

First do no Harm

The studies described in this thesis were performed at Teylingereind Forensic Youth Centre, Sassenheim, The Netherlands, with permission of the Dutch Prison Service

VRIJE UNIVERSITEIT

**First do no Harm**

*Living group climate in secure juvenile correctional institutions*

**ACADEMISCH PROEFSCHRIFT**

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geboren te Groningen

promotoren: prof. dr. P.H. van der Laan  
prof. dr. G.J.J.M. Stams

## A Contribution to Statistics

Out of a hundred people

those who always know better -- fifty-two	cruel when forced by circumstances -- better not to know even ballpark figures,
doubting every step -- nearly all the rest,	wise after the fact -- just a couple more than wise before it, taking only things from life -- thirty (I wish I were wrong),
glad to lend a hand if it doesn't take too long -- as high as forty-nine,	hunched in pain, no flashlight in the dark -- eighty-three sooner or later,
always good because they can't be otherwise -- four, well maybe five,	righteous -- thirty-five, which is a lot,
able to admire without envy -- eighteen,	righteous and understanding -- three,
suffering illusions induced by fleeting youth -- sixty, give or take a few,	worthy of compassion -- ninety-nine,
not to be taken lightly -- forty and four,	mortal -- a hundred out of a hundred. Thus far this figure still remains unchanged.
living in constant fear of someone or something -- seventy-seven,	
capable of happiness -- twenty-something tops,	
harmless singly, savage in crowds -- half at least,	

~ Wislawa Szymborska<sup>1</sup> ~  
(from: *Poems: New and Selected*, trans. by S. Baranczak and C. Cavanagh)

<sup>1</sup> Overgenomen van internet [www.panhala.net](http://www.panhala.net)  
De auteur en de uitgever hebben geprobeerd in contact te komen met de rechthebbende zonder resultaat.



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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

Incarcerating adolescent delinquents and youth with severe behavioural problems in our society serves the goals of punishment, deterrence, treatment and rehabilitation (Liebling & Maruna, p. 18, 2005; Harvey, 2005a). Rehabilitation of juvenile delinquents should be a major goal of youth correctional interventions (Gatti, Tremblay, & Vitaro, 2009), especially from the perspective of children's rights (Grewcock, 2009), but the long term effects of these interventions are not promising yet (Biehal, 2010; Biehal et al., 2010; Kimberley & Huizinga, 2008; Lipsey, 2009; Parhar et al., 2008). Recidivism rates of youths within one year after detention vary, dependent on measurement type: approximately 40-55% based on re-arrest figures in the US, The Netherlands and Germany (Jehle, Albrecht, Hohmann-Fricke & Tetal, 2010; Nauta, 2008; Snyder & Sickmund, 2006; Wartna, Harbachi & van der Laan, 2005), although some researchers find substantial higher recidivism rates (Van Dam, 2005; Nauta 2008). Each year, approximately 6-7000 adolescents live from several weeks to several years in youth correctional facilities<sup>1</sup> in Holland<sup>2</sup>. Most of them live in groups, consisting of 8-12 persons, supervised by two to three group workers, called group treatment or 'sociotherapy'.

Incarcerating youth poses two main problems concerning adolescent development and treatment, which are addressed throughout this thesis. The first problem stems from locking up 10 to 12 deviant adolescents together in a small space, influencing each other negatively, which has been designated as 'deviancy training' or 'contagious behavior' (Dishion, Mc Cord, & Poulain, 1999; Osgood & Bridell, 2006). The second problem is concerned with keeping a balance between treatment and control. Adolescents with severe behavioural and psychiatric problems often resist discipline and can react with violence to their confinement (Ashkar & Kenny, 2008). Group workers are often threatened and physically assaulted, and can react by imposing strict control and wielding unnecessary power, which hampers any effort to successfully treat serious internalizing and externalizing behavior problems in delinquent youth (Lipsey, 2009).

Studies examining the detrimental effects of power imbalance both outside prison (Lammers, Stapel, & Galinsky, 2011) and inside prison (Ashkar & Kenny, 2008; Goffman, 1961; Zimbardo, 1971), as well as recent research on offender coercion

<sup>1</sup> Throughout this dissertation the word 'youth correctional facility' and 'youth prison' are also used to designate secure juvenile correctional institutions.

<sup>2</sup> Secure residential care capacity in Holland in september 2009 counted 1839 places in the penal system with approximately 5000 youth incarcerated yearly, but it is estimated capacity will have shrunk to 950 places in 2010 (Dutch Prison Service, 2010; JJI in getal; press release from 16-11-2010, [www.dji.nl](http://www.dji.nl)).

in treatment (Parhar, Wormith, Derkzen, & Beauregard, 2008) underscore that incarcerating juvenile delinquents in correctional institutions may aggravate the harm that has already been inflicted on them before entry into a secure juvenile correctional institution (Huizinga & Henry, 2008). Lammers, Stapel & Galinsky (2011) found people invested with power to impose strict moral standards on other people, but practicing less strict moral behavior themselves. Lammers & Stapel (2011) also conclude 'dehumanization' (e.g., attributing 'incurable badness' to others) is often used as a cognitive excuse for violence by professionals. Recent research by Lambert, Altheimer, Hogan & Barton-Bellessa (2011) shows correctional staff members with a punitive attitude to have less moral commitment. A punitive attitude by prison staff, leading to reactance and more repression in correctional institutes, is described in research by Baumeister (1999), Toch (2008), Toch and Kupers (2007) and Zimbardo (1971, 2004). A cycle of reactance and repression could lead to a negative and repressive group climate (Bugental, 2009; Patterson & Bank, 1989), which can harm adolescent development and diminish rehabilitation results (Lipsey, 2009). Therefore, this dissertation departs from the perspective of the historical oath doctors take to practice medicine, and which is believed to date back almost 2400 years, and could be applied to forensic youth services too: 'First do no harm' ('primum non nocere'). To avoid harm, forensic youth services face the difficult task of combining therapeutic flexibility with structure. Structure is needed to prevent chaos and anarchy at the living group, but too much structure can easily turn into repression.

Effects of individual treatment methods are considerably well researched (Garrido & Morales 2007; Lipsey, 2009; Pritikin 2010), but the influence of group treatment and living group climate are in need of further research (Marshall & Burton 2010). Trieschman, Whittaker & Brendto (1969) reached a similar conclusion in their seminal work 'the other twenty three hours' in the late sixties of the preceding millennium. The influence of living group climate on adolescent development could be considerable, as our social surrounding influences the way we perceive others and interacts with each other. Social Information Processing Theory (Crick & Dodge, 1994), a bio ecological view (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994), Transactional Theory (Sameroff 2009) and recent neurobiological research (Decety & Ickes 2010) all emphasize the influence of social surrounding on behaviour. As adolescents in secure correctional facilities cannot escape from the compulsory confinement with others, this influence could be even more pronounced, and may in extreme situations inflict the existential harm that has been voiced by the famous French philosopher and writer Jean Paul Sarte in his play "Huis Clos" (No exit, or Behind closed doors): "L'enfer, c'est les autres" (Hell is other people). This dissertation therefore examines the effects of the social environment in a secure juvenile correctional institution on juvenile delinquents from the perspective living group climate.

Perhaps one of the main problems in climate research is the assessment of group climate in secure correctional facilities. Existing prison instruments have been

mostly developed to assess satisfaction in adult prison. In adult prison research, few climate instruments are available, while psychometric qualities are not satisfactory (Moos, 1975; Toch, 1978). Whereas in most adult prisons social interaction between inmates is mostly limited to recreation and work and inmates spend a lot of time in their cells, this is different for most youth correctional facilities. Incarcerated adolescents often live in supervised living groups that should provide a structured, educational and rehabilitative environment. Living group climate and its consequences for rehabilitation in youth correctional facilities, however, are still underresearched (Marshall & Burton, 2010). This dissertation aims at making a start examining group living climate in youth correctional facilities.

### ***Aims and outline of this dissertation***

The first study examines the construct validity and reliability of an instrument, specifically designed to measure living group climate in a secure forensic setting. The instrument can be used as an assessment tool for therapeutic interventions that use group climate to improve outcomes in youth and adults receiving group treatment for behavioural problems.

The following cross-sectional studies presented in this dissertation should be considered as a first step in research on the effects of living group climate. Accordingly, results should be treated with considerable care, as causal inferences could only be obtained by larger studies and more rigorous research designs, such as longitudinal studies and randomised control trials in residential youth care, no matter how difficult to set up (Stams, 2011).

The second study examines the influence of living group climate on treatment motivation and internal locus of control of incarcerated adolescents. Effective treatment is thought to be dependent on treatment motivation. Notably, treatment motivation might even be the core of the 'responsivity principle' – one of the 'what works' principles of effective offender intervention – which states that correctional treatment programmes should be matched to offender characteristics, such as learning style, motivation and the offenders' living circumstances (Andrews & Bonta, 2003; Andrews et al., 1990). After release, adolescents need an internal locus of control to adequately cope with the difficulties that are associated with living in an adverse neighbourhood, being insufficiently prepared for the labour market, having diminished prospects due to conviction and 'having done time', which may result in unemployment and great disappointments (Ashkar & Kenny, 2008; Harvey, 2005b; Huizinga & Henry, 2008; Laub & Samson, 2003; Wikstrom & Butterworth, 2006).

Two other constructs, related to rehabilitation and development, are examined in studies three and four, namely, empathy development (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2004) and personality problems in connection with violent tendencies of adolescents at the living group (Gover, Mackenzie, & Armstrong, 2000). Study four examined the

influence of group climate in a Dutch youth correctional institution on empathy in a sample of incarcerated delinquent boys. Lack of empathy has been shown to be related to juvenile delinquency and recidivism (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2004). Empathy has also been shown to be positively associated with prosocial behaviour and moral development, and is thought to be vital for successful rehabilitation and recidivism reduction (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2006). Safety in juvenile correctional institutions is considered a main problem and violence occurs between staff and adolescents or among adolescents themselves (Harvey, 2007, Little, 2009, Toch & Kupers, 2007).

The fifth study examined the influence of group climate in a Dutch youth prison on personality and self reported violent behavior at the living group in a sample of incarcerated delinquent boys. Often, criminal youth suffer from psychiatric problems and an instable personality (neuroticism) and a long history of violence on the streets (Anderson, 2003), sometimes called 'importational problems' (Gover, Mackenzie, & Armstrong, 2000). These importational problems together with a repressive climate could cause reactance and violence inside youth prison. As violence inside youth prison could lead to a rapidly deteriorating group climate and mutual distrust between inmates and group workers this could possibly lead to suboptimal treatment outcomes and recidivism.

Adolescents in secure care often point at differences in professional behavior by group workers and differential justice (Little, 1990). As incarcerated adolescents depend on group workers for daily activities and therapy, these differences in professional behavior could cause uncertainty and anxiety in adolescents, aggravating existing psychiatric and personality problems. Insight in the quality of living group climate could be of major help to strengthen their professional behavior. This could also help group workers avoiding the pitfalls of a coercive cycle in which aggression by inmates stimulates punitive behavior by group workers, resulting in a deteriorating living group climate (Patterson & Bank, 1998). The final study of this dissertation examined the professional attitude of group workers in a Dutch youth prison.

The concluding chapter of this dissertation summarizes and discusses the results of the six consecutive studies, and provides practice implications and directions for further research.

The results of this study promoted a new research line on living group climate at Leiden University of Applied Sciences and Amsterdam University. Currently 23 institutions for secure residential youthcare are participating in a longitudinal study in the Netherlands.

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## Chapter 2

# Measuring Group Climate in Prison<sup>3</sup>

### Abstract

The present study examines the construct validity and reliability of the Prison Group Climate Instrument (PGCI) in a sample of 77 adolescents placed in a Dutch youth prison and 49 adult prisoners living in a Dutch psychiatric prison with a therapeutic living group structure. Confirmatory factor analysis of a four-factor model – with ‘repression’, ‘support’, ‘growth’ and ‘group atmosphere’ as first order factors – and ‘overall group climate’ as a second order factor showed an adequate fit to the data, indicating construct validity of the PGCI. Cronbach’s alpha reliability coefficients were good for all factors. The PGCI is a parsimonious instrument, enabling future research on group climate in youth prisons and secure forensic psychiatric institutions. The instrument can be used as an assessment tool for judicial interventions that use group climate to improve outcomes in delinquent youth and adult delinquents receiving treatment for psychiatric problems.

### Introduction

In systematic reviews of the effectiveness of correctional treatment, questions have been raised about the effects of incarceration and coercion on successful reintegration (Andrews et al., 1990; Garrido & Morales, 2007; Gatti, Tremblay & Vitaro, 2009; Huizinga & Henry, 2008; Parhar, Wormith, Derkzen & Beauregard, 2008; Pritikin, 2009). Some researchers argue that the failure to reintegrate into society after incarceration is due to the problems delinquents experienced before they entered prison (‘import hypothesis’), and that a prison stay has no substantial effect on behavior after detention (‘deep freeze hypothesis’) (Liebling & Maruna, 2005; Loughran et al., 2009). These same researchers contend that the degree to which reintegration is successful not only depends on initial risks for maladjustment, but also on the availability of efficacious aftercare, the avoidance of environmental risks, such as dangerous neighbourhoods and antisocial friends, and the presence of protective factors in the domains of relationships, formal education, work and housing.

The ‘import’ and ‘deep freeze’ hypotheses have been criticized for neglecting the susceptibility of people to their environment. For instance, research in the field of social neuroscience has shown that a stimulating environment can result in bet-

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<sup>3</sup> Van der Helm, G.H.P., Stams, G.J.J.M., & Van der Laan, P.H. (2011). Measuring Group Climate in a Forensic setting. *The Prison Journal*, 91, 158-177.

ter executive functioning of the brain, more advanced social cognition and social learning (Gazzola, Aziz Zadeh, & Keysers, 2006; Iacoboni & Dapretto, 2006; Vignemont & Singer, 2006), less impulsivity and fear (Wykes et al., 2002), and improved ability to show feelings and empathy (Corrigan 2004, Jolliffe & Farrington, 2004; Wicker et al., 2003). Neurohormones connected with aggression (Fishbein & Shepard, 2006; Nelson & Trainor, 2007; Popma & Raine, 2006) are often produced by an environment that is characterised by stress, fear and aggression. In addition, there is empirical evidence showing that stress, fear and aggression, being induced by the immediate social environment, are associated with lower levels of oxytocine and higher levels of vasopressine and cortisol, which may engender negative emotions, hostility bias, antisocial behavior, and low social involvement (Tremblay, 2008; for a review see: Van Goozen, Fairchild, & Snoek, 2007).

Some researchers found empirical support for the criminogenic effects of incarceration (Camp & Gaes, 2005; Gatti et al., 2009; Kimberly & Huizinga, 2008; Liebling & Maruna, 2008; Osgood & O'Neill Briddell, 2006). These criminogenic effects of incarceration may be ascribed to the negative impact of imprisonment on moral development (Stams et al., 2006), socialization into criminality during imprisonment, exposure to the prison's antisocial subculture, strengthening of deviant bonds (Osgood, O'Neill Briddell, 2006), labeling (Huizinga & Henry, 2008), weakening of protective social bonds and brutalization (for a review, see Pritikin, 2008).

It is plausible to suggest that the occurrence of a criminogenic effect depends on the degree to which efficacious treatment targeting criminological needs is available during detention. For instance, Garrido & Morales (2007) conducted a systematic review, and found reduced recidivism rates in incarcerated serious criminal adolescents who had received cognitive behavioral treatment. In most adult prisons and some youth prisons, however, rehabilitation and treatment are almost absent and (repressive) control is the main concern. Otherwise, in psychiatric detention centers for adult offenders and most youth prisons rehabilitation and treatment are considered of primary importance and (repressive) control of secondary importance (Clark Craig, 2004; Drost, 2008). The delicate balance between control and flexibility that is required for successful rehabilitation or treatment in secure forensic facilities<sup>4</sup> is probably one of the main factors that shape institutional climate<sup>5</sup>. Flexibility is needed to practice newly acquired social competences at the living group, whereas too much reliance on repressive control fosters distrust and damages (therapeutic) relationships between staff and inmates (De Dreu, Giebels & Van der Vliert on the effects of punitive power, 1998).

<sup>4</sup> A secure forensic facility differs from other residential settings by the 'detention' aspect. Inmates are incarcerated and treatment is mostly enforced, issuing from criminal law. There is the possible use of force in pursuing organizational goals.

<sup>5</sup> The definition of climate, used in this article is: "those characteristics that distinguish the organization from other organizations and that influence the behavior of people in the organization" (Gilmer, 1966, p.57 in: Hoy, 1990).

There is ample empirical evidence showing that the prison in general is a stressful and fear- and aggression-eliciting environment, starting from the seminal work of Goffman on 'total institutions (1957), the 'pains of imprisonment' research in 1958 by Sykes (1958), the climate research by Hans Toch (Toch, 2008; Toch & Kuipers, 2007) to recent studies of prison climate (Bell, Ridolfi, Finly, & Lacy, 2009; Harvey, 2005; Holman & Ziedenberg, 2006; Van Binsbergen, 2003; Ross, Diamond, Liebling, & Saylor, 2008; Van der Helm, Klapwijk, Stams, & van der Laan, 2009). Recently, White, Shi, Hirschfield, Mun and Loeber (2009) found elevated levels of depression and anxiety among incarcerated boys compared to released- and non-incarcerated criminal boys.

### ***Climate research in adult prisons***

In the seventies a lot of climate research was done in adult prisons. For example, Moos (1975) developed the Correctional Institutions Environment Scale (CIES) in the early seventies to assess three dimensions that had been suggested by Campbell in 1970, namely: 'autonomy', 'structure' and 'support'. He also developed the Group Environment Scale (GES) for use in psychiatric wards (Moos & Houts, 1986). This instrument contains three meaningful dimensions: 'relations within group', 'growth' and 'group structure'. However, validity and reliability of the GES proved to be unsatisfactory (Wright & Boudouris, 1986). The Ward Atmosphere Scale (Moos, 1974) and the Sheltered Care Environment Scale or abbreviated SCES (Moos & Lemke, 1992) were also developed by Moos and fellow researchers. Kevin Wright (1985) based the Prison Environment Inventory (PEI) on the seminal work of Hans Toch on prison climate, and added the dimensions of 'privacy', 'safety', 'activity', 'social stimulation' and 'freedom' to the original three Moos dimensions.

Besides the CIES and PEI, other frequently used instruments in adult prison research are the Prison Social Climate Survey (Camp, Gaes, Klein-Saffron, Daggett, & Saylor, 2002; Ross et al., 2008), the Dutch Patient Satisfaction Scale (Timmerman & Lucker, 2006), and Measuring the Quality of Prison Life scale (MQPL Ross et al., 2008). These instruments assess more or less the same dimensions, though often naming scales differently and using slightly different items (appendix 1). In these instruments that assess climate in adult forensic settings, 'support', 'growth' ('activity', 'social stimulation' and 'autonomy'), 'atmosphere' and 'repression' are recurring dimensions (appendices 1 and 2).

These four dimensions make up the (adult) prison climate. If the 'support' dimension is well taken care of, group workers are responsive to the needs of the inmates, and they invest in building positive relationships (Bottoms, 2003; Ross et al., 2008). 'Growth' pertains to facilitation of leaning and preparation for a meaningful life both within and outside prison. The 'atmosphere' dimension concerns the degree to which the physical as well as the social environment foster feelings of safety and trust among inmates. Features of 'repression' are harsh and unfair control, a weak

organizational structure, no flexibility, incremental rules, little privacy, extreme boredom and (frequent) humiliation of inmates (Akers, 1977; Toch, 2007, 2008).

The prison climate may be regarded as 'open' when support is high, opportunities for growth are evident, and the prison is a safe and orderly structured environment where flexibility is in balance with the organizational needs for control and repression is minimal (Clark Craig, 2004; Ule, Schram, Riedl, & Cason on trust and control, 2009). In contrast, the prison climate should be regarded as closed when support from staff is (almost) absent and opportunities for 'growth' are minimal. A closed prison climate is also reflected by a grim and uninviting atmosphere (e.g., lack of safety and boredom) and high repression, including incremental rules, little privacy, and (frequent) humiliation of inmates (Harvey, 2005; Irwin & Owen, 2005; Liebling & Maruna, 2005; Little, 1990; Wright & Goodstein, 1989).

Although the relation between an open or closed prison climate and recidivism still needs to be empirically confirmed (Liebling & Maruna, 2005; Ross et al., 2008), a focus on treatment and rehabilitation instead of repression has yielded promising results. For instance, Beech & Hamilton-Giachritsis (2005) found a relation between therapeutic alliance within groups of sex offenders and diminished pro-offending attitudes, and Van der Helm et al., (2009) found a relation between an open climate, better treatment motivation and a higher internal locus of control. Recent systematic reviews by Garrido and Morales (2007) and Parhar et al., (2008) found evidence for positive effects of cognitive-behavioral treatment and multi-focus programs for serious and violent adolescent offenders.

### ***Prison climate versus group climate in a secure forensic setting***

Whereas in most adult prisons social interaction between inmates is mostly limited to recreation and work and inmates spend a lot of time in their cells, this is different for most youth prisons and detention centres for offenders requiring psychiatric treatment. Incarcerated adolescents and delinquents placed in psychiatric residential treatment facilities often live in special units or supervised living groups that should provide a structured, educational and rehabilitative environment (Harvey, 2005; Janzing & Kerstens, 2000). The use of social interaction as a therapeutic tool in these special units or supervised living groups makes it imperative to focus on group climate instead of prison climate (Saylor, 1984).

As there is currently no instrument available to assess group climate in secure forensic settings, the present study examines the construct validity and reliability of a new instrument, the Prison Group Climate Instrument (PGCI), which has been developed to assess group climate in youth prisons and secure residential treatment facilities where inmates reside in living groups. The Prison Group Climate Instrument is based on the four dimensions that constitute (adult) prison climate:

‘repression’, ‘support’, ‘growth’ and ‘group atmosphere’<sup>6</sup>. These four dimensions together are responsible for the quality of forensic group climate.

The PGCI differs from existing prison climate instruments in that all items are meaningful in the context of living groups, and mainly focus on social interaction and treatment. A number of items are relevant from the perspective of international research on treatment effectiveness (Andrews & Bonta, 2007; Asay & Lambert, 1999) and pertain to support delivered by the staff. One of the most important ingredients of support, especially in group based forensic facilities, where group workers and inmates interact on a regular basis, is responsiveness of group workers to the specific needs of the inmates, which features prominently in the ‘Risks-Needs-Responsivity’ (RNR) principle of successful rehabilitation (Langton, 2007). The RNR principle holds that the intensity of the behavioral intervention matches the risk for recidivism, that treatment should target criminogenic needs, and that treatment should be fine-tailored to the learning style, motivation, abilities and strength of the offender (Andrews & Bonta, 2007). The ‘support’ items also pertain to the way group workers act professionally regarding fairness and flexibility (as opposed to strict control, Clark Craig, 2004).

In the present study, construct validity of the PGCI will be assessed by means of confirmatory factor analysis in a sample of adolescents placed in a Dutch youth prison and 49 adult prisoners living in a Dutch psychiatric prison with a therapeutic living group structure. Internal consistency reliability will be established by computing Cronbach’s alpha.

## Method

### *Participants*

The first group of participants consisted of  $n = 77$  serious and violent juvenile offenders ( $M = 15.4$  years of age,  $SD = 1.64$ ),  $n = 61$  boys and  $n = 16$  girls, residing in a Dutch youth prison. The mean incarceration period was 14 months ( $SD = 1.67$ ). The second group of participants consisted of  $n = 49$  adult inmates ( $n = 41$  males and  $n = 8$  females) of a Dutch psychiatric prison. The mean age was  $= 34.6$  years ( $SD = 2.63$ ), with a mean incarceration period of 9.5 years ( $SD = 6.7$ ).

### *Prison Group Climate Instrument (PGCI)*

Items from the PGCI were derived from existing instruments measuring prison climate and were adapted for specific use at the living group level. The PGCI consists of 63 items rated on five-point Likert-type scales, ranging from 1 = ‘I do not agree’ to 5 = ‘I totally agree’. Each item belongs to only one of the four scales for group cli-

<sup>6</sup> ‘Atmosphere’ is used here as a more proximal and temporal variable, and part of the overall ‘climate’ construct, pertaining to the ‘feeling’ of the place (Hoy, 1990).

mate. The support scale (19 items) assesses professional behavior and in particular the responsiveness of group workers towards specific needs of the inmates. Paying attention to inmates, taking complaints seriously, respect and trust are important characteristics of support. An example of a support item is: 'group workers treat me with respect'. The growth scale (12 items) assesses learning perceptions, hope for the future and giving meaning to prison stay. An example for a growth item is: 'I learn the right things here'. The repression scale (18 items) assesses perceptions of strictness and control, unfair and haphazard rules and lack of flexibility at the living group. An example of a structure item is: 'You have to ask permission for everything here'. The group atmosphere scale (14 items) assesses the way inmates treat and trust each other, feelings of safety towards each other, being able to get some peace of mind and having enough daylight and fresh air. An example of a relationship item is 'We trust each other here'.

### ***Statistical analysis***

Construct validity and internal consistency reliability of the PGCI were examined by means of confirmatory factor analysis in Mplus (Muthén & Muthén, 1998) and the computation of Cronbach's alpha in SPSS, respectively. A multi-factor model was specified in which each item loaded on only one factor, allowing reverse-worded, very similarly worded items (e.g. "We take initiative together" and "Taking initiative is welcomed by group workers") or items prone to social desirability to correlate. Both the model's Chi-Square and fit-indices, which are non-sensitive to sample size (CFI, TLI, and RMSEA), were used to evaluate model fit (Kline, 2005). The following fit index cut-off values are indicative of good model fit: CFI > .90, TLI > .90, and RMSEA < .05 (Kline, 2005). Whereas a non-significant Chi-Square indicates exact model fit, a ratio between the  $X^2$  statistic and the degrees of freedom (df) that is lower than 2.5 indicates a close fit to the data (Hu & Bentler, 1999). To account for non-independence (delinquents are nested into living groups) and non-normality, we chose to use the robust MLR maximum likelihood estimation procedure (Muthen & Muthen, 1998). A modification index, giving the expected drop in Chi-Square if a parameter in question is freely estimated, was used to improve model fit. We thus identified parameters that could improve model fit by freeing those parameters. Examples of such parameters were items loading on more than one factor or the wrong factor. In stead of freeing those parameters, we removed them. Further improvement of model fit was achieved by removing items that did not load significantly on their respective factors.

## **Results**

Confirmatory factor analysis was performed on all 63 PGCI-items. Table 1 presents the final factor solution, showing the items and the corresponding factor loadings that were all significant. The model that best fitted the data contained four first order factors – 'support' (14 items), 'growth' (9 items), 'group atmosphere'



(7 items) and 'repression' (7 items) – and a second order factor for overall climate (37 items). The best-fitting model showed a satisfactory fit to the data: RMSEA=0.048, CFI= 0.91; TLI=0.90,  $\chi^2(586) = 748.9, p < 0.00$ . The root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) was lower than 0.05, the ratio between the  $\chi^2$  statistic and the degrees of freedom was 1.28 and lower than 2.5, and the centrality fit index (CFI) and Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) were larger than 0.90. 'Support', 'growth', 'group atmosphere' and 'repression' proved to be reliable, with internal consistency reliabilities of  $\alpha > .77$  (Table 1). Cronbach's alpha for the overall climate scale was .82 (4 items), and was a summation of the four subscales divided by four.

## Discussion

This study examined the validity and reliability of the Prison Group Climate Instrument (PGCI) in a group of juvenile delinquents placed in a Dutch youth prison and a group of adult prisoners living in a Dutch psychiatric prison with a therapeutic living group structure. Evidence for construct validity and good internal consistency reliability was found in a confirmatory factor analysis and a series of reliability analyses, showing that 'support', 'growth', 'group atmosphere', 'repression' and the 'overall climate' scale of the PGCI can be used to validly and reliably assess group climate within prison.

From the original 63 items, only 37 survived in the final solution. Some deleted items pertained to security staff and guards, which play a less prominent role in group based forensic facilities compared to normal adult prisons (most security tasks are delegated to group workers, like restraining measures and internal investigation of inmates after a visit). Other 'classic' prison items concerned privacy, noise from other cells, cleanliness, food quality, which play a less prominent role in a group climate instrument that mainly focuses on social interaction.

The 'support' and 'growth' dimension loaded highest on the 'overall climate' scale, which indicates that support and growth are the most important indicators of group climate within prison. Support provided by group workers or staff, which builds on meaningful relationships (Ward, Melser & Yates, 2007) and responsiveness to the specific needs of each individual inmate, sets the groundwork for successful rehabilitation according to the 'Risks-Needs-Responsivity' principle (Andrews & Bonta, 2007; Andrews, Bonta, & Wormith, 2006; Mc Guire, 2004). Growth is intimately connected with the concept of 'learning', and reflects the need of inmates to give meaning to life in prison. This construct also features prominently in research on adult prison climate (Moos, 1975) and pertains to the criminogenic 'Needs' part of the RNR principle, as the target is improvement in domains that are associated with desistance, such as education, work and relationships (Langdon, 2007).

'Group atmosphere' and 'repression' had relatively lower loadings on the overall climate scale, and also proved to be less reliable than the 'support' and 'growth' factors. Lower reliabilities for the 'group atmosphere' and 'repression' scales can simply be explained by the fact that these scales contain fewer items, but also to the heterogeneity among the items (Streiner, 2003). The items of the 'group atmosphere' scale deal with positive relationships between inmates, experiences of safety and quality of the physical environment, and 'repression' is composed of items that also differ widely in content, assessing compliance, (lack of) trust, understanding, and (lack of) stimulation.

The PGCI instrument could be important not only for measuring the positive and therapeutic effects of group climate, but also for maintaining safety and control in the living group. Competition and aggression among inmates and workers are often characteristic of a closed and repressive climate, where group workers tend to shift from support to control and adolescents display reactance or try to 'play the system' with decreased treatment motivation as a result (Harambolos & Holborne, 1995; Harvey, 2005, Van der Helm et al., 2009). A predominantly negative group climate, with a lack of responsiveness from group workers, insufficient possibilities for growth, a grim and competitive group atmosphere and violence among the incarcerated delinquents and staff may have great consequences for the safety of both the inmates and workers (Kury & Smartt, 2002; Maitland & Sluder, 1998). Notably, the instrument can also be used as a tool for assessing safe work conditions and training purposes at the workplace.

The four climate dimensions of the PGCI, designated as support, growth, atmosphere, and repression, probably reflect the difficult task of group workers to combine therapeutic flexibility with control. The overall climate scale of the PGCI includes all four dimensions and is bipolar. At the 'positive' end of the scale the prison climate should be regarded as open and therapeutic, whereas at the negative end of the scale the prison climate should be regarded as closed and extremely repressive, hampering treatment of any form. The PGCI instrument is different from traditional prison climate instruments to the extent that it is sensitive to the balance between on the one hand 'therapeutic flexibility and openness' and on the other hand 'restrictive control and closeness'.

There are some limitations of this study that need to be acknowledged.

First, the small sample size and the inclusion of only two prisons hamper the generalizability of the study findings. The sample size was too small to examine measurement invariance in a multi-group factor analysis that distinguishes between the juvenile and adult offenders, testing the equality of the factor solution in these different groups.



As the present study only provides preliminary evidence for the validity and reliability of the PGCI, results should be replicated in a large sample study that enables a robust test of measurement invariance in a multi-group confirmatory factor analysis, focusing on possible differences between male and female inmates, different age groups, and between youth prisons and psychiatric prisons for adult offenders. A future validity study of the PGCI should also examine convergent, divergent and criterion validity of the PGCI, including concurrent and predictive validity. Concurrent validity can be assessed by relating group climate to antisocial behavior during detention, whereas predictive validity can be established by predicting recidivism from differences in group climate.

Despite the preliminary status of the evidence for the validity and reliability of the PGCI, the newly developed PGCI is unique to the extent that it measures group climate in prisons and accounts for the balance between treatment and control. Therefore, the PGCI has the potential to be an important instrument for studies examining prison climate and research on treatment effectiveness of judicial interventions targeting rehabilitation of delinquent youth and adult delinquents in secure forensic psychiatric institutions.

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**Appendix 1: Climate Instruments for Adult Prisons**

<b>Instrument</b>	<b>Reported Validity/reliability</b>	<b>scales</b>	<b>references</b>
1. Prison Social Climate Survey	good	Privacy Safety Structure Support Emotional feedback Social stimulation Activity Freedom	Camp et al., 2002
2. Correctional Environment Scale (CIES)	Doubtful	Relations Growth and development Systems maintenance	Moos, 1975 Wright & Boudouris, 1982
3. Group Environment Scale (GES)	Doubtful	Relations within group Personal growth Structure group	Moos & Houts, 1986, Wright & Boudouris, 1982
4. Prison Environment Inventory (PEI)  And	acceptable	Toch's 8 environmental concerns: Privacy Safety	Wright, 1985
5. Prison Preference Inventory	Doubtful	Structure Support Emotional feedback Social Stimulation Activity Freedom	Toch, 1977 Summer & Dear, 2003
6. Sheltered Care Environmental Scale (SCES)	good	Conflict Cohesion Independence Control Leadership Freedom of choice	Moos & Lemke, 1992
7. PTV (Dutch) Patient satisfaction in a forensic setting	good	Treatment Surroundings Attitude group workers Response to complaints Temporarily leave Leisure Social contacts	Timmerman & Lucke, 2006

First do no Harm

Instrument	Reported Validity/reliability	scales	references
8. Measuring the Quality of Prison Life (MQPL)	acceptable	Respect Humanity Support Relations Trust Fairness Order Safety Well being Development Decency Power Prisoner social life Compliance Belonging Quality of life	Ross et al., 2008
9. Ward Atmosphere scale	good	Involvement Support Spontaneity, Autonomy, Practical orientation Personal problems Orientation Anger and aggression, Order and organization, Program clarity and staff control.	Moos, 1974
10. State Prison Inmate Survey	good	Inmate work and employment Security Education & training Counseling & treatment Visit and outside contacts Classification and diagnosis Physical structure	Akers, 1977

**Appendix 2: Climate Properties Described in the Instruments**

<b>Climate property (scale)</b>	<b>Scale properties</b>
1. Repression	Lack of safety, control, order, and systems maintenance; lack of privacy, justice and fairness. Problems with program clarity; physical structure mainly constructed for control; limited or no visits at all and limited outside contacts (no leave). Forcing not followed by adequate problem solving.
2. support	Feedback and communication; activity and stimulation; positive attitude group workers coupled with consistent behavior; respect and decency; trust, involvement; innovative leadership; practical orientation; spontaneity; personal problem solving; relations and companionship; counseling and diagnosis.
3. growth	Development; independence and autonomy; choice; wellbeing; power; belonging; involvement; personal problems; activities; program quality.
4. atmosphere	Companionship; communication; social cohesion and stimulation; leisure activities; social contacts; trust and social life; involvement and respect; fresh air and adequate surroundings.

Table 1: Results from Confirmatory Factor Analysis of the PGCI

Item no.	Scale/item	Standardised estimates first order factors	Standardised estimates second order factor
<b>Support (alpha = .90)</b>			<b>.92</b>
V1	Group workers stimulate me	.83	
V2	When I complain about something, group workers take it seriously	.76	
V3	Group workers treat me with respect, even if I am angry	.70	
V4	when I have a problem, there is always somebody I can turn to	.69	
V5	Group workers pay attention to me and respect my feelings	.68	
V6	Group workers treat me with respect	.66	
V7	There are always enough people to help me	.62	
V8	I trust the group workers	.58	
V9	Complaints are being taken seriously	.58	
V10	We regularly discuss things with the group workers	-.58	
V11	Group workers don't have enough time for me	.55	
V12	Taking initiative is welcomed by group workers	.49	
V13	Group workers show respect to me	.42	
V14	When I complain about something, group workers take it seriously		
<b>Growth (alpha = .88)</b>			<b>.80</b>
V1	What I am learning here is helping me	.86	
V2	Group workers allow me some space	.79	
V3	I feel I am making progress here	.79	
V4	I work at my future here	.72	
V5	Treatment is helpful for me	.71	
V6	What I learn here will help me when I'm outside	.64	
V7	I learn the right things here	.66	
V8	I know what I am working at	.52	
V9	Life is meaningful here	.48	
<b>group atmosphere (alpha = .76)</b>			<b>.79</b>
V1	I feel fine here	.79	
V2	We have enough fresh air and daylight	.66	
V3	The atmosphere is good at the group	.62	
V4	We trust each other here	.50	
V5	I get some peace of mind at the group	.41	
V6	You can trust everybody here	.41	
V7	I always feel safe at the group	.38	
<b>Repression (alpha = .76)</b>			<b>-.78</b>
V1	You always have to comply with requests of the group workers	.95	
V2	We have nothing to do here	.82	
V3	These surroundings make me depressive	.82	
V4	I do not trust group workers	.76	
V5	You better give in and do what group workers tell you to do	.70	
V6	They don't understand me here	.66	
V7	You have to ask permission for everything	.61	



## Chapter 3

# What works<sup>7</sup> for juvenile prisoners: the role of group climate in a youth prison<sup>7</sup>

### Abstract

The Dutch juvenile justice system locks up an increasing number of adolescent boys and girls at a cost of approximately €250,000 for each inmate annually (Boone & Moerings, 2007; Tonry, 2005). Questions have been raised, however, about the cost-effectiveness of treatment in closed institutions. This study, with a sample of 49 adolescents residing in a Dutch youth prison, examined the role of group climate in establishing and maintaining treatment effects. Results show that an open group climate, with group workers paying more attention to the psychological needs of the adolescents and giving them 'space' to experiment, predicted the feeling of the inmates as 'being understood by the group workers'. This perception of being understood was associated with greater treatment motivation and higher internal locus of control. A positive role of prison workers in the living group turned out to be a key factor in building an open group climate and subsequently higher internal locus of control and greater treatment motivation.

### Summary of policy and practice implication

- Group workers should be aware of the specific limitations that juvenile delinquents may have, in particular with regard to their possibilities of active problem-solving and long term planning. The inmates should therefore be supported in pursuing short-term and self-concordant goals that have a positive meaning for them. This is thought to result in feelings of self-efficacy.
- Prison inmates tend to be more sensitive to reward than to punishment. Reward fosters the inmates' self esteem, internal locus of control and sets the groundwork for an open group climate.
- Whereas an open group climate is a prerequisite for the establishment of treatment motivation, a closed group climate is counter-productive for any treatment that inmates receive during their incarceration.
- Adolescents need possibilities to explore and learn. Group workers should facilitate exploration and discuss what went wrong in an empathic way, acting both as a secure haven and a secure base.

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<sup>7</sup> Van der Helm, G.H.P., Klapwijk, M., Stams, G.J.J.M., & Van der Laan, P.H. (2009). 'What Works' for juvenile prisoners: The role of group climate in a youth prison. *Journal of Children's Services*, 4(2), 36-48.

- The selection and training of group workers should therefore be based on their professional ability to be responsive to incarcerated adolescents.

**Key words:** youth crime, juvenile delinquency, group climate, youth prison

## Introduction

In recent systematic reviews of the effectiveness of correctional treatment in reducing recidivism among juvenile delinquents questions have been raised concerning the negative effects of incarceration and coercion (Garrido & Morales, 2007; Parhar et al., 2008). Next to adequacy of treatment during imprisonment, living circumstances after release and quality of aftercare, it is argued that group climate in prison is an important factor affecting treatment outcome, although the relationship with reduced recidivism rates still needs to be empirically confirmed (Liebling & Maruna, 2005). Group climate (sometimes called 'environment') refers to the inmates' and workers' perceptions of particular aspects of the culture – that is, the way one ought to think, feel and behave in an environment or situation (after Schein, 1993). The present study examines how group climate influences treatment motivation and locus of control (internal and external) in 49 adolescent inmates staying in a youth prison and who were incarcerated for on average 18 months. It compares their locus of control with that of non-incarcerated serious delinquents and non-delinquent adolescents.

Effective treatment is thought to be dependent on treatment motivation. Notably, treatment motivation might even be the core of the 'responsivity principle' – one of the 'what works' principles of effective offender intervention – which states that correctional treatment programmes should be matched to offender characteristics, such as learning style, motivation and the offenders' living circumstances (Andrews & Bonta, 2003; Andrews et al., 1990). Incarcerated juvenile delinquents need a high level of treatment motivation in order to be able to profit from interventions targeting their coping behaviours that are linked with behavioural adjustment both within and outside prison. More specifically, after release, adolescents need an internal locus of control to adequately cope with the difficulties that are associated with living in an adverse neighbourhood, being insufficiently prepared for the labour market, having diminished prospects due to conviction and 'having done time', which may result in unemployment and great disappointments (Laub & Samson, 2003; Harvey, 2005; Wikstrom & Butterworth, 2006; Ashkar & Kenny, 2008; Huizinga & Henry, 2008).

Locus of control refers to the extent to which individuals believe that they can control events that might have an effect on them. Individuals scoring high on internal locus of control attribute success or failure primarily to their own behaviour. Individuals scoring high on external locus of control attribute success or failure

primarily to factors outside themselves. Juvenile offenders are often found to have a greater external locus of control, which is related to a denial of their own responsibility for anti-social behaviour and the inability to cope with life, making them more vulnerable to low self-esteem and depression (Page & Scalora, 2002).

A lot of attention has recently been given to the effectiveness of treatment inside prisons. Although a systematic review showed that the effects of correctional treatment for incarcerated adults were almost zero (Parhar et al., 2008), Garrido & Morales (2007) reported promising treatment effects for juvenile delinquents residing in prisons, especially in the case of cognitive-based interventions. Garrido & Morales explain these contradictory results by suggesting that adolescents are more susceptible to treatment in general. It should be noted, however, that treatment or method/technique itself is thought to be responsible for no more than 15% the outcome variance, whereas relationship factors, hope and expectancy, and what the client brings to treatment account for 30%, 15%, and 40% of the outcome variance, respectively (Asay & Lambert, 1999). Therefore, it is plausible to suggest that the increased susceptibility to treatment of adolescents, as suggested by Garrido & Morales, may be largely affected by extra-treatment factors, including the group climate in youth prison.

In Holland, imprisoned adolescents spend their time in living groups consisting of 8-12 prisoners. Besides attending school they receive treatment for only a few hours a week. These treatments cover a wide variety of methods but are mostly cognitive based. Compared to the time at school and in treatment, incarcerated juvenile delinquents spend most of their time in the living group (usually they can't leave this group, and recreational facilities are minimal). Research suggests that the influence of group climate and the relationship with the group workers is crucial for the way these youngsters develop, for their views and attachment to the outside world, and for the effects of imprisonment on their hopes and expectations for the future (Harvey, 2005).

In the literature on residential treatment an open and supportive group climate is often contrasted with a closed or repressive group climate (Janzing & Kerstens, 2002; Toch, 2007, 2008). In an open climate equality within the boundaries of the institution and mutual respect are important goals. Proper care and attention for the adolescents is provided for in the interaction between inmates and staff. It should be noted that an open group climate is aligned with one of the most important pedagogical aims of the juvenile youth prison, namely, facilitating a successful re-integration into society through restoring the bond with society that was damaged by the criminal offence.

A closed or repressive group climate is often thought to provide a secure environment for adolescents with severe mental and behavioural problems (eg. conduct disorder), who may need a quiet, extremely structured and predictable environ-

ment to recover. It is questionable, however, whether a closed group climate can be a secure environment, as it may also be characterised by an extremely asymmetric balance of power, great dependency on staff, lack of mutual respect, emphasis on incremental and haphazard rules and punishment ('chickenshit rules'), boredom, hopelessness, fear and lack of protection (Little, 1990; Harvey, 2005; Liebling in Liebling & Maruna, 2008).

Severe stress emanating from being locked up could lead to either 'freeze' or 'fight' reactions (Gray, 2003). Freeze reactions are often associated with dependency, uncertainty and lack of predictable punishment. This can result in hopelessness and depression, which may be considered as symptoms of 'learned helplessness' (Maier & Seligmann, 1976). Short-term symptoms are often withdrawal reactions, auto-mutilation and suicidal thoughts (Little, 1990; Harvey, 2005). Lack of agency and helplessness negatively affect important developmental tasks, such as experimenting with social situations, adaptation to the outside world, flexibility and self-governance (Neustatter & Gonis, 2003; Liebling & Maruna, 2005). Institutionalisation, routinisation and boredom often lead to a developmental standstill (Harvey, 2005; Liebling, 2008). Loss of agency often results in an external locus of control (Irwin & Owen, 2005), while depression and feelings of hopelessness and despondency can have a negative effect on treatment motivation.

Fight reactions (aggression) are often consistent with a climate that characterises life on the street (Anderson, 2001; Wilkinson, 2001; Brezina, 2004; de Jong, 2005), a survival mentality with a cynical world view, delays in moral judgment (Stams et al., 2006) and a group identity based on deviance (Emler & Reicher, 1995; Warr, 2006). This deviant group identity serves to counteract feelings of discrimination, inadequacy and low self-esteem (Greve, 2001; Greve & Enzmann, 2003; De Jong, 2005). A closed or repressive climate can strengthen this worldview in the sense that others are seen as responsible for the person's anti-social behaviour (external locus of control and inadequate moral judgment) and one needs to be very suspicious of others' motives (Marchand & Vonk, 2005). Treatment motivation can be very low through defiance and external locus of control (Page & Scalora, 2002).

In present day Western society, the individual adolescent must take responsibility for his/her own future (Feldman, 2008). This requires a strong sense of agency, active coping abilities, self-control, social skills and competent participation in social institutions (eg. Hirschi, 1977). However, several authors argue that learned helplessness, non-adaptive locus of control and a cynical and defensive worldview, which may be attributed to the loss of agency inflicted by adverse correctional treatment, could impede the successful reintegration of juvenile delinquents into society (Halliday & Grahams, 2000; Harvey, 2005; Irwin & Owen, 2005; Huizinga & Henry, 2008; Toch, 2008). Whereas a closed group climate fosters dependency and lack of agency, an open group climate facilitates the development of an internal locus of control through the promotion of autonomy and responsibility, which

subsequently might be expected to have a positive influence on the propensity to trust others and on motivation for treatment. This may contribute to a more positive view of the world, a stronger social bond to society (eg. school and work) and confidence in the ability to change.

The aim of our study was to assess group climate, internal and external locus of control, treatment motivation and the way group workers could influence or shape group climate (Figure 1). First, we hypothesised that incarcerated juvenile delinquents would score lower on internal locus of control and higher on external locus of control than non-incarcerated delinquents receiving ambulatory treatment and a non-delinquent comparison group that was matched with the incarcerated delinquent group on age, distribution of boys and girls and level of formal education. Second, we hypothesised that a more open and less closed group climate would be associated with more adaptive control (higher internal locus of control, and lower external locus of control) and greater treatment motivation.

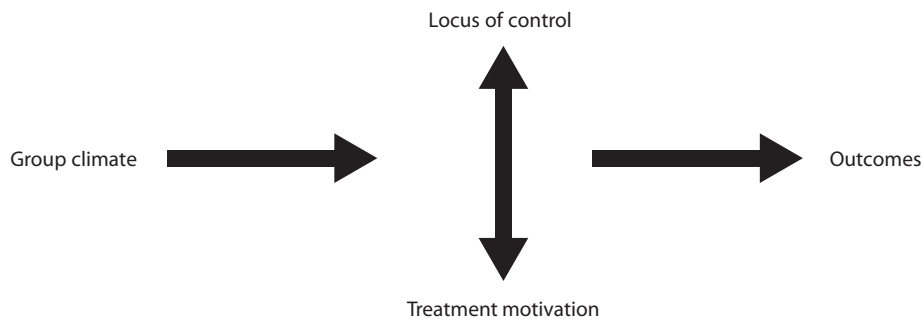


Figure 1: group climate, treatment motivation and locus of control

## Method

### *Participants*

The present study was conducted in a Dutch youth prison. The population consisted of 49 adolescents (38 male and 11 female). The mean age of respondents was 16.5 years ( $SD = 1.28$ ) and the mean length of stay in correctional facilities was 18.5 months ( $SD = 15.44$ ). The interviews took about three-quarters of an hour and most participants filled out the questionnaire afterwards or in their cells. All adolescents participated voluntarily, signed an informed consent declaration and were told that their answers would be treated confidentially and anonymously and would be accessed only by the researchers. As a token of gratitude for their participation, they received a telephone card of €2.50. All names on the questionnaires and interview transcripts were deleted and given a code number in SPSS. In order to protect the privacy of the adolescents, researchers had no access to the names. Two comparison groups were involved in this study: a group of 33 non-incarcerated juvenile serious and violent frequent offenders (25 boys and 4 girls, mean age

15.8 years, SD= 1.78) receiving ambulatory treatment<sup>8</sup>, and a non-delinquent group of adolescents attending vocational training school (15 boys and 14 girls, mean age =17.7 years, SD = 0.93).

### **Questionnaires and interviews**

All interviews and questionnaires were administered by specially trained graduate students of the Leiden School of Social Studies.

*The climate questionnaire* had been designed previously for use in a prison for adult delinquents to assess open and closed (repressive) group climate (Van der Helm, Stams & van der Laan, 2011) and was customised for use with adolescent inmates for the purpose of the present study. The climate questionnaire comprised 72 items to assess group climate. From these items two scales were constructed in a sample of adult offenders. The 'open climate' scale consisted of 18 items; the 'closed climate' scale contained four items. The items were rated on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1= 'I do not agree' to 5= 'I totally agree'. An example of an item from the 'open' climate scale is: *'When I have a problem, there is always somebody I can turn to'*. An example of an item from the 'closed' climate scale is: *'You better strictly adhere to the rules here'*.

The climate questionnaire was subjected to a principal component analysis in order to replicate the two-factor solution found in the sample of adult offenders. The results showed a similar two-factor solution, with factor loadings comparable in magnitude to the loadings in the adult sample (Tables 1 and 2). Four items that did not have significant loadings on the climate scales in the adult sample loaded significantly on the open (two items) and closed (two items) climate factor in the adolescents sample. The internal consistency reliability coefficients were somewhat lower in the present study than in the original study, but still satisfactory (Cronbach's alpha was .87 for the open climate scale and .70 for the closed climate scale). We found a significant but small correlation between open and closed climate ( $r = .36, p < 0.05$ ). A higher score represented a more open or a more repressive climate. Some of the original 72 climate items did not load on the factors that emerged from the principal component analysis but were considered important nonetheless because they reflected salient issues in the open interviews that were held with the incarcerated juvenile delinquents (see below). These items were: *'Group workers allow me some space'*, *'Group workers are too busy to help me'*, *'Group workers always get their way'*, *'You can argue over the rules'*, *'Exceptions to the rules are possible'* and *'They don't understand me here'*. Correlations between these individual items and the climate scales ranged from  $r = .33$  to  $r = .76$  (*'Group workers allow me some space'* with open climate).

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<sup>8</sup> Ambulatory treatment consisted of a wide spectrum of interventions, ranging from home visits by a police officer, to specific training programmes like Aggression Replacement Training, to comprehensive programmes like Multi-Systemic Therapy or Functional Family Therapy.

*Treatment motivation* was measured using an abbreviated form of the Dutch translation of the 'Readiness to Change Questionnaire' (Rollnick et al., 1992), which is based on the theoretical motivation stadium model of Prochaska and Di Clemente (1986) measuring the 'active change' phase (Van der Helm et al., 2011). This questionnaire, which was translated and validated by Van Binsbergen (2003), assesses different phases in motivational change. A five-point Likert scale was used, ranging from '1= I do not agree' to '5= I totally agree'. An example of an item from the active phase of motivational change is: '*I want to work at my problems*'. Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .88. Higher scores on the scale for treatment motivation indicated greater treatment motivation.

The original Locus of Control scale by Rotter (Pugh, 1994) was also customised for use in an adolescent (forensic) setting. The questionnaire measures both internal and external locus of control. An example of an item of the 'Internal Locus of Control' scale is: '*The way my life turns out is dependent on what I do*'. Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .72. An example of an item of the 'External Locus of Control' scale is: '*If you want to succeed you have to know the right people*'. Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .79. Higher scores on the locus of control scales indicated higher internal or external locus of control.

All incarcerated juvenile delinquents were interviewed for one hour. The topic list in the open interview mirrored the questionnaire. The interviews were used to create an in-depth description of the group climate, locus of control and treatment motivation and to cross-validate the results obtained with the questionnaires. All interviews were written out verbatim and the transcripts were coded and analysed with Kwalitan (Peters, Wester & Richardson, 1994), a computer program for coding qualitative results.

## Results

### *Quantitative study*

The quantitative study consists of three sections. The first section contains results of preliminary analyses of the extent to which incarcerated juvenile delinquents perceive the group climate as open (supportive) or closed (repressive), and their self-reported locus of control and treatment motivation. In the second section, we examine differences in locus of control between incarcerated juvenile offenders and two comparison groups of non-incarcerated juvenile offenders and non-delinquent adolescents who were matched on age, sex and level of formal education (hypothesis 1). In the third section, associations between group climate on the one hand and locus of control and treatment motivation on the other are examined in correlational analyses (hypothesis 2). In the final section two structural equation models that summarise the main results of both the qualitative and quantitative



analyses were fitted to the data, analysing factors that emerged as salient and influential from the open interviews with the inmates (hypothesis 2).

### ***Preliminary analyses***

The scale means from the climate questionnaire indicated that incarcerated juvenile delinquents experienced the group climate to be more open ( $M = 3.60, SD = .69$ ) than closed ( $M = 3.20, SD = 0.60$ ) –  $t(32) = 2.6, p < 0.01$ . The means for internal and external locus of control were  $M = 4.10 (SD = 0.69)$  and  $M = 2.34 (SD = .78)$  respectively, which indicated that incarcerated juvenile delinquents reported relatively high levels of internal locus of control and low levels of external locus of control. This is contrary to our expectations, which were based on the review of the literature in the introduction. The mean scores for treatment motivation were rather high:  $3.96 (SD = 1.46)$ .

### ***Differences in internal and external locus of control between groups (hypothesis 1)***

A series of  $t$ -tests did not show any significant differences in levels of internal control between incarcerated juvenile delinquents ( $M = 4.02, SD = .62$ ), non-incarcerated juvenile delinquents ( $4.05, SD = .60$ ) and students attending a vocational training school ( $M = 3.93, SD = .24$ ). Once again no significant differences were found in external locus of control between incarcerated juvenile delinquents ( $M = 2.3, SD = .78$ ), non-incarcerated juvenile delinquents ( $M = 2.2, SD = .60$ ) and students attending a vocational training school ( $M = 1.94, SD = .82$ ). This is not in line with the research findings that were presented in the introduction, indicating that juvenile inmates generally show high levels of external locus of control and low levels of internal locus of control.

### ***Correlational analyses (hypothesis 2)***

Correlational analyses (one-tailed significance) showed no significant relationships between closed group climate and locus of control and treatment motivation (Table 3). A more open group climate, however, proved to be associated with higher internal locus of control ( $r = .47, p < 0.01$ ) and greater treatment motivation ( $r = .57, p < 0.001$ ). No significant correlation was found between open climate and external locus of control.

Two variables that are indicative of a positive outlook were positively correlated with internal locus of control: 'I am learning the right things here' ( $r = .51, p < 0.001$ ) and 'I am having hope for the future' ( $r = .51, p < 0.001$ ). A number of group workers' attitudes towards inmates reflecting openness were also positively correlated with higher internal locus of control: 'Group workers treat me with respect' ( $r = .40, p < 0.001$ ), 'I can always turn to a group worker whenever I have a problem' ( $r = .44, p < 0.001$ ) and 'Exceptions to the rules are possible' ( $r = .42, p < 0.001$ ). Group workers' attitudes that were positively associated with treatment motivation were trust ( $r = .41, p < 0.001$ ) and paying enough attention to the well-being of the inmates ( $r = 0.46, p < 0.01$ ). Other variables that were positively correlated with treatment motivation were:



'I am having enough fresh air' ( $r=.58, p < 0.001$ ), 'I know what's going to happen to me tomorrow' ( $r=.42, p < 0.01$ ), and 'Honesty inside is important' ( $r=.41, p < 0.01$ ). Boredom ('I waste my time here') was negatively associated with treatment motivation ( $r=-.44, p < 0.001$ ).

### **Structural equation modelling (hypothesis 1)**

To investigate whether the variables showing the highest correlations ( $r > .40$ ) with climate, internal locus of control and treatment motivation (Figure 1) were connected, a series of structural equation models were fitted to the data using the statistical software package Amos 16. We chose only to present the two best-fitting models. 'Group workers allow me some space' was the dependent variable in the first model (Figure 1). It was chosen on the basis of interview information showing that 'space allowed by group workers' was highly indicative of an open climate, which was confirmed in a significant correlation of  $r = .76$  ( $p < .001$ ) between 'Group workers allow me some space' and 'open climate'. In the second model 'treatment motivation' and 'internal locus of control' were inserted as dependent variables (Figure 2). Both fit-indices (CFI, TLI, and RMSEA<sup>9</sup>) and the model Chi-Square, also designated as the generalized likelihood ratio, were used to evaluate model fit (Kline, 2005). The following cut-off values are indicative of close model fit: NFI and CFI  $> .90$ , TLI  $> .95$  and RMSEA  $< .06$ , whereas a non-significant Chi-Square indicates exact model fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Arbuckle, 2005; Kline, 2005).

Model 1 showed an exact fit to the data when using a null hypothesis significance test:  $X^2(13) = 9.56, p = .11$ . However, fit indices that are less sensitive to differences in sample size than the Chi-square test (Civo et al., 2006) showed a marginal fit to the data: NFI = 0.70; CFI = .80; TLI = .62; RMSEA = 0.08. It can be derived from Figure 1 that a perceived inflexible attitude of group workers and lack of attention (possibly a result of understaffing) were associated with inmates' experiences of not being understood and lack of space provided by the group workers.

Model 2 showed an exact fit to the data –  $X^2(7) = 10.49, p = .16$  – and a close fit when using fit indices: NFI = 0.90; CFI = .96; TLI = .88; RMSEA = 0.01. Measures of responsiveness by group workers (the way they thought group workers understood them and 'Group Workers allow me some space') were associated with 'open climate', and subsequently higher 'internal locus of control'. An open climate proved to be associated with inmates' coping behaviours and the idea that they were learning the right things, which resulted in higher treatment motivation.

<sup>9</sup> CFI (Comparative Fit Index), TLI (Tucker-Lewis Index) and RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation) are indices of goodness of fit that are independent of sample size. Models that fit well score favourably on these fit-indices. For further references see Arbuckle (2007).

### **Qualitative study**

The interviews provided a wide-ranging picture of the adolescents living in prison. Most juvenile delinquents were quite frank and open to the interviewers (students). Some respondents gave detailed examples in their interviews of extortion, drug dealing and rape inside the prison. Group workers confirmed some of the most striking examples of norm-violating behaviours that were reported by the respondents. To investigate climate aspects in the interviews two authors coded independently statements for evidence of open and closed climate. An example of a statement reflecting open climate was:

*I: How do you feel here*

*R: Quite OK, I have a very good contact with a group worker, he always takes time for me whenever I feel down.*

An example of a statement reflecting closed climate was:

*R: We have a very stupid rule, if you don't drink your milk you have to go to your room [incarceration-PvdH.]*

*I: You don't agree with this?*

*R: Last time my milk was sour and I had to drink it. If I didn't I had to go to my room.*

We counted the number statements referring to an open and closed climate (hypothesis 2).

### **Open (supportive) group climate**

The respondents (76%) reported huge climate differences within the living-group, not only depending on individual inmates' behaviour but also on the behaviour of the group workers. Important aspects of an open climate were having trust in group workers (35%), experiencing feelings of safety (50%), being treated with respect ('Even if I become aggressive') and 'Getting some space'. Enough attention to arguments and feelings from group workers (43%) and the idea of working on their own problems and future (78%) were very important for the adolescents. Also the possibility of discussing the rules and making exceptions to the rules were also important aspects of their perception of the group climate (41%).

### **Closed (repressive) climate**

The most important characteristics of a closed climate were differences in professional performance of group workers, which were mainly connected with 'Getting no space from group workers' (76%) and excessively strict (96%), erratic (80%) or unfair rules (group punishment, 58%). Lack of attention (88%) and lack of trust in group workers (78%), differential treatment from group workers (65%), aggressive behaviour being tolerated by group workers (41%), group workers not adhering to rules themselves (56%) and taking complaints not seriously (44%) were often mentioned. Further characteristics were boredom (86%), lack of perspective (48%), depressive feelings (96%) and fear for own safety (16%).

### ***Differences between quantitative and qualitative results***

The incarcerated juvenile delinquents responded very differently to questionnaires and open interviews. They turned out to be more negative about the climate of the living group in the interviews. Elaborated remarks about excessively strict and unfair rules or punishment, lack of attention and trust of group workers, boredom, hopelessness and fears of safety were mentioned more often than became apparent in the results of the questionnaire. The interview results showed relatively low levels of internal locus of control when compared to the results obtained with questionnaires. These contradictory findings led us to examine locus of control in the interviews.

To further specify these low levels of internal locus of control two authors coded the interviews independently for feelings and thoughts often related to low levels of internal locus of control: instances of depression, sleep problems, loss of initiative and powerlessness. We found signs of learned helplessness and depressive affect in 80% of the cases. For example:

*I: How are you now?*

*R: Just waiting. I sit waiting and waiting. I am at a standstill and do nothing.*

When coded for internally oriented vs. externally oriented statements we found three times more externally oriented labels. An example of an externally oriented statement was:

*I: Do you consider it your fault to be here?*

*R: No.*

*I: Why not? You are here for three incidents of grave assault.*

*R: It's not my fault, more from the other side.*

*I: the victim?*

*R: Yes, that was, eeeuh, from cause comes effect. He was the cause and this is the effect, he is outside and I am inside.*

*I: Was that also the case with the others?*

*R: Yes, if they didn't come to me there would be no problem.*

A lot of respondents have just accepted their situation:

*I: How do you feel now?*

*R: Just normal like at home.*

*I: Is it just like a home?*

*R: Yes.*

And:

*I: How does is feel to be outside?*

*R: Outside you don't feel at home, I'd rather go back because I'm not used to be outside with so many people around.*

## Discussion

This study examined incarcerated juveniles' perceptions of group climate, treatment motivation, locus of control and the relations among them. The questionnaire results did not show differences in locus of control between incarcerated juvenile delinquents, non-incarcerated juvenile delinquents receiving ambulatory treatment, and a matched comparison group of juvenile non-delinquents (hypothesis 1 not supported). On the other hand, the interviews revealed lower levels of internal locus of control and signs of learned helplessness among the group of incarcerated juvenile delinquents. Unexpectedly, questionnaire self-report yielded rather high scores on both open (supportive) and closed (repressive) group climate. It is possible that inmates experience the group climate to be both open and closed, which may, as the interview data suggest, parallel the supportive and repressive attitudes of group workers. Notably, the climate was even perceived to be more open than closed.

Interview data, on the contrary, showed that the climate was extremely closed. Group workers, especially inexperienced ones, were described as very strict. Inmates reported integrity problems, differential treatment and lack of trust. Some group workers emphasised different rules, not taking rules themselves seriously. These differences constituted a considerable source of stress for the inmates. 'Good' group workers were group workers who could be trusted and the inmates could turn to when feeling down, who treated the inmates with respect and who were considered 'straight'.

The different results that were obtained with questionnaires and open interviews may be due to the problems that are associated with the use of self-report questionnaires in delinquent samples. For instance, Breuk and colleagues (2007) found that juvenile delinquents report unrealistically positive scores on questionnaires measuring psychopathology and relationship quality, which were not in agreement with the fact that all juvenile delinquents were receiving treatment for severe behavioural maladaptation and relationship problems. Moreover, parents rated psychopathology in the clinical range and evaluated the quality of the relationship with their delinquent sons as very poor. A plausible explanation for substantial underreporting of behaviour problems and problematic relationships by juvenile delinquents is found in the propensity to give socially desirable answers. Possible fear of repercussions can be one of the sources of this answering tendency (Tourangeau & Yan, 2007). To illustrate this, two inmates told the interviewers they were discussing questionnaires at the group and the way one should answer specific questions. Researchers should therefore be careful not to rely on a single assessment method and instead complement self-report questionnaires with in-depth interviewing (see Stams et al., 2006).

Responsivity, in particular the aspect of treatment motivation, is one of the most important principles underlying successful rehabilitation (Andrews & Bonta, 2003). As responsivity pertains to how the juvenile delinquent interacts with the treatment environment (Ward, Melser & Yates, 2007), it is crucial to focus on the group climate when dealing with the efficacy of behavioural interventions that are delivered in residential settings. The present study showed that an open group climate was positively related to both treatment motivation and internal locus of control in incarcerated juvenile delinquents, and provided evidence that group workers can influence group climate (hypothesis 2 confirmed). Results of the open interviews showed the group climate to be more closed (repressive) than open (supportive). Moreover, we found evidence of an anti-social group climate among the incarcerated delinquents, which may have great consequences for the safety of the inmates. It should be noted that safety is a necessary condition for the establishment of an open group climate (Maitland & Suder, 1998; Kury & Smartt, 2002). Competition and aggression among inmates and workers are often characteristic of a closed and repressive climate, where group workers tend to shift from support to control and adolescents try to 'play the system' (Harambolos & Holborn, 1995; Harvey, 2005).

There are some important limitations of this study that need to be acknowledged. First, the closed climate scale proved to be less reliable than the open climate scale, which may partly explain the absence of significant associations between closed climate and treatment motivation and locus of control. Second, we found evidence of serious underreporting of problems when using questionnaires, which limits the conclusions can be drawn from the questionnaire data. Third, the small sample size and the inclusion of only one youth prison hamper the generalisability of the study findings. Finally, the control group of the non-incarcerated offenders was not matched on seriousness of offences and negative attitudes. It is possible that the incarcerated group was more extreme in extent and depth of their criminal activities, personal problems and anti-social values. Also the volunteer group from a vocational training school was not matched on these and other potentially confounding characteristics, such as learning problems, which may explain differences between the groups. Notably, the bias that results from confounders that could not be statistically controlled in this study applies to the findings obtained with questionnaires, as the open interviews were only held with the group of incarcerated juvenile delinquents. As we found no significant group differences when using self-report questionnaires, it might be possible that hypothesised group differences in locus of control were suppressed by factors related to locus of control that differ systematically between the groups. Finally, the sample size was too small to allow multi-level analysis in order to account for dependency of measurements in hierarchically structured data (eg. inmates are nested into living groups). Notably, the neglect of statistical dependency results in capitalisation on chance and the risk of spurious research findings. Because of this and other limitations the results of our study should be interpreted with great caution.

The present study is probably one of the first studies to examine the relationship between group climate in a youth prison and responsivity, in particular the important aspect of treatment motivation. The results indicate that an open and supportive group climate appear to contribute to greater treatment motivation and higher internal locus of control. As the present study only provides preliminary evidence of associations among group climate, treatment motivation and locus of control, results should be replicated in a prospective, longitudinal study that allows for the examination of contextual effects by means of multi-level analysis.

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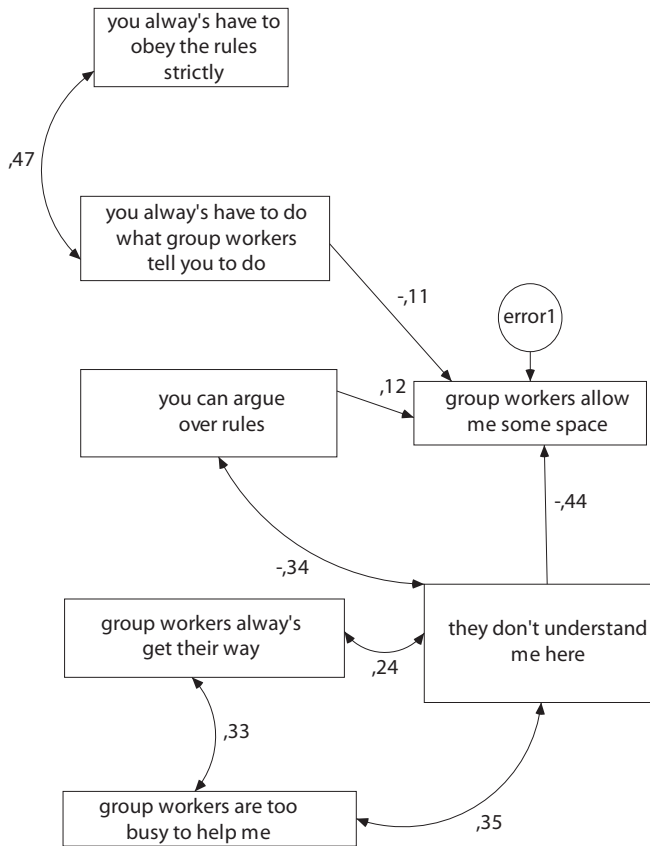


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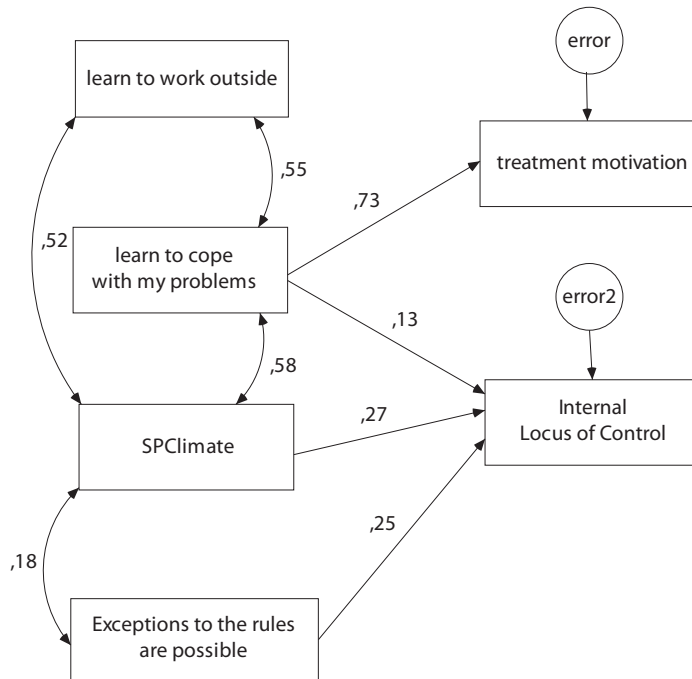
3 What works' for juvenile prisoners: the role of group climate in a youth prison



chi-square value=19,562; df=13; probability level=,107

Figure 1: Sem model with flexibility

First do no Harm



Chi-square value=10,486; df=7; probability level=,163

Fit model 1:  
 CMIN= 1.5  
 NFI = 0.70  
 CFI= 0.80  
 RSMEA = 0.08

Fit model 2:  
 CMIN= 1.4  
 NFI= 0.90  
 CFI=0.96  
 SMEA = 0.01

Figure 2: Sem model with treatment motivation and internal locus of control

3 What works' for juvenile prisoners: the role of group climate in a youth prison

Table 1: Open Climate (factor 1): Factor Loadings and Reliability Coefficients in Two Samples

		<b>N= 49 Alpha = .87</b>	<b>N=48 Alpha = .94</b>
<b>item</b>		<b>Factor loadings in the adolescent sample</b>	<b>Factor loadings in the adult sample</b>
3	when I have a problem, there is always some- body I can turn to	.58	.74
6	I feel safe at the living group	.53	.69
7	Taking initiative is welcomed by group workers	.35	.50
10	Group workers treat me with respect	.72	.60
11	I trust the group workers	.51	.54
12	Group workers show respect to me	.49	.43
14	Group workers pay attention to me and respect my feelings	.47	.67
18	I get some peace of mind at the group	.67	-- <sup>1</sup>
20	We trust each other at the group	.68	.56
24	I work toward my future	.60	.70
27	Life is meaningful here	.55	.76
31	Group workers stimulate me	.78	.47
33	I feel safe here	.68	-- <sup>1</sup>
34	Complaints are being taken seriously	.61	.63
39	Treatment is helpful for me	.78	.67
40	I am aware of my problems	.74	.77
41	I feel I'm making progress here	.60	.48
46	There are always enough people to help me	.78	.79
55	When I complain about something, group workers take it seriously	.71	.74
56	We regularly discuss my treatment	.76	.44

<sup>1</sup> Non-significant factor loadings in the adult sample

First do no Harm

Table 2: Closed Climate (factor 2): Factor Loadings and Reliability Coefficients in Two Samples

		<b>Alpha=.70</b>	<b>Alpha = .75</b>
<b>Item no.</b>	<b>Content item</b>	<b>Factor loadings in the adolescent sample</b>	<b>Factor loadings in the adult sample</b>
2	You better strictly adhere to the rules here	.57	.35
5	You have to ask permission for everything	.41	.65
8	You always have to comply with requests of the group workers	.47	.52
36	I do not trust the security staff	.49	.52
39	You better give in and do what group workers tell you to do	.60	-.1
40	Sometimes I am afraid of others	.50	-.1

1 Non-significant factor loadings in the adult sample

Table 3: Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations between Group Climate, Treatment Motivation, and Locus of Control (33 < N < 43)

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<b>Open Climate</b>	<b>Closed Climate</b>	<b>Motivation</b>	<b>Internal Control</b>	<b>External Control</b>
Open climate	3.60	0.69	1.00				
Closed climate	3.20	0.60	.36*	1.00			
Motivation	3.96	1.46	.57***	.25	1.00		
Internal control	4.10	0.69	.47**	-.12	.15	1.00	
External control	2.34	0.78	.31	.22	.57***	-.10	1.00

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$  (one-tailed significance)

## Chapter 4

# The relation between incarceration length, living group climate, coping and treatment motivation among juvenile delinquents in a youth prison<sup>10</sup>

### Abstract

The present study examined the association between incarceration length, living group climate, coping and treatment motivation among 59 juvenile delinquents in a Dutch youth prison. Longer incarceration was associated with the perception of a more open living group climate, but proved to be unrelated to coping and treatment motivation. A repressive group climate was positively associated with passive coping. A more open group climate was associated with both more active coping and greater treatment motivation. Finally, mediation analyses showed that the relation between open group climate and treatment motivation was mediated by active coping. It was concluded that creating an open group climate in order to foster active coping and greater treatment motivation is probably one of the most important challenges for youth prisons.

### *Authors' epilogue: June 2009*

On a Friday afternoon a boy passes the security barriers of a Dutch youth prison. One of the guards says 'don't come back' in a friendly tone of voice. The boy carries four large blue prison issued garbage sacks containing all his belongings, indicating a long stay inside. He sits on his bags, looking around, not knowing what to do or where to go. After a while a young girl with large bags passes the security barriers too. Together they wait, share a cigarette and look around. The parking lot remains silent. Nothing happens. After a short while, they knot their bags around their waist and walk waveringly in the direction of the bus station one mile away.

### Introduction

Incarcerating adolescent delinquents in our society serves the goals of punishment, deterrence and rehabilitation (Liebling & Maruna, 2005). Rehabilitation of juvenile delinquents is a major goal of youth correctional interventions (Gatti, Tremblay, & Vitaro, 2009), but the long term effects of these interventions are not

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<sup>10</sup> Van der Helm, G.H.P., Beunk, L.M., Stams, G.J.J.M. & van der Laan, P.H. The relation between incarceration length, living group climate, coping and treatment motivation among juvenile delinquents in a youth correctional facility. Manuscript submitted for publication.

promising yet (Biehal, 2010; Biehal et al., 2010; Kimberley & Huizinga, 2008; Parhar et al., 2008; Lipsey, 2009). A long history of adverse childhood experiences, including maltreatment and neglect (Lamers-Winkelmann & Visser, 2009; Prinzie, Stams, & Hoeve, 2009; Spinhoven, Elzinga, Hovens, Roelofs, Zitman, Oppen & Pennix, 2010), a criminogenic environment after detention and lack of aftercare contribute to diminished possibilities for positive enduring change (Biehal, 2010; Farrall, Bottoms, & Shapland, 2011; Pritikin, 2009; Loeber, van der Laan, Slot, & Hoeve, 2008; Wikstrom & Butterworth, 2006).

Some researchers have ascribed lack of positive intervention effects to the deprivational effects of incarceration. Deprivation expresses itself in reactance, (Liebling & Maruna, 2005), brutalisation, deviancy training (Shapiro, Smith, Malone, & Collaro, 2010) learned helplessness (Huizinga & Henry, 2008; Loughran, 2009) and internalising and externalising symptoms (White, Mun, Shi, & Loeber, 2009; Witvliet, 2009). Incarceration could also increase maladaptive coping strategies and decrease treatment motivation (van der Helm, Klapwijk, Stams, & van der Laan, 2009).

Treatment in institutional youth care, including youth prison, is still considered a 'black box' that has not been opened yet (Axford, Little, Morpeth, & Weyts, 2005; Gendreau, Goggin, French & Smith, 2006). Environmental characteristic, such as living group climate, and individual inmate characteristics, such as coping and treatment motivation, that may affect behavioural change are still underresearched (Marshall & Burton, 2010). The present study therefore focuses on the relation between living group climate in a youth prison, coping and treatment motivation in a sample of juvenile delinquents.

### ***Living group climate***

In prison climate research an open and supportive living group climate is often contrasted with a closed or repressive group climate (van der Helm, Stams & van der Laan, 2011; Janzing & Kerstens, 2002; Toch, 2008, Toch & Kupers, 2007). A structured, safe and therapeutic environment is often designated as an 'open' climate when support is high, opportunities for growth are evident, and flexibility is in balance with the organizational needs for control (Clark Craig, 2004; van der Helm, Stams & van der Laan, in press; Ule, Schram, Riedl, & Cason, 2009; Wortly, 2002). A repressive climate is characterized by an extremely asymmetric balance of power, great dependency on staff, lack of mutual respect, emphasis on incremental and haphazard rules and punishment ('chickenshit rules'), boredom, hopelessness, fear and lack of protection (Harvey, 2005; Liebling & Maruna, 2005; Little, 1990).

### ***Coping in youth prison***

Goffman (1957) developed a five-stage model for adaptation and coping inside adult prison, proposing a gradual shift from passive to active coping during confinement. Empirical support for Goffman's stage model has been found in qualita-

tive research, although the sequence of stages proved not to be invariant (Harvey, 2005; Little 1990). Passive (emotion-focused) coping is characterized by cognitive reinterpretation ('life isn't so bad here'), dissonance reduction ('others are to blame for my situation'), a palliative reaction pattern, and suppression of emotions (Schreurs, Van de Willige, Brosschot, Tellegen, & Graus, 1993). Active coping is generally defined as a coping style that is characterized by active problem solving, information seeking and a capacity to obtain social support from the environment, including professional help (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004).

Most prison literature shows that passive coping is predominant among prisoners (Goffman, 1957; Irwin & Owen, 2005; Maruna, 2008; Toch, 2008; Toch & Kupers, 2007). A long prison stay, complacency and loss of hope have been shown to be associated with passive coping, which is thought to negatively affect treatment motivation through suppression of emotions, unrealistic optimism, and denial of responsibility (Brandtstädter & Renner, 1990; Brown & Ireland 2005; Greve & Enzmann, 2003; van der Helm, Klapwijk, Stams, & van der Laan, 2009). Unrealistic optimism and denial of responsibility can also result in diminished reality testing, destabilisation of personality, reactance and violence (van der Helm, Stams, van Genabeek, & van der Laan, in press; Thomaes, 2007). In Goffman's model, length of stay affects coping negatively, but the influence of treatment motivation and group living climate is not incorporated in his model.

### ***Treatment motivation***

Effective treatment is thought to be dependent on treatment motivation (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1984; Olver, Stockdale & Wormith, 2011). Notably, treatment motivation may be considered the core of the 'responsivity principle' – one of the 'what works' principles of effective judicial interventions – which states that correctional treatment programs should be matched to offender characteristics, such as learning style, motivation and the offenders' living circumstances (Andrews & Bonta, 2007; Andrews et al., 1990). Incarcerated juvenile delinquents need a high level of treatment motivation in order to be able to profit from interventions that target behavioural adjustment both within and outside prison. Recent research has shown group climate and treatment motivation to be closely related (Drost, 2008; van der Helm, Klapwijk, Stams & van der Laan, 2009; van Binsbergen, 2003).

### ***Living group climate, coping and treatment motivation***

Recent research suggests that not the length of stay, but the quality of treatment climate at the living group to be crucial for internal locus of control and treatment motivation (van der Helm, et al., 2009). According to a positive group climate is associated with greater internal locus of control and *more* treatment motivation. Coping theory suggests (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) that having control over the environment facilitates active coping, whereas passive coping is more suitable when having no control. An open group climate offers more possibilities for control and

hence may facilitate active coping, whereas a repressive climate diminishes control and therefore limits active coping.

Although living group climate is thought to be an important factor affecting coping and treatment motivation (Harvey, 2007; Pugh, 2000; Reitzel & Harju, 2000), a prolonged stay in prison can also diminish active coping and treatment motivation through prisonization effects and loss of hope (Goffman, 1961; Irwin & Owen, 2005; Maruna, 2008; Toch, 2008; Toch & Kupers, 2007).

### ***The present study***

The aim of the present study is to examine the relation between length of stay, living group climate, active and passive coping and treatment motivation in a sample of incarcerated juvenile delinquents. We expect a more open living group climate to be positively associated with more active coping and greater treatment motivation and a more repressive treatment climate to be positively associated with passive coping and less treatment motivation.

## **Method**

### ***Participants***

The present study was conducted in a Dutch youth prison. The population consisted of 59 adolescents (63 % male and 37 % female) randomly selected from the living groups (response rate 94%). The mean age of respondents was 16,1 years ( $SD = 1,5$ , range 12-20 years). The mean stay was 14,5 weeks ( $Sd = 15,2$  range 1-74 weeks).

### ***Procedure***

Participants were interviewed for about one hour (results not reported here) and afterwards filled out a questionnaire. All respondents participated voluntarily, signed an informed consent declaration and were told that their answers would be treated confidentially and processed anonymously and would be accessed only by the researchers. All names on the questionnaires and interview transcripts were deleted and given a code number in SPSS. In order to protect the privacy of the respondents, researchers had no access to the names. All interviews and questionnaires were administered by specially trained graduate students of the Leiden School of Social Studies (Bachelor of Social Work and master Youth care) and the University of Amsterdam (Department of Forensic Child and Youth Care Sciences).

### ***Measures***

*Prison group climate was measured with the Prison Group Climate Inventory (PGCI; Van der Helm, Stams & van der Laan, in press). The PGCI consists of 4 scales and 37 items rated on a five-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 = 'I do not agree' to 5 = 'I totally agree'. Each item belongs to only one of the four scales for group*



climate. The support scale (12 items) assesses professional behaviour and in particular the responsiveness of group workers to specific needs of the inmates. Paying attention to inmates, taking complaints seriously, respect and trust are important characteristics of support.

An example of a support item is: 'group workers treat me with respect'. The growth scale (9 items) assesses learning perceptions, hope for the future and giving meaning to the prison stay. An example of a growth item is: 'I learn the right things here'. The repression scale (7 items) assesses perceptions of strictness and control, unfair and haphazard rules and lack of flexibility at the living group. An example of a repression item is: 'You have to ask permission for everything here'. The group atmosphere scale (7 items) assesses the way inmates treat and trust each other, feelings of safety towards each other, being able to get some peace of mind and having enough daylight and fresh air. An example of an atmosphere item is 'We trust each other here'.

For the purpose of this research 'support', ( $\alpha = .88$ ) 'growth' ( $\alpha = .86$ ) and 'atmosphere' ( $\alpha = .78$ ) were taken together to form the 'open' climate scale ( $\alpha = .87$ ), while 'repression' formed the 'repressive' climate scale. Reliability of both scales in this study was good (open climate  $\alpha = .87$ ; repression,  $\alpha = .77$ ).

*Treatment motivation* was measured using an abbreviated form (27 items) of the Dutch translation of the 'Readiness to Change Questionnaire' (Rollnick, Heather & Bell, 1992; Van Binsbergen, 2003), which is based on the theoretical motivation stage model of Prochaska and Di Clemente (1986) measuring the 'active change' phase. A five-point Likert type scale was used, ranging from '1= I do not agree' to '5= I totally agree'. An example of an item from the active phase of motivational change is: '*I want to work on my problems*'. Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .88. Higher scores on the scale for treatment motivation indicate greater treatment motivation.

*Coping styles* were measured with the Utrechtse Coping List (UCL, Schreurs, van de Willige, Brosschot, Tellegen & Graus, 1993). This instrument consists of 47 items and seven subscales that distinguish active coping (active problem solving and seeking social support) from passive coping (passive reaction, palliative reaction, avoidant coping, emotional expression and soothing thoughts). All items are rated on a five-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 = 'I do not agree' to 5 = 'I totally agree'. Reliability and validity are good (Schreurs, van de Willige, Brosschot, Tellegen & Graus, 1993).

In this study reliability for active and passive coping and the subscales were satisfactory (Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for active coping was .64; passive coping  $\alpha = .66$ ; subscales:  $.61 < \alpha < .89$ ).

## Results

### *Preliminary analyses*

Correlational analyses (one-tailed significance) showed active coping to be significantly correlated with passive coping ( $r = 0.36, p < 0.05$ ), open treatment climate ( $r = 0.50, p < 0.01$ ) and treatment motivation ( $r = .69, p < 0.01$ ). Repressive treatment climate was negatively associated with open treatment climate ( $r = -.41, p < 0.01$ ). Finally, open treatment climate was positively associated with treatment motivation ( $r = .66, p < 0.01$ ) and incarceration length ( $r = .39, p < 0.05$ ).

### *Structural equation modeling*

A series of structural equation models were fitted to the data in order to examine associations between length of stay, living group climate, active and passive coping and treatment motivation. We chose to only present the best-fitting model (Figure 1). Both fit-indices (NFI, CFI, TLI, and RMSEA<sup>11</sup>) and the model Chi-Square, also designated as the generalized likelihood ratio, were used to evaluate model fit (Kline, 2005). The following cut-off values are indicative of close model fit: NFI and CFI  $> .90$ , TLI  $> .95$  and RMSEA  $< .06$ , whereas a non-significant Chi-Square indicates exact model fit (Arbuckle, 2005; Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2005).

The model showed an exact fit to the data –  $X^2(7) = .74, p = .998$ . Fit indices that are less sensitive to differences in sample size than the Chi-square test (Sivo et al., 2006) showed a close fit to the data: NFI= 0.99; CFI= 1.00; TLI= 1.5; RMSEA = 0.00. It can be derived from Figure 1 that a more repressive living group climate was related to more passive coping. A longer stay in the institution was related to more open climate, but the relation with active coping just failed to reach significance, and should therefore be considered a trend. Active and passive coping were positively associated. Finally, open living group climate was positively associated with both more active coping and greater treatment motivation. Applying Baron and Kenny's (1986) criteria for mediation, we tested for indirect effects using a bootstrap method in Amos 18 (Arbuckle, 2006). Results show that the relation between open group climate and treatment motivation was mediated by active coping: (*Indirect effect* =.21, *SE* =0.051, *p* =0.05).

## Discussion

The aim of this study was to examine the relation between incarceration length, living group climate, coping and treatment motivation in a sample of incarcerated

<sup>11</sup> CFI (Comparative Fit Index), TLI (Tucker-Lewis Index), NFI (Normed Fit Index) and RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation) are indices of goodness of fit that are independent of sample size. Models that fit well score favourably on these fit-indices. For further references see Arbuckle (2007).

juvenile delinquents. Longer incarceration length was associated with the perception of a more open living group climate, but proved to be unrelated to coping and treatment motivation. A more repressive group climate was only associated with more passive coping. The relation between open living group climate and treatment motivation was mediated by active coping. Finally, active coping proved to be positively associated with passive coping.

The lack of a negative effect of incarceration length on coping and treatment motivation may be explained by the relatively short length of stay of on average 14,5 weeks, which is probably too short for prisonization effects to occur. This explanation is not only in line with the absence of a relation between repressive climate and both active coping and treatment motivation, but also in line with the unexpectedly small positive association between repressive climate and passive coping. It is also possible that incarceration length did not produce any negative effects because inmates experienced incarceration as a simple continuation of negative relationships with parents, peers, authorities or society at large (Anderson, 2000; Bugental, 2009; De Jong, 2007, Sato et al., 2009; Van Spinhoven et al., 2010). Alternatively, a longer stay in prison may have been experienced in a positive way. The strong positive relation between length of stay and open treatment climate supports this explanation.

The positive relation between length of stay and treatment climate as well as the positive association between active and passive coping could reflect adaptation processes that have been described in prison research (Harvey, 2005; Little, 1990) and coping literature. Adjustment to prison is best considered as a transactional process (see Sameroff, 2009) in which inmates gradually become more skilled and receive less negative feedback from group workers and their peers. Coping literature suggests passive coping to be functional when having insufficient control over the environment (Lazarus & Folkman, 1969). As youth prisons can be characterized by a balance between repression, taking control away from the youngsters, and rehabilitation, giving control back to the youngsters (Van der Helm, Boekee, Stams & van der Laan, in press), passive and active coping strategies may be reinforced at the same time, or alternatively, active coping strategies may increase during prison stay because of successful rehabilitation efforts. Results of this study provide some empirical evidence for this suggestion given the positive associations between length of stay and both open climate and active coping.

Maintaining an 'open' and rehabilitative environment requires a delicate balance between structure (safety) and therapeutic challenge for incarcerated adolescents (Clark Craig, 2004; Liebling, 2004; Liebling & Price, 2001; Lipsey, 2007; Van der Helm, et al., in press; Wortly, 2002). Structure is needed to stabilize personality of adolescents (van der Helm, van Geenabeek, Stams & van der Laan, submitted), avert chaos and anarchy and to provide care, safety and security to youngsters who often have been living on the streets. Notably, too much structure or even

repression may cause feelings of boredom and hopelessness (White, Shi, Mun & Loeber, 2010), which may foster passive coping strategies that frustrate achieving the developmental tasks of adolescence (Greve & Enzmann, 2003).

The opportunities for therapeutic challenge care however are limited in secure correctional facilities without additional risks for structure and safety. The challenge could be met by a gradual transfer to less secure residential care at the facility where adolescents can exercise more control over their own lives and practice developmental tasks in a realistic setting.

There are some limitations of this study that need to be acknowledged. First of all the average length of detention was rather short. A longer detention length could have yielded different results with regard to prisonization and coping. The small sample size and the inclusion of only one youth prison hamper the generalizability of the study findings. Further, the sample size was too small to allow multi-level analysis in order to account for dependency of measurements in hierarchically structured data (e.g. inmates are nested into living groups). Notably, the neglect of statistical dependency results in capitalisation on chance and the risk of spurious research findings. Because of this and other limitations the results of our study should be interpreted with great caution.

The present study is probably one of the first quantitative studies to examine the relation between incarceration length, living group climate, coping and treatment motivation in a youth prison. As the present study only provides preliminary evidence of the rehabilitative impact of an open living group climate, results should be replicated in a prospective, longitudinal study that allows for the examination of contextual effects by means of multi-level analysis. Nevertheless this study is one of the first to attempt to open the 'black box' of treatment in forensic residential youth care. Researchers like Gofmann, Toch, Harvey and Little highlighted the importance of coping in prison with a predominantly negative prison climate and negative outcomes (prisonization). The results of this study, however, indicate that a positive living group climate in youth correctional facilities can be related to more active coping and greater treatment motivation in adolescent inmates and, perhaps, may contribute to better outcomes (Garrido & Morales, 2007; Lipsey, 2009). These findings of this study can be used for improvement of judicial interventions that use group climate for rehabilitation in delinquent youth. An open living group climate should provide enough challenge for positive change and rehabilitation. As active coping and taking initiative in youth prison is often not encouraged and inmates have little control, passive coping and prisonization could be a main consequence of a prolonged prison stay. But an open group living climate, restructured to foster leaning, taking initiative, offering opportunities to exercise control and active coping could counteract passive coping tendencies in inmates and the negative effects of prisonization. We argue that creating an open

living group climate is one of the main challenges for secure youth correctional institutions.

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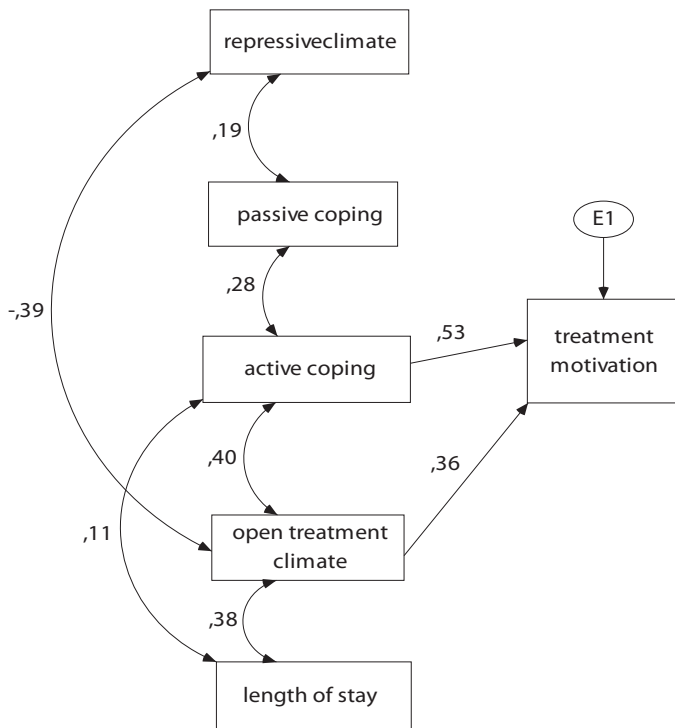


4 The relation between incarceration length, living group climate, coping and treatment ...

Table 1: n= 59 means, standard deviations and correlations

	M	SD	Passive coping	Repressive climate	Open treatment climate	Treatment motivation	Length of stay
Active coping	51.19	10.92	.36*	-.079	.50**	.69**	.13
Passive coping	97.6	14.67		.07	-.14	-.24	0.09
Repressive climate	27.28	5.12			-.41**	-.23	-.045
Open treatment climate	60.08	14.79				.66**	.39*
Treatment motivation	1.2	1.49					.24

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$  (one-tailed significance)



chi-square value=,741;df=7; probability level= ,998

Figure 1: Sem model of the relation between group climate, length of stay, coping and treatment motivation



## Chapter 5

# Group climate and empathy in a sample of incarcerated boys<sup>12</sup>

### Abstract

The present study examined the influence of group climate on empathy in a Dutch youth prison in a sample of 59 incarcerated delinquent boys. Higher levels of empathy have been shown to be associated with less delinquent and more prosocial behaviour, and may therefore be vital for successful rehabilitation and recidivism reduction. Although empathy was originally considered to be a trait, recent neurobiological research has shown that empathy has state-like properties in that levels of empathy change in response to the social environment. The present study showed that differences in group climate were associated with cognitive empathy in juvenile delinquents, but not with affective empathy. It is argued that inmates' depressive feelings and anxiety could diminish the effects of prison group climate on affective empathy. The discussion focuses on group dynamics in youth prison. A positive prison group climate in youth prison could turn out to be a major factor contributing to effectiveness of secure institutional treatment.

### Introduction

Juvenile delinquency and recidivism constitute serious problems in society (Loeber & Farrington, 1998). In order to attend to these problems, incarcerating adolescent delinquents in Dutch society and in most Western societies not only serves the goals of punishment and deterrence, but is also aimed at rehabilitation (Gatti, Tremblay, & Vitaro, 2009; Liebling & Maruna, 2005). Yet little is known about the effectiveness of treatment in secure facilities (Camp & Gaes, 2005; Garrido & Morales, 2007; Van der Helm, Boekee, Stams, & van der Laan, in press; Parhar, Wormith, Derkzen, & Beauregard, 2008). In their review of group processes in offender treatment, Marshall & Burton (2010) concluded that characteristics of the therapist, therapeutic alliance and group climate constitute major mechanisms of effective treatment with juvenile offenders, and that more research on group processes is needed in offender treatment given the limited body of research in this area.

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<sup>12</sup> Van der Helm, G.H.P., Stams, G.J.J.M, Van der Stel, J. & Van der Laan, P.H. *Group climate and empathy in a sample of incarcerated boys*. Manuscript submitted for publication

In their meta-analysis, Jolliffe & Farrington (2004) have shown delinquent youth to exhibit less empathy than non-delinquent youth (see also: Smith & Farrington, 2004; de Wied, Goedena, & Matthys, 2005; Lovett & Sheffield, 2007). Results were stronger for cognitive empathy (understanding of another's emotions) than for affective empathy (experience of another's emotions), although the relation between affective empathy and delinquency remains equivocal (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2007). This finding is of major importance, because empathy is thought to be a motivational base for moral development (Eisenberg & Eggum, 2009). In a recent meta-analysis, Van Vugt et al., (in press) showed more advanced moral development in terms of both moral emotion and moral cognition to be associated with lower recidivism rates, with the largest mean effect size for moral judgment. The findings of this meta-analysis concur with results from the meta-analysis by Stams et al., (2006), who showed that moral judgment is strongly associated with juvenile delinquency.

### ***Empathy***

Recent studies of the social brain have shown that empathy is affected by the social environment (Batson, 2009; Decety & Lamm, 2006; Knafo, Zahn-Waxler, Van Hulle, Robinson, & Rhee, 2008; Zahn-Waxler, 2010). People respond to their social environment by mimicking other's behavioural cues and synchronization of one's behaviour with others, possibly leading to emotion sharing and empathy (Decety & Ickes, 2010; Decety & Meyer, 2008; Decety & Cacioppo, 2010; Hassin, Uleman & Bargh, 2005). These behavioural cues are processed in a subconscious direct and very fast 'emotional' way in the amygdalae in order to be able to act in a split second (Anderson, Christoff, Panitz, De Rosa, & Gabrieli, 2003; Reis & Gray, 2009). This behavioural activating system (the 'fast lane') is geared towards rewards without much thoughts about consequences and connects from the amygdalae direct to the motor area's. Because the prefrontal cortex is still underdeveloped in adolescents, this 'fast lane' is especially a feature of the adolescent brain (Blakemore, 2008; Crone & Westenberg, 2009). This is possibly why adolescents are even more sensitive to their social environment than adults are (Frey, Ruchkin, Martin, & Schwab-Stone, 2009).

### ***Youth prison treatment and group climate***

In youth prison, the social environment has been described in terms of group climate, which can be relatively open (rehabilitative) or closed (repressive, Van der Helm et al., 2009). A structured, safe and rehabilitative environment at the living group is designated as an 'open' climate (Van der Helm, Stams, & van der Laan, 2011). An open group climate, with sufficient support from group workers, ample opportunities for growth and a safe atmosphere is thought to foster affiliation, perspective taking and empathy (Barrett & Wager, 2006).

A closed or repressive group climate (Toch & Kupers, 2007, Toch, 2008; Van der Helm et al., 2011) is characterised by an extremely asymmetric balance of power,

great dependency on staff, lack of mutual respect, emphasis on incremental and haphazard rules and punishment ('chickenshit rules'), aggression, boredom, hopelessness, fear and lack of protection (Harvey, 2005; Liebling & Maruna, in Liebling & Maruna, 2005; Little, 1990; Wright & Goodstein, 1989). A repressive group climate with permanent danger signals in the immediate environment will result in stress, aggression, fear and distrust, reducing empathy (Fishbein & Sheppard, 2006; Bargh, Gollwitzer, Lee-Chai, Barndollar, & Troetschell, 2001; Miers, 2010; Nelson & Trainor, 2007; Wright, 1991).

The present study examines the relation between group climate and empathy in a sample of incarcerated delinquent boys. We hypothesize that an open group climate in youth prison, characterized by support from group workers, ample opportunities for growth and a safe atmosphere, will be associated with more empathy (hypothesis one), but a closed (repressive) living climate will be associated with less empathy (hypothesis two).

## Method

### *Participants*

The present study was conducted in a Dutch youth prison. The population consisted of 59 boys. The mean age of respondents was 17.4 years ( $SD = 1.79$ ) and the mean length of stay in correctional facilities was 10 weeks ( $SD = 2.3$ ). All adolescents participated voluntarily, signed an informed consent declaration and were told that their answers would be treated confidentially and anonymously and would be accessed only by the researchers. Response rate was 90%, two boy's refused to participate and two were unable because of disciplinary measures. As a token of gratitude for their participation, they received a telephone card of €2.50. All names on the questionnaires and interview transcripts were deleted and given a code number in SPSS. In order to protect the privacy of the adolescents, researchers had no access to the names. Questionnaires were administered by specially trained graduate students of the Leiden School of Social Studies (Bachelor of Social Work and master Youth care) and the University of Amsterdam (Department of Forensic Child and Youth Care Sciences).

### *Measures*

*Prison Group Climate (PGCI, van der Helm, Stams & van der Laan, in press).* Items from the PGCI are derived from existing instruments measuring prison climate and adapted for specific use at the living group level. The PGCI consists of 37 items rated on a five-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 = 'I do not agree' to 5 = 'I totally agree'. Each item belongs to only one of the four scales for group climate. This factor structure showed adequate model fit in a confirmatory factor analysis. The support scale (12 items) assesses professional behaviour and in particular the responsiveness of group workers towards specific needs of the inmates.

Paying attention to inmates, taking complaints seriously, respect and trust are important characteristics of support.

An example of a support item is: 'group workers treat me with respect'. The growth scale (9 items) assesses learning perceptions, hope for the future and giving meaning to prison stay. An example for a growth item is: 'I learn the right things here'. The repression scale (7 items) assesses perceptions of strictness and control, unfair and haphazard rules and lack of flexibility at the living group. An example of a repression item is: 'You have to ask permission for everything here'. The group atmosphere scale (7 items) assesses the way inmates treat and trust each other, feelings of safety towards each other, being able to get some peace of mind and having enough daylight and fresh air. An example of a relationship item is 'We trust each other here'.

The four factors proved to be reliable, with internal consistency reliabilities of  $\alpha > .77$ . Cronbach's alpha for the overall climate scale was .82 (4 items), and was a summation of the four subscales divided by four.

*Basic Empathy Scale (BES)*. The BES (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2006) was developed using four basic emotions (anger, sadness, fear and happiness, Power & Dalgleish, 1997) and was translated into Dutch and validated for the Netherlands by Van Langen, Wissink, Stams, Asscher, & Hoes (submitted). The instrument consists of 20 items measuring cognitive (9 items) and affective (11 items) empathy. An item measuring cognitive empathy was: 'I can see when my friends are afraid' and an item measuring affective empathy was: 'When I am with friends who are afraid, I feel afraid too'. Jolliffe and Farrington performed a confirmatory factor analysis in their validation study among 720 adolescent schoolchildren and found a satisfactory fit for the two-factor model and satisfactory reliability (cognitive empathy  $\alpha = .79$  and for affective empathy  $\alpha = .85$ ). Van Langen et al., replicated their study with 655 adolescent schoolchildren and found comparable results (a two-factor solution and alpha's for cognitive empathy of .72 and affective empathy .81).

## Results

### *Preliminary analyses*

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations of the four group climate dimensions and cognitive and affective empathy as well as the associations among these variables. Juvenile delinquents reported lower affective empathy ( $M=2.7, SD=.61$ ) than cognitive empathy ( $M= 3.5, SD=.73$ ): paired samples t-test,  $t(51) = 6.37, p = 0.00$ ). Support and atmosphere were positively associated with cognitive empathy (both  $r = .27$ ), whereas repression was negatively associated with cognitive empathy ( $r = -.28$ ). Associations among the four climate scales were in the expected

direction, with repression showing a negative relation with the other three climate scales ( $-.28 < r < .73$ ).

### ***Structural equation modelling***

To investigate relations between prison group climate scales and cognitive empathy a structural equation model was fitted to the data using the statistical software package Amos 18. We chose only to present the best-fitting model. Cognitive empathy was the dependent variables. Fit-indices (CFI, TLI, and RMSEA<sup>13</sup>) and the model Chi-Square, also designated as the generalized likelihood ratio, were used to evaluate model fit (Kline, 2005). The following cut-off values are indicative of close model fit: NFI and CFI > .90, TLI > .95 and RMSEA < .06, whereas a non-significant Chi-Square indicates exact model fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Arbuckle, 2007; Kline, 2005).

The model showed an exact fit to the data when using a null hypothesis significance test:  $X^2(8) = 9.0, p = .34$ . Fit indices that are less sensitive to differences in sample size than the Chi-square test (Sivo et al., 2006) showed a close fit to the data: NFI= 0.91; CFI= 0.98; TLI = 0.96; RMSEA = 0.046. It can be derived from Figure 1 that repression is negatively related to cognitive empathy ( $p = 0.01$ ). Support is positively related to cognitive empathy ( $p = 0.03$ , one tailed significance). The relation between atmosphere and cognitive empathy was only marginally significant ( $p = 0.06$ , one tailed significance) and could therefore be considered a trend.

## **Discussion**

This study showed prison group climate in terms of support, repression and atmosphere (a trend) to be associated with cognitive empathy. No association, however, was found between growth and cognitive empathy. Moreover, none of the four climate dimensions proved to be associated with affective empathy. The discussion focuses on the meaning of the results for secure institutional treatment and directions for future research.

The absence of a relation between growth and cognitive empathy could reflect the social origin of the empathy construct, as support, repression and atmosphere pertain to social interaction and growth to personal development. Lack of associations between prison group climate and affective empathy may be attributed to numb affect in criminal boys who used to live on the streets in a harsh, competitive environment where showing affect could be considered a weakness (Anderson,

<sup>13</sup> NFI (Normed Fit Index), CFI (Comparative Fit Index), TLI (Tucker-Lewis Index) and RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation) are indices of goodness of fit that are independent of sample size. Models that fit well score favourably on these fit-indices. For further references see Arbuckle (2007).

2000, De Jong, 2007). There is empirical evidence showing that a 'stiff upper lip', showing reactance or 'playing the system' (Harlambolos & Holborne, 1995; Little, 1990) enhances status among juvenile delinquent boys (Van der Helm, Klapwijk, Stams, & van der Laan, 2009). In a post hoc analysis, using single items from a Big Five personality inventory<sup>14</sup>, we found 'fear of other boys' to be negatively related to affective empathy ( $r = -.35, p < 0.01$ ), which supports the idea that affective empathy is reduced among incarcerated delinquent boys.

In the present study, delinquent boys rated lower on affective empathy than on cognitive empathy, which may not only be accounted for by negative peer influences within prison, but also by high levels of depression among incarcerated boys (White, Shi, Mun, Hirschfeld & Loeber, 2010). A post hoc analysis, again using single items from the same Big Five personality questionnaire, showed rumination, boredom, hopelessness, and lack of contact with the outside world to be negatively associated with affective empathy ( $-.33 < -.39, p < 0.01$ ). In sum, fear and depression in youth prison could result in numb affect, explaining the lack of associations between the four prison group climate dimensions and affective empathy.

Marshall and Burton (2010) called for more research on group process in offender treatment. The present study adds to the limited body of research examining the possible effects of group climate as a process variable facilitating treatment and positive outcomes. It was found that a favourable group climate was positively associated with cognitive empathy, but not with affective empathy in young incarcerated offenders. The positive association with cognitive empathy seems important, as Jolliffe & Farrington (2004) found cognitive empathy to be related to delinquency in their meta-analysis of empathy and offending. Moreover, Van Vugt et al., (in press) conducted a meta-analysis of moral development and recidivism, showing that moral cognition was more strongly related to recidivism ( $r = .20$ ) than moral affect ( $r = .10$ ), which is in line with Jolliffe & Farrington's meta-analytic results. Based on our study results, we argue that interventions targeting empathy development in young offenders need the context of a positive group climate, and should account for the possibility that depression and anxiety in juvenile offenders may hamper the development of affective empathy.

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<sup>14</sup> In a previous study of the same sample (Van der Helm, van Genabeek, Stams, & van der Laan, submitted) we used a Big-five questionnaire (translated into Dutch and adapted for prison use; John & Srivastava, 1999) to measure emotional stability, conscientiousness, agreeableness, openness, and extraversion. Reliability was found to be satisfactory for all scales ( $.62 < \alpha < .74$ ). Five items from the Big Five questionnaire were used in the post hoc analysis of the present study: 'I am afraid of other boys'; 'I use to ruminate a lot'; 'I am often bored', 'I feel hopeless' and: 'I am having no contact with the outside world'.



There are some important limitations of this study that need to be acknowledged.

The small sample size and the inclusion of only one youth prison hamper the generalizability of the study findings. Further, the sample size was too small to allow multi-level analysis in order to account for dependency of measurements in hierarchically structured data (e.g. inmates are nested into living groups). Notably, the neglect of statistical dependency results in chance capitalisation and the risk of spurious research findings. Because of this and other limitations the results of our study should be interpreted with great caution.

The present study is probably one of the first quantitative studies with criminal adolescents to examine the relation between group climate and empathy in a youth prison. As the present study only provides preliminary evidence of associations between a positive prison group climate and empathy, results should be replicated in a prospective, longitudinal study that allows for the examination of contextual effects by means of multi-level analysis. Nevertheless this study opens the way to further research into the effectiveness of group interventions with incarcerated boys and possibilities of recidivism reduction. A positive prison group climate in youth prison could turn out to be a major factor contributing to effectiveness of secure institutional treatment.

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Table 1: correlations

	M	SD	support	growth	repression	athmosfere	cognitive empathy
support	2.8	0.94					
growth	3.1	0.98	.73***				
repression	3.3	0.76	-.28*	-.29*			
athmosfere	3.2	0.88	.63**	.62**	-.30*		
cognitive empathy	3.5	.73	.27*	.15	-.28*	.27*	
affective empathy	2.7	.61	-.016	.15	-.21	.050	0.1

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$  (one-tailed significance),  $n=59$

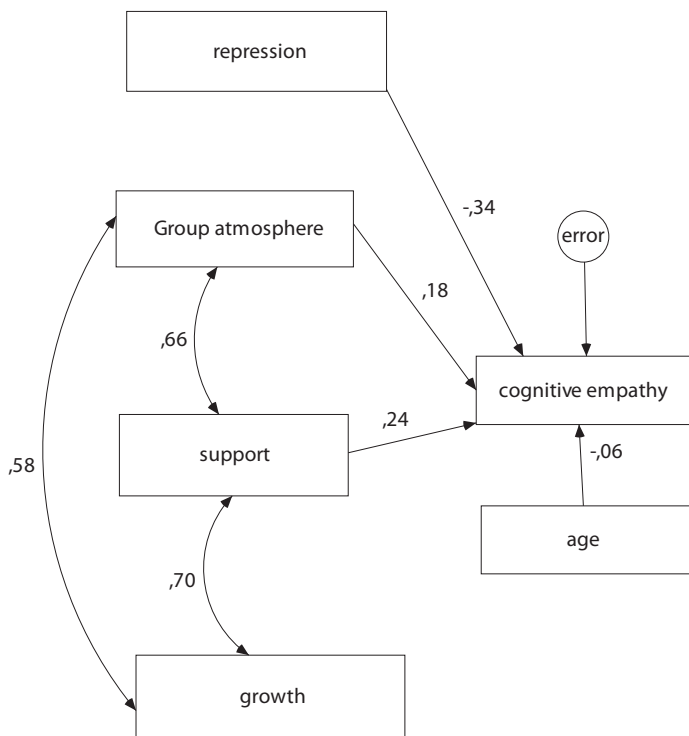


Figure 1: sem-model

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## Chapter 6

# Group Climate, Personality and Self-reported Aggression in Incarcerated Male Youth<sup>15</sup>

### Abstract

Aggression in youth prison is considered a major problem, probably interfering with rehabilitative goals and treatment, and creating an unsafe work environment for group workers. The present study examined how inmates' personality (dispositional characteristics) and group climate in youth prison (situational characteristics) contribute to aggression in a sample of 59 incarcerated delinquent boys. The results showed that open group climate was positively associated with openness and agreeableness and buffered against aggression through its positive effect on emotional stability. A repressive group climate was negatively associated with emotional stability and proved to be unrelated to aggression. The discussion focuses on the importance of a positive group climate for efficacious treatment and rehabilitation of incarcerated young offenders.

**Key words:** group climate; youth prison; personality; Big Five; aggression

### Introduction

Aggression in youth prison – which refers to hostile, destructive, and/or violent behaviour intended to cause harm or pain – is considered to be a serious problem, not only for inmates but for staff as well (Harvey, 2005; Joint Dutch Inspections, 2007; Liebling & Maruna, 2005; Liebling & Price, 2001; Little, 1990, Toch & Kupers, 2008). Some studies on aggression in youth prisons support a 'dispositional' or 'import' model, in which inmates' characteristics, such as a propensity to behave aggressively cause aggression (Delisi et al., 2009; Van Nieuwenhuijzen et al., 2006; Young, Justice, & Erdberg, 2004). Other research (Dye, 2010; Gover, Layton MacKenzie, Styve, & Armstrong, 2000; Parisi, 1982; Sykes, 1958) supports a 'situational' or 'deprivational' model in which inmates react to the 'pains of prison' (loss of autonomy, humiliation, fear; Sykes, 1958), causing increased anger, stress, depression and anxiety (White, Shi, Mun, Hirschfeld, & Loeber, 2010), mutual hostility and aggression towards staff (Bracha, 2006, Whittle, Allen, Lubman & Yu'cel, 2006;

<sup>15</sup> Van der Helm, G.H.P., van Genabeek, M., Stams, G.J.J.M., & Van der Laan, P.H. *Group climate, personality and self reported aggression in incarcerated male youth*. Manuscript submitted for publication.

Toch & Kupers, 2008). Gover, Mackenzie & Armstrong (2000), in their study on adjustment to youth prison, found empirical evidence for both models. The present study examines how inmates' personality (dispositional characteristics) and group prison climate (environment characteristics) contribute to aggression.

### ***The relation between personality and aggression in juvenile delinquents***

Human personality can be described in terms of five dimensions, commonly designated as the 'Big Five' (McCrae & Costa, 1996): 'emotional stability' (low 'neuroticism'), 'conscientiousness', 'agreeableness', 'openness' and 'extraversion'. Digman (1997), replicated by DeYoung (2006), showed that associations among the big five dimensions can be explained by two higher order factors, that is, stability (low neuroticism, agreeableness and conscientiousness) and plasticity (extraversion and openness).

There is empirical evidence showing that both juvenile and adult delinquents tend to have unstable personality traits (Hornsveld, van Dam-Baggen, Lammers, Nijman, & Kraaimaat, 2004; Trninić, Barančić & Nazor, 2008; Van Dam, Janssens, & de Bruyn, 2005), and that such unstable personality traits are associated with antisocial personality disorder (Saulsman & Page, 2004), a tendency to attribute hostile intent to others (Sato, Uono, Matsuura, & Toichi, 2009), and aggression (Baumeister, Smart, & Boden, 1996; Bushman & Baumeister, 1998; Moffitt, Caspi, Dickson, Silva, & Staton, 1996; Ostrowsky, 2010; Van Dam et al., 2005; for a review see: Van Goozen et al., 2007). The relations between on the one hand plasticity (extraversion and openness) and on the other hand delinquency and aggression, however, are still equivocal (e.g. Van Dam et al., 2005), and can even be different for extraversion and openness (e.g. Klimstra, Akse, Hale III, Raaijmakers, & Meeus, 2010).

The dispositional or importational model proposes that inmates are at risk for aggressive behavior due to unfavorable personality characteristics, including high neuroticism, low agreeableness, and low conscientiousness (instability). Whether the plasticity dimension can explain aggression from the dispositional/importational model perspective too is still far from clear, but is exploratively examined in the present study.

### ***Group climate in youth prison and aggression***

In youth prison, inmates' social environment consists of adolescents often showing a propensity to behave aggressively (Anderson & Rancer, 2007). Ample research has shown that externalizing behaviour, including aggression, can be contagious (Witvliet, 2009). In a situation where boys are forced to live together, aggression in the immediate environment can probably enhance aggressive behaviour through emotional contagion (Baumann & DeSteno, 2010; Frijda, 1986.) and social learning (Dishion, McCord, & Poulain, 1999). Therefore, aggregation of adolescents with antisocial tendencies is thought to increase aggressiveness at the living group,



which may shape a negative group climate, reflected by repression and hostility. Recent research has shown that also group workers shape group climate. Their influence can be decisive in establishing a more open (supportive) or closed (repressive) climate (Van der Helm, Boekee, Stams, & van der Laan, in press).

A positive ('open') living climate is a structured, safe and rehabilitative environment, where support is high, opportunities for growth are evident, where flexibility is in balance with the organizational needs for control, and repression is minimal (Clark Craig, 2004; van der Helm, Klapwijk, Stams & van der Laan 2009; Ule, Schram, Riedl, & Cason, 2009; Wortly, 2002). In an 'open' climate incarcerated boys are motivated to connect to others in the environment, to take another person's perspective and show empathic responding (Chartrand & Dalton, 2008; Oettingen, Grant, Smith, Skinner, & Gollwitzer, 2006). This climate is thought to buffer against aggression at the living group by eliciting prosocial behavior, which counteracts aggressive tendencies resulting from instable personality traits (Janzing & Kerstens, 2002).

A repressive living group climate is characterised by distrust among inmates and between inmates and group workers, contributing to mutual hostility. Hostility among inmates is associated with aggression and violence as a means to maintain control (Cheng, Tracy, & Henrich, 2010; Thomaes, 2010; Van der Helm, Boekee, Stams & van der Laan, in press). A repressive group climate has been shown to result in low self worth, anxiety, and aggression (Ostrowsky, 2010; Thomaes, 2007). While inmates' aggression can elicit repression by staff in order to maintain control, repression can subsequently aggravate aggression in inmates. This transactional mechanism (Sameroff, 2009) has been designated as a 'deviance amplifying feedback cycle' (Patterson & Bank, 1989), a 'coercive cycle with reciprocal negative reinforcement' (Gravine & Patterson, 2006) or a 'pathology amplifying cycle' (Baulieu & Bugental, 2009) and can result in a rapid deteriorating group climate, resulting in severe violence.

### ***Group climate in youth prison and personality***

Advances in psychology and neuroscience question a trait-like property of personality and point to a more malleable nature of personality that is influenced by our social surroundings (Fraley & Roberts, 2005; Hassin, Uleman, & Bargh, 2005; Singer & Lamm, 2009; Vignemont & Singer, 2006). Fraley and Roberts propose a transactional model of personality change in that someone's personality has an effect on the social environment, which on its turn can influence individual personality characteristics. The role of transactional mechanisms in adolescent personality development could be especially strong in a secure environment, where eight to twelve boys with similar problems are living together, cannot leave the group, and cannot avoid each other and group workers (Van der Helm, et al., 2009, Witvliet, 2009).

An open group climate is thought to have a positive effect on personality development (Chartrand, Dalton, & Fitzsimmons, 2008, Van der Helm, Stams, van der Stel, & van der Laan, submitted; Wikstrom & Treiber, 2009). Roberts, Wood and Smith (2005) propose that prosocial personality development is being directed by success in social roles, which is a major target in group therapy. Positive role-taking and openness at the living group can be seen as a form of social investment and will elicit positive attention from group workers, who have been shown to have a great impact on inmates' prosocial development (Arden & Linford, 2009; Van der Helm et al., 2009, Van der Helm et al., submitted).

A repressive group climate is associated with a hierarchic and violent surrounding. Repeated danger of violence in the immediate environment is known to change the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis (stress system) rapidly and influence the way we perceive others and their intentions (Fontaine, Burks, & Dodge, 1998; Miers, 2010). As with criminal boys, who are used to living on the streets (Anderson, 2003; De Jong, 2007) this tendency to attribute hostile intent to others can rapidly be activated (Baumann & DeSteno, 2010). Recently, Tracy, Cheng, Robbins & Treszniewsky (2010) argued that hierarchically structured environments, like prisons, are related to emotional instability and poor mental health. Ostrowsky (2010) pointed in his recent review to the connection between emotional instability and violence. Klimstra, Akse, Hale III, Raaijmakers & Meeus (2010) found evidence for relations between lack of stability and aggression in their longitudinal research.

The present study examines relations among group climate, inmates' personality and aggression in a sample of incarcerated delinquent boys. We hypothesize a repressive group climate to be negatively related to emotional stability (low neuroticism), agreeableness and conscientiousness (the stability dimension, hypothesis one) and to be positively related to aggression (hypothesis two). An open climate (support, growth and a positive atmosphere) is hypothesized to be positively related to emotional stability, agreeableness and conscientiousness and negatively related to aggression (hypothesis three). We also hypothesize a negative relation between emotional stability, agreeableness, conscientiousness and aggression (hypothesis 4). The relations among group climate, extraversion, openness (the plasticity dimension) and aggression will be exploratively examined.

## **Method**

### ***Participants***

The present study was conducted in a Dutch youth prison. The population consisted of 59 boys. The mean age of respondents was 17.4 years ( $SD = 1.79$ ) and the mean length of stay in correctional facilities was 10 weeks ( $SD = 2.3$ ). All adolescents participated voluntarily, signed an informed consent declaration and were told that their answers would be treated confidentially and anonymously and would be accessed only by the researchers. Response rate was 92%; three boy's

refused to participate and two were unable because of disciplinary measures. As a token of gratitude for their participation, they received a telephone card of €2.50. All names on the questionnaires and interview transcripts were deleted and given a code number in SPSS. In order to protect the privacy of the adolescents, researchers had no access to the names.

### **Questionnaires**

Questionnaires were administered by specially trained graduate students of the Leiden School of Social Studies (Bachelor of Social Work and master Youth care) and the University of Amsterdam (Department of Forensic Child and Youth Care Sciences).

*Prison Group Climate* (PGCI, Van der Helm, Stams & van der Laan, in press). Items from the PGCI are derived from existing instruments measuring prison climate and were adapted for specific use at the living group level. The PGCI consists of 37 items rated on a five-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 = 'I do not agree' to 5 = 'I totally agree'. Each item belongs to only one of the four scales for group climate. The support scale (12 items) assesses perceived professional behaviour and in particular the responsiveness of group workers to specific needs of the inmates. Paying attention to inmates, taking complaints seriously, respect and trust are important characteristics of support. An example of a support item is: 'group workers treat me with respect'. The growth scale (9 items) assesses learning perceptions, hope for the future and giving meaning to the prison stay. An example of a growth item is: 'I learn the right things here'. The repression scale (7 items) assesses perceptions of strictness and control, unfair and haphazard rules and lack of flexibility at the living group. An example of a repression item is: 'You have to ask permission for everything here'. The group atmosphere scale (7 items) assesses the way inmates treat and trust each other, feelings of safety towards each other, being able to get some peace of mind and having enough daylight and fresh air. An example of a relationship item is 'We trust each other here'.

For the purpose of this study, 'support' ( $\alpha = .88$ ), 'growth' ( $\alpha = .86$ ) and 'atmosphere' ( $\alpha = .78$ ) formed the 'open' climate scale ( $\alpha = .87$ ), while the 'closed' climate scale consisted of the 'repressive scale'. Reliability of both scales in this study was good (open climate  $\alpha = .87$ ; repression,  $\alpha = .77$ ).

The Burke-Durkee Hostility Inventory. The BDHI was originally developed by Buss and Durkee (1957) and was revised by Buss and Perry (1992). Lange, Hoogenboom & Widerspahn (1995), who translated the instrument into Dutch, found two independent factors: overt (direct) and covert (indirect) aggression, rated by boy's themselves on a 'true'- 'not true' dichotomous scale. Direct aggression represents the combination of physical and verbal aggression. Anger and hostility are the core concepts of indirect aggression. Lange et al., (1995) reported excellent reliability and validity. An example of a 'direct aggression-item' was: 'If I am angry, I slam

doors'. In this research reliability was found to be good for the direct aggression scale (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .76$ ) but reliability for the indirect aggression scale was unsatisfactory (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .42$ ).

Personality: a reliable and valid Big-five questionnaire (Dutch, John & Srivastava, 1999) with 43-items was used to measure the big five factors: emotional stability, conscientiousness, agreeableness, openness and extraversion. An example of an emotional stability item was: 'I am often sad or down' and an 'agreeableness-item' was: 'I trust others'. Reliability was found to be satisfactory for all scales ('stability',  $\alpha = .68$ ; 'consciousness',  $\alpha = .61$ ; 'agreeableness',  $\alpha = .71$ ; 'openness',  $\alpha = .74$  and 'extraversion'  $\alpha = .62$ ).

## Results

### *Preliminary analyses*

Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations of the group climate scales, the big 5 personality factors and direct aggression, and the correlations between these variables. Open group climate proved to be negatively associated with closed or repressive group climate ( $r = -.32, p < .05$ ) and direct aggression ( $r = -.30, p < .05$ ), and positively associated with agreeableness ( $r = .49, p < .01$ ). Repressive group climate was negatively associated with emotional stability ( $r = -.24, p < .05$ ) and openness ( $r = -.26, p < .05$ ). Emotional stability was negatively associated with extraversion ( $r = -.57, p < .01$ ) and positively associated with aggression ( $r = .29, p < .05$ ). Conscientiousness was positively associated with both agreeableness ( $r = .50, p < .01$ ) and openness ( $r = .61, p < .01$ ). Agreeableness was positively associated with openness ( $r = .52, p < .01$ ), extraversion ( $r = .41, p < .01$ ) and negatively associated with aggression ( $r = -.35, p < .01$ ). Finally, openness was positively associated with extraversion ( $r = .49, p < .01$ ).

### *Structural equation modelling*

A structural equation model was fitted to the data, testing a model in which group climate is associated with the big five personality traits, and both group climate and the big five personality traits predict aggression as the dependent variable. We chose only to present the best-fitting model. Fit-indices (CFI, TLI, and RMSEA<sup>16</sup>) and the model Chi-Square, also designated as the generalized likelihood ratio, were used to evaluate model fit (Kline, 2005). The following cut-off values are indicative of close model fit: NFI and CFI  $> .90$ , TLI  $> .95$  and RMSEA  $< .06$ , whereas

<sup>16</sup> CFI (Comparative Fit Index), TLI (Tucker-Lewis Index), NFI (Normed Fit Index) and RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation) are indices of goodness of fit that are independent of sample size. Models that fit well score favourably on these fit-indices. For further references see Arbuckle (2007).

a non-significant Chi-Square indicates exact model fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Arbuckle, 2005; Kline, 2005).

The model showed an exact fit to the data when using a null hypothesis significance test:  $\chi^2(5) = 5.4, p = .37$ . Fit indices that are less sensitive to differences in sample size than the Chi-square test (Civo et al., 2006) showed a good fit to the data: NFI = 0.94; CFI = 0.99; TLI = 0.96; RMSEA = 0.036. It can be derived from Figure 1 that repressive climate was negatively associated with emotional stability ( $p = 0.03$ ). Open climate was positively associated with emotional stability ( $p = 0.02$ ), agreeableness ( $p = 0.00$ ), and openness ( $p = .04$ ). Agreeableness was positively associated with openness ( $p = 0.00$ ). Finally, emotional stability ( $p = 0.00$ ) and agreeableness ( $p = 0.04$ ) were both negatively related to direct aggression. We examined possible mediation by testing indirect effects using a bootstrap method in Amos (Arbuckle, 2005). Results show that the relation between open group climate and aggression was mediated by emotional stability (Standardized indirect effect = .21; SE = 0.053,  $p < 0.05$ ). Other mediation tests did not yield significant results. The relation between open group climate and aggression was not mediated by agreeableness, and the relation between repressive group climate and aggression was not mediated by emotional stability.

## Discussion

This study examined the relations between group climate, personality traits and self reported aggression in a sample of incarcerated juvenile delinquents. Repressive group climate proved to be negatively associated with emotional stability, but not with any of the other big five personality traits. Open group climate was positively associated with openness, agreeableness and emotional stability, but not with conscientiousness and extraversion. We did not find a direct effect of repressive group climate on aggression. However, a relation between open group climate and aggression was found, which was fully mediated by emotional stability.

The present study findings demonstrate that the dispositional and situational model should be examined in concert in order to be able to understand young inmates' aggression. Whereas open group climate buffered against aggression through its positive effects on emotional stability, a repressive group climate did not affect aggression. The absence of an effect of a repressive climate on aggression is not in accordance with the deprivational hypothesis. It is possible that repression does not add or hardly adds to juvenile delinquents' personality problems and aggression, as repression could be a continuation of prior negative experiences with peers, parents and authorities within school or society at large (Anderson, 2000; Bugental, 2009; De Jong, 2007, Sato et al., 2009; Van Spinhoven et al., 2010). In contrast, an open climate is thought to foster more positive social interactions in the lives of

juvenile delinquents. The results of this study suggest that this experience could positively affect inmates' personality and aggression.

No relations were found between on the one hand consciousness openness, extraversion and on the other hand aggression. Consciousness is thought to buffer against aggression through its association with planned behavior and control (McCrae & Costa, 1994). In contrast to most research on the relation between personality and aggression, which has been carried out in the general population, this study was conducted with incarcerated juvenile delinquents. Youth prison offers very little opportunity for planned behavior and control (Harvey, 2007; Little, 1994; Van der Helm et al., 2009), which could explain the absence of an association between consciousness and aggression.

Relations between the two plasticity subtypes (extraversion and openness) and aggression were exploratively examined because previous studies yielded equivocal results (De Young, Peterson, Sequin & Tremblay, 2008), but no significant associations were found. It is therefore possible that extraversion and openness neither make incarcerated delinquent adolescents more vulnerable for aggressive behavior nor buffer against aggressive behavior. Research on this topic is still equivocal (Depue & Collins, 1999; De Young, Peterson, Sequin & Tremblay, 2008; McCrae & Costa, 1997; Miller & Lynam, 2001; Thomaes, 2007). Whereas extraversion was unrelated to both repressive and open group climate, openness proved to be associated with open group climate. This can be considered an important finding, since it is plausible that more openness to experience makes juvenile delinquents more susceptible to treatment. Van der Helm et al., (2009) found that open group climate was associated with greater treatment motivation. Future research should examine whether the relation between open group climate and treatment motivation is mediated by openness to experience.

There are some limitations of this study that need to be acknowledged.

Due to the cross-sectional nature of our study, it was not possible to examine transactional effects (Gershoff, Aber & Clements, 2009). The small sample size and the inclusion of only one youth prison hamper the generalisability of the study findings. Further, the sample size was too small to allow multi-level analysis in order to account for dependency of measurements in hierarchically structured data (e.g. inmates are nested into living groups). Notably, the neglect of statistical dependency may result in chance capitalisation. Because of this and other limitations the results of this study should be considered as preliminary.

The present study is probably one of the first studies to examine the relation between group climate, personality and aggression in a youth prison. As the present study only provides preliminary evidence of associations between a positive group climate, personality and aggression, results should be replicated in a prospective, longitudinal study that allows for the more dynamic examination of



contextual effects by means of multi-level modelling (Gershoff, Aber, & Clements, 2009). Despite its limitations, this study opens the way to further research into the effectiveness of residential interventions for delinquent boys (Garrido & Morales, 2007). Results of the present study can be used to inform group workers about the importance of a positive group climate.

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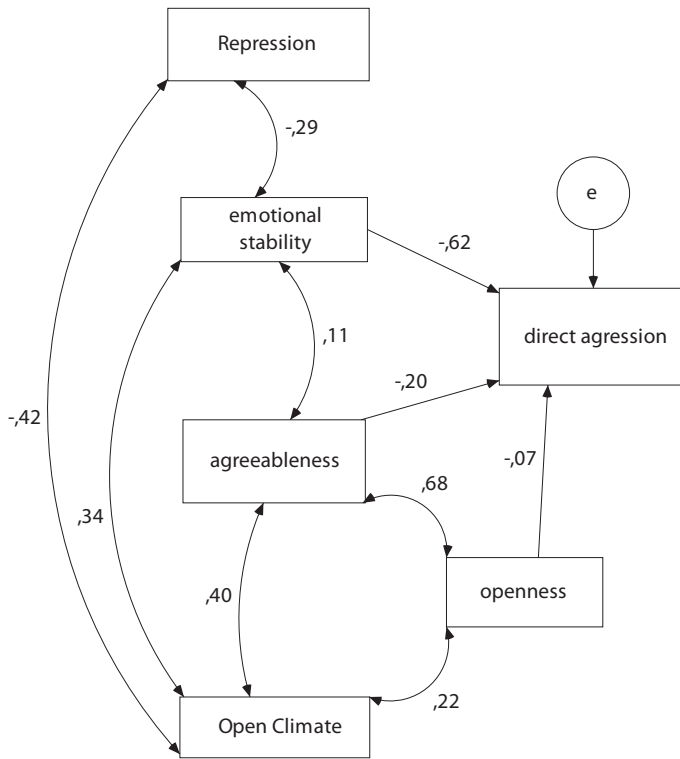
First do no Harm

Table 1: means and correlations

	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Open climate</b>	<b>Closed climate (repression)</b>	<b>Emotional stability</b>	<b>Consciousness</b>	<b>Agreeableness</b>	<b>openness</b>	<b>extra-version</b>
Open climate	3.1	.80							
Closed climate (repression)	1.7	.76	-.32*						
Emotional stability	2.2	.55	-.00	-.24*					
Consciousness	3.8	.57	-.07	-0.07	-.15				
Agreeableness	3.5	.57	.49**	.15	-.07	.50**			
Openness	3.5	.59	-.08	-.26 *	.21	.61**	.52**		
Extraversion	3.3	.58	.08	-.15	-.57**	.23	.41**	.49**	
Direct aggression	1.5	.56	-.30*	-.14	.29*	-.05	-.35**	.06	.03

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , (two-tailed significance),  $n=59$

6 Group Climate, Personality and Self-reported Aggression in Incarcerated Male Youth



Chi-square= 5.39 df= 5 probability level= .37

RMSEA= .037

NFI= .937

TLI= .975

CFI= .994

Figure 1: sem-model



## Chapter 7

# Fear is the Key, keeping the Balance between Flexibility and Control in a Dutch Youth Prison<sup>17</sup>

### Abstract

The present study examined the education, safety and professional attitude of group workers in a Dutch youth prison and their perceptions of the organizational culture and leadership by line and staff management. To be able to attain therapeutic goals, group workers must maintain a balance between therapeutic flexibility and control. It was found that some interactions between group workers and prisoners created fear, suspicion and violence, and that staff varied in their behavioural responses to perceived unsafety and lack of control. 'Transformational' (inspiring) leadership by line and staff management was associated with less fear and more flexibility and control, which seems needed to create a rehabilitative group climate. The findings of this study can be used for the improvement of treatment of juvenile delinquents who reside in secure correctional facilities.

### *Summary of policy and practice implications*

- An open group climate could provide a structured rehabilitative environment for incarcerated adolescents, but the difficulty in maintaining the balance between flexibility and control needs constant monitoring of climate quality to avoid negative consequences of incarceration.
- Education, training, and professional attitudes of group workers as well as organisational culture should be aligned with rehabilitative goals.
- Fear of violence can engender perceptions of losing control in both inmates and group workers. Group workers depend on each other for safety and do not criticize fellow workers. Group workers who are perceived to be 'in control' because of their repressive and often punitive behaviour tend to attain most authority and dominance, which can result in a rapidly deteriorating group climate. Living group climate should therefore be monitored regularly, especially after incidents to prevent a downward cycle of violence and punishment.
- Transformational leadership by line and staff management is needed to counteract feelings of unsafety among group workers and punitive attitudes, as well as to support group workers in performing their difficult task at the group.

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<sup>17</sup> Van der Helm, G.H.P., Boeke, I., Stams, G.J.J.M., & Van der Laan, P.H. (in press). Fear is the key: keeping the balance between flexibility and control in a Dutch youth prison. *Journal of Children's Services*.

- Almost every shift yields urgent problems. Group leaders should therefore be adequately supported by their line and staff management during shifts. To be able to do this, line and staff management and psychologists should be present at the living group on a regular base.

## Introduction

Incarcerating adolescent delinquents in Dutch society, and in most Western societies serves the goals of punishment and deterrence (Liebling & Maruna, 2005), but rehabilitation is the most important goal (Gatti, Tremblay & Vitaro, 2009). The long term effects of incarceration, however, are not promising yet (Andrews, Zinger, Hoge, Bonta, Gendreau & Cullen, 1990; Garrido & Morales, 2007; Gatti, Tremblay & Vitaro, 2009; Huizinga & Henry, 2008; Parhar, Wormith, Derkzen & Beauregard, 2008; Mac Kenzie, 2006; Pritikin, 2009, Loughran, 2009). Although Knorth, Harder, Kendrick and Zandberg (2008) performed a meta-analysis of the effects of (forensic) residential youth care (27 studies) and found moderate to large effect sizes for overall improvement, including improved social functioning and decreases in aggression and recidivism (Cohen's  $d = 0.60$ ), institution workers in the Knorth study reported hardly any progression. Notably, when Stams, Van der Helm and Van der Laan (2010) performed an analysis solely on the controlled studies, the effect size dropped to a non-significant  $d = 0.03$ .

To conclude, we notice two urgent problems in this field of research: first empirical evidence for a positive effect of (forensic) residential youth care on rehabilitation is lacking. Second: there is a lack of knowledge about negative effects of incarceration and treatment conditions in residential youth care that may affect successful rehabilitation (Axford, Little, Morpeth, & Weyts, 2005; Drost, 2008). Therefore, the present study examines the role of workers' level of education, their perception of safety, work attitudes, organizational culture and leadership in shaping a rehabilitative group climate in youth prison. Characteristic of a rehabilitative climate is the combination of flexibility and control, which should be attuned to the developmental needs of the juvenile delinquents.

In this study, flexibility is used in the sense of responsiveness, opportunities for growth and innovation, while control is congruent with structure, predictability, safety and effective rule keeping at the living group. In a secure institution, however, undue reliance on control can easily turn into repressive control and coercion (Gofman, 1961; Zimbardo, 1991). Inspiring leadership by line and staff management seems therefore needed to help group workers find a balance between flexibility and control in the face of challenging behavior of inmates at the living group (Berridge & Brodie, 1998; Hicks, 2008), and to help group workers counteract the negative effects of coercion in correctional treatment of incarcerated delinquent youth (Parhar et al., 2008).



### ***Negative effects of incarceration***

Some researchers have found incarceration to have criminogenic effects (Camp & Gaes, 2005; Gatti et al., 2009; Kimberly & Huizinga, 2008; Liebling & Maruna, 2005; Osgood & O'Neill Briddell, 2006). These criminogenic effects of incarceration may be ascribed to the negative impact of imprisonment on moral development (Stams et al., 2006), socialization into criminality during imprisonment, exposure to the prison's antisocial subculture, strengthening of deviant bonds (Osgood, O'Neill Briddell, 2006), labeling (Huizinga & Henry, 2008), weakening of protective social bonds and brutalization (for a review, see Pritikin, 2009).

Recent neurobiological research has shown that the social climate affects human behaviour (Van Goozen, Fairchild, & Snoek, 2007). As incarcerated boys cannot leave their living area, the impact of the social climate on them is thought to be relatively large (van der Helm, Stams & van der Laan, 2011). Incarceration may engender stress, fear and aggression in the immediate environment. This can produce neurohormones, like vasopressine and cortisol, which are connected with negative emotions, hostility bias, antisocial behaviour, and low social involvement (Fishbein & Sheppard, 2006; Nelson & Trainor, 2007; Popma & Raine, 2006, Tremblay, 2008; Sato, Uono, Matsuura, & Toichi, 2009; for a review see: Van Goozen et al., 2007).

### ***Youth prison climate***

Compared to most adult prisons the impact of the prison environment on adolescents is probably more pronounced, as incarcerated adolescents spend less time in their cells and often live in supervised living groups. In contrast to most adult prisons, social interaction at the living group is a main therapeutic instrument and serves educational goals (Slot & Spanjaard, 2009). A structured, safe and rehabilitative environment is often designated as an 'open' climate when support is high, opportunities for growth are evident, and flexibility is in balance with the organizational needs for control (Clark Craig, 2004; van der Helm, Stams & van der Laan, 2011; Ule, Schram, Riedl, & Cason, 2009; Wortly, 2002). In contrast, the prison climate should be regarded as 'closed' when support from staff is (almost) absent and opportunities for 'growth' are minimal. A closed prison climate is also reflected by lack of flexibility, a grim and uninviting atmosphere and repressive control, coercion, including incremental rules, little privacy, lack of safety and boredom and (frequent) humiliation of inmates (Harvey, 2005; Irwin & Owen, 2005; Liebling & Maruna, 2005; Little, 1990; Wright & Goodstein, 1989).

### ***Flexibility versus control***

Maintaining a structured and rehabilitative environment requires a delicate balance between flexibility and control (Clark Craig, 2004; Liebling, 2004; Liebling & Price, 2001; Wortly, 2002). Control incorporates safety, a predictable day structure and effective rule keeping and is needed to avert chaos, anarchy and violence among adolescents who are often used to live in an aversive environment, and

are afraid of and/or distrust other people (Sato, Uono, Matsuura, & Toichi, 2009). Flexibility or innovation are needed to practice newly acquired social competences and to stop a negative spiral of social fears, a tendency to evaluate ambiguous stimuli in the environment as negative, and socially inadequate or rigid hostile behaviours (Miers, 2010; White, Shi, Hirschfield, Mun & Loeber, 2009). Too much reliance on control, however, can turn into repressive control and coercion, which creates more fear and depression and fosters distrust and damages (therapeutic) relationships between staff and inmates (De Dreu, Giebels & Van der Vliert on the effects of punitive power, 1998, Wortly, 2002).

Flexibility is considered important from the perspective of the 'Risks-Needs-Responsivity' (RNR) principle of successful rehabilitation (Langdon, 2007). The RNR principle holds that the intensity of the behavioural intervention matches the risk for recidivism, that treatment should target criminogenic needs, and that treatment should be fine-tailored to the learning style, motivation, abilities and strength of the offender (Andrews & Bonta, 2007). Fine tailoring needs flexibility in treatment as opposed to a 'one size fits all' method. In youth prison, this arduous task of reconciling two seemingly opposite goals (the need for control to avert chaos and violence and flexibility to promote learning and rehabilitation) is especially the domain of group workers and their professional behavior.

### ***Group workers' professional behaviour***

The professional behaviour of group workers in a closed forensic setting is subject to many (external) influences. Working with adolescents who are often victim as well as perpetrator, and who display serious externalizing an internalizing behaviour (Vermeiren, 2003) requires efficacious professional behaviour of group leaders. For this, education, task maturity ('knowledge, experience and skills that the specific task requires'; Herschi & Blanchard, 1977), a shared social identity with high motivational attitudes and safety are important conditions according to organizational literature (Fiedler, 1964; Furnham 1997; Haslam, 2004). An organizational culture that combines flexibility (innovation) and control (structure) and inspiring (transformational) leadership (Bass, 2008) may shape conditions for group workers to create a flexible and open living climate (Fiedler, 1964; Herschi & Blanchard, 1977; Jaffee, 2001). But to be able to create such a climate under difficult conditions, education seems to be necessary for understanding inmate behavior and organizational and group dynamics at the living group.

### ***Education***

Aggression by inmates can easily be misattributed by group workers (Crick & Dodge, 1996), and therefore demands a high degree of professionalism and suitable education and training in order to be able to adequately interpret and handle 'aggressive' or challenging behaviour of the inmates. For a treatment orientation that is based on young offenders' prospects of rehabilitation (Cullen, Latessa, Burton, & Lombardo, 1993; Quinn & Gould, 2003), knowledge of their psychopathol-

ogy is needed (Combined Dutch Inspections, 2007). We conclude that working with delinquent adolescents in a secure correctional institution requires higher professional education and knowledge (for instance, Bachelor of Social Work or University degree in Educational Science or Psychology: Ministry of Justice, Dutch Prison Service, 2009). Such knowledge facilitates adequate interpretation of challenging behavior and could help de-escalate the level of aggression in delinquent adolescents with serious mental, emotional and behavioral problems, which altogether could enhance safety at the living group.

### ***Safety***

A closed prison climate, which is characterized by stress, suspicion, fear and frequent violence, can negatively influence staff behaviour. Severe stress emanating from violence could lead to either 'freeze', 'flight' or 'fight' reactions (Gray, 2003). 'Freeze' reactions have been found in group workers who distance themselves from the inmates ('just doing my shift', Liebling & Price, 2001) who are not responsive to their needs, and believe that 'nothing works'. 'Flight' reactions can be diverse: 'bad boys' are often neglected by the group workers who tend to concentrate on 'good boys'. Another flight reaction is retreating from the social interactions of the living group by performing administrative duties. 'Fight' reactions often stem from fear of losing control at the living group (Fast & Chen, 2010; Bugental, 2009) and can be characterized by exercising strict control, coercion and punishment, 'get tough' ideations (Perelmans & Clements, 2009, Toch, 2008) at the living group and picking on 'bad boys'. These reactions can gain dominance over group workers easily as they offer a perceived solution for control loss at the living group. To counteract these tendencies, an organizational culture, congruent with institutional goals, is required to maintain professional standards and support rehabilitative efficacious behaviour of group workers.

### ***Organizational culture***

Organizational culture is defined by Schein (1996) as the way a group of people share and determine their perceptions, thoughts, feelings and overt behaviour and pass these on as 'the right way' to newcomers in the institution (Schein, 1996, 1997). One of the main characteristics of organizational culture according to Schein is its layered structure and the likelihood of internal inconsistencies. Schein proposed organizational culture to consist of three layers or 'onion' rings. The outer layer or 'artifacts' are the visible structures of the place (e.g. bars, barbed wire, safety measures). Beneath artifacts are 'espoused values' that are conscious strategies, goals and philosophies of the organization (e.g. rehabilitation and treatment). The core, or essence, of culture is represented by the 'basic (underlying) assumptions' that operate at a largely unconscious level. These basic assumptions concern notions about the nature of humans ('good' or 'bad'), human relationships, activity, reality and truth.

Internal inconsistencies in the youth prison 'onion' can be explained by espoused values that are based on a treatment orientation with common values associated with responsiveness and an organizational culture that is based on a balance between flexibility and control at the living group (Cameron & Quinn, 1999; Haslam, 2004). Underlying basic assumptions can be simultaneously characterized by the core belief that all youngsters are 'bad', beyond cure and deserve harsh punishment, resulting in punitiveness and control, although 'espoused' institutional values stress rehabilitation and treatment. This basic assumption of 'incurable badness' can be nurtured by the growing acceptance and positive evaluation of retribution and severe punishment in the media and political landscape, where often criminal adolescents are portrayed as incurable 'urban predators' (Green, 2009; Piquero, Cullen, Unnever, Piquero, & Gordon, 2010). The 'nothing works' paradigm (Cullen & Gendreau, 2001) can exert a negative influence on 'basic assumptions' and group leaders' behaviour (Green, 2009). In a closed climate punitive 'basic assumptions' and 'get tough' ideations (Perelmans & Clements, 2009) often contrast with 'official' or 'espoused values' (treatment orientation). To maintain organizational values effective leadership is required.

### **Leadership**

Task-maturity and high work motivation have to be complemented by a stable organization with clear organizational goals, a corresponding organizational culture and active, inspiring and innovative leadership (Camp, Gaes, Langan & Saylor, 2003; Colvin, 2007; Diluio, 1987; Steiner & Wooldredge, 2008; Souryal p. 268 (2008). Leadership that is solely based on control is probably not sufficient for carrying out a complicated task, according to leadership literature (Bass & Bass, 2009; Fiedler, 1964). Leadership in a forensic setting should be inspiring and innovative to motivate (organizational) learning, growth and support of group workers in maintaining flexibility *and* control. Passive leadership can elicit disappointment and an organizational withdrawal response from group workers (the inmates 'take over') or increased punitive behaviour in order to gain repressive control of the living group (Perelmans & Clements, 2009). Active leadership is called upon to counteract these tendencies, especially after incidents. Active (and (transformational) leadership (Hackman & Oldham, 1980) is also needed for maintaining motivational attitudes in the face of challenging behaviour of incarcerated boys.

### **Work attitudes in youth prison**

A high work motivational attitude is needed to handle difficult adolescents and to preserve responsiveness towards them in spite of incidents and disappointments. Traditional elements of work motivational attitudes (Hackman & Oldham, 1980) pertain to job characteristics like skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy and feedback. These job characteristics are thought to be fundamental to intrinsic work motivation. The 'nothing works' paradigm (Cullen & Gendreau, 2001) and a lack of a shared social identity at work can be devastating to work motivational attitudes by diminishing perceptions of task significance, autonomy

and task identity (Haslam, 2004). Task significance, autonomy and feedback are reduced in a closed climate where group workers react to fear of losing control with repression and coercion (Fast & Chen, 2010, Bugental, 2009). Inmates, in order to maintain self esteem and respect from their peers, respond often with reactance (Ostrowsky, 2010; Thomaes, Bushman, Stegge & Olthof, 2008), creating a coercive cycle, often found in developmental processes (Patterson, 2006). In some cases these work attitudes can lead to aversive behaviour of group workers: exercising strict, unfair control and coercion, neglecting needs of inmates and humiliating them (Souryal, 2009). Also downright criminal conduct like misuse of power and violence (Liebling & Price, 2001, Fast & Chen, 2009), discrimination (Bell, Ridolfi, Finly, & Lacy, 2009), maltreatment, staff sexual victimization of adolescents (Rabkin, 1999, Beck, Page & Guerino, 2010; Roush, 2008; Stein, 2006) and drug trafficking have sometimes been reported (Mc Carthy 1984).

To maintain an 'open' group climate group workers should combine therapeutic flexibility (responsiveness, providing opportunities for growth and innovation) with control, that is, structure. To achieve this, organizational values must be congruent with group workers' work attitudes and education. Leadership should be inspiring and innovative to support and facilitate growth of group workers.

The aim of this study is to examine whether group workers' education, safety, organizational culture, leadership and work attitudes, are sufficiently suited for creating a rehabilitative group climate by maintaining a balance between flexibility and control.. We hypothesize that active and inspiring (transformational) leadership is important to provide for group workers sense of control and safety, and that a balance between flexibility and control is needed to facilitate rehabilitation. We interviewed group workers in a Dutch youth prison and subjected them to a questionnaire measuring work motivation, common values, safety, organizational culture and leadership.

## Method

### *Participants*

The present study was conducted in a Dutch youth prison in 2009 and 2010. The population consisted of  $N = 59$  group workers (40% male and 60% female) randomly chosen from eight living groups ( $N = 141$  group workers). The mean age of respondents was 32.2 years ( $SD = 7.4$ , range 20-53 years) and their mean experience was 2,5 years ( $SD = 1.7$ , range 1- 5 years). The participants were interviewed for about one hour and filled out a questionnaire. All workers participated voluntarily, signed an informed consent declaration and were told that their answers would be treated confidentially and anonymously and would be accessed only by the researchers. All names on the questionnaires and interview transcripts were

deleted and given a code number. In order to protect the privacy of the workers, researchers had no access to the names.

### **Questionnaires and interviews**

All interviews and questionnaires were administered by specially trained graduate students of the Leiden School of Social Studies (Bachelor of Social Work and master Youth care) and the University of Amsterdam (Department of Forensic Child and Youth Care Sciences). The questionnaires used were derived from Industrial and Organizational research on organizational culture, leadership and work motivation to assess whether youth prison organizational values, such as flexibility and rehabilitation, and the need for a balance between flexibility and control match with workers' values at the living group.

*The Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI).* The Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument was an abbreviated version (15 items) that originated from Quinn and Cameron's competing values theory (Quinn & Cameron, 1988, Cameron & Quinn, 1999), translated into Dutch Language and validated by van Muijen (1994). Organizational culture (OC) was defined by Quinn and Cameron (1988) as '*what is valued, the dominant leadership style, the language and symbols, the procedures and routines, and the definitions of success that characterizes an organization*'. OC represents the values, underlying assumptions, expectations, collective memories, and definitions present in an organization' (Cameron & Quinn, 1999; Schein, 1992).

The competing values consist of a flexibility dimension (innovation) and a structure dimension (rules and procedures). An example of an item from the flexibility scale is: '*Unknown situations are seen as a challenge*'; an example of an item from the control scale is: '*We keep to the rules here*'. The items were rated on a five-point Likert type scale, ranging from 1= 'I do not agree' to 5= 'I totally agree'. Reliability in this study was satisfactory for all 4 scales (Cronbach's alpha for all scales was greater than .60, table 1).

*The Multifactor leadership Questionnaire.* To measure leadership an abbreviated version (12 items) of the 'Multifactor leadership Questionnaire' (MLQ: Bass, 1990, 1995) was used, that was translated into Dutch and validated by den Hartog, van Muijen and Koopman (1997). The Bass 'Full Range Leadership Theory' distinguishes three kinds of leadership: passive leadership (doing nothing or absentee leadership), controlling leadership (control) and transformational leadership. Transformational leadership, sometimes called charismatic leadership, uses inspiration and innovation to motivate workers and is thought to increase group workers' awareness of task importance and values. An example of an item from the 'passive' scale is: '*my superior doesn't like to make decisions*'; an example of an item from the control scale is: '*my superior keeps track of my performance*' and an example of an item from the transformational scale is: '*my superior shows to me different points of*



*view*'. The items were rated on a five-point Likert type scale, ranging from 1= 'I do not agree' to 5= 'I totally agree'. Reliability in this study was satisfactory for all 3 scales, with Cronbach's alpha for all scales greater than .60 (table 1).

*The 'Need for recovery after Work Questionnaire' (NFR).* To measure work motivational attitudes and safety perceptions, an abbreviated version (35 items) of the NFR was used. The NFR is a validated Dutch questionnaire (Veldhoven & Meijman, 1994) that quantifies workers' difficulties in recovering from work related exertion (Corn, Sluiter & Frings, 2006). An example of an item from the 'work motivation scale is: 'I am satisfied with my work'; an example of an item from the 'work perception' scale (subscale safety at work) is: 'I always feel safe at work'. The items were rated on a five-point Likert type scale, ranging from 1= 'I do not agree' to 5= 'I totally agree'. Reliability in this study was satisfactory for all 3 scales, with Cronbach's alpha for all scales greater than .60 (table 1).

All workers were interviewed for one hour. The topic list in the open interview mirrored the constructs that were measured by means of the questionnaire. The interviews were used to create an in-depth description of work related perceptions and values, leadership, work motivation and to cross-validate the results obtained with the questionnaires. All interviews were written out verbatim and the transcripts were coded and analysed with Kwalitan (Peters, Wester, & Richardson, 1994), a computer program for coding qualitative results.

## Results

### *Qualitative study*

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with group workers in order to provide insight into their attitudes and perception of group climate. The qualitative study consists of the following sections: education and training, values (flexibility and control), safety perceptions, work motivation, organizational culture, and leadership.

### *Safety perceptions*

A total of 82% of the group workers remarked that they were sometimes afraid at the living group and did not know how to handle problems adequately: only 6 % of the group workers reported not to be afraid at all. Group workers (85%) felt they were dependent for their safety on fellow group workers. Twelve percent of the group leaders reported feelings of unsafety, but nearly all (97%) group leaders talked extensively about safety problems and fear of injuries (those working in girls groups less). All group workers recollected severe incidents and 76% reported to be frightened and to feel unsafe more than once:

*"After some time the chairs, which aren't bolted to the floor, cease to be a chair but become something they can throw at you".*

Safety had also to do with fellow workers:

*"Safety has to do with other group workers who don't do a proper job, not with the boy's. I can see immediately who is afraid and sits his whole shift in the office compartment".*

And:

*"Yes, I feel safe, but that's because I can fight. But when I look around there are a lot of women around, so if there is an incident you have a real problem. There are too few men here. I don't mean 'pedagogic talking' men, but real men who can stand their ground'.*

Another example was self-reassuring:

*"I am trained in martial arts; when it comes to a conflict I am not afraid of anyone".*

### **Organizational culture**

Opinions about organizational culture were diverse and ranged from repressive control and 'get tough' statements ('we are too lenient here for them', 72%), 'human relations' statements ('I feel safe with my fellow workers, they support me when something happens', 87%) and statements pertaining to flexibility ('punishment is not enough, you have to create trust and help these boys', 43%). Fewer (30%) statements were coded as 'rational goals' ('we are here to rehabilitate them'), but all goals mentioned were not specified according to espoused organizational values, like treatment and rehabilitation in the organization's pedagogical handbook. Some group workers (24%) found organizational culture changing into the direction of more repressive control before and after a group uprising:

*'The atmosphere became 'us' against the boys and we had to isolate a lot of boys and punish them very often. Fellow group workers who were more inclined to punish took the lead and were backed by management. Although I didn't agree always and we had at one time almost the whole group in disciplinary trajectories, we didn't discuss this because you don't want to question your fellow worker: we have to rely on each other. I went with the flow'.*

### **Leadership**

A total of 29 % of the respondents complained about passive leadership:

*"From the other group they were allowed to wave their bare parts at the girls and group leaders didn't do nothing; they even didn't punish them".*

And:

*"When I complained about fellow workers letting through drugs (I could clearly see the Marijuana leaves printed on the bag) he replied: they are only youngsters".*

Transformational leadership was reported by 52% of the group leaders:

*'One time our group was a shambles. A lot of incidents and aggression and we didn't trust each other anymore. This new team leader took responsibility for the boys and the*



*group leaders. He was here when we needed him and was always positive about our ability to overcome problems.'*

**Work attitudes: flexibility versus control**

Prevailing values in the interviews centred on repressive control. More than 54 % of the group workers thought this to be *the* organizational goal and 42 % of the group leaders did not agree with rehabilitative organizational goals, expressing a need for stricter control and punishment. One group leader used these words:

*"Education is not only talking, we can be stricter here; sometimes a corrective slap may do."*

Or a 'get tough' reaction:

*"The organizational mission statement is rehabilitation, but I think we have gone too far in this. These boys have had enough chances; when there is an incident where I get hurt, talking is not enough, we have to punish them real hard. They have to burn. Not many colleges will help me in this".*

An advice to one of the interviewers was provided by a group leader:

*"If you have a boy that is becoming a nuisance at the group, I have a good trick for you. When we are doing the dishwashing, I get to stand beside him and dry my wet hands on his shirt. He takes a swing at me, I duck and he is gone (isolation-red) for three days"*

But also opposite reactions ('Laissez-faire') were noted (4):

*"We are here so that the boys have a good time, I don't want to spoil it, if they want to smoke marihuana its's OK by me"*

A total of 64 % of the respondents said they got work motivation out of successes with the adolescent; 74 % also got their motivation from working with fellow workers and a positive group climate. Factors that diminished work motivation (41%) were 'nothing works' cognitions, negative group climate, loss of control, not enough punishment for transgressions of rules and violence problems with adolescents.

*"There really are group workers who don't do a thing when something happens; they say often: 'I don't feel well I'd rather sit in the office today'".*

Or:

*"I am here for the money; the rest doesn't interest me".*

And a nothing works statement:

*"Whatever you do or say, these boys will always be back in a few months".*

Results showed that group workers' attitudes did not always align with organizational goals of rehabilitation. These attitudes ranged from extreme 'laissez faire' and therapeutic attitudes to outright punitive and 'get tough' attitudes. Post hoc,

we coded group workers as 'laissez faire' (6%), 'therapeutic' (45%), and 'punitive' (42%) and a 'mixed' group (7%) of having both therapeutic and punitive attitudes.

### **Quantitative study**

The quantitative study consists of three sections. The first section describes group workers' education and perceptions of safety. In the second section, associations between perceptions of safety and work motivation on the one hand and organizational culture and leadership on the other hand are examined in correlational analyses. In the final section, a structural equation model that summarises the main results of both the qualitative and quantitative analyses were fitted to the data, analysing factors that emerged as salient and influential from the quantitative results and open interviews with the group workers.

### **Education and Training**

The educational level of the group leaders sample ranges from elementary school (1 respondent) to university (3 respondents) and is often not specific to the job: only 22% of respondents had a degree in pedagogical education. In the group without specific training, 38 respondents had attended vocational training, ranging from security guard to soldier, and 4 obtained a Bachelor degree. We asked group workers if they thought their education was sufficient for this job: 4 % thought this was not the case (in this group two respondents had a vocational specific education) and 96 % thought their education was sufficient for the job. Mean work experience (already reported: mean years of experience 2,3;  $SD = 1.8$ , range 1-5 years), was short, considering the task difficulties and 30 % of respondents were actually looking for another job, reflecting a high turnover. Safety perceptions turned out to be high ( $M = 3.8$ ;  $SD = 1.0$ ); 71 % of the group workers reported they felt safe at work.

### **Associations between safety, work, organizational culture, leadership and attitudes**

We examined whether flexibility and control at the living group were related to safety, organizational culture, leadership and work attitudes. Correlational analyses (Table 1) showed that transformational (inspiring) leadership was positively associated with work motivational attitudes ( $r = .57, p < 0.001$ ). Safety was positively associated with control ( $r = .45, p < 0.01$ ) and transformational leadership ( $r = .48, p < 0.01$ ), but negatively associated with passive leadership ( $r = -.25, p < 0.01$ ). Work motivational attitudes were positively associated with safety ( $r = .73, p < 0.001$ ), flexibility ( $r = .67, p < 0.001$ ) and transformational (inspiring) leadership ( $r = .57, p < 0.01$ ).

Control was positively associated with flexibility ( $r = .55, p < 0.01$ ) and transformational leadership ( $r = .45, p < 0.01$ ) and negatively associated with passive leadership' ( $r = -.27, p < 0.05$ ). Flexibility was positively associated with transformational leadership ( $r = .66, p < 0.001$ ) and negatively associated with passive leadership ( $r = -.50, p < 0.001$ ).

***Structural equation modelling: do safety and leadership predict flexibility and control?***

To further investigate relations between passive and transformational leadership, safety and the connections with flexibility and control (Figure 1), a series of structural equation models were fitted to the data using the statistical software package Amos 18. Fit-indices (NFI, CFI, TLI, and RMSEA<sup>18</sup>) and the model Chi-Square, also designated as the generalized likelihood ratio, were used to evaluate model fit (Kline, 2005). The following cut-off values are indicative of close model fit: NFI and CFI > .90, TLI > .95 and RMSEA < .06, whereas a non-significant Chi-Square indicates exact model fit (Arbuckle, 2005; Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2005).

The organizational culture variables flexibility and control were the outcome variables, and safety and leadership (passive and inspiring) were the predictors. We chose only to present the best-fitting model. The best fitting model showed an exact fit to the data:  $X^2(2) = 5.9, p = .5$ . Fit indices that are less sensitive to differences in sample size than the Chi-square test (Civo et al., 2006) showed a good fit to the data: NFI= 0.96; CFI= .96; TLI = .97; RMSEA = 0.04. It can be derived from Figure 2 that safety predicted control and flexibility. Whereas inspiring leadership predicted more flexibility and control, passive leadership predicted less flexibility and was associated with less safety.

## Discussion

This study examined group workers' educational level, their feelings of safety, organizational culture, leadership and work attitudes and the relations among these factors. The majority of group leaders lacked a specific pedagogical training and expertise to deal with adolescents who suffer from serious psychopathology. Although some research reports this to be a problem, especially when dealing with adolescents with psychiatric problems (Joint Dutch Inspections report 2007), group workers themselves rated their education as sufficient in the questionnaire, although their level of education was not up to Dutch National Standards (Bachelor degree in Social Work). This was sometimes reflected in workers telling the interviewer not knowing what to do in critical situations and not being able to consider alternatives for punishment and coercion (efficacious conflict handling). Group workers may not perceive lack of professional training, as they may not feel that any training can prepare them for working with incarcerated youth. Prison workers often perceive a great distance between what has been taught in vocational training programmes and the skills they learn on the job. Among inexperienced and undereducated workers, this could indicate some form of self protection (Kruger 2004) in terms of 'illusory superiority' (Matlin, 2004; Alicke, Dunning,

<sup>18</sup> CFI (Comparative Fit Index), TLI (Tucker-Lewis Index) and RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation) are indices of goodness of fit that are independent of sample size. Models that fit well score favourably on these fit-indices. For further references see Arbuckle (2007).

& Kruger, 2005). Lacking necessary pedagogical knowledge can be a main problem for effective professional behaviour.

Safety was a major issue in this study for group workers. Although the quantitative results indicated a safe working climate, qualitative results showed otherwise. The group workers responded very differently to questionnaires and open interviews. They turned out to be more negative about the living group climate, reporting much more fear of violence in the interviews. Elaborated remarks about these incidents were mentioned more often than became apparent in the results obtained with the questionnaires. The interview results showed fewer consensus about organizational culture, leadership and work attitudes when compared to the questionnaire results. 'Punitive' and 'get tough' ideations were expressed by a large part of the group workers, in contrast with the mission statement of the institution (rehabilitation, education and treatment).

The different results that were obtained with questionnaires and open interviews may be due to the intrinsic properties of a 'total institution' that not only may have a negatively effect on inmates, but also on group workers (Goffman, 1961, Zimbardo, 1971). Obedience and adaptation alignment ('playing it cool together', Goffman 1961) could lead to underreporting of fears at the workplace in questionnaires ('on paper'). The problems, associated with the use of self-report questionnaires in secure accommodations have already been established for inmates (Breuk, Clauser, Stams, Slot, & Doreleijers, 2007, Van der Helm, Klapwijk, Stams & van der Laan, 2009). A possible explanation for this can be derived from research on dissonance reduction and self categorization theory at work (Haslam, 2004): admitting you are afraid is not congruent with group workers' social identity ('being in control'), makes work at the living group much harder ('seeing chairs as throwing objects') and can promote an organizational culture of error-denial (van Dijk, 2000; van der Helm, 2009). This mechanism has been shown to deteriorate stress resistance, learning, self competence and coping with aversive events for workers (Delahaij, 2010).

Results of the present study suggest that group workers depend on each other for their safety and for being able to create a positive and rehabilitative group climate. Shared attitudes at work, positively associated with flexibility, control, feelings of safety and work motivation were found to be correlates of a positive group climate. Transformational (inspiring) leadership was positively associated with safety and an open and supportive group climate, whereas passive leadership was associated with unsafety, a non-rehabilitative and closed group climate, and punitive attitudes. Finally, the high turnover of group workers – resulting in lack of job experience, psychological detachment from work, and lack of team stability and coherence – may negatively affect professional functioning of group workers.

Effective professional behaviour was influenced by leadership and fear of incidents, which showed in the interviews. The SEM analysis replicated these findings. When leadership is 'transformational', group workers report substantially less fear and more flexibility, and they perceive more control. When leadership is passive, group workers might not be able to preserve their flexibility, which could result in substantially more fear and eventually loss of structure and safety at the workplace (Hypothesis 1 confirmed). Such loss of control can create withdrawal responses and 'laissez faire' attitudes in some group workers. Other group workers may respond by becoming less flexible, stricter and even aggressive (Fast & Chen, 2009). They exercise more repressive control and coercion, are less efficacious in conflict handling and develop more punitive attitudes, which may contribute to a less flexible and more closed climate (Hypothesis 2 confirmed). Notably, group workers who are perceived to be 'in control' because of their repressive and often punitive behaviour tend to attain most authority among group workers and are often backed up by their team leaders who fear to lose control as well. These transactional mechanisms could result in a coercive cycle (Patterson, 2006) and a rapidly deteriorating group climate.

Passive leadership and inspiring leadership appeared as competing leadership styles in the SEM model, where passive leadership is causing unsafety in organizations. Inspiring group leadership not only seems to have a positive effect on workers' attitudes and feelings of safety, but also on inmates' conduct and group climate (Hicks, 2008; van der Helm, et al., 2009).

There are some limitations of this study that need to be acknowledged. First, as already referred to, we found evidence of serious underreporting of problems when using questionnaires, which limits the conclusions that can be drawn from the questionnaire data. Second, the small sample size and the inclusion of only one youth prison hamper the generalizability of the study findings. Finally, the sample size was too small to allow multi-level analysis in order to account for dependency of measurements in hierarchically structured data (e.g., group workers are nested into living groups). Notably, the neglect of statistical dependency results in capitalisation on chance and the risk of spurious research findings. Because of this and other limitations the results of our study should be interpreted with caution and viewed as preliminary.

The present study is probably one of the first studies examining the relations between group climate, fear, leadership and organizational culture in a youth prison. 'Passive leadership', a lack of shared work attitudes may lead to more fear, less social support at the workplace, coercive and even deviant behaviour of group workers becoming dominant, resulting in violence, stress and symptoms of burn-out. These results are consistent with findings from general Industrial and Organizational research by Furnham (1997), Haslam (2004) and Wang & Rode (2010), but also with findings from children's home research (Berridge & Brodie, 1998; Hicks,

2008), indicating that 'transformational leadership' is vital for maintaining a proper balance between flexibility and control. This balance is probably a prerequisite for an open and supportive group climate as well as for providing more safety and work motivation (Wade, Biehal, Sinclair, & Gibbs, 1998). Inspiring leadership and active presence seems to be very important for group leaders to support group workers and counteract their uncertainties and fears.

An open group climate contributes to greater treatment motivation and higher internal locus of control of incarcerated adolescents (van der Helm, et al. 2009). As the present study only provides preliminary evidence of associations among group climate, work motivation and organizational culture and behaviour, results should be replicated in a prospective, longitudinal study that allows for the examination of contextual effects by means of multi-level analysis. Nevertheless this study is one of the first to open the 'black box' of treatment in forensic residential youth care.

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Table 1: Correlations among Safety, Common Values, Structure, Flexibility, Leadership and Motivation

	M	SD	Reliability (Cronbach's alpha)	safety	structure	flexibility (innovation)	passive leadership	transformational leadership
safety	3.80	0.86	.79					
control	3.90	.52	.82	.45**				
flexibility	3.90	.69	.78	.56**	.55**			
passive leadership	1.90	.67	.74	-.25*	-.27**	-.50**		
transformational leadership	3.71	.73	.74	.48**	.45**	.66**	-.54**	
motivational attitude	3.61	.50	.76	.73**	.39**	.67**	-.24*	.57**

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$  (two-tailed significance)

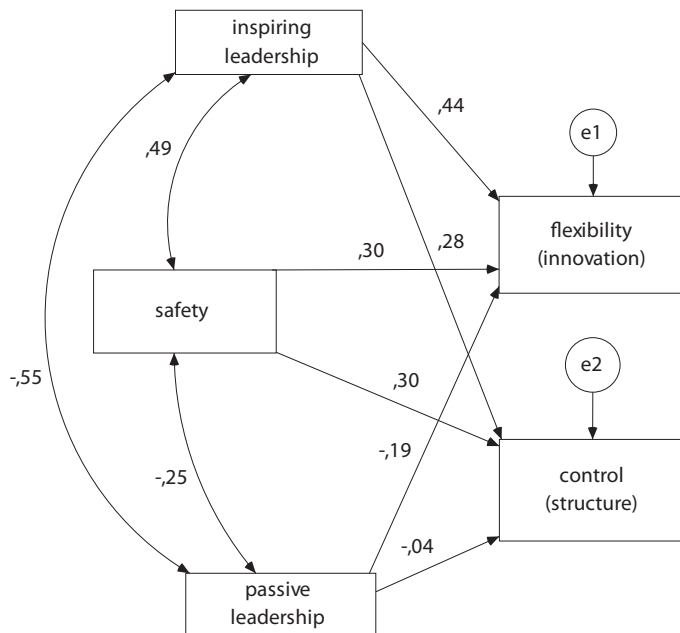


Figure 1: SEM-model of Safety, Leadership, flexibility and control

## Chapter 8

### General Discussion

This dissertation comprises six studies examining living group climate in secure juvenile correctional institutions. The first study was a validation study of a new instrument to assess living group climate in (secure) correctional and non-correctional institutions.

Using the main constructs of ten existing prison climate questionnaires and results from interviews in a secure Psychiatric facility and a Dutch secure juvenile correctional institution a new climate instrument, the Prison Group Climate Inventory (PGCI) was devised. Confirmatory factor-analysis of a four-factor model, with 'support', 'growth', 'atmosphere' and 'repression' as reliable dimensions, showed an adequate fit to the data, indicating construct validity of the PGCI. An open or rehabilitative group climate is characterized by a positive atmosphere among juveniles and staff as well as a supportive environment that contains opportunities for growth. A closed climate, in contrast, is characterized by 'repression'.

The second study examined treatment motivation and locus of control (inmates taking responsibility for their own actions). Results showed an 'open' group climate to be associated with a greater internal locus of control and substantial higher treatment motivation, whereas a repressive climate was associated with less internal locus of control and lower treatment motivation. A repressive living group climate was associated with depressive feelings and learned helplessness. After a prolonged stay respondents showed little initiative and extreme dependency ('prisonisation').

As prisonization is connected to detention length, adjustment and coping patterns in prison, study three was conducted with detention length, coping and adjustment as the main variables. Contrary to our expectations, a longer detention period was associated with the perception of a more open living group climate, but proved to be unrelated to coping and treatment motivation. A repressive group climate was positively associated with passive coping. A more open group climate was associated with both more active coping and greater treatment motivation. Finally, mediation analyses showed that the relation between open group climate and treatment motivation was mediated by active coping. It was concluded that creating an open group climate in order to foster active coping and greater treatment motivation to promote rehabilitation and to reduce recidivism is probably one of the most important challenges for youth prisons.

Rehabilitation and recidivism reduction also depend on adolescents being able to create meaningful interactions with others and fit into society. Empathy could be a major requirement for social interaction.

Study four: in their meta-analysis, Jolliffe & Farrington (2004) have shown delinquent youth to exhibit less empathy than non-delinquents. Results were stronger for cognitive empathy (*understanding* of another's emotions) than for affective empathy (*experience* of another's emotions), although the relation between affective empathy and delinquency remains equivocal. This finding is of major importance, because empathy is thought to be a motivational base for moral development. The findings of this meta-analysis concur with results from the meta-analysis by Stams et al., (2006) and Van Vugt et al., (in press), who showed that moral judgment is strongly associated with juvenile delinquency. Findings from this study showed the influence of prison group climate's social factors, responsivity from group leaders ('support') and mutual relations ('atmosphere') on cognitive empathy, but not affective empathy. Results on affective empathy suggested a numbing of affect inside youth prison, probably caused by depression and the need to show 'a stiff upper lip' to maintain group status. A repressive climate was associated with less empathy, often related to hostility and aggression (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2004).

Study five examined the relation between personality and aggression. Aggression is a major problem in youth prison often compromising the safety of inmates as well as group workers. Adjustment to prison is thought to be a function of inmates' dispositional characteristics, like personality, and possible deprivational effects caused by the prison environment. The results of this study showed that open group climate buffered against aggression through its positive effects on emotional stability and agreeableness, whereas a repressive group climate was not associated with aggression, but had a negative relation with emotional stability. As violence inside youth correctional facilities could lead to a rapidly deteriorating group climate and mutual distrust between inmates and group workers this could possibly lead to suboptimal treatment outcomes and recidivism.

Study six examined the professional attitude of group workers in a Dutch youth correctional facility and perceptions of the organizational culture and leadership by line and staff management. To be able to attain therapeutic goals, group workers must be sensitive to the balance between on the one hand therapeutic flexibility and openness and on the other hand control to maintain safety at the living group. It was shown that some interactions between group workers and prisoners could create mutual fear, suspicion and violence, and that staff varied in their behavioural responses to perceived lack of safety. A substantial part of group workers had punitive and 'nothing works' attitudes, which did not concur with the institution goals (education and rehabilitation). Faced with violence, strict and punitive group workers attained authority among unsure fellow group workers, which could contribute to a rapidly deteriorating group climate. Passive leadership by

teamleaders was related to more fear, less perceived control and flexibility by group workers, resulting in a repressive group climate. Transformational (inspiring) leadership by line and staff management was associated with less fear, more flexibility and increased feelings of control by group workers, needed to maintain an open group climate.

### ***Discussion***

Locking up adolescents with severe behavioural problems is associated with two main risks negatively affecting their development: 'deviancy training' (inmates influencing each other negatively) and reactance caused by a repressive group climate. This can result in deminished treatment motivation, an external locus of control, less empathy and suboptimal treatment outcomes. Although international research (Lipsey, 2009; Pahar et al., 2008;) shows coercive treatment outcomes to be suboptimal, incarceration sometimes could be necessary to treat and protect adolescents and to protect society as well.

A repressive group climate did not seem to have a great impact on inmates in this study, which is not in accordance with what one would expect on the basis of the major theoretical studies by Goffmann (1961) and Toch (2008). This could be explained by repression being a continuation of prior negative experiences in the family, with antisocial friends, school or formal authorities. Contrary to 'nothing works' cognitions in society in general and by particular group workers too (see chapter 7), results of this dissertation suggest that an open living group climate in a secure correctional juvenile institution be related to stabilizing urgent personality problems, stimulating active coping and eventually rehabilitation (Garrido & Morales, 2008).

The results of the studies presented here also depict the difficulties that correctional institutions and group workers have in maintaining an open group climate.

When inmates try to gain some extra benefits (e.g., often an extra smoking turn outside or extra television hours), group workers, busy with their tasks and responsibilities of keeping daily routine going, often fear loss of control and can act in an authoritarian way. Inmates are challenged by this behavior, often try to prevent loss of self-esteem in the presence of peers and can react with aggression, resulting in a coercive cycle of interaction (Ostrowsky, 2010; Sameroff, 2009). These transactional group dynamics are probably intensified when compared to more natural social surroundings, because inmates are unable to leave the living group but neither can staff. A downward 'transactional' cycle (Patterson, 2009) can result in a rapidly deteriorating group climate, often resulting in more repression. This deteriorating living group climate causes instability and fear in adolescents who can react violently. Adolescents who show the most problem behaviour and reactance could create a 'personal' downward transactional cycle and as a consequence



are being punished more and more severely resulting in lesser benefits from therapy or even aggravation of symptoms (Lipsey, 2009; Lee et al., 2010).

Keeping an open group living climate should be a main concern for prison staff and workers and should be regularly monitored and improved. The newly developed PGCI instrument could be used to monitor group living climate on a regular basis.

Results of this study also show inspiring or 'transformational leadership' to be related to vital for group workers maintaining a proper balance between flexibility and control. This balance is probably a prerequisite for an open and supportive group climate as well as for providing more safety, work motivation, commitment and reducing stress among group workers and staff (Lambert, Altheimer, Hogan & Barton-Bellessa, 2011; Wade, Biehal, Sinclair, & Gibbs, 1998). Inspiring leadership and active presence seems to be very important for team leaders to support group workers and counteract their uncertainties and fears.

#### ***Directions for future research***

The cross-sectional studies presented in this volume should be considered as a first step towards the understanding of the effects of living group climate. To improve outcomes for adolescents and working conditions for group workers prospective longitudinal research and intervention studies are necessary (Welsh & Farrington, 2005). The results of this study forms the basis of an innovative longitudinal research project which is currently being undertaken in 23 institutions for secure residential youthcare in the Netherlands. New practice based training programs ('Top PM'ers') which has been developed in FC Teylingereind, The Netherlands, should help group workers in improving professional standards. Some group workers need to shift from 'Nothing Works' cognitions to 'What Works' insight. Social science can help bolstering professional attitudes of group workers with research. Professional universities, training group workers and social workers are best suited for developing new professional standards, forging care paths and transgressing traditional professional boundaries in Social Work.

#### ***Conclusion: first do no harm***

Society and youth care should question whether we do make a fundamental error thinking that we could rehabilitate juvenile delinquents by locking them up in a repressive environment. If we do not have an alternative for incarceration, we should do no harm and provide incarcerated juvenile delinquents a rehabilitative group climate. If we are unable to create such a climate, the huge financial costs and personal efforts could probably be spent wiser in developing effective alternatives for secure institutional treatment (Spellmann, 2000), starting with prevention and intensive social services.



Group workers, together with other professionals, should develop new professional standards to improve living group climate and treatment. In the mean time secure juvenile correctional institutions could change their current paradigm ('safe and secure inside'), based on control, into a paradigm focusing on attaining an open living group climate, thereby preparing juvenile delinquents for the challenges of emerging adulthood ('how to grow up outside').



## Nederlandse samenvatting (Dutch Summary)

### *Inleiding*

In Nederland worden er naar schatting ieder jaar circa vijfduizend adolescenten van 12-18 jaar opgesloten in Justitiële Jeugdinrichtingen. Uit resultaten van een recente overzichtsstudie Marshall & Burton (2010) blijkt echter dat er weinig bekend is over deze vorm van opvang en behandeling. Zij concluderen dan ook dat er dringend onderzoek nodig is naar de effectiviteit van groepsgewijze behandeling van jongeren.

In de afgelopen vijf jaar is een aantal crossectionele studies naar het leefklimaat bij jongeren en medewerkers verricht. De studies vonden plaats in Forensisch Centrum Teylingereind.

De eerste studie van dit proefschrift had tot doel te onderzoeken wat de belangrijkste eigenschappen van het leefmilieu waren en op welke wijze het klimaat op de groep gemeten kon worden. Er is al langer onderzoek gedaan, vooral naar tevredenheid in gevangenissen in de VS en Engeland en bijvoorbeeld TBS-klinieken in Nederland, en alhoewel in deze lijsten het klimaat een rol speelt was niet duidelijk in hoeverre deze constructen ook zouden gelden voor de specifieke situatie van leefgroepen voor adolescenten. Aan de hand van bovenstaande lijsten (van der Helm, Stams & van der Laan, 2011) zijn de belangrijkste klimaatcategorieën gedefinieerd en is een omvangrijke lijst met items samengesteld en afgenomen in een TBS kliniek en in een Justitiële Jeugdinrichting. Vervolgens is met behulp van een confirmatieve factoranalyse getoetst welke factoren als belangrijkste eruit kwamen. In volgorde van belangrijkheid waren dat:

1. 'Steun'; responsiviteit van de pedagogische medewerker; de relatie tussen hulpverlener en de jongere is voor de jongere heel belangrijk. Het gaat vaak om kleine dingen: aandacht voor de jongere als die dat nodig heeft, het gevoel dat de jongere de pedagogisch medewerker kan vertrouwen, zo af en toe een complimentje en ondersteuning bij problemen (ook bij probleemgedrag!).
2. 'Groei'; als in leren en zingeving: jongeren moeten het idee hebben dat ze wat leren en hun verblijf zin heeft en ze perspectief hebben op een beter leven.
3. 'Repressiviteit' en gebrek aan structuur; met name wanneer jongeren ervaren dat regels oneerlijk en onconsequent worden toegepast en geen uitleg krijgen, ze niet weten waar ze aan toe zijn (gebrek aan structuur) ervaren de jongeren het leefklimaat als negatief.
4. De 'atmosfeer' tussen jongeren onderling; het is belangrijk dat ze elkaar kunnen vertrouwen en de bijvoorbeeld geen spullen worden gestolen, drugs verhandeld of jongeren worden gepest of afgeperst.

Met behulp van deze analyse is een vragenlijst samengesteld van 37 items die de kwaliteit van het leefklimaat op betrouwbare en valide wijze meet. Een tweede belangrijke uitkomst was dat alle factoren van dit leefklimaat in principe beïnvloedbaar zijn en dus aanleiding kunnen zijn voor het ontwikkelen van concrete handvatten voor pedagogisch medewerkers in hun beroepspraktijk. Vervolgonderzoek richtte zich met name op de invloed die het klimaat had op de jongeren.

In de tweede crossectionele studie onder 49 opgesloten jongeren is gekeken naar behandelmotivatie en *Locus of Control* (de mate waarin mensen de gevolgen van hun daden aan zichzelf of aan anderen toeschrijven, van der Helm, Klapwijk, Stams & van der Laan, 2009).

Uit dit onderzoek is gebleken dat een open leefmilieu in belangrijke mate geassocieerd was met een grotere behandelmotivatie en externe locus of control. Deze uitkomsten kunnen worden gezien als een aanwijzing dat er 'iets' kan werken in een gesloten leefmilieu en dat een open leefklimaat daarbij een belangrijke rol speelt.

In de volgende crossectionele studie onder 59 opgesloten jongeren (van der Helm, Beunk, Stams en van der Laan, submitted) is gekeken naar de manier waarop jongeren met hun vrijheidsberoving omgaan (coping). Daarbij is gekeken naar de samenhang tussen coping en de kwaliteit van het leefklimaat, behandelmotivatie en de duur van opsluiting. Uit deze studie kwam naar voren dat een open leefklimaat een belangrijke samenhang had met een meer actieve manier van coping en grotere behandelmotivatie. Een langere behandelduur was geassocieerd met een meer open leefklimaat. Een repressief leefklimaat was gerelateerd aan meer passieve manieren van coping, zoals vermijding en passief gedrag.

Uit onderzoek van ondermeer Jolliffe en Farrington (2004) is gebleken dat gebrek aan empathie een belangrijke voorspeller kan zijn voor recidive. Ook verschillende studies op het gebied van de neurobiologie (zie voor een overzicht: de Kogel, 2008) laten zien dat empathie een belangrijke rol speelt in het sociale verkeer.

De volgende studie onder 59 opgesloten jongeren keek naar de relatie tussen de kwaliteit van het leefklimaat en empathie (van der Helm, Stams, van der Stel, van Langen & van der Laan, submitted), waarbij een onderscheid werd gemaakt tussen 'cognitieve' empathie (de mate waarin je kan herkennen hoe anderen zich voelen) en 'affectieve' empathie (de mate waarin je met emoties van anderen kan meevoelen). Uit deze studie kwam de aanwijzing dat een tweetal open leefklimaatvariabelen ('responsiviteit' en 'atmosfeer') een positieve relatie hadden met cognitieve empathieontwikkeling van de jongeren.

Dat er geen relatie gevonden werd met affectieve empathie kan waarschijnlijk worden verklaard uit recente onderzoeksresultaten die aangeven dat veel jongeren zich depressief voelen tijdens opsluiting, en de noodzaak om zich op een

leefgroep niet al te kwetsbaar op te stellen naar deviante leeftijdsgenoten ('stiff upperlip' fenomeen).

Vanwege het feit dat agressie op de leefgroep het klimaat en de ontwikkeling van de jongeren negatief kan beïnvloeden is in de vijfde studie gekeken naar de invloed van het leefklimaat op de persoonlijkheid van de jongeren en op zelf gerapporteerde agressie (van der Helm, van Genabeek, Stams & van der Laan, submitted). Uit dit onderzoek kwam naar voren dat er een relatie was tussen een open leefklimaat en de stabilisatie van persoonlijkheidsproblemen en dat de laatste de relatie met agressie medieerde. Een repressief leefklimaat was gerelateerd aan destabilisatie van de persoonlijkheid van jongeren ('bang en boos', van der Helm, van Nieuwenhuijzen & Wegter, 2010).

De tweede t/m vijfde studie suggereren dat een open leefklimaat een positieve invloed kan hebben op de ontwikkeling van jongeren. Jongeren gaven aan dat individuele pedagogisch medewerkers een grote invloed hebben op het klimaat (van der Helm, Klapwijk, Stams en van der Laan, 2009). De zesde crossectionele studie keek daarom naar meningen en opvattingen van 59 pedagogisch medewerkers op de groep, alsmede organisatiecultuur, leiderschap en arbeidsmotivatie.

Professioneel handelen op de groep veronderstelt het hebben van een hoge arbeidsmotivatie (in weerwil van agressie op de groep) en het kunnen bewaren van een evenwicht tussen controle en flexibiliteit. Controle (en het handhaven van regels) is nodig om structuur en veiligheid te garanderen, maar flexibiliteit is nodig om een therapeutisch klimaat te kunnen creëren. Uit dit onderzoek onder pedagogisch medewerkers op leefgroepen in FC Teylingereind (van der Helm, Boekee, Stams & van der Laan, 2010), bleek dat veel pedagogisch medewerkers (pm'ers) zelf niet overtuigd zijn van de invloed die zij kunnen hebben op jongeren ('niets werkt' cognities). Het gebrek aan zichtbare resultaten, het vaak teleurgesteld worden in jongeren, de incidenten en het feit dat steeds opnieuw jongeren terugkomen naar de instelling vanwege recidive, kunnen hier debet aan zijn. Tevens bleek dat pedagogisch medewerkers vaak bang waren voor agressie op de groep. Deze angst had een samenhang met strakker optreden naar jongeren en tevens met het gevoel de zaak onder niet controle te hebben. Inspirerend leiderschap van de kant van de teamleider had echter een relatie met minder angst en meer flexibiliteit en het gevoel controle te hebben.

### **Discussie**

Om belangrijke doelstellingen als opvoeding, behandeling en rehabilitatie te realiseren is het van groot belang dat er een 'open' sociaal therapeutisch behandelklimaat wordt gecreëerd. Omdat pedagogisch medewerkers (of groepsleiders) een groot deel van de tijd samen met de jongeren op de groep doorbrengen is het realiseren van dit klimaat als eerste de verantwoordelijkheid van deze pedagogisch medewerkers. Pedagogisch medewerkers hebben het in de regel niet makkelijk. Als

gevolg van het verleden en de problematiek van de jongeren en omdat ze er tegen hun wil zitten, is er vaak agressie op de groep. Controletaken en opvoeding gaan vaak lastig samen. Als gevolg van agressie en recidive heerst er bovendien onder sommige pedagogisch medewerkers het idee dat 'niks werkt'. Een dergelijke houding kan een 'self fulfilling prophecy' worden en resulteren in een negatieve spiraal van agressie en repressie op de groep (Hanrath, 2009). Teneinde deze beroepsgroep te kunnen ondersteunen en de uitkomsten voor de jongeren te verbeteren in dit werk is het belangrijk meer te weten van de werking van het klimaat op de groep en van de mogelijkheden om dit te verbeteren.

De zes in deze samenvatting beschreven studies geven een aanwijzing dat er waarschijnlijk wel degelijk 'iets' kan werken in de gesloten jeugdzorg. Een opvallende uitkomst hierbij is dat de resultaten aangeven dat de invloed van repressie minder groot is dan van een open leefklimaat, met name 'support' en 'groei'. Dit kan mogelijk verklaard worden doordat repressie bij deze doelgroep misschien een voortzetting is van eerdere negatieve levenservaringen.

De voorwaarden waaronder dat 'iets' zou kunnen werken lijken echter niet gemakkelijk: namelijk het scheppen van een open leefklimaat op de groep in weerwil van veel problemen bij jongeren, negatief gedrag en gebrek aan behandelmotivatie. Een dergelijk open leefklimaat zal moeten bestaan uit voldoende ondersteuning van de pedagogisch medewerkers, voldoende groeimogelijkheden bij jongeren, zo min mogelijk repressie en een goede onderlinge atmosfeer. De kwaliteit van het leefklimaat zou op reguliere basis moeten worden gemeten om een negatieve spiraal te voorkomen. Het nieuwe meetinstrument (PGCI) lijkt door zijn betrouwbaarheid en validiteit en relatief gering aantal items hiervoor een goed instrument.

Het valt te verwachten dat een positief leefklimaat tevens de uitkomsten van specifieke behandelmethoden kunnen verbeteren.

De verantwoordelijkheid voor het scheppen van een open leefklimaat ligt in eerste instantie bij de pedagogisch medewerker op de groep, ondersteund door de gedragsdeskundige en teamleider. Professioneel (pedagogisch) handelen op de groep kan een belangrijke bijdrage leveren aan dit klimaat omdat uit deze onderzoeken is gebleken dat pedagogisch medewerkers een grote invloed kunnen hebben op jongeren.

Maar het professioneel handelen van pedagogisch medewerkers staat niet los van het professionele handelen van hun collega's op de groep (van der Helm, Boeke, Stams & van der Laan, 2011, in press) en van de teamleider. Ook visie en de inzet van de instelling om de juiste medewerkers aan te nemen, medewerkers adequaat op te leiden en te ondersteunen in wat misschien wel een van de moeilijkste beroepen ter wereld is zijn onontbeerlijk voor het pedagogisch handelen op de groep.

De tweede leefklimaatfactor ('groei') laat zien dat in de gesloten jeugdzorg werken aan een beter toekomstperspectief voor jongeren eveneens belangrijk is. Een toekomstperspectief is vaak gekoppeld aan hoop op een beter leven. Een adequate behandelmotivatie, externe locus of control, actieve coping, het ontwikkelen van belangrijke sociale vaardigheden en beheersen van agressieve impulsen, al het geleerde is alleen van waarde als aansluitend een perspectief kan worden gerealiseerd op succesvolle aansluiting met de samenleving.

Uit dit onderzoek kwam de mogelijk schadelijke werking van repressie voor 'responsiviteit' en 'groei' naar voren. Een belangrijk onderdeel van de 2400 jaar oude eed van Hippocrates voor artsen en hulpverleners ('primum non nocere') luidt: 'Ik zal naar mijn beste oordeel en vermogen (...) nooit iemand kwaad doen'.

De gesloten jeugdzorg zou zich deze eed kunnen aantrekken en de moeilijkste opgave van de gesloten jeugdzorg zal daarom de komende jaren zijn pedagogisch medewerkers en groepsleiders zo op te leiden en te trainen dat ze in staat kunnen zijn een open leefklimaat op de groep te realiseren. Hiervoor is waarschijnlijk een paradigmawisseling nodig, waarbij het huidige paradigma van 'opvoeding en controle binnen' vervangen moet worden door 'opvoeding gericht op buiten', om met de samenleving een toekomstperspectief te creëren voor de onder haar verantwoordelijkheid gestelde jongeren.

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## Dankwoord

In een recente publicatie van Hill in het wetenschappelijke blad *Science* bleek (maart 2011) dat in vergelijking tot apen menselijke jager-verzamelaars groepen niet uit verwanten bestaan. Deze schijnbaar onbelangrijke vondst heeft grote implicaties; wanneer samenleven niet gebaseerd is op verwantschap worden prosociaal gedrag, empathie en samenwerking evolutionair gezien minder vanzelfsprekend. Waarom zou je immers ongerelateerde anderen helpen?

De moderne mens beschikt dan ook in vergelijking tot de apen over een veel geavanceerder 'sociaal brein', gericht op samenwerking. Dit sociale brein is waarschijnlijk een belangrijke overlevingsfactor van onze soort, naast een ongekeerde hoeveelheid nieuwsgierigheid (waarom zou je anders 3.5 miljoen jaar geleden helemaal uit Afrika naar het koude Nederland migreren?).

Ingewikkelde projecten komen niet alleen tot stand maar zijn meestal het resultaat van samenwerking en nieuwsgierigheid. Zo ook dit proefschrift. Het is dan ook belangrijk om in dit dankwoord aan te geven zonder wie dit hele project nooit van de grond was gekomen.

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Nico wist door zijn uitgebreide theoretische achtergrond en ervaring in de klinische psychiatrie als geen ander hoe belangrijk het leefklimaat was voor de rehabilitatie van zijn patiënten. Er miste echter nog een empirische fundering. Dit proefschrift heeft daar aan bij kunnen dragen. Ik hoop de komende jaren met je samen verder te kunnen gaan en innovatieve en 'state of the art' kennis voor de beroepspraktijk te ontwikkelen.

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De resultaten van dit onderzoek worden binnen de instelling verder gedragen door de ontwikkeling van een training, gericht op het verbeteren van het leefklimaat op de groep. Ook op deze wijze is een vruchtbare samenwerking tussen onderzoek, onderwijs en beroepspraktijk tot stand gekomen die zich inmiddels tot bijna de hele sector gesloten jeugdzorg heeft uitgebreid en waarvan we de komende jaren veel van verwachten.

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## **About the author**

Peer van der Helm was born on the 26th of October 1957 in the town of Groningen (Holland). After studying medicine at Amsterdam University and working as a ski- and mountaineering instructor in the Swiss and French Alps, he became a civil servant in 1998, working for amstelveen local community. While studying Psychology at Amsterdam University he worked as a senior researcher and advisor for the Dutch Council of Local Communities (VNG). In 2004 he moved to Leiden University of Applied Sciences as a Quality Officer and teacher, later to become Research Director of the School of Social Studies and guest researcher at Amsterdam University, department of Forensic Youth Studies. He started his Phd project in 2007.

## **Colofon**

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