

Prison Makes Us and Them

The Views of Prison Officers working with Youth Offenders

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BACKGROUND

Risk, Need and Responsivity guides most offender rehabilitation. External responsivity is, arguably, the least well understood concept in this model.

The relationship between prison officers and youth offenders (YOs) is a key ingredient of intervention.

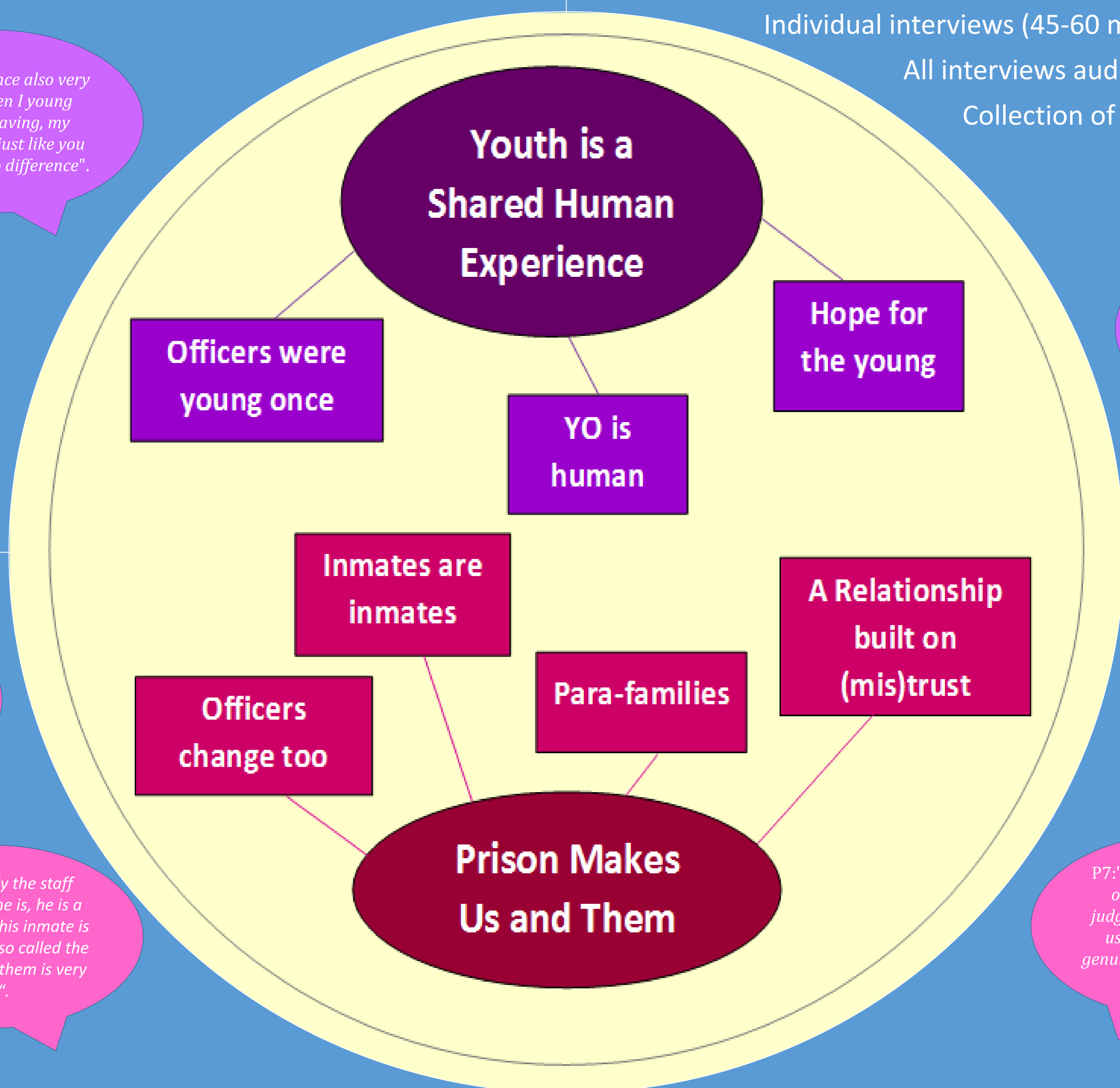
Understanding how attitudes inform relational frameworks is important for effective responsivity.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What are prison officers' attitudes towards youth offenders?
- What is the nature of the prison officer-youth offender relationship?
- What factors impact the prison officer-youth offender relationship?

METHOD

- Development of semi-structured interview schedule
- Initial pilot interview to refine questions & interview style
- Individual interviews (45-60 minutes) by second author
- All interviews audio-recorded & transcribed
- Collection of demographic information



P11: "I was once also very playful, when I young right, I behaving, my behaviour is just like you all, there is no difference".

P2: "I feel like they are just going through the period that my son went through before, so in that sense I am more understanding".

P1: "After working with them ... it actually surprised me a lot ... I really felt that if you give these boys something to focus on ... they can actually change and give you something nice and exciting in return".

P12: "usually the staff believe that he is, he is a staff lah and this inmate is a inmate and so called the gap between them is very far".

P10: "I like to see their life change, because wasted, they are so young right?"

P4: "being a big brother you do that then you tell them what they did wrong, and how they can do better from what they did. You don't just charge 'ok you go to another cell' charge close the door then that's it".

P7: "So in the end it's my own discretion, my judgement that they are using me or they are genuinely approaching me for help".

ANALYSIS

- Thematic Analysis at semantic level
- Braun & Clarke's (2006) six-stage guidelines
- Inductive approach with cut-and-sort technique
- Development of thematic map

CREDIBILITY CHECKS

- Multiple researchers & audit trail
- Agreement at coding, identifying themes & defining themes stages
- Grounding themes in data examples

PARTICIPANTS

13 male prison officers	8 married
Aged 20 – 40+	5 fathers
6 educated to degree level	1 – 7+ years' experience

DISCUSSION

- Prison context shaped officer attitudes towards young offenders
- Over time officers shifted preconception that they needed to be strict and regimental
- Different and distinct as YOs versus similar and connected as humans
 - Paradoxes need to be identified and acknowledged
 - Shared experience promoted empathy and hope
- Hopeful and positive attitudes towards change can be fostered
- Adolescence as a temporary and malleable life stage
 - Consider YOs' developmental characteristics
- Relational framework was fraternal, with concerns that trust would be misused
- Reconcile dual responsibilities of security and rehabilitation using para-kin model

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