelji-Taylor, 2003). This may be especially true for staff members whose 'us' versus 'them' relates to staff versus prisoners; the initial reaction may be to protect the staffing group. This may influence staff reluctance to report and may contribute to the dilemma faced by staff when deciding whether to report a fellow staff member for suspected sexual misconduct and influence the "culture of brotherhood" (Surrell & Johnson, 2020) as discussed in the prison climate subtheme.

The factors associated with prison climate in terms of feeling unable to say no, fear of repercussions and a lack of consequences for staff appear to act as reinforcing factors which further enable SBV. These factors are also consistent with the existing literature regarding the reporting of SBV (Butler et al., 2023). Concerns of retaliation, embarrassment, or a belief an investigation will not take place have been cited as reasons prisoners do not report SBV by staff (Levan Miller, 2010). Butler et al., (2023) reported how limited social support, in prison experiences, and assault characteristics influenced prisoners' perceptions of potential embarrassment, fear of retaliation, and a belief an investigation would not occur (Butler et al., 2023). Factors which in turn influenced prisoners' decisions regarding reporting (Butler et al., 2023). Prison climate therefore appears to not only reinforce why SBV occur but also impact on whether they get reported.

The final studies incorporated into this review were all conducted in the USA. Garland (2001) argued developments in criminal justice system in the USA and the UK have been similar over the past two decades. Despite this, there appears to be differences in terms of the main function and role of prison between the two countries. Rehabilitation or at a minimum the rhetoric of rehabilitation plays a central role in the UK prison system (MOJ, 2014). This differs from the USA whose correctional mission focuses on public safety and recidivism reduction (Kruttschnitt & Gartner, 2003). The Prison service of England and Wales encourages the development of staff-prisoner relationships to help maintain decent and stable regimes and support the rehabilitative process (Crewe, 2011). Staff are now seen as more approachable and as less authoritarian than in the past (Crewe, 2009), likely resulting in a reduction of social distance (Crewe, 2011). Based on this, it is hypothesised SBV relating to love, emotional connection and us and us thinking would be more prevalent in UK prisons than that of power. Due to the lack of research within the UK, however, it is difficult to draw conclusions and further research is required.

Strengths and Limitations

It is important to consider the strengths and limitations of the REA itself. In relation to strengths, a number of different databases were used, and pilot searches conducted in an attempt to identify the most suitable databases. In addition, a range of search terms were used for the different concepts relevant to the research question. Incorporating the explanations as to why articles were excluded at the final review stage is a strength, as it increases the openness of the process undertaken by the author. A further strength relates to the inclusion and discussion with an additional author at each stage of the review to enhance inter-rater reliability. In terms of limitations, whilst unavoidable the

exclusion of articles not published in English may have resulted in relevant information not being included or captured. Another limitation relates to all studies in the final sample being conducted in one country, the USA. This limits generalisability of the findings due to differences in custodial and correctional systems and cultures across different countries.

Conclusion

This REA has shown there are multiple reasons and factors influencing why SBV occur between staff and prisoners. Understanding the factors which contribute to why SBV occur, can help inform practice and support the development of proactive policies and better management.

Implications for future research and practice

The findings of this review have several potential implications for policy, practice, and future research.

- Whilst the majority of staff working in prisons will not engage in SBV the mechanisms which contribute towards instances where this does occur remain an area of outstanding research which would benefit from further exploration. This is especially the case for prisons outside of the USA (including the UK) where a paucity of literature appears particularly prevalent. Future research should explore both the slow and fast triggers which may place staff at increased vulnerability of SBV, the circumstances in which this occurs and what proactive strategies could be put in place to reduce this risk. Future research should include both the views of prisoners and staff.

- Prison staff experiencing difficulties outside of the prison setting (e.g. changes or conflict in their home environment or life trauma) should be offered additional support. This could include an opportunity for reduced prisoner contact at a time when they may be vulnerable. They could also be offered additional access to well-being services and supervision to provide a safe space which offers them social connection to discuss their difficulties to reduce feelings of isolation from colleagues.

- Staff training should include psycho-education on the Boundary Seesaw and the risk of the transference and countertransference of roles with prisoners at times when they may be vulnerable or seeking to act out a need for control in their lives through the workplace. This could include potential warning signs to look out for in themselves or others that roles may be becoming blurred (e.g. sexualised language, over-familiarity and increased lone working or distance from colleagues).

- Staff training should also include education on what staff can do to protect themselves and others if they feel the risk of SBV is increasing or occurring and the benefits of discussing this both for themselves and others. This could include psycho-education on the 'slippery slope' of boundary violations including the impact experiences outside of the work context may have within work. Training should include psycho-education on the risks of not reporting potential SBV.

- Staff training should also include psycho-education on the illegality of SBV with prisoners and how this is not only an issue of safeguarding but a criminal offence. In the absence of threats, intimidation, or coercion it is possible for staff and prisoners to inaccurately consider sexual relations as consensual (Surrell & Johnson, 2020).

- Psycho-education should also be provided for staff and managers on the benefits of supervision in which open discussions can be had regarding interactions, risks associated with these, and developing collaborative strategies for practice to prevent SBV (Faulkner & Regeher, 2011).

- Mechanisms to support the confidential reporting of potential SBV should be implemented throughout prisons to encourage a culture of reporting potential concerns in a way that enables staff and prisoners to feel safe from negative repercussions. This could include modifying prison policies and procedures for reporting suspected SBV such as developing a confidential reporting strategy for both staff and prisoners in which an independent team is responsible for investigating these claims. This may enhance confidence reports will be investigated fully and there will be consequences for those engaging in misconduct. Reports of SBV no matter who they are reported by should be taken seriously and fully investigated.

- Managers of staff working in prisons should consider if particular prison environments or client groups within prisons should reduce the opportunities for lone working. For example, prisons which support prisoners with higher levels of personality traits associated with manipulation or complex interpersonal dynamics with a risk of transference and countertransference (e.g. psychopathy or emotionally unstable characteristics).

- In prisons where staff support complex clients with additional vulnerability needs (e.g. mental health difficulties, cognitive deficits or drug addiction) or risk (e.g. the capacity for manipulation) they may benefit not only from reduced lone working but increased supervision and regular reflective practice spaces to discuss the complex interpersonal dynamics which may arise. This could serve to normalise discussions around the roles which staff and prisoners adopt and highlight any changes in these dynamics/reciprocal roles to safely explore the function of these. This approach would be consistent with literature which

recommends prison settings progress from a 'nothing to see here' approach to one that advocates openness, transparency, and accountability (Kelly & Potter, 2022).

- Trusted positions held by prisoners throughout the prison (and those that afford increased mobility) should be subject to regular review. This should include the potential for rotation of prisoners and/or staff involved in these roles to prevent the risk of over-familiarity or misuse of trust.

- Wider systemic approaches to reduce the risk of SBV should be implemented such as reviewing the policy for reporting. An approach which combines aspects of a supportive policy in which staff training, forums and amnesty programmes are prioritised alongside aspects of a zero-tolerance policy, advocating for increased supervision, whistleblowing and serious consequences is recommended (Kelly & Potter, 2022).

- Prisons should create safe spaces, policies and procedures in which alleged victims (or prisoners who are witnesses) can report their experiences confidentially without fear of repercussions and in a way which does not incorporate punitive measures of deprivation or re-traumatisation (Novisky et al., 2022; Surrell & Jonson, 2020). Thus, policies and procedures for prisoners to report SBV should be reviewed to ensure these provide a mechanism which is free from a fear of potential repercussions from staff or other prisoners if they report potential SBV.

- Prisoners should also be provided with safeguarding psycho-education highlighting that staff engaging in sexual behaviour with prisoners is a criminal offence. This should include information on how to report any concerns.

- Support should be provided to prisoners who have experienced staff sexual misconduct and boundary violations. Responding appropriately to reports of victimisation and providing victims with the support and help necessary to recover can support individuals to feel comfortable to report SBV and victimisation (Freemon et al., 2023).

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