

Treatment Instead of Punishment

Piloting IPT as an early intervention strategy for women involved with the criminal justice system.

Depression & Women in Criminal Justice System

Women involved with the criminal justice system (CJS) have multiple and complex needs including high rates of mental health problems. Eighty-seven percent of individuals who attend the Women's Community Justice Centre in Edinburgh (Willow) present with clinical depression. Depression is associated with poor service engagement and is a stronger predictor of recidivism in females than males. Depression is associated with reoffending because it impairs a woman's ability to make the changes in identity and relationships that are required to desist. Despite this there is a dearth of research investigating the impact of treatments for depression in this population.

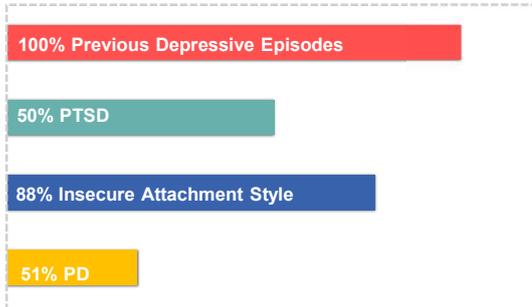
Pilot Study

The innovative study aimed to evaluate the feasibility of offering IPT for depression as an early intervention strategy for women who had recently become involved with the CJS. Given the lack of previous research, the pilot aimed to investigate whether:

- 1 • Women consistently engaged with IPT?
- 2 • IPT was viewed as an acceptable treatment?
- 3 • IPT was associated with decrease in depressive symptoms?
- 4 • IPT had impact on future CJS involvement?

Sample Characteristics

Twenty four women completed baseline assessment. The sample presented with complex needs including depression, PTSD, anxiety, traits of personality disorder, alcohol and substance use issues. Women had experienced a mean of 7.5 significant life events in the last year, 25% had a child removed from their care, 25% were currently experiencing domestic abuse and 70.8% were unemployed.



Was IPT an Acceptable Treatment?

Treatment satisfaction questionnaires completed at the end of treatment indicated 100% of women felt that IPT helped them to cope better with their problems with 73.3% agreeing that IPT had "helped a lot." One hundred percent of women agreed that IPT had met their needs.



...I feel like I'm allowed to feel sad, I'm allowed to feel angry, I'm allowed to be a bit down at times. I never allowed myself any of that....

"It's the first time through anything that I've had or done that it felt like somebody had got me. And yeah that was quite an eye opener...it was quite a strange but a good feeling."

Interpersonal Psychotherapy

Interpersonal Psychotherapy (IPT) is a psychological therapy developed as a treatment for depression. It aims to alleviate depressive symptoms, improve interpersonal functioning and increase an individual's use of her interpersonal network. IPT has been found to significantly reduce depressive symptoms and increase positive social support in three group studies with female prisoners who have substance use disorder in USA (Johnson & Zlotnick, 2008; 2012; 2015).

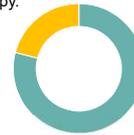
Method

The uncontrolled pilot study offered 12 sessions of IPT to depressed women referred to Willow following their first or second contact with the CJS. Exclusion criteria were kept to a minimum to increase external validity and to avoid repeating women's history of exclusion from services. Proactive engagement strategies including regular keywork appointments with a social worker, text reminders, flexible approach to non attendance and free travel to appointments were used to maximise engagement..

Baseline assessment included the Structured Clinical Interview for DSM IV and a range of self report outcome measures. These were repeated at end of treatment with additional treatment satisfaction measures. Women were also invited to take part in a semi structured qualitative interview.

Could Women Consistently Engage?

Seventy-nine percent of women completed therapy (19/24). The drop out rate of 21% indicates that women were able to consistently attend and engage with therapy at rate similar to average (Swift & Greenberg, 2012). This seems particularly noteworthy given the complex range of co-morbidities (often a predictor of drop out) and women experiencing a mean of 4.5 new life events during the course of therapy.



- 79% Completed
- 21% Dropped Out
- 4.5 Mean Life Events
- 17.7 Mean Appointments Offered

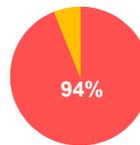
Decrease in Depressive Symptoms?

75% of completers no longer depressed

Completers showed a significant decrease in depression severity from pre treatment to post treatment on both the Beck Depression Inventory II ($Z = -3.43$; $p = 0.001$) and Hamilton Rating Scale for Depression ($Z = -3.62$; $p = 0.000$). Women who completed therapy also showed significant reductions in symptoms of: anxiety measured by the GAD-7 ($Z = -2.93$; $p = 0.003$); post-traumatic stress ($Z = -3.00$; $p = 0.003$); and personality disorder ($Z = -2.55$; $p = 0.011$). Analysis indicated participants experienced a significant increase in their perceived levels of social support ($Z = -2.80$; $p = 0.005$).

Impact on Future CJS Involvement?

Ninety-four percent of completers had no further criminal charges or convictions during therapy or at three month follow up.



.. I'm getting better I'm realising how much I've got to lose by getting a criminal record...it would be absolutely devastating but it's moving away from feeling that low that you don't give a shit to actually care about the impact that is having on your life...I think that fundamentally that's the key isn't it? Going from a place where you just don't care to actually saying, well yeah that can actually make a difference and taking responsibility... It's about caring about the outcomes and your future.

Discussion

As long as pro-active engagement strategies were used, the majority of women were able to consistently engage with IPT. It is assumed that a less flexible approach to attendance (in keeping with more traditional models of mental health service delivery) would have resulted in higher drop out rates and women not receiving a service that met their needs. Despite limitations in terms of small size and lack of control group, IPT was associated with a decrease in symptoms. Women believed IPT cut their risk of reoffending by reducing their depressive symptoms and supporting them to: understand their difficulties, communicate, manage and regulate their emotions, make meaningful changes in their relationships and increase their sense of self worth. As a result of the pilots success IPT has become part of routine service delivery at Willow.