

Exploring Shame Resilience Theory (SRT) and its potential for understanding how shame affects the behaviours of women with lived experience of imprisonment

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Abstract

The Shame Resilience Theory (SRT) is a response to working with shaming feelings and behaviours as a way of both understanding and responding to shame (Brown, 2006, 2007, 2009). Shame is most effectively addressed through contact with those who understand and have had similar experiences, allowing for connection and empathy to self and other.

This research explores the potential for more effective use of such strategies and interventions to support women in custody. Using a case study approach, it explores the experiences of women who have participated in an SRT informed programme (RESTORE) to ascertain the potential impact of SRT on time served and on release.

A case study methodology was adopted with thematic analysis of data, obtained from a set of in-depth semi-structured interviews with the women. The interviews were conducted in retrospect of women's lived experience of prison, and employing a phenomenological perspective allowed them to explore, re-frame and reveal new layers of meaning from their experiences without seeking to explain or analyse all they had been through. By offering a descriptive process the hope was to enable the women to navigate the messy complexities of speaking shame and find a way of making new meaning out of their lived experience of shame.

Findings

- Shame causes affect and effect in the lives of women who have lived experience of imprisonment.
- Speaking, understanding, and developing resilience in relation to shame facilitates personal growth and easier reintegration into the community. .
- There is a potential for SRT to be incorporated into intervention programmes in women's prisons.

Recommendations

- All women entering the prison system should have equal and fair access to high quality interventions that meet their needs.
- Existing intervention programmes should be examined to ascertain the potential for incorporating SRT into existing structures.
- Facilitators in intervention programmes that encourage women to share their stories or speak of their trauma receive training in SRT and facilitating the sharing of shame related issues.
- A training course on Shame Resilience Informed Practice should be put in place for prison officers.
- SRT should be specifically included in Five Minute Interactions (FMI) training.
- A larger cohort research study should be conducted exploring the links between trauma, shame, and behaviours in prison settings.