Ageing in corrective services: from the perspective of prison chaplains

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The number of older inmates in New South Wales prisons has increased over the past ten years but it is unclear whether corrective services can cater for the increase. The current study reports the results of a qualitative study about ageing in prison. Eight prison chaplains from four corrective facilities in NSW were interviewed using a semi-structured interview schedule. The results of a thematic analysis revealed four main themes: *the system, the services, the environment and the inmate*. The themes reveal a system that is not designed to cope with an ageing population. Inmates become resentful of what has happened to them rather than for the damage they have done to somebody else. The system lacks processes and programmes to enable proper rehabilitation. The issues raised by the chaplains in terms of services, the environment and the inmates decrease the possibility that an older inmate will adapt to the environment and successfully age in place.

Key words: ageing in place; aged care; bullying; chapel services; corrective services; older inmates; victimisation.

Introduction

The number of older adults in Australian prisons has increased and continues to do so. Old age among inmates has variably been defined as 45 years up to 65 years and above (Baidawi et al., 2011). Most often 50 to 55 years of age is used based on the assumption that there is about a 10-year difference between old age in corrective services and old age in the general population. However, there are differences between indigenous and non-indigenous populations, with indigenous prisoners ageing at a younger age than non-indigenous prisoners (Inspector of Custodial Services, 2015a). This difference is consistent with the differences between these two

groups in the general population where current life expectancy for non-indigenous males is 79.7 years while for indigenous males it is 69.1 years (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, AIHW, 2015). Age differences between the general population and inmates are thought to be a consequence of previous lifestyle choices such as drugs and/or alcohol use or poor eating habits (Grant, 1999) but the prison environment also may act to increase the ageing process (Stojkovic, 2007).

In the year 2000, approximately 8.3% of the total prison population was aged 50 years and over (Australian Bureau of Statistics, ABS, 2000). This figure increased to approximately 11.5% in 2010 (ABS, 2010). The

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fastest growing group in corrective facilities in Australia are those aged over 65 years. There was a 134% increase in this age group between 2010 and 2014 (ABS, 2014). The figures for New South Wales (NSW) are similar to the national averages. The number of inmates aged 65 years and over in NSW prisons increased by approximately 225% over the past 10 years. In 2009, indigenous aged offenders accounted for 26% of the total number of aged inmates in NSW, an increase from 16% in 1999 (Leach & Neto, 2011).

The increase in the number of older inmates can be attributed to a number of factors, including an increase in the number of older males being charged and convicted of historical sexual abuse. In addition, many of those who received lengthy sentences in the past are now reaching old age while others are repeat offenders (Grant, 1999; Stavrou, 2017). In NSW between 2000 and 2016, 28.5% of inmates aged 45 years and above were reoffenders (NSW Bureau of Crime Statistical and Research, 2017). An increase in the number of drug-related offences (possession and dealing), harassment, and threatening behaviour and bail breaches has been reported for females (Holmes, 2014). According to Stavrou (2017), violent/sexual offences, drug offences, justice procedural offences and property offences accounted for the majority of custodial sentences among older adults in 2015.

As people age, where they age becomes an important issue. 'Ageing in place' is a phrase that has been used to describe the idea that older people prefer to remain living in their own homes, in their current community, maintaining some level of independence (Yen, Shim, Martinez, & Barker, 2012). Research by Wiles, Leibing, Guberman, Reeve, and Allen (2012) found that older adults considered ageing in place in terms of feelings of attachment to a particular place, and a sense of security and familiarity with their surroundings. These feelings may be related to the person's home but also more broadly as an attachment to the general

community. Community was seen as an important resource particularly in terms of personal safety – that is, community members look out for each other. Thus, not only does an older person feel a sense of attachment to their place, but identification with place is also important for self-identity. The result is a two-way relationship between an older person's self-identity and the environment in which they live (Peace, Holland, & Kellaheer, 2005).

These views are relevant to older adults who age in place in the general community but research has also considered ageing in place in an aged care facility – for example, a nursing home (Johnson & Bibbo, 2014). Johnson and Bibbo (2014) argue that, while the older adults in their study did not come to think of the nursing home as 'home', attitudes towards the facility did become more positive over time. The change in attitude was particularly salient when the older adult had been involved in the process of deciding to move into the nursing home in the first place. Johnson and Bibbo's findings are consistent with Lawton and Nahemow's (1973) concept of environmental press.

According to Lawton and Nahemow (1973), older adults can adapt behaviour to allow them to cope with environmental change, particularly if the environment is 'pressing' (challenging). The ability to cope is related to the individual characteristics of the person – for example, personality. The participants in Johnson and Bibbo's (2014) study who had some involvement in the decision to relocate to a nursing home were more likely to have adapted to the new surroundings because they maintained a sense of control. However, those who were excluded from the decision-making process were less likely to adapt because they had no control. The move into the nursing home was a forced move.

Older inmates do not have the option to choose the place in which they will age. They also are likely to be vulnerable to victimisation by younger, more agile inmates, either because of their age or because of the type of

crime they have committed (Inspector of Custodial Services, 2015a). For instance, a number of older inmates have been incarcerated for sexual crimes against children (Baidawi et al., 2011). Further, current facilities may not be designed to cater for an ageing population (Inspector of Custodial Services, 2015a).

According to a report on older inmates by the NSW Justice Inspector of Custodial Services, 'The current limited level of service provision to aged inmates across the prison estate means that it is increasingly difficult for aged inmates to live and function with dignity in the correctional facility' (Inspector of Custodial Services, 2015a, p. 5). Recent research in France found that older male prisoners demonstrated lower perceived quality of life than the general population (Combalbert et al., 2018). These researchers also argue that a large number of older male inmates have some form of cognitive impairment, which prevents them from participating in structured activities that may prevent or minimise cognitive impairment. These findings highlight the importance of research that increases awareness of the experience of ageing in corrective services. Such research will help with the development of policy and programmes in relation to ageing in corrective facilities.

The current study aimed to explore the experience of older inmates from the perspective of prison chaplains. Prison chaplains have close contact with inmates and are familiar with the corrective services system. Consequently, they have an understanding of how inmates are ageing and how the system provides for older inmates. The results from this study will be used to develop an instrument that can be used to survey a large number of inmates in corrective facilities across Australian States and Territories.

Method

Participants

Eight prison chaplains from four corrective facilities in NSW agreed to be interviewed

for this study. The facilities are not named to protect the identity of the chaplains. Three of the chaplains were female, and five were male. Duration of services as a prison chaplain ranged from a number of weeks to 20 years with most serving two years or more.

Materials

A semi-structured interview schedule was used with prompts where relevant. The questions on the schedule included:

1. Can you give me a history of how long you have worked as a prison chaplain?
2. Can you tell me about the changes in the age of prisoners within corrective services?
3. Can you tell me your thoughts about what it is like to age within a corrective facility?
4. Can you tell me about how older inmates are perceived by younger inmates?
5. What types of activities do older inmates engage in?
6. Can you tell me your thoughts about how well the current corrective system can cater for older inmates?
7. Without breaking any confidentiality, what are the themes of conversations chaplains (you) have with inmates?
8. What are the topics that inmates seem to most want to discuss with you?
9. Are these topics/themes similar to that of people of similar ages you talk to who are not incarcerated?

Procedure

Ethics approval was sought and granted by Charles Sturt University Human Research Ethics Committee. All but two of the interviews were face to face and were conducted within a corrective facility. The exceptions were phone interviews; however, the same interview schedule was used for all interviews. Interviews lasted between 20 to 90

minutes and were audio recorded. All interview recordings were transcribed with any potentially identifying information (e.g., facility name) removed during this process. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the transcripts (Braun & Clark, 2006). This involved an initial reading of the transcripts, during which items related to ageing in prison were coded. The 10 initial codes were reduced to four themes through a process of reading and re-reading to reduce redundancy and overlap. It is important to acknowledge that the final themes reflect the researchers' understanding of the prison chaplains' perspectives.

Results

Consistent with ABS (2014) figures, the chaplains interviewed for this study who had worked within in a corrective facility for more than two years noted that there had been an increase in the number of older adults in facilities in NSW. Increases were thought to be the result of a number of factors including people being charged at an older age, often as a result of sexual abuse, drug or fraud offences:

... there's now, of course, a cohort of older inmates that have come in sometimes in their 80s! The cohort of sex offenders that have come in at a later age it is only going to increase. (C2)

Others have been incarcerated for a long period of time and have aged in prison:

The older guys who are already here are, let's say, what they would call themselves a serious criminal. You know, they are violent crimes or bank robbers or, you know these sorts of things. (C7)

Or are repeat offenders:

It is a bit of a mixture. Some of them are getting near the end of say, 15 year sentences, or things like that, but I think I would say

that there tends to be more repeat offenders. One in particular ... is her 11th visit to prison. (C8)

There was also a perception that charges are being brought more often than previously:

So there is both recent and older charges. But the atmosphere to litigate or to take action has been increased. (C4)

Further, courts are more likely to prosecute a range of offenders including older people, and prison sentences are more likely to be applied for first offences than had previously been the case:

... magistrates are perhaps being a little bit stricter and rather than giving a few extra warnings or something along those lines, it seems that they move a little bit quicker towards custodial sentencing. (C8)

Despite the increase in the number of older inmates, only one of the corrective facilities that were serviced by the chaplains who took part of this study had an aged care unit, or something akin to an aged care unit:

... there must be this inevitability about ageing. But also, there is all too little provision for ageing if any apart from when people get infirmed and they go to [name of unit] or places like that. (C2)

The themes defined here suggest that the corrective services system is not currently equipped to deal with the increase in older adults in prison. The results of the thematic analysis revealed four main themes: *the system, the services, the environment and the inmate*. While these themes are discussed separately, there is a clear link between them.

Theme 1: the system

The first theme, *the system*, relates to the corrective services system in NSW. The general consensus among the prison chaplains

interviewed for this study was that the current system is neither effective nor evaluated.

*It looks to me like there are lots of systems here to provide security and care. I'm not sure that . . . and we say 'what are the controls in transport, what are the controls in the reception processing, classification, what are the controls in delivering food, what are the controls handling complaints? What's the system? Will that system produce an outcome? Is it working?' Because sometimes systems, you draw them, put them in a folder and that's it. No one has evaluated it. That will **never** (emphasis on never) produce an outcome. (C4)*

The chaplains believed the current system does not reflect a proper systems approach to managing inmates regardless of their age. The system comprises a number of different sub-sets: education, reception, transport, clinic, and so on, but these tend to work in isolation rather than as part of a single workable system. They do not represent a system that is being evaluated or tested but rather a 'whatever will happen, will happen approach'. What happens, however, is not necessarily going to produce good outcomes; it is more likely to produce adverse ones. Consequently, there is a lack of a real plan for dealing with issues that older inmates may face as a function of the normal ageing process.

While the chaplains agreed that most of the prison officers, and other corrective service employees, are caring and try to 'do the right thing', it is very difficult for them to do so in a system that appears to be under-resourced.

I think the clinic, generally, try to do the right job because they are professionals but they're swamped. Particularly when you concentrate, say 50 older people in a wing. They don't necessarily 'beef-up' the clinic resources. (C4)

Prison staff are under increasing pressure not only because of an increase in the number of inmates, but also because of decreasing staff numbers. The number of full-time nursing

and clinical staff has decreased over a number of years leading to delays in the provision of health services (Inspector of Custodial Services, 2015b).

There are also no restorative processes in place. The chaplains perceived a system that does not encourage people to return to the community as reformed members of that community. Instead it is seen to accentuate narcissism and selfishness because people become resentful of what has happened to them rather than for the damage they have done to somebody else.

Yes, they'll say 'I've paid my time' and I say to them 'you haven't paid anything. You've taken what you can never give back. You've had liberty deprived but you still blame the victim. How can you do that?'. (C4)

. . . people don't have any therapy. They don't have any restorative practice. The only feedback they get in the environment is from the other inmates and that's generally just reinforcing their delusions. It's not therapeutic in any way, it's not restorative in any way and it's not . . . yes, I don't think that it is helpful . . . anyone who's in prison for any length of time this is a place for free dreaming. (C3)

The lack of restorative processes may also lead to recidivism as inmates are returning to the community with victim mentalities. There is a sense among some that they have lost something that they can never get back, and the victim of their crime is responsible for this.

The issues raised by the chaplains relate to the prison system but also extend to the justice system in general with instances of inmates who have dementia being sentenced to time in a corrective facility.

When you see a guy that has come in with dementia who was brought in for driving while disqualified, he probably didn't know that he didn't have a licence. (C2)

But there are also cases where inmates are not aware of legal issues surrounding their case.

For example, one chaplain spoke about an inmate who may have been incarcerated based on a false accusation:

... this chap didn't seem to be alert to the fact that he could appeal his charge so he didn't. So he is now out of time. But the terrible thought is that they may be falsely accused and as they are older their ability to work through the systems seems to be not properly taking account of the age so that justice is done is my concern. (C4)

In summary, this theme, *the system*, articulates chaplains' perceptions of a clear lack of planning for an ageing population. Nobody is articulating the vision of what the outcomes should be. As a result there do not appear to be systems directed at a specific outcome, and any action is ad hoc than a product of systems thinking. The ad hoc approach can only serve to increase environmental press, making it less likely that the older inmate will adapt their behaviour in order to cope with the environment (Lawton & Nahemow, 1973). The end result is that the correctional experience simply becomes one of further damage to already vulnerable people. The lack of a proper systems approach is evident in each of the following themes.

Theme 2: the services

The second theme is about the chaplains' perceptions of *the services*, or lack thereof, for inmates, particularly for older inmates. These services include medical, therapy, aged care, dental care, access to reading glasses and chapel services. The chaplains were concerned by the lack of training for staff in relation to aged care but also about the lack of time staff have to attend to the needs of older inmates. *'It is like it [ageing] doesn't exist'* (C2). One of the chaplains spoke about an inmate who had kidney problems:

He does his own dialysis. He is one of the few and the system can't seem to respond to an acute need like that. (C4)

The reduction in the numbers of nursing and clinical staff identified by the Inspector (Inspector of Custodial Services, 2015b) can only serve to compound issues like this, adding to the level of stress that older inmates face. The chaplains did, however, state that most of the staff were doing what they could to assist older inmates, despite the lack of resources.

Despite this, the chaplains also expressed concern about a lack of compassion towards older inmates, particularly those who were incarcerated as a result of sexual offending:

It's this idea of compassion, why would you be compassionate for someone who has committed a sex offence? (C4)

According to this chaplain *'the system is not generous towards people who have done awful things'* although some *'do get good treatment'*. The inmate can be seen as complaining for the sake of it. However, what may be considered a small issue on the outside – for example, access to reading glasses – can be an important issue for the inmate:

While it's comparatively a small thing, but the number of older people who can't see! And so the chaplains are providing reading glasses to older inmates and by old, they could be in their 40s who can't even see. A man spoke to me yesterday, needs reading glasses, now we are talking about \$2.50, because he can't see. It's no big deal for me to provide glasses because you are talking about \$2.50! (C2)

Some chaplains will provide glasses for those who ask for them but it is unclear what happens if an inmate does not ask. Not being able to see to read is one concern, but a more pressing issue is the potential for health and safety risks within a corrective facility for somebody who is not able to see clearly. As discussed in the next theme, many prisons have stairs but there is also an issue with uneven surfaces in prison yards (Inspector of Custodial Services, 2015a).

While medical and other services were seen as lacking, chapel services were viewed as a safe place that provides ‘*something out of the nothing that is there*’ (C2). The chaplains spoke about how they get good attendance at their services and how they rarely need to deal with behavioural issues. The inmates see these services as an activity in an otherwise unstimulating environment:

. . . many, many times virtually every single person would be involved and they would be very surprised themselves that they have been there . . . it's bigger than the church thing it's people, engagement, community you know. (C2)

Chapel services also provide a link to the past for older inmates:

Yes and sometimes because of the sorts of hymns we would sing it links into 30, 40, 50 years ago. Because we deliberately sing hymns that they would perhaps . . . amazing grace, you can't go wrong with that. They will be surprised with how they remember things. (C2)

Some corrective facilities provide a range of religious options:

The full-time chaplains are for everyone regardless of their faith background. The sessional chaplains . . . they come and just look at the Muslim, Buddhists etc. They provide particular spiritual experiences that are common for their own faith background. (C7)

In other instances, ‘*The Muslims have . . . they organise it themselves*’ (C1). What services are offered depends on the facility and the availability of chaplains. Only one chaplain discussed religious services for indigenous inmates by noting that they will:

. . . either link in with Christians that come from missions or from towns that they have lived in with that Christian experience or they will go to the Muslims because the Muslims that are in the yard have a greater sense of community. (C7)

In general, the chaplains across all facilities agreed that there was a need for improved services for older inmates, particularly access to medical services and the provision of aged care. However, the system itself, in terms of physical structures, is not conducive to catering for older inmates. A contributing factor is the heritage listing of certain prisons, which limits structural change. Cells have double bunks, and buildings are often multi-storied with stairs that need to be climbed a number of times throughout the day. The temporary solution may be to move them ‘*from an upper cell to a ground floor cell so they don't have to climb the stairs*’ (C7) but what will happen when the ground floor cells have filled?

Theme 3: the environment

The theme, *the environment*, discusses a range of issues identified by the chaplains within the prison environment. These issues include the physical structures, as noted previously:

The beds themselves, if you are not on the bottom bunk, to expect an old man to climb into a top bunk and many of the beds have no ladders so it is quite dangerous. I knew of one fellow sleeping under the bed 'cause he couldn't get up to the top bunk and he didn't want his other celly to climb up the top. . . . (C4)

But there is also the lack of stimulation and the vulnerability experienced by some older adults within this environment. All of the chaplains spoke about the lack of stimulation in the environment. According to the chaplains, there are no real structured activities outside of the chapel services:

Like with all of them there is this sense of utter boredom. Every day is the same as every other day. Yes, so any sort of activity is ad hoc and it is not frequent and it depends on the staff apart from playing

chess. But again there's rarely any organised activity. (C1)

There is no effort to make the prison experience in any way rewarding. It operates on crisis management; there is no evident planning. (C4)

Often there is 'nothing to help them pass the time' (C2) except sit in the yard. Consequently:

. . . most aged people, where there's no stimulation, no semblance of 'you're actually worthwhile', they vegetate because they think there's nothing else for them. (C2)

When the inmates sit in the yard they tend to sit in 'cliques' (groups).

*Well jails are cliquey so at the best of times they are cliquey. At the worst of times they are **gangs** [emphasis on gangs]. They don't connect with each other. Yes, so you have guys sitting in their cliques making fun of each other. At the worst of times it is an intolerance . . . but you know the only thing you are doing with older people is to let them be in their cliques. It's not helpful. Not helpful for the young either. (C3)*

Forming cliques can provide a sense of comfort for older inmates who may feel vulnerable among much younger and stronger inmates:

I think it could be a comfort thing, vulnerability and because in a group you've got more power against the younger guys. (C3)

But more often:

The older inmate probably won't complain because reprisal is just . . . it's not . . . well they don't fancy it. Some inmates can gather support from others in that environment and they will be protected. Interviewer: By younger people? Yes, but that creates . . . it's a dangerous environment putting older people in [type of wing] because they [younger inmates] will stand over older men to get what they need. Something as simple as coffee and the sweeteners

become a prized commodity and the older man is vulnerable. (C4)

Not all of the chaplains felt that the older inmates were vulnerable. One spoke of the 'incredible kindness' they had witnessed during their time as a prison chaplain:

They look after each other and are 'nice' to each other. Some share their dinners. A form of solidarity, like in the Army 'all for one'. For younger prisoners aged prisoners are simply older than themselves. 'He's the old one' – a man of 40. (C5)

This view was the exception rather than the rule, however. For another chaplain there was a clear sense of vulnerability among older inmates:

Because . . . in the past, older guys would have been looked up to . . . you know 'he's Mr Big, you want to give him a bit of respect' whereas the guys that are coming in are coming in because of antisocial behaviour so they don't see the older guys as being guys to stand up for, they don't look up to them . . . the younger guys just push the older guys out of the way. That sort of thing . . . the youngsters don't look up to the elderly. (C7)

In this particular facility, older inmates may be separated from the younger inmates because they are perceived to be vulnerable, not just because of their age but also because of the type of crime they had committed. This segregation of inmates creates its own set of problems:

As they age and perhaps if they are perceived to be vulnerable they will be moved to protection yards . . . they are really set aside for sexual offenders. So that, because they are vulnerable, if you put them into the general community someone will take them out. So . . . as they age and become vulnerable within a unit they are moved to these protection yards . . . that brings its own dichotomy because a fair percentage of men here in this situation are here because they have been abused themselves. So if you put

them into protection yards you've got the abused with the abusers. Sometimes it just does their head in and they can't cope. (C7)

Others saw the prison environment as 'a bullying environment'.

So the older people are bullied to conform . . . bullied by the officers and bullied by the other inmates. (C3)

Bullying can only serve to increase the vulnerability of older inmates in an environment where there is often no choice but to combine younger and older inmates. Older inmates are not respected simply because they are older but they also do not respect the younger inmates. As one chaplain noted when asked whether the older inmates showed respect for the younger inmates:

It's more of a resentment I would say generally speaking. Because it comes from two angles: one, the youth don't respect the elderly generally these days, but two, the older guys see themselves as serious criminals. So the older guys see themselves as real crims, they don't see the youngsters as real crims. They see them there as a result of drugs and that is not a real crime that is a weakness on your part for being addicted to something that you let rule your life. (C7)

Here the chaplain is highlighting that the culture within prisons has changed. Previously, inmates with long sentences related to serious offences were respected but this is no longer the case.

In summary, the prison environment brings a range of issues for the older inmate to deal with. The physical environment is challenging as a person ages because of the way prisons have been built – often with stairs and double bunks. But there are also issues around mixing younger and older inmates within specific areas. Older adults often become victims of bullying by the younger adults and therefore feel a sense of vulnerability. This vulnerability was noticed by all but one of the chaplains in this study.

That is not to say, however, that older inmates are the only victims of bullying because they themselves may also be bullies.

Theme 4: The inmate

The environment with its lack of stimulation, services and a workable system is conducive to a victim mentality among inmates. The final theme, *the inmate*, looks at the chaplains' perceptions of the character of older inmates. The clear message from chaplains was that there was a lack of remorse from many older inmates for the crimes they had committed. Remorse, when shown, was for their own losses rather than for the pain they had inflicted on others. This lack of remorse for others was seen, by the chaplains, to be a result of the current corrective services system in NSW:

What is does, [the system] it does produce remorse in inmates but the remorse is 'I'm sorry that I've lost so much. When I came in I had a family and I don't have one now. When I came in I had a business and I don't have one now'. It's never sorrow towards the victim. It's never saying 'I've actually done a terrible thing, that's got to stop. I've got to stop hurting people'. It becomes narcissistic and selfish. It actually generates a selfishness. (C4)

The chaplains appear to have misunderstood the notion of remorse here and appear to have confused it with regret. If there is no empathy for the victim then there is no remorse, just self-centred regret. That said, the selfishness identified by the chaplains can lead to a sense of entitlement and an expectation of what they should receive when, and if, they are released.

See a lot of the guys come here and they think 'well I'll push the pause button on real life, I'll come here and then when I go out I'll push play again'. Now if you've been inside for a long time they have this sense that I have done my time so I have a sense of entitlement. They have it in jail, 'I've done my time, you've taken my freedom'. (C3)

Many of the inmates felt that they had been treated badly. They bemoaned lost freedom and lost family and belongings:

He is constantly talking about what he's lost and I've tried to say to him in my recent contacts with him 'it's not about what you've lost, it is about what you have taken'. (C4)

The blame for these losses is often placed on the victims of their crimes:

Then we get to the point where you have a person who should have been released 17 years ago and we can't release him because he's still... I had read the psychology report and they said three things, they said 'he fails to appreciate the seriousness of his offence, he continues to blame the victim and he doesn't have any risk management'. So it's recognised as serious offending behaviour and he says to me 'I don't have any offending behaviour'. I said 'they are talking about the offending behaviour back here when you took that life. You don't think it was serious, it was justified and you continue to blame the victim'. So this guy's been in jail for 40 years and he hasn't learned! (C4)

The chaplains perceived that the current system may perpetuate this type of thinking because it lacks processes and programmes that enable proper rehabilitation for many inmates. As one chaplain noted, the current system is '*all about managing them*'. (C3)

General discussion

The aim of the current study was to explore how older inmates age within a corrective facility from the perspective of prison chaplains. Four themes were identified from the chaplains' narratives: *the system*, *the services*, *the environment* and *the inmate*. The first theme, *the system*, highlighted the chaplains' view that the current system is not tenable. It is a fragmented system with little planning for an ageing population. The second theme explored the perceived value of chapel

services and contrasted this with an apparent lack of appropriate medical and other services for older inmates within corrective facilities. The lack of services extended to the availability of reading glasses with some chaplains using their own money to provide these for inmates who need them. Chapel services, however, were seen to provide an important outlet for older inmates. The corrective services *environment* was considered not to be conducive to ageing given that the physical structures were not designed with an older population in mind but also because of the potential for victimisation. Finally, the older inmate was seen by the chaplains to lack remorse for the crimes that they had committed but were remorseful for what they had lost. The lack of remorse, or self-regret, was seen to be a result of the current system, which lacks restorative processes.

Given that the participants in this study were all chaplains, it is not surprising that chapel services were discussed in a positive light. Despite that, the services could be seen to be providing a valuable service for the inmates. Not only do they give older inmates something to do, the services could also help older inmates cope with the stress of being incarcerated. Religious and spiritual beliefs have been found to act as a buffer that allows people to cope with stressful events (Pargament, Koenig, Tarakeshwar, & Hahn, 2004). Attendance at these services could provide a period of respite for inmates who do not consider themselves as religious or spiritual. For those who have religious or spiritual backgrounds, the buffering effect may be more consistent, allowing them to cope on a daily basis. Access to religious services, readings and the like has the potential to increase the ability of an inmate to adjust to the prison setting and to reduce recidivism by increasing motivation for self-improvement (Lonczak, Clifasefi, Marlatt, Blume, & Donavan, 2006). While other factors – for example, access to medical services and victimisation – would need to be taken into account, future research is needed to examine whether or not religious

and spiritual services could help older inmates successfully age in a corrective facility.

Most of the chaplains in this study spoke about how the current facilities are not well designed to meet the needs of an ageing inmate population. Most facilities have stairs and bunk beds without step ladders, which make access difficult for older frail inmates. Corrective Services NSW recognised the need to increase accommodation for older inmates in a number of regional facilities in 2012 (Inspector of Custodial Services, 2015a). However, the inability of Corrective Services NSW to meet the legitimate needs of ageing is exacerbated by the growth of the prison population and consequent overcrowding.

The current study is limited in that the views are those of prison chaplains. It is possible that chaplains may not be fully aware of many proposed programmes and initiatives within the corrective system in NSW. For example, the NSW State Government has a state priority plan for reducing reoffending (2016–2020; Corrective Services NSW, 2016). While not specifically targeted towards older adults, the plan may benefit older inmates through increased evidence-based programmes and case-management strategies. Further, the planning and pathways for aged offenders in NSW prisons have been reprioritised in order to successfully manage a sudden ongoing offender influx (Corrective Services NSW, 2017). Despite this limitation, the chaplains have raised important concerns about how older inmates age within a corrective facility.

Without access to appropriate aged care, it could be assumed that older inmates will be unlikely to age successfully within the corrective services system. However, this may depend on the length of incarceration. A person who was incarcerated at a younger age and who has served a long sentence would probably have adapted their behaviour to the environment over a period of time. Even so, we cannot assume that they would have successfully aged in place because the prison

environment is a pressing environment (Lawton & Nahemow, 1973) that presents a number of challenges for all inmates. Those who have served longer sentences and who have aged within the corrective system may be better able to cope with the environment than those who are incarcerated at an older age.

While the four themes, *the system*, *the services*, *the environment* and *the inmate*, have been discussed separately, it is very clear that they are closely entwined. According to the chaplains, the current system cannot cater for the increasing number of older inmates. The current facilities were not designed with an ageing population in mind, but newly constructed prisons appear to be taking older inmates into account. Further facilities or specialised aged care units are needed to cater for the needs of the increasing number of older inmates. Older inmates have the right to a safe environment in which they are treated with respect and have similar access to appropriate health care as they would within the general community. Many of the issues the chaplains discussed in relation to services, the environment and the inmates decrease the possibility that an older inmate will adapt to the environment and successfully age in place. Some of these issues could be overcome by the introduction of a system that allows for the implementation of plans and programmes that can be evaluated and modified according to need. Corrective Services have gone some way to doing this through a recently implemented custodial case management system aimed at addressing the needs of each inmate (Corrective Services NSW, 2017). This system will need to be evaluated for effectiveness but it is a step in the right direction. Dealing with the ageing of the prison population is not going to be an easy task; however, it is an important one.

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Rhonda Shaw has declared no conflicts of interest

Bruce Stevens has declared no conflicts of interest

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Phillip Snoyman has declared no conflicts of interest

Ethical approval

All procedures involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the Charles Sturt University Ethics in Human Research Committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

Informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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