

Violent and Disruptive Prisoner Behaviour in the Irish Prison Service: An Examination of Current Management

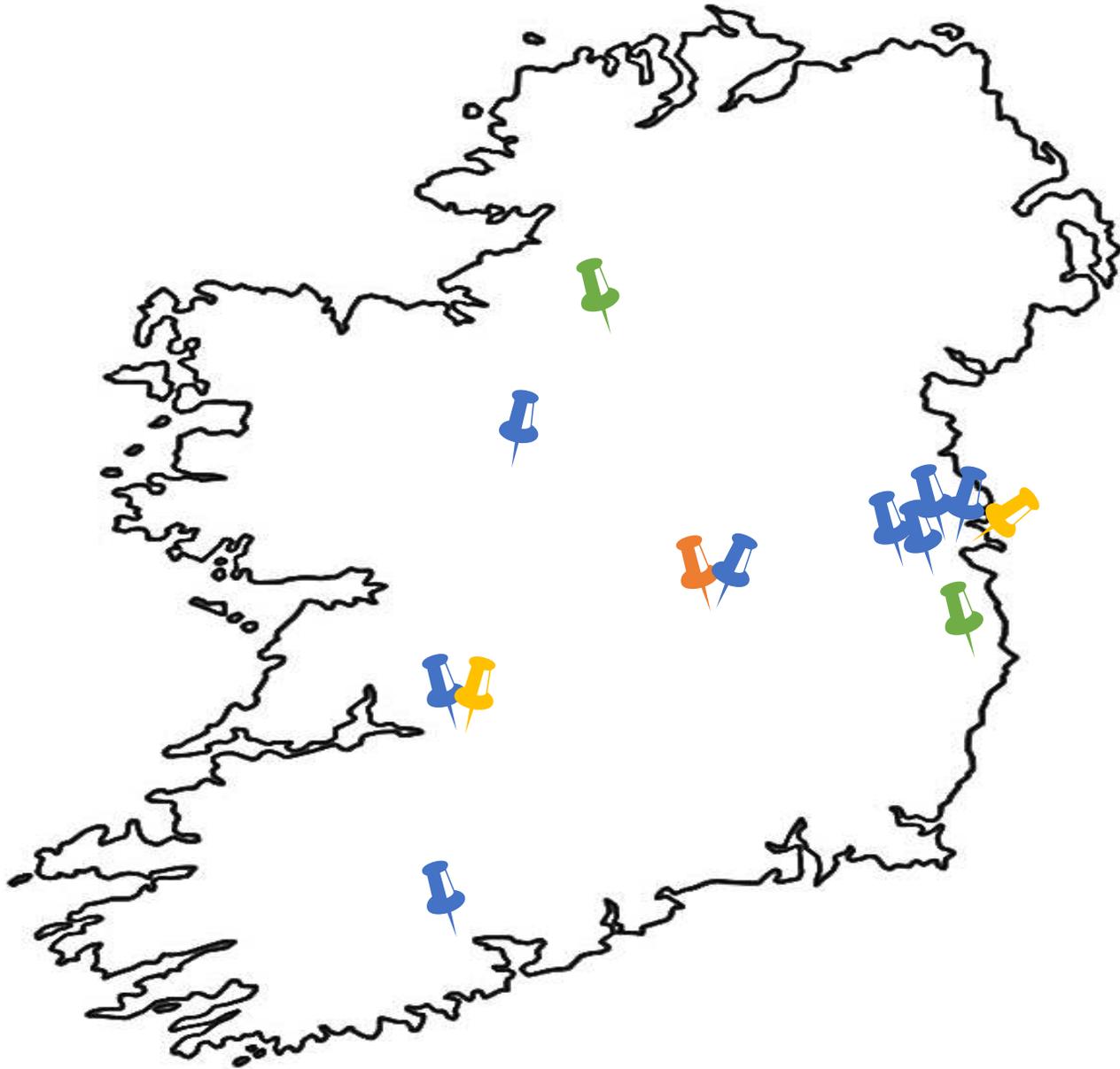
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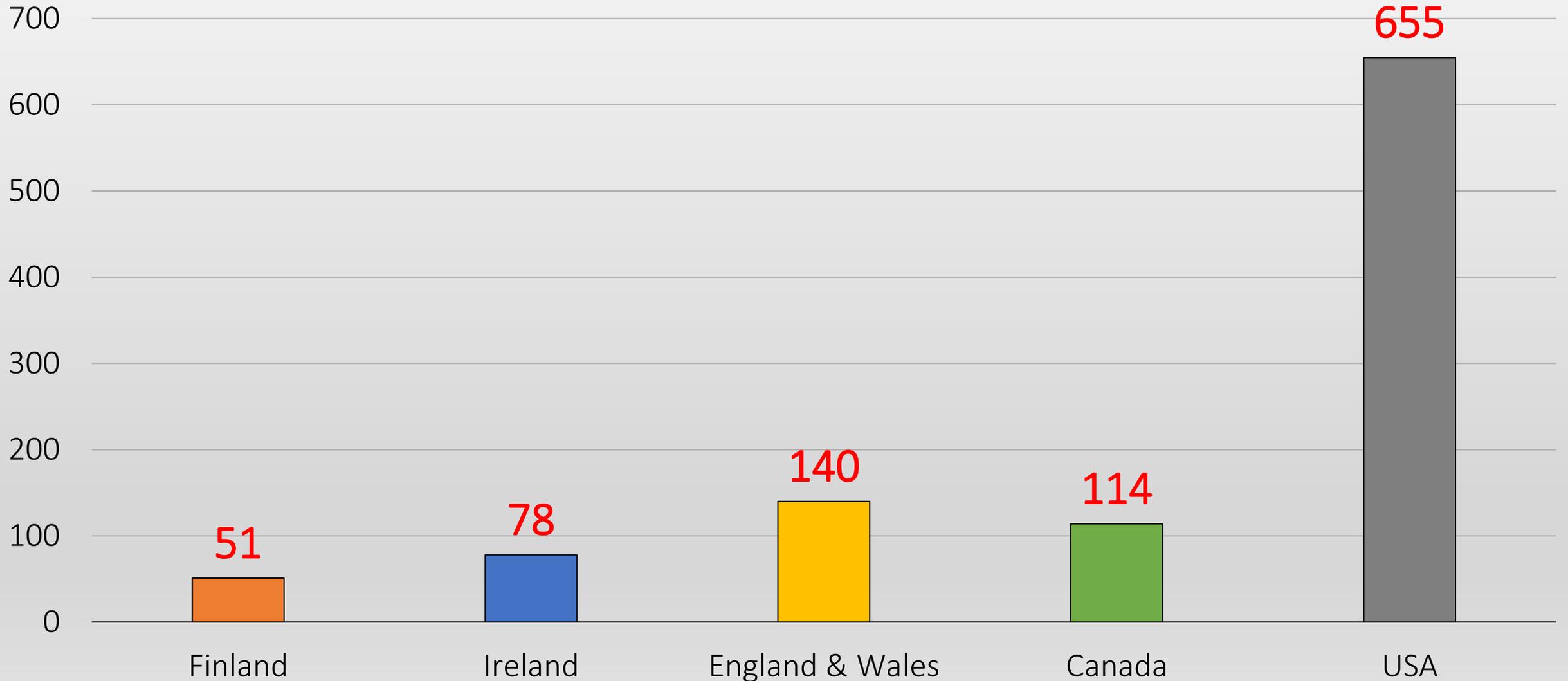
Irish Prison Service



-  high security
-  medium security
-  open centre
-  female

Irish Prison Population

Prison Population per 100,000 National Population



Violent & Disruptive Prisoners – ‘VDPs’

IPS Definition

- Serious repetitive violence towards staff &/or other prisoners
- Significant risk of violence towards others
- Operational issues for the prison system
- 5 prisoners (<1%) in the IPS meet this criteria

VDP Policy

- Isolated locations
- Limited interaction
- Restricted regimes
- Increased security

‘Barrier Handling’



VDP Policy Aims

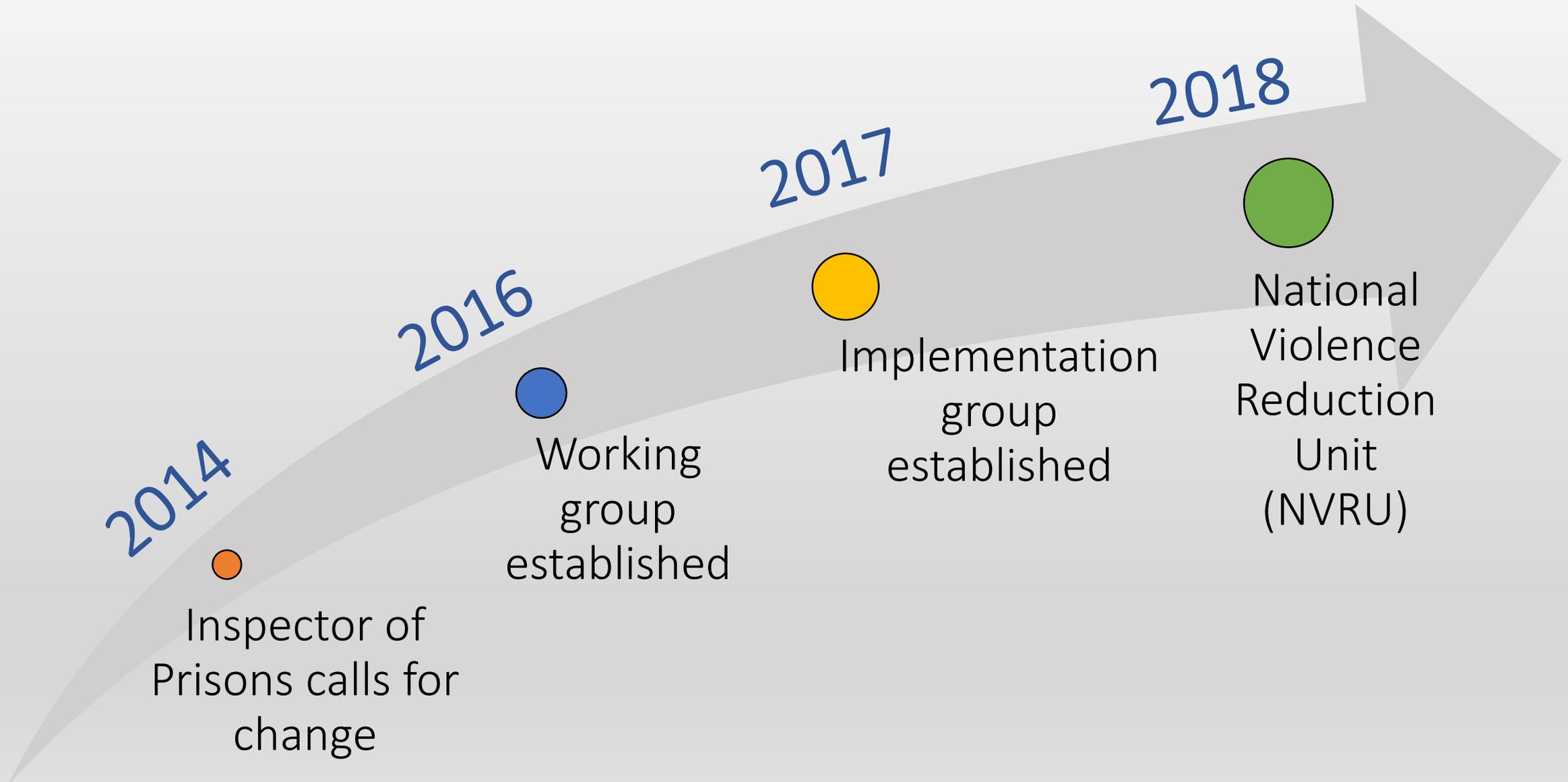
1. Protect staff from violence

- Reduced opportunities for violence
 - But ... can still happen
- Protection from physical harm:
 - But ... what about 'other' harms?
 - psychological, e.g. stress
 - occupational, e.g. job satisfaction

2. Intervene & reduce risk of violence

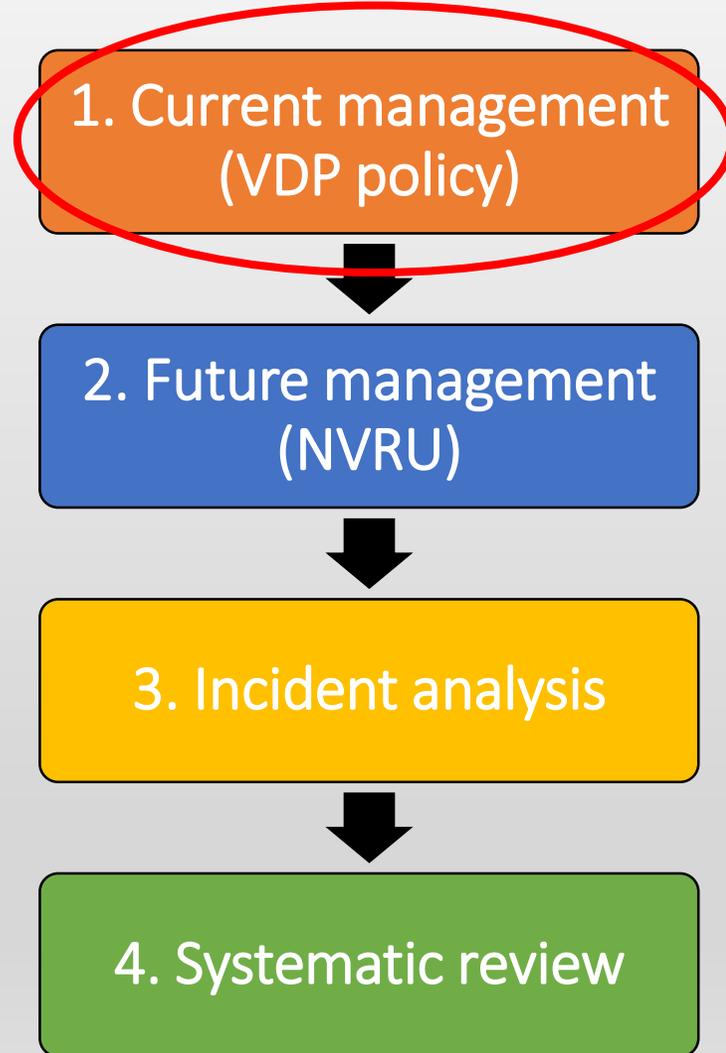
- Limited scope for intervention
- Lack of progression
- Harm to the individual:
 - Psychological, e.g. self-harm
 - Physical , e.g. weakness

Changing Practice



Research

4-Year Research Project



Current study - Aims

1. Describe and the experiences of:
 - (a) staff managing prisoners under the VDP policy
 - (b) prisoners managed under the VDP policy
2. Inform the NVRU:
 - (a) guide practice and policy
 - (b) generate baseline data

Methodology

- Qualitative
- Quantitative

Sample Demographics

Involvement with VDP policy

- $N = 11$ Prison Officers
- Current = 7 Prison Officers (17%)
- Previous = 4 Prison Officers (27%)

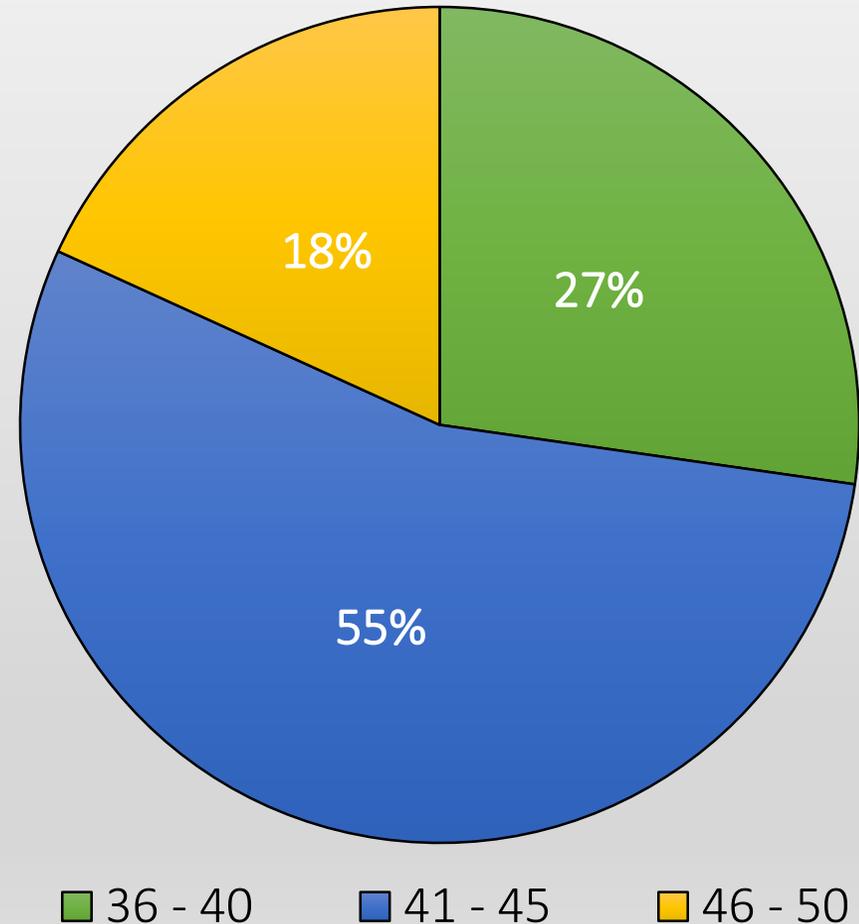
Prison Setting

- Prison A = 5 Prison Officers
- Prison B = 4 Prison Officers
- Other = 2 Prison Officers

Gender

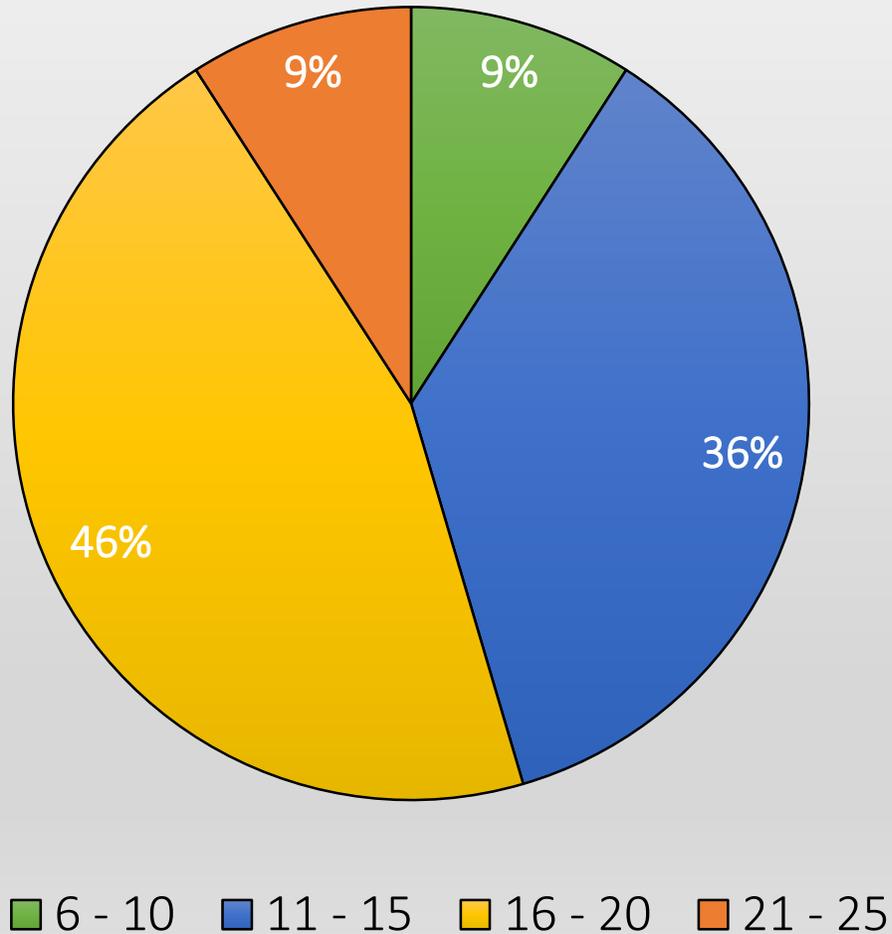
- All participants were male

Age (years)

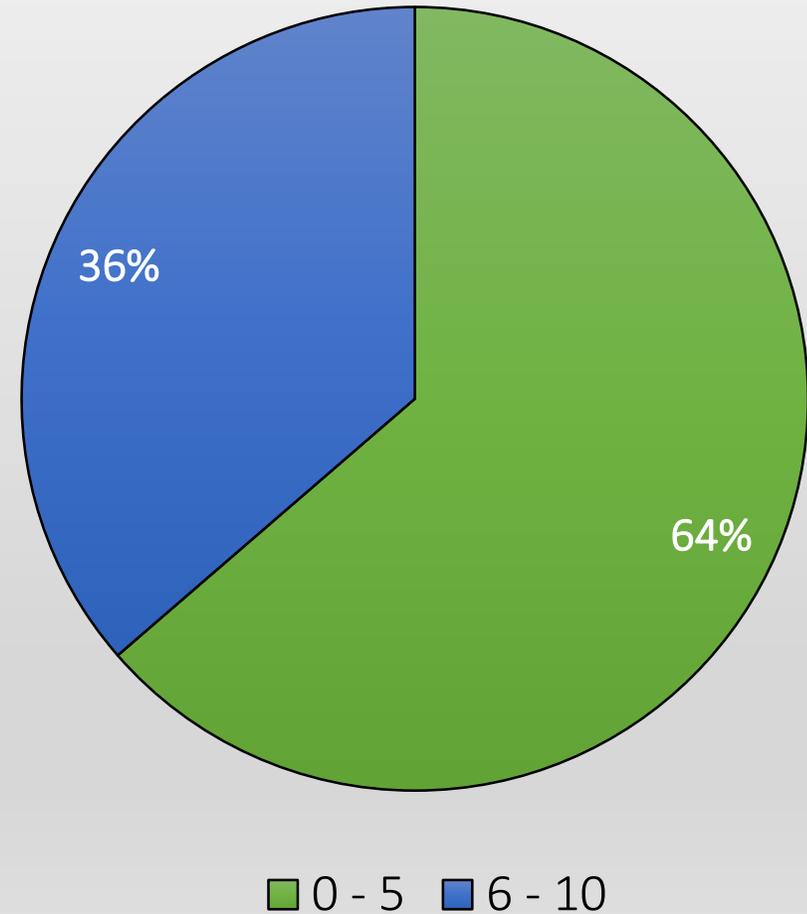


Sample Demographics

Years of Service in IPS



Years Managing Prisoners under the VDP Policy



Quantitative Scales

Social Climate – EssenCES

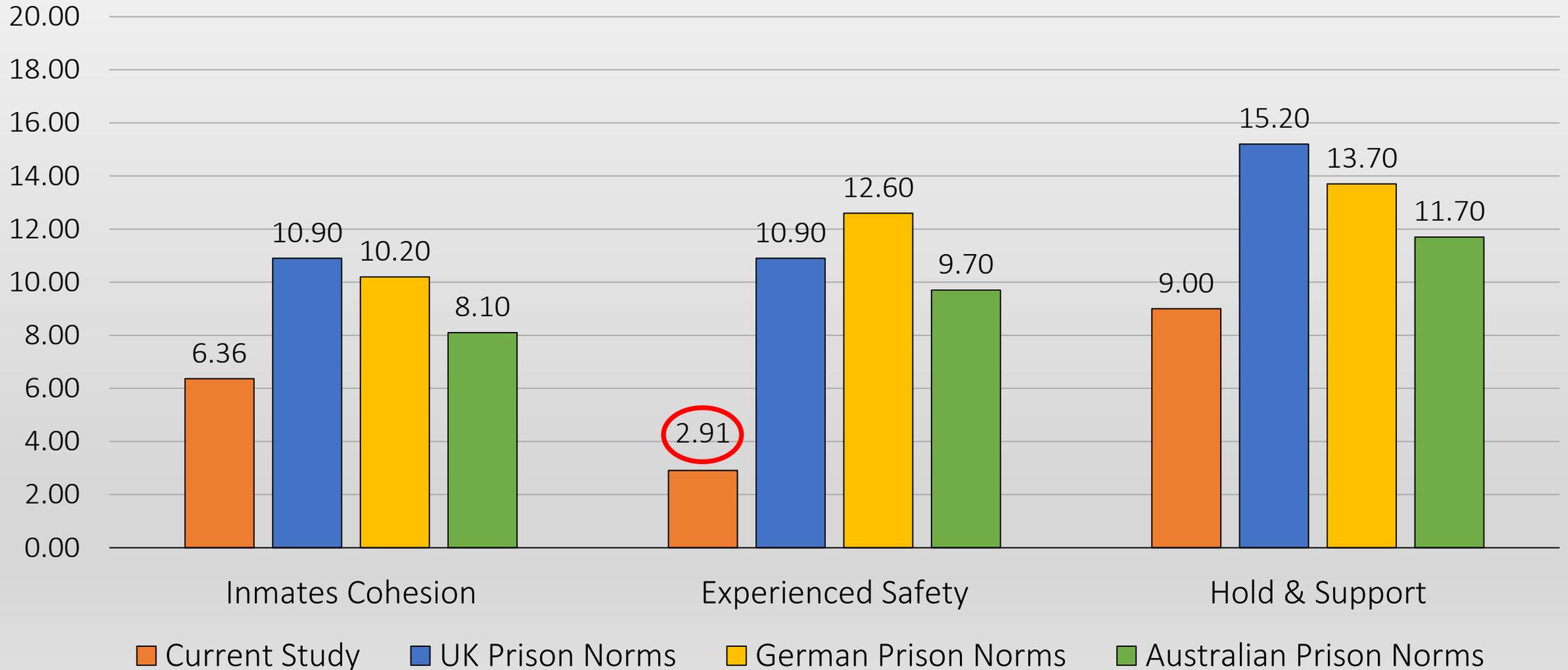
- 15 items, 3 sub-scales:
 1. Inmate Cohesion
 2. Experienced Safety
 3. Hold & Support
- Correctional environments have distinct social climates
- Influences outcomes for:
 - Prisoners, e.g. treatment engagement
 - Staff, e.g. morale
 - Organisation, e.g. violence levels

Occupational Wellbeing – Management Standards Indicator Tool

- 35 items, 7 sub-scales:
 1. Role
 2. Control
 3. Demands
 4. Peer Support
 5. Manager Support
 6. Relationships
 7. Change
- Prison Officers fare worse than the ‘average’ employee in the UK
- Influences outcomes for:
 - Staff, e.g. psychological distress
 - Organisation, e.g. staff turnover

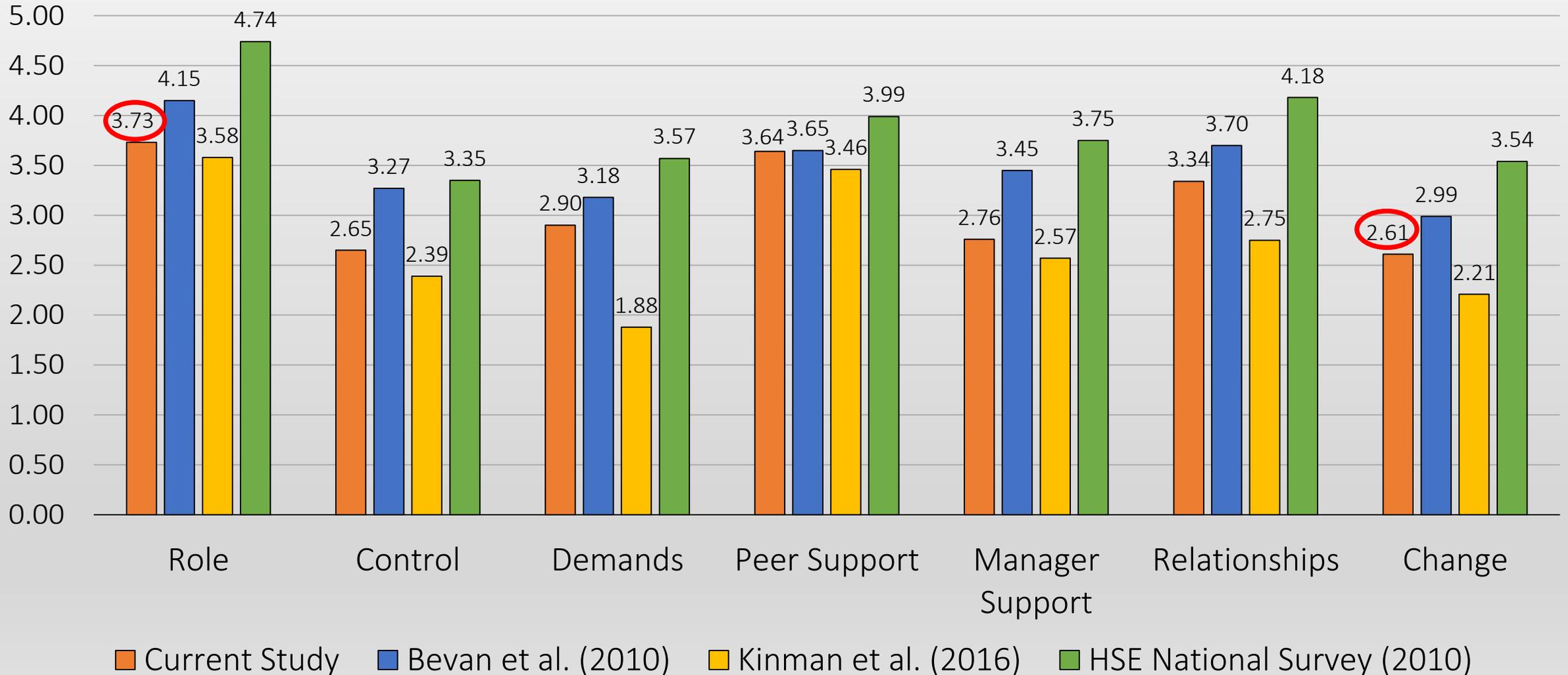
Social Climate

EssenCES – Mean Scores



Occupational Wellbeing & Stress

Management Standards Indicator Tool - Mean Scores



Content Analysis

1. What does current management look like?

2. Why is current management like this?

3. How is current management working?

4. How could current management change?

1. What are the social characteristics of current management?

Prisoner Interaction

- Generally “restricted”

“He gets to talk to fellas through the doors, that’s it”.

- **But ...** varies based on prisoner behaviour

“He’s on a landing [...] with two other guys that are [...] good for his mental health and stuff, and he has progressed”.

Prison Officer-Prisoner Interaction

- Generally “minimal”
- A desire to show humanity

“So that he can see [...] beyond the blue shirt, that he can see beyond the suit, that we’re people too”.

- **But ...** inhibited by social norms

“The environment in the prison is that staff stick together, and you don’t want to be seen to be socialising with the fella that broke [his] nose”

1. What are the social characteristics of current management?

Prison Officer Interaction

- “Comradery” within groups

“You kind of get into a tight group where you come so dependent on each other”

- **But ...** varies between groups

“If certain people are working, there’s no talk like that [re: mental health]”

Prison Officer & ‘Other’ Staff Interaction

- “Kept in the dark”

“Knowledge is power, just some people don’t give up the knowledge”.

- Desire for collaboration

“We’re working with these people every day of the week, and that’s not utilised near as much as it should be”.

2(a). Why are some prisoners managed under the VDP policy?

- Prisoner behaviour

“Prisoners fight, and that’s the environment we’re in [...] when they’re placed on the policy they have a history of it”.

- Safety

“Pure and simple, they’re a danger to staff”

2(b). What is the aim of the VDP policy?

What the policy **currently** aims to do

vs

What the policy **should** or **could** aim to do

“At the moment the purpose of the regime is safety of everyone, but in an ideal world with a bit of training and support it could be more of an intervention role and a helping role”

2(c). What are the risk factors for violence/disruption?

Organisational level

- Managerial inconsistency with prisoners:
 - Rules
 - False promises

“If you have a Governor or a Chief or person who’s managing the area telling the prisoner that they’re going to do this, that, or the other, and not following through on that, that causes huge issues”.

Environmental level

- Lack of structured activity

“There has to be structured activities put in place to help them because they’re never going to get better, their aggression is only going to increase, and the way they treat the staff and think about the staff is only going to get worse”.

2 (c). What are the risk factors for violence/disruption?

Interactional level

- Inconsistent staff approaches:

- Enforcing the rules

- **Communication style**

“The mode of delivery, how you speak to someone, how you interact with someone, can essentially dictate whether someone gets hurt or not”.

- Negative peer influences

“[other prisoners] telling him ‘you got to go, and you got to do this’, so then they have to show face”.

Individual level

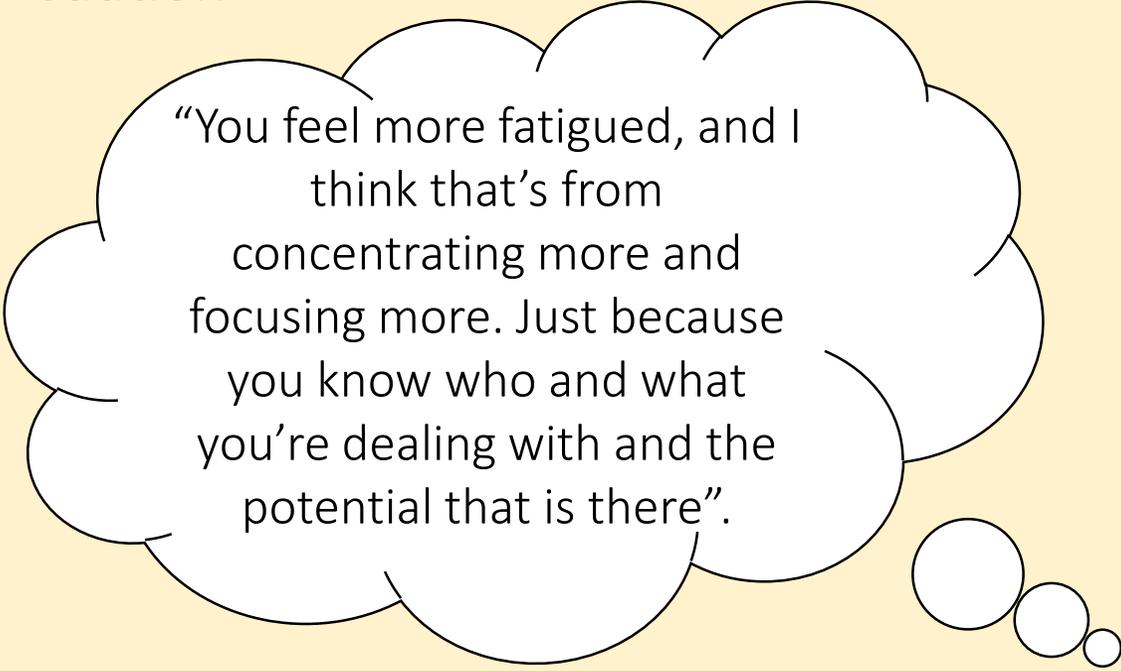
- Mental illness
- Adverse upbringings

“Life I think for most of those kind of guys it’s obviously not our lives, they came up in a complete different environment all together. So what’s normal for them is not normal for us”

3. What impact has your role had on you?

Personal impact

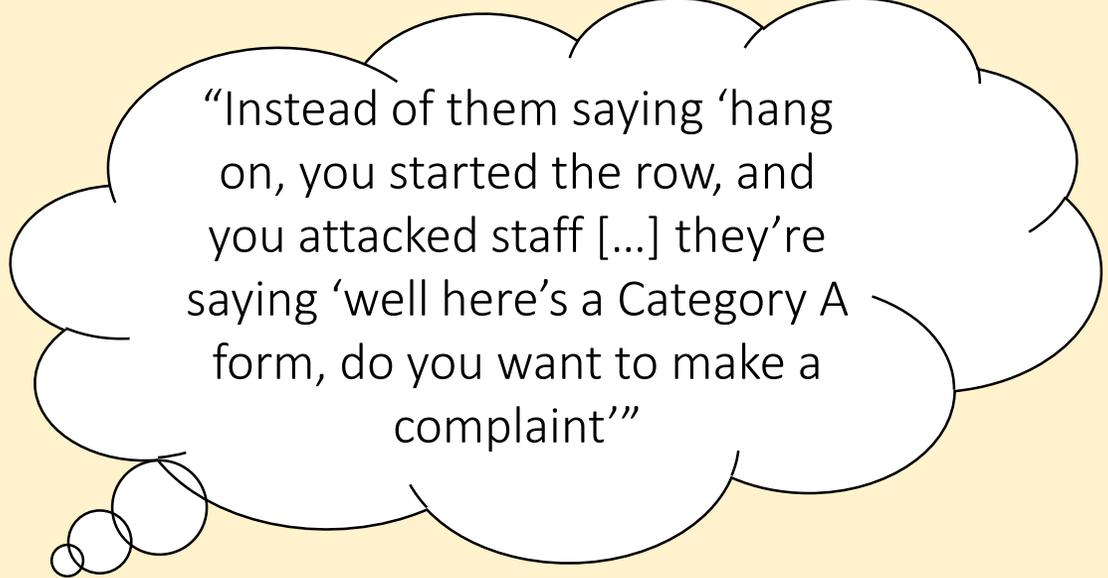
- Stress
- Feeling unsafe
- De-sensitisation
- Caution



“You feel more fatigued, and I think that’s from concentrating more and focusing more. Just because you know who and what you’re dealing with and the potential that is there”.

Coping strategies

- Comradery with staff
- Good family life
- Talking about issues
- **But ...** lack of organisational support



“Instead of them saying ‘hang on, you started the row, and you attacked staff [...] they’re saying ‘well here’s a Category A form, do you want to make a complaint’”

4. What is your understanding of the new unit?

Hopes

- Potential for progression
- Safe environment
- Unit invested in
- Staff needs addressed
- Prisoner needs addressed

“Prisoners lash out for certain reasons, and you have to identify [...] and try to go after those reasons”

Concerns

- Prisoners not progressing
- Poor organisational commitment
- Poor staff selection
- Operational vs. Psychology staff

“They’ll both be coming from very different standpoints”

Conclusion

So ...

1. What does current management look like?
2. Why is current management like this?
3. How is current management working?
4. How can current management change?

Next Steps

- Prisoner perspectives
- In-depth analysis
- Inform NVRU



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