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Recreation or rehabilitation? Managing sport for development programs with prison populations



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ABSTRACT

The provision of sport and recreation programs to inmates within the prison system provides a unique context to investigate the role of sport in enacting social change. Three main aims of prison-based sport programs have been identified in research: inmate health and wellbeing, inmate rehabilitation, and inmate management. This paper presents four case studies of sport programs in prisons across Australia. Inmates completed qualitative interviews in order to investigate program outcomes, design, and delivery. Although the participants in the four case studies came from substantially different prison populations (male, female, Indigenous, intellectual disability, general population) and geographic locations, there were key themes across the groups. Outcomes for both inmates and prisons tended to focus on inmate health and wellbeing and inmate management. Sport and recreation programs appeared to have a positive influence on inmates' health and behaviour; however, the efficacy of rehabilitation efforts through sport remains uncertain.

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1. Introduction

Over the last decade, prison populations throughout the world have increased exponentially (Walmsley, 2012). In Australia, similar to many other Western nations, there has been a substantial increase in the number of people receiving custodial sentences; in the last decade, there was a 30% increase in the prison population (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2011b), double the rate of general population growth during the same period (ABS, 2011a).

At the same time, sport has increasingly been used as a method of community development and engagement, including programs related to antisocial behaviour and crime reduction. Although there is an established body of research on sport programs aimed at decreasing antisocial behaviour and criminal activities (Coalter, 2007; Crabbe, 2000; Morris, Sallybanks, Willis, & Makkai, 2003; Nichols, 2004; Sandford, Armour, & Warmington, 2006; Smith & Waddington, 2004), little research has been done on sport programs within correctional facilities.

This paper brings together data from two separate studies that contemporaneously examined the delivery of sport and recreation programs within four different prisons in Australia. The sport and recreation programs investigated were delivered by two national not-profit-organisations funded by government and philanthropic donations to provide a variety of opportunities for disadvantaged Australians. These programs aimed to use engagement with sport as a method of rehabilitating prisoners during their confinement, as well as facilitating possible reintegration into community sport

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programs upon release; an explicit aim of these programs was to institute a transition between a program and activity within the correctional facility to a similar program in the general community. The proposed outcome of these programs was to provide prisoners with a new group of peers and structured support, and in doing so, affect a decrease in recidivism.

The purpose of this paper is to contribute to an embryonic field of research by presenting four case studies that examine the management of sport activities in correctional facilities and the impact of these activities on prisoners and prison facilities. Each case study was developed using data collected by the authors during two large research studies, which examined the perceived impacts of organised sport and recreation activities on disadvantaged individuals and communities.

1.1. Research context

According to the ABS (2011b), approximately 29,000 adults were incarcerated in Australia in 2010, a national adult imprisonment rate of 166 persons per 100,000. Within the incarcerated population, the vast majority of Australian prisoners are male; female inmates represent only 7% of the total inmate population (ABS, 2011b). Whilst this ratio of male-to-female incarceration is common in many Western countries, it is worth noting that female incarceration rates have increased by 70% in Australia since 2001 (ABS, 2011b).

The incarceration rates of Indigenous Australians relative to the general population are also worth noting in the context of this study. The 1991 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody found that Australian Aboriginal people were the most imprisoned race in the world (Elliott, 1998). Australian Indigenous people currently represent more than 26% of the total inmate population (ABS, 2011b), but only 3% of the total Australian population (ABS, 2011b). This disproportionate number of Australian Indigenous people was also reflected in the sample for this study and is a particular issue to consider in designing and delivering sport programs.

The need for sport and recreation opportunities for prisoners is particularly germane in light of a recent study highlighting the poor mental and physical health of inmates in Australia (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2011). The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2011) found that at least 31% of all prisoners reported having a mental health issue; 4 out of 5 inmates smoked tobacco; approximately half of all inmates reported drinking alcohol at risky levels; and 2 out of 3 inmates had used illicit drugs within the last 12 months. Finally, Australia's recidivism rates have been increasing (Payne, 2007), which provides some evidence that current custodial sentencing practices are doing little to deter people from returning to prison. According to recidivism research in Australia, 2 out of 3 prisoners have previously been incarcerated, and between 35% and 41% of prisoners will return to prison within 2 years of being released back into the community (Payne, 2007).

The economic and social consequences of Australia's rapidly expanding prison population and high recidivism rates have increased pressure on governments and correctional facilities to develop informed policies and programs to rehabilitate prisoners. One of the notable responses has been to engage external sport and recreation providers—most commonly drawn from the not-for-profit or welfare sector—to work with inmates and corrections staff to deliver sport and recreation programs to inmate populations.

Over the last 40 years, prisoners detained in Western correctional facilities have been afforded greater and more regular access to organised sport and recreation activities (Carter & Russell, 2005; Elger, 2009; Hagan, 1989; Hayburn, 2007; Slater, Groves, & Lengfelder, 1992). In turn, these developments have prompted some investigation from academics and industry professionals alike (Calloway, 1981; Elger, 2009; Frey & Delaney, 1996; Gras, 2005; Hayburn, 2007; Leberman, 2007; Lewis & Meek, 2012; Medve, 1961; Slater et al., 1992). Despite an increased research interest, there is still a lack of sound evidence-based studies documenting the nature and efficacy of sport and recreation activities within the prison setting (Calloway, 1981; Elger, 2009; Lewis & Meek, 2012; Little, 1995; Meek & Lewis, 2014; Orton, 1977; Slater et al., 1992). The scarce research that has investigated sport and recreation in the prison setting has mainly been conducted in the United States and the United Kingdom. Limited research has directly investigated the nature and efficacy of sport and recreation within the Australian prison setting (Cashin, Potter, & Butler, 2008).

Coalter (2007) noted that the debate about the relationship between sport participation and crime is divided into two key theoretical areas: (a) rehabilitation of offenders and (b) crime prevention or diversion. Although there are strong theoretical arguments for the potential contribution of sport to crime prevention and rehabilitation, there appears to be little empirical data to support these claims. Coalter (2007) argued that the fundamental problem with research into sport and crime is the widespread lack of clarity about the nature of outcomes and their measurement. In short, whilst assumptions about sport development programs as a tool for rehabilitation abound, there is an increased need to examine their efficacy in prison settings.

2. Literature review

Although there is a scarcity of literature pertaining to sport and recreation activities within prisons, a thematic analysis of available literature reveals that previous work has centred on three key themes: (1) health and wellbeing outcomes for inmates (Amtmann, Evans, & Powers, 2001; Elger, 2009; Meek & Lewis, 2012; Vaiciulis, Kavaliauskas, & Radisauskas, 2011), (2) the propensity of sport and recreation to aid in the rehabilitation process (Hagan, 1989; Leberman, 2007; Mahon & Bullock, 1991; Stumbo & Little, 1991), and (3) the use of sport and recreation activities as an offender management tool (Aguilar & Asmussen, 1990; Crutchfield, Garrette, & Worrall, 1981; Martos-García, Devis-Devis, & Sparkes, 2009; Medve,

1961; Sabo, 2001). In addition, Meek (2014) bridged the fields of criminology and sport for development. The importance of Meek's (2014) work in linking the conversation across multiple fields is discussed throughout this paper. The key themes from the literature are reviewed here.

2.1. Health and wellbeing

It has been argued that research on sport and recreation in prisons has primarily focused on exploring physical and mental wellbeing outcomes for inmates (Meek & Lewis, 2014). According to Vaiciulis et al. (2011), one explanation for the concentration in this area is that sport and recreation "have become the main type of activity that has a significant impact on inmates' physical, mental and social health in modern imprisonment institutions" (p. 680).

Across the literature, there is evidence suggesting that sport and recreation activities have a positive impact on physical wellbeing in inmates. Sabo (2001) argued that inmates participate in sport and recreation activities to "create a healthy body in an unhealthy environment" (p. 64). Physical wellbeing outcomes include providing alternatives to substance abuse in prison (Martos-García et al., 2009; Stöver & Thane, 2011), reducing health risks for older inmates and inmates with a chronic disease (Amtmann et al., 2001; Perez-Moreno et al., 2007) and increasing the general physical fitness levels of inmates (Meek & Lewis, 2012; Nelson, Specian, Tracy, & DeMello, 2006; Vaiciulis et al., 2011; Verdot, Champely, Clément, & Massarelli, 2010).

Sport and recreation activities also have a positive impact on mental health. Inmates who are regularly engaged in sport and recreation activities report improved levels of self-esteem (Amtmann et al., 2001; Leberman, 2007; Ozano, 2008; Pedlar, Yuen, & Fortune, 2008; Sabo, 2001; Slater et al., 1992), reduced anxiety and stress (Buckaloo, Krug, & Nelson, 2009; Martos-García et al., 2009; Nelson et al., 2006), decreased depression and feelings of hopelessness (Buckaloo et al., 2009; Cashin et al., 2008; Libbus, Genovese, & Poole, 1994), decreased insomnia (Elger, 2009), and reduced levels of anger and aggression (Wagner, McBride, & Crouse, 1999).

It is also important to acknowledge the potential negative impacts of sport on the wider community, including individuals who are incarcerated, which Meek (2014) argued would be "naïve and at worst dangerous" (p. 150) not to. For example, according to Sabo (2001), some inmates participate in sport and recreation to "get big to be bad, to manufacture muscle and a jock presence in order to intimidate and dominate" (p. 63). Sport and recreation activities also have a propensity to promote anti-social behaviour (Coalter, 2007; Meek, 2014). Further, according to Meek and Lewis (2012), sport and recreation activities can be detrimental to inmates' health (e.g., increasing risk of injury) if poorly delivered or supervised.

2.2. Desistance from crime and rehabilitation

Desistance from crime refers to "a change in the person's pattern of behaviour from involvement in crime to non-involvement in crime" (Bushway, Thornberry, & Krohn, 2003, p. 130). The concept of desistance may be viewed as a process rather than an event. Studies on desistance have sought to understand the change process in order to illuminate *how* and *why* people stop offending (Farrall, 2002; Maruna, 2001; McNeill, 2004, 2006). Farrall (2002) posited that a number of factors can influence a person ending their involvement in criminal activity; these are typically related to gaining something of meaning or significance (e.g., employment, a partner, social networks) which, in turn, fosters the desire to change behaviour. Meek (2014) argued that inmate participation in sport could promote the development of socially accepted identities and assist in building more positive social networks with those outside the prison setting, such as coaches and program volunteers.

Among prison administrators, academics, and other industry professionals, sport and recreation are perceived to aid offender rehabilitation (Brayshaw, 1981; Gras, 2005; Hagan, 1989; Leberman, 2007; Little, 1995; Medve, 1961; Meek & Lewis, 2014; Nelson et al., 2006; Stumbo & Little, 1991; Williams, Walker, & Streaun, 2005). Despite these widely accepted perceptions, there is limited empirical research to support the efficacy of sport and recreation in the rehabilitation of inmates (Lewis & Meek, 2012).

The concept of rehabilitation through sport and recreation is often referred to as therapeutic recreation (Aguilar & Asmussen, 1990; Aguilar, 1986; Mahon & Bullock, 1991). It has been theorised that in order to maximise the potential for rehabilitation, therapeutic recreation should include the following elements: carry over value, goals and objectives, trained personnel, and adequate equipment and facilities. Additionally, in prison settings, participation in therapeutic recreation should be viewed as a right rather than a privilege (Aguilar, 1986; Brayshaw, 1981; McIntosh, 1986; Stumbo & Little, 1991).

Though limited, a growing body of literature addresses the positive impact of therapeutic recreation in the prison setting. Leberman (2007) found that New Zealand female inmates involved in an outdoor education program reported rehabilitative progress. Inmates challenged themselves in physical activities and reported that they were a conduit for personal growth; inmates learned new skills, developed self-confidence, improved interpersonal communication, and developed coping strategies. In 3-month follow-up interviews, participants reported continued use of skills learned in the program. Nelson et al. (2006), in a study of U.S. inmates in a rehabilitation program, found that the majority of inmates perceived physical exercise sessions to be a key component in their recovery from substance abuse and behavioural problems. In a study of French inmates, Gras (2005) found that participation in community sport activities prior to release assisted with the transition back to society. Further, he found that engaging in community sport helped to reduce stigma and stereotyping among community members (Gras, 2005).

Whilst there is evidence suggesting that sport and recreation play a role in the rehabilitation process for inmates, several studies have argued against this notion. Frey and Delaney (1996) investigated the inmate participation levels in sport and recreation in the United States. They found that participation levels were particularly low. This led them to conclude that it was unlikely that sport and recreation activities had positive benefits because so few inmates were participating (Frey & Delaney, 1996). McIntosh (1986) investigated the attitudes of inmates from three minority groups (African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans) regarding acceptance or rejection of sport and recreation as a rehabilitative tool. McIntosh (1986) found that only African Americans reported accepting the notion that rehabilitation could be achieved through sport and recreation activities.

2.3. Offender management

Offender management literature on sport and recreation can be divided into three subthemes: (1) sport and recreation as a diversionary service, (2) sport and recreation as an adjustment tool, and (3) sport and recreation as a form of institutional privilege. It has been argued that correctional administrators have used sport and recreation programs as an effective diversionary service within the prison system for decades (Aguilar, 1986; Crutchfield et al., 1981; Mahon & Bullock, 1991; Martos-García et al., 2009; Medve, 1961; Murtaza, Uddin, Imran, & Bari, 2011; Sabo, 2001; Stumbo & Little, 1991). It appears accepted in the literature that participation in sport and recreation programs in prisons provides inmates with an opportunity to “blow off steam and escape the monotony of the prison routine” (Mahon & Bullock, 1991, p. 8). Several studies reported that administrators perceived inmates’ participation in recreation activities as directly related to a decline in incidents of violence in prisons (Crutchfield et al., 1981; Martos-García et al., 2009). Sabo (2001) argued that sport and recreation activities were not only utilised as a diversionary service by prison officials but also by prisoners themselves:

On one hand, sport and exercise provide prisoners with vehicles for self-expression and physical freedom. On the other hand, prison officials know that involvement in sports and exercise activities help make inmates more tractable and compliant. Therefore, the cultivation of the body through sports and fitness activities is simultaneously a source of personal liberation and social control. (p. 65)

In contrast, it was argued that “it was impossible for significant tension release to take part” (Frey & Delaney, 1996, p. 84) because so few inmates reported being engaged in regular physical exercise. Aguilar and Asmussen (1990) found that inmates participated in more sedentary activities than physical activities.

Administrators also perceive participation in sport and recreation programs to support the adjustment process for inmates shifting from a free life to a highly regulated and controlled life (Aguilar & Asmussen, 1990; Aguilar, 1986; Crutchfield et al., 1981; Sabo, 2001). Aguilar (1986) argued that providing recently incarcerated inmates with opportunities to participate in sport and recreation activities offers “a positive aspect in an otherwise negative environment” (p. 2).

The use of sport and recreation activities as an institutional privilege was also evident in the literature (Aguilar, 1986; Martos-García et al., 2009; Stumbo & Little, 1991; Wagner et al., 1999). It has been argued that correctional administrators routinely use sport and recreation in prison as a hook to promote appropriate behaviour (Aguilar, 1986). Martos-García et al. (2009) reported that inmates granted access to sport and recreation activities perceived it as a reward, whilst inmates who were denied access or taken off an activity considered it as a punishment. Although it is apparent that sport and recreation activities have been used as an offender management strategy, there is little empirical evidence of the efficacy of activities in achieving desired outcomes.

3. Method

3.1. Data collection

Data were collected from two separate studies that contemporaneously examined the delivery of sport and recreation programs within four different prisons in Australia. As discussed in the introduction, the sport and recreation programs investigated were delivered by two national not-profit-organisations funded by government and philanthropic donations to provide a variety of opportunities for disadvantaged Australians. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with inmates as part of these two broader studies that examined perceptions of organised sport and recreation activities among disadvantaged individuals and communities. Research team members visited four separate correctional facilities across Australia whilst collecting data for these two projects. Both larger projects were evaluated concurrently during the period of 2008–2012; site one was the first and largest of the evaluations undertaken in 2008, followed by site three, site two and finishing with site four in 2012. Although each research project was initially designed, analysed and reported separately, the shared experiences of the research team and the similarities of findings presented a unique opportunity to consolidate the data and findings to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the role of sport for development programs within the prison context.

Each correctional facility had unique characteristics, including the geographic location, management of the facility (i.e., private or governmental), security rating, gender of inmates, specific populations, and types of sports and recreation

activities available. The variety and unique characteristics of facilities provided for the collection of rich data. The specific characteristics of each facility are discussed in the case studies.

Potential participants within both projects were identified by either a program facilitator or prison administrator involved with sport or recreation activities. In total, 36 inmates (21 male and 15 female) across the four sites volunteered to participate. Interviews were held, whenever possible, around sport and recreation sessions to enable participants to share their personal experiences in a comfortable and relevant environment. Due to the contextual differences of the two projects, the semi-structured interview protocols were not the same for each project, as they were developed in consultation with the specific program delivery and corrections authority staff. However, the two organisations delivering the programs that were the basis for the two larger studies have common goals and objectives, and as such the interview protocols exhibited significant conceptual similarities despite being developed independently. Protocols for both studies were informed by both the sport for development and sport and prison literature and covered the key themes listed in subsequent subsections.

3.1.1. Sites one and two (Project One)

- Participants' experiences with the sport and recreation program in the prison.
- Participants' interest and participation in sport and recreation programs outside the correctional facility.
- Factors influencing participation in the program (both positive and negative).
- Perceived outcomes from participation in the program (both positive and negative).

These interview themes focus predominantly on the research literature surrounding the health and wellbeing outcomes of the participants, and potential desistance from crime and rehabilitation through activities linked with the sport program provider post-release.

3.1.2. Sites three and four (Project Two)

- Participants' perceptions of their health prior to participating in the sport and recreation program and currently.
- Inmates' perceptions of the benefits of participation in the sport and recreation activities.
- Likelihood of continuing to participate in sport and recreation activities; positive and negative factors influencing participation.
- Development of friendships with other inmates since participating in the sport and recreation activities.

Similar to project one, the interview themes focus predominantly on the research literature surrounding the health and wellbeing outcomes of the participants. When preparing the interview schedules for both research projects, the concept of offender management was not an area of focus. However, for both projects, this concept of offender management and the role of sport and recreation became apparent during data analysis.

Due to the relatively high-risk nature of the participant group, ethics approval was sought from the university as well as the respective state or territory corrections authority governing each facility. It is important to note that due to the sensitive nature of the study as well as governmental restrictions, specific demographic information and details about crimes or prison sentences were not obtained; however, a concise summary of the overall population of each prison is provided. Due to this constraint, relationships between specific demographic characteristics and other factors—outcomes, motivations, attitudes, and intentions—were not explored. Interviews focussed solely on rehabilitation in relation to sport and recreation, as opposed to rehabilitation related to sentencing issues.

Immediately prior to each interview the individual researchers spent time to brief each participant individually about the nature and purpose of the research, as well as obtain informed consent. Interviews lasted on average 40 min, which included an interviewee briefing.

Site one was a unique site within the data set, as there was a longer period of engagement with the prison and the program delivery organisation. As a result of this longer period of engagement (10 weeks), in addition to interviews with the prisoners an interview with the prison unit manager responsible for the program within the prison was undertaken, and focussed on the key themes of:

- health and wellbeing outcomes for prisoners,
- impact of program on offender management.

This interview schedule explicitly focussed on the structural benefits of the program to the prison itself, in addition to the outcomes for individual prisoners.

Again due to the unique nature of the research engagement at site one, a researcher (ES) also attended 10 separate weekly sport sessions, and other program activities and tournaments to undertake interviews with participants, and undertake observations of the program delivery and participant interaction in the program environment. These observations were recorded after each visit and used as theoretical memos to supplement the interview data collection and inform data analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

3.2. Data analysis

Interviews for all four research sites were digitally recorded and transcribed. A thematic analysis procedure was employed to uncover key themes drawn from the interview transcripts (Patton, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Data were first analysed by a single researcher from each prison site (i.e. the research team member who undertook the interviews), to identify and group consistent themes and supporting quotes relating to the role of sport and recreation in the prison context.

In the process of consolidating the findings of the four sites from the two separate studies, several themes emerged that appeared to be common across both projects and all four sites. Next, key themes were reviewed and confirmed by a second researcher; any differences were discussed with the first researcher until agreement was reached (Patton, 2002). These consolidated results were next developed into four separate case studies to allow for site-by-site comparison, followed by cross-case discussion of the overarching themes and findings in the following section (Stake, 1995).

3.3. Research context challenges

Conducting research in prisons poses particular challenges, which impacted data collection in this study. For instance, security checks were cumbersome and time-consuming. The researcher at each site was checked for drugs and other banned substances. In some cases, finger print scans were required to confirm identity. The individual researcher undertaking the interviews was required to hand in all personal items, such as keys, pens, wallets, and mobile phones. Special permission was required to use the recording device for interviews. Researcher team members waited long periods of time for correctional staff to conduct escorts or for inmates to be cleared for interviews.

Interviews with inmates were held in various locations, including interview rooms, gymnasiums, cell blocks, sports fields, and education rooms. The lack of consistency in locations could not be controlled by the interviewer on-site or prison administrators; this is largely due to the unpredictable nature of correctional facilities and the risk of incidents. Finally, because the researcher only had permission to enter facilities for short periods of time (on average, three days, with the exception of site one as indicated earlier), the number of inmates who could be interviewed was limited. On more than one occasion, interested inmates were unavailable for interviews because they had been moved to confinement cells or due to unscheduled prisoner lock-downs.

4. Results

This section provides the results of the data analysis from each of the four prison programs as individual case studies. Due to the distinct nature of each prison program, individual site case studies were deemed to be the most effective means to present the research findings. The cross-case discussion of the case studies integrating the major themes in the literature will follow in the subsequent discussion section.

4.1. Site one

The prison in the first case study is a maximum security facility for men only. The facility is located near Melbourne, Australia. The prison has a combined capacity to house almost 1000 prisoners. There are two noteworthy characteristics of the facility that provide context for this case study. Firstly, the facility is privately operated; in recent history, Australian penology has seen an increasing trend towards privatised prisons. Secondly, all the case study participants were housed in a special unit that monitors and supports intellectually disabled offenders. In this case study, 12 male inmates with intellectual disabilities were interviewed; some reported concurrent mental disorder diagnoses. The age range was approximately 20–60 years old.

A weekly soccer program was established in partnership with a not-for-profit organisation. The program was designed to provide increased access to sport and recreation opportunities and to facilitate a stronger transition process to the community upon release. The 12 inmates participated in interviews across a 10-week data collection.

All participants discussed positive mental and physical health outcomes as a result of participation in the soccer program. Participants stated that they had an increased sense of happiness and reduced feelings of stress, anxiety, and tension. As one interviewee noted, “Wednesday is a good day. It releases it all out, everyone out there playing their hearts out, training, all the stretches as well you know? It’s good for their mind; it’s good for my mind too.” Furthermore, many of the inmates also perceived a positive change in their physical health: “You work out too, you know, where you’re not just sitting around lazy all day. You’re working your body out.” Two of the inmates reported that they had reduced their smoking habit because they were focusing on bettering their health, specifically to play soccer.

Some of the participants also discussed how they perceived the soccer activity as a diversionary service. This was encapsulated by one inmate who stated that “as I said, it bides time and that’s what you want in here. Something that makes the day go passed.” Some inmates suggested that the soccer program created a diversion from everyday issues that could occur in the unit: “Wednesday after soccer, everyone has a nice sleep, everyone’s all quiet by the time we get out, there’s no tension in the unit, there’s no anger between anyone because everyone’s all nice and quiet and tired.” Inmates also spoke about their participation in the soccer activity as being a privilege in prison; furthermore, it was noted that this privilege was

a significant motivation for participants to modify their behaviour in the unit: “Yeah it all new different prison when they come in [visiting teams and coaches] because you have to be on our best behaviour. We can’t do nothing wrong.”

Finally, inmates discussed how they had learned new skills playing with other inmates and against visiting teams. Another outcome of the program was the opportunity for program staff and visitors to model appropriate social behaviours. Inmates often learned and rehearsed these behaviours in a controlled and supportive environment. The program manager described this experience:

It’s the little things like, respect for our people, for the visitors that come in. They’ll go up and talk to them. Greet them. They’ll sit down and have conversations with them. They run around asking, “Do they want a drink of water?” Especially the meals, which I’ve done intentionally—taken away their normal lunches that they have here and put on finger food. These guys all stand back and wait for the visitors to have theirs first. Then they’ll go in and help themselves, but, they show a lot of respect.

One of the primary outcomes noted by inmates was that their interactions with visiting community members provided opportunities to demonstrate their newly learned social skills. This, in turn, fostered a sense of pride and achievement.

4.2. Site two

The facility in Case Study 2 is relatively small; it houses approximately 150 female inmates of all classifications (minimum, medium, and maximum security). The prison is located near a regional city in Queensland, Australia. The case study focused primarily on an ongoing softball program delivered biweekly in the prison by a not-for-profit organisation. One of the key aims of this program was to engage inmates in sport as a method of rehabilitating prisoners during their confinement. In total, 12 female inmates participated in interviews.

The majority of inmates discussed how they had perceived improvement in their mental and physical health as a result of their participation in the sporting activities. As one noted, “My social interactions have definitely changed. I was actually really, really, really, really quiet in here—I kept to myself—I didn’t interact with anyone really—and yeah that’s definitely helped in that regard.” Some of the inmates also stated that just going out to the activities to socialise was a great way to reduce their stress and anxiety within the prison: “It reduces my stress and anxiety . . . I go out and sit down, have a yarn with her [program facilitator].” A number of the participants also noted that they felt that their overall mood had been lifted due to participation in the activities: “I look forward to Friday, every Friday. It’s something that I do look forward to and it does actually lift my mood.” A few of the participants stated that they felt that their overall physical health had also improved: “It’s exercise and it’s for myself too.”

Many of the participants indicated that the activities provided a diversion from the daily monotony of prison life: “I just hope it stays cause’ [otherwise] the girls will have nothing to do . . . they’ll be sitting there doing nothing and just bore their life away.” Furthermore, the inmates also stated that the activity provided them with a constructive outlet to vent their frustration and anger: “I’ve never seen a jail so happy. Normally they’re arguing and all that, but when [activity coordinator’s name removed] gets us out there, there’s no arguing—we’re all just getting along. . . It’s really good.”

Inmates stated that their participation in the program was a privilege. Several inmates believed that the program served as an incentive to improve behaviour; many maintained good behaviour to avoid being removed from the program: “It helps us . . . when we’ve got something to work towards, well then it helps us to be good.”

4.3. Site three

The prison in this case study is located in Tasmania, Australia, just outside the capital city; it houses both male and female inmates. The prison contains over 200 maximum and medium security male inmates, over 100 minimum security male inmates, and at least 30 female prisoners of all security classifications. In total, seven inmates participated in interviews (four men and three women). The case study focused primarily on inmates’ participation in an organised physical exercise program delivered by a not-for-profit organisation. The program was run on a rotating weekly basis with different cohorts of inmates. The primary aim of the program was to provide meaningful physical activity to occupy inmates’ time and to develop links to similar established programs in the community (which inmates could access once released). Some of the activities run in the prison complex included soccer, football, softball, and a boot camp.

The majority of inmates discussed how the activities helped them to pass time and alleviate boredom whilst in prison: “It gets you out of the division . . . otherwise you’re just warehoused in a division with no movement.” Several of the male inmates indicated the diversion provided by sporting activities helped to reduce issues arising from inmate boredom: “[Boredom] definitely leads to arguments with officers, *jack-ups* in jail.” Female inmates stated that the activities allowed them to forget where they were for a short period of time: “It’s great—it takes your mind off where you are . . . you just concentrate on the activity.”

When discussing their health, the majority of inmates stated that their mental and physical health had been poor prior to participating in the activities: “Not in a great place . . . very stressed, not eating, not sleeping.” Inmates perceived their health to have improved because of their participation in the activities. Inmates suggested that the activities provided them with an outlet to cope with stress and anxiety: “Healthy body, healthy mind . . . definitely notice that after a football game.”

Both male and female inmates spoke about how the physical activities contributed to their personal growth: “I’m just a sports nut . . . I know it assists my personal growth . . . It’s been awesome for me.” Inmates stated that the activities provided them with a personal challenge; when they contributed positively to an activity, they felt good about themselves. As one participant stated, “[I] feel a sense of belonging . . . [a] sense of achievement.”

Finally, many of the inmates spoke about their willingness and desire to connect with similar programs upon release from prison. Inmates stated that having a similar program in the community may help to avoid returning to prison: “Something to look forward to instead of hanging around the old crew.”

4.4. Site four

The prison visited for this case study is located in Central Australia. The facility can accommodate over 300 prisoners of all security levels; whilst the facility typically holds male prisoners, the prison can also hold female inmates in a specialist wing. The final case study focused primarily on participation in an organised Australian Rules football competition, which was facilitated by a not-for-profit organisation. Local football teams were brought into the prison every other week to play against a team of prisoners. At the completion of the season, inmates were also allowed to participate in the finals, which were often held at off-site locations. The primary aim of the program was to provide meaningful physical activity to occupy inmates’ time and to develop stronger links with the community.

In total, six male inmates participated in interviews. Participant access was limited at this location because of the language barrier between inmates and the researcher, as substantial number of inmates identified as Australian Indigenous men, and often spoke English as a second or third language.

Unlike the inmates from the other three sites, only a few inmates stated that the football program helped to improve physical health; only one participant perceived improvement in mental health: “Better than sitting down doing nothing . . . keeps me happy.” Whilst inmates did not directly perceive any improvement in their mental health, several stated that the football program helped to reduce stress and anxiety related to family issues occurring on the outside: “Takes my mind off the phone sometimes.” All of the inmates believed that the program was an effective diversion from their current environment: “Makes my time easy . . . just concentrating on what you’re doing in here.”

Several inmates specifically discussed the importance of football to Indigenous communities. They reported that the skills they were learning in the program would serve as model behaviour once released: “I like to show the young men they can carry on with it [football] . . . they can be role model when they go home. They can take their skill back to where they come from.” A few of the inmates believed that in order to continue changing their behaviour, it was important to continue playing football once released: “It is important to take it from the inside to the outside, carry on with it—even for me—I might start back when I go home.”

The inmates also stated that the football program created harmony amongst the different Indigenous groups in the prison: “We are one team—brothers, cousins and nephews.”

5. Discussion

The programs examined in the case studies clearly had a sport-for-development focus, but they operated within a controlled environment with several constraints. Unlike other sport-for-development programs, access to participation can be denied (i.e., punishment) or used as an incentive (i.e., positive reinforcement) for behaviour change—both of which affect motivation. The aims of the sport and recreation programs may not necessarily be carried out and expected outcomes may not be achieved due to the nature of the context in which these programs are delivered. Findings from the case studies are discussed in relation to major themes in the literature. Implications for the management and delivery of programs are discussed.

5.1. Health and wellbeing outcomes

Prisoners in the four case studies reported a range of physical and health outcomes as a result of their participation in the sport and recreation programs. Although the physical health benefits appeared to vary—largely dependent on the level of physical activity prior to incarceration—most participants interviewed noted positive health changes due to increased physical activity, which in general supports previous literature that has found that sport and recreation activities can increase the general fitness levels of inmates. These changes included improved cardiovascular fitness (evidenced by statements such as “not getting as puffed”), reduced smoking, and improved sleeping on program days.

Though physical health benefits may be more expected, the particular impact of sport and recreation activities on participants’ mental and emotional health was surprising. Participants across all four programs consistently reported increased happiness; feeling good about themselves (arguably a measure of self-esteem); and reduced feelings of stress, anxiety, and tension as a result of participation in activities. These findings support the previous literature, which identified self-esteem and reduced anxiety and stress as important themes in investigating the mental health impact of prison-based sport and recreation programs. Importantly, most, if not all, of the participants noted that “program day” was something that they looked forward to; “program day” had a number of positive effects, including improved behaviour.

Program outcomes not only had an impact on the mental and physical health of individual inmates, but also likely had a positive impact on the social health of the broader inmate community. Participants noted that sport and recreation programs provided an alternative outlet for physical tension, as well as a safe and controlled outlet for managing anger and aggression. In addition to relieving tension on an individual level, programs likely reduced tension on a systemic level—in the units and prisons where programs were delivered. This is not to claim that the sport and recreation programs can act as a panacea for the many behavioural issues—from impatience to outright aggression—in the prison setting, but rather to suggest that programs can act as a pressure valve to release some of the tensions in a structured and controlled setting. This finding adds to the literature as it provides an important link between mental and health impacts and offender management. Although the social health of the broader inmate community has not been considered as a key theme of research in the offender management area, it is clear that this nexus between what Sabo (2001) referred to as personal liberation and social control is worthy of further investigation on the basis of the results of this study.

The design and delivery of sport and recreation programs with the explicit aim of improving inmate health—particularly mental and social health—requires the support of experts in inmate management, psychology, and social work. Although programs are inherently for sport and recreation, they also have non-sport outcomes, as found in the case studies in this paper. Programs require professionals with unique skills and expertise in order to ensure optimal delivery. Effectively recruiting sport and recreation coaches is a particular challenge to the development of programs.

5.2. Desistance

Whilst the research did not aim to examine the impact of sport programs on inmates' desistance from crime post-release, it did find that inmates in several of the case studies used the activities to better themselves. Inmates believed that the skills they learned in sport and recreation programs in prison would help them to avoid repeat offences. This was exemplified by comments such as the following: "It's important to take it from the inside to the outside, carry on with it—even for me—I might start back when I go home." Furthermore, inmates stated that having the ability to access similar programs post-release would provide ongoing support and help to avoid reoffending. This was exemplified in comments such as the following: "Something to look forward to instead of hanging around the old crew." These preliminary findings add weight to Meek's (2014) argument that sport can provide individuals with skills and knowledge to help them desist from crime.

5.3. Rehabilitation

As noted earlier, Brayshaw (1981) and Little (1995) argued that if sport and recreation programs are aimed at rehabilitation, then activities must be made available after inmates are released.

One outcome that may be rehabilitative for the inmates is the opportunity to rehearse appropriate social behaviours in a controlled setting. Program staff and visitors (e.g., community members) served as role models to inmates; coaches served as role models by providing the "rules of play." Finally, guest speakers acted as role models in delivering relevant discussion topics.

Each sport and recreation program claimed that program participation had a rehabilitative effect for inmates, adding further support to the arguments previously presented in the work of Leberman (2007), Nelson et al. (2006) and Gras (2005). Programs were explicitly structured to facilitate the transition to local community programs upon release. Community programs encourage the development of new peer-support networks, which ideally reduce recidivism.

The efficacy of this transition process was not examined in this study; however, there was some evidence from the broader research projects (from which these cases were drawn) that former prisoners were engaged in sport and recreation programs outside prison, with in-prison providers. A key challenge to transitioning to external sport and recreation programs is the collaboration of the bureaucratic corrections system with small not-for-profit sport and recreation providers. In particular, the corrections system may not inform providers of imminent releases of prisoners into the community. Information may not be shared in a timely manner, and providers may be unaware of inmates' former participation in sport and recreation programs. These management challenges appear to frustrate both program funders and providers.

5.4. Offender management

Inmate behaviour management, although not an explicit aim of the programs, was a clear outcome in the four case studies. As noted previously, three areas of focus were identified in the literature pertaining to the use of sport and recreation for offender management: diversion, adjustment, and institutional privilege. In the case studies, outcomes were identified in each of these areas; diversion and privilege were the most commonly cited.

Consistent across the case studies was the importance of sport and recreation programs as a diversion from day-to-day prison experience, a finding that has been previously identified by a growing body of literature in this field (Aguilar, 1986; Crutchfield et al., 1981; Mahon & Bullock, 1991; Martos-García et al., 2009; Medve, 1961; Murtaza et al., 2011; Sabo, 2001; Stumbo & Little, 1991). In particular, programs played a role in alleviating boredom from being in a confined and structured environment. The value of diversion and decreased boredom should not be underestimated. Sport and recreation activities may distract inmates from daily aggravations (Mahon & Bullock, 1991), which can positively impact individual mood as well as the overall mood of the facility.

There was no evidence from the case studies that sport and recreation programs facilitated adjustment to prison; however, there was some support that programs provided “free” space to inmates within the confines of the prison environment.

Participants noted that participation in sport and recreation programs was a privilege. They knew that they needed to follow the rules and, at times, modify their behaviour in order to continue attending activities, demonstrating the use of sport and recreation in prison to promote appropriate behaviour, as argued by Aguilar (1986). Participants perceived tournaments and visits from outsiders were to be highlights of the programs. They often used these events to set goals and to modify their behaviours. Participants perceived special treatment on tournament days to be a privilege, and this acted as a significant motivator for participation in activities and behaviour modification.

5.5. Program delivery and management

From a programming and delivery perspective, programs faced a number of challenges and concerns, which may have had an impact on outcomes. Some of these challenges were unique to facilities or units, whilst others were found more commonly across locations. From an analysis of the four case studies, one of the keys to a successful sport and recreation program appeared to be the input of corrections and not-for-profit program staff. A significant challenge appears to be the transition from prison programs to outside programs upon release. This transition should be coordinated during the release process with both the prison system and community providers. Transition processes are often context dependent, requiring consultation and cooperation among all parties; models may require a number of iterations before successful implementation in a particular prison.

One observation that researchers made across the four sites was that inmates had limited opportunities for structured physical exercise activities. One of the biggest issues that Australian correctional administrators currently face is the shortage of staffing and, more specifically, a lack of qualified personnel with sport or recreation expertise. External organisations may prove a valuable resource to address this shortage. External staff can offer structured activities that may otherwise be unavailable. As suggested by Meek (2014), external partnerships with sport and recreation providers are much needed in the prison system.

In each of the case studies, it was clear that unexpected challenges occurred during the delivery of programs, such as scheduling, regular attendance, and commitment. These challenges threatened the efficacy of programs. At one site, it was evident that sport and recreation programs were not a priority. Activities were often scheduled after the administration of medication (for the treatment of mental illness). The timing had a direct impact on the inmates' ability to participate in sport activities; that is, they were often lethargic due to medication side effects.

When sport and recreation programs focus on health and behaviour management, it is likely that both inmates and the broader prison community benefit from more regularly scheduled sport and recreation activities. It is important that programs incorporate a range of activities. However, as noted in the literature and through similar sport-for-development studies, the choice of sport activity is often less important than the actual delivery of an activity.

Funding is also a considerable challenge. Limited funding for sport and recreation activities in corrections facilities can severely restrict program development. Community providers may be limited in their ability to deliver programs utilising best practices. A well-structured and professionally delivered program with clear outcomes would be ideal for sport development in the prison setting; however, within the constraints of the prison system, diversion and behaviour management are often prioritised above other outcomes.

Finally, despite Meek's (2014) necessary call for the acknowledgement that sport and recreation have potential negative as well as positive impacts, there was no evidence within any of the four case studies of the negative impact of sport and recreation activities within the prison setting. An important limitation of this finding is that interviewees were drawn from a pool of existing participants; the researchers did not interview participants who had ceased participation. This limitation is worth considering in the design of future research.

6. Conclusion

The role of sport and recreation in corrections facilities is complex. Sport and recreation programs can improve physical and mental health; they can also be used as effective tools to manage inmate behaviour. Some argue that the inclusion of sport and recreation is a moral issue pertaining to inmates' rights to pleasure. Although the programs examined in this paper have many similarities to sport-for-development programs in other contexts, the controlled environment of the prison setting presents unique challenges to funders, stakeholders, and providers.

Although results from the four case studies provided insight into sport and recreation programs in the Australian prison system, there were obvious limitations to this study. First, data collection with inmates was a particular challenge in the prison environment. Second, due to the sensitive nature of material, there were a number of ethical considerations related to collecting inmates' personal information. Many questions went unanswered, leaving a myriad of opportunities for future research.

There is a need for larger participant-based research projects in Australia to further our knowledge of sport and recreation programs. Future research projects might explore the provision of sport and recreation in different corrections systems (e.g., high security versus low security facilities). They may examine program delivery in different cohorts of inmates (e.g., short-term prisoners vs. long-term prisoners). Research could also examine the extent to which sport in prisons can be used as an

effective hook to engage inmates in larger rehabilitative programs (e.g., education, alcohol and drug rehabilitation). Research in this area may provide evidence for the larger role of sports in the rehabilitation process. It may also explore the role of community members in prison sport and recreation programs. For instance, do community members foster social inclusion and help inmates to develop social capital?

Similarly, further research is needed on desistance from crime and how sport can be an effective tool in this process. Conducting research with offenders and ex-offenders through the prism of their engagement in recreation and physical activity is needed in order to further explore desistance. Finally, future research might investigate the provision of sport and recreation programs in refugee detention centres. Individuals awaiting processing of refugee status are typically hoping to be welcomed into the local community. As such, the role of sport and recreation in the transition from the facility to the broader community may be important.

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