

Summary

The study

This report describes the investigation into ‘need and supply’ of spiritual care in detention centres seen from the perspective of the detainee.

Reason for the present study was the observation in research that the need for spiritual care exceeded the actual consumption of its services (Spruit et al., 2003). In spiritual counsellors of judicial institutions this observation aroused the wish for more insight into the need for and the consumption of spiritual care services by detainees.

This study is unique. Never before detainees were asked, independent of denomination, what need they had for spiritual care, what opportunities they experienced in practicing their religion or convictions during their time in custody, nor what encouraging or hampering factors they then encountered. Also, research was done to what extent the supplied care met the need for spiritual care formulated by the detainees.

The Research Centre Community Care for Vulnerable People of the St Radboud University Nijmegen Medical Centre executed the study into spiritual care in custody, consisting of a literature study, interviews, a concept mapping procedure, and a survey among detainees in the period between January 2009 and April 2010.

Next to a systemic literature search, policy papers and documents were investigated. Research into spiritual care in custody appeared to be scarce. A search into English and Dutch literature resulted into nine relevant hits. These results were then utilized in the mapping trajectory outline, and had functioned together with the mapping trajectory outline in composing the questionnaire and interpreting its results.

The Heads of the denominations had been interviewed to gain more insight into the backgrounds, goals, supplies, and developments of spiritual care in custody.

The mapping trajectory outline was meant to broaden the view on the detainees’ needs for spiritual care and included the detainees’ opinions about their need for spiritual care. These opinions were then clustered and ordered.

From the results of the mapping trajectory outline it appears that what detainees (except for forensic psychiatric hospitals, where the concept mapping could not take place) need to practice their religion or conviction they mainly define in connection with others and with the self. The importance of the relationship with others appears from high score opinions such as ‘feel connected to my relatives’ and ‘permission to be present at major events in my family’. ‘Respect other people’s beliefs’ and ‘be seen as a person not as a number’ emphasize the importance of the detainees’ need for mutuality and recognition. Need was also felt for ‘faith in myself’, the self as source for a relationship with others. However, the five highest scoring opinions of the (regretfully only five) participating spiritual counsellors have a completely different character; they all, without exception, concern their own functioning.

The clustered items about ‘relationship with fellow men’ and ‘assistance of spiritual counsellors in contacts with relatives’ get the highest scores. The availability of the caretakers comes third. The clustered items ‘assistance by spiritual counsellors’ get the relatively lowest scores from the detainees, whereas the spiritual counsellors themselves give these items the highest scores.

Next, a survey was executed among 1.835 detainees. This is 13% of the number of detainees in custody nationwide. The survey has a relatively good response (43%). The random test is representative for the total sample, except for gender and origin. Since denomination was stratified no influence of these differences was anticipated on the results.

Below we will contemplate the results of the study.

Need for spiritual care of detainees

From the survey it appears that the majority of detainees, approximately two thirds, believe in God. More than 50% feel connected with God. If God is not mentioned and instead ‘somebody higher’ is referred to, the detainees in general do not feel committed.

The need for support by religion or convictions is reigned by ‘coping strategies’. Detainees feel supported by their belief or convictions in getting through their detention time, accepting life as it is, and through their own development.

The supposed links found in earlier research between adherence to a faith/convictions or not and detention time and adherence to a faith/convictions or not and age in detainees have not been found in this study.

‘Feeling connected with relatives’ is of great importance to detainees while practicing their religion or convictions. This appears, among other things, from the high scores for the clustered items ‘relationships with fellow men, relatives’ of the map outline. The importance of relatives is seen from the survey data as well; the detainees value the closeness of their family especially with major religious holidays. To detainees the cluster ‘contact with relatives, family’ is the most important of all.

The practicing of a faith seems a coping strategy of most of the detainees. To try and get in touch again with relatives can be placed within this scope.

Coping – meaning and spirituality issues

- The need for care in the so-called intrinsic religiousness is less indeed than the need for help to strengthen coping in detention, yet it is present.
- This structure found in the results of the survey is in line with the structure of the mapping outline. The groups of items of the mapping outline referring to faith in God and the individual’s spirituality and religiousness are less important to the detainees than the items referring to practical matters and social and family relationships. They indicate their faith in God, but need less support in this than in aspects relating to coping with religion and convictions. When straightforwardly asked whether help of a spiritual counsellor is needed for someone’s personal development the answer is ‘yes’. However, when asked for the need for support by a spiritual counsellor for meaning and spirituality, then the detainee is much more reticent.

- The difference in comprehension of ‘coping’ and ‘belief’ is shown in the importance detainees attach to the clusters of the questionnaire. Most important cluster is the one about ‘contact with fellow men, relatives’, followed by ‘support by religion or convictions’. Least important to the detainees are the items cluster about ‘personal relationship with God’.

Hampering and encouraging factors

Institution: One of the hampering factors for the practicing of a belief or conviction, connected to the institution, is the day program of the detainees. Detainees are not allowed to deviate from their day program. This hampers the creation of a timetable for individual or group sessions. Also, the institutions’ closure time at 5.00 PM deems it impossible to plan a spiritual care session in the evening. Another hampering factor is that the detainee feels obliged to choose between a spiritual care session and his relax time. These hampering factors connected to the institution are described by spiritual counsellors, detainees, and in the Dutch literature.

Spiritual counsellors: According to the detainees, spiritual counsellors are easy accessible and trustworthy. That spiritual counsellors can be trusted is one of the highest scoring positive opinions in the survey. Religion and convictions are hopeful and supportive within detention, according to spiritual counsellors as well as detainees. This is in line with the literature, in which it is described that religion eases deprivation from detention. The fact that a detainee cannot speak with the spiritual counsellor of his own denomination is a hampering factor connected with spiritual care and applies only to the small denominations. This is due to the small number of posts for the nationwide working spiritual counsellors of the small denominations. This picture emerges from not only the interviews with the Heads of the denominations, but also from the policy documents, the literature, and the survey.

Detainees: According to the detainees, when they actually want to join a service or celebration, and in the end they do not go, this is due to a decision of their own and not caused by a hampering factor connected with the institution or spiritual care. Detainees respect each other’s belief. However, it is a point of concern that a relatively large number of detainees in forensic psychiatric hospitals indicate to be threatened because of his/her beliefs or convictions. Unclear is yet by whom.

Connecting need and supply

Although the majority of detainees with a faith or a conviction – and even some without any – believe in God and find strength in it, they not always feel the need to be supported in their faith by a spiritual counsellor. This deviates from what the Heads of the denominations and the spiritual counsellors indicate; they think it important to have a conversation about religion and spirituality with detainees.

The detainees’ needs for topics of conversation with spiritual counsellors mostly include, but not mainly, subjects related to coping strategies. That spiritual counsellors and detainees differ in chosen topics was described in the literature before. However, contrary to the literature, spiritual counsellors do accommodate the detainees’ wishes concerning items of conversation.

The trust detainees place in spiritual counsellors contributes to the fact that spiritual counsellors can offer a safe haven within detention; detainees can freely speak, without fear for therapeutic consequences or sanctions.

Fifty per cent of the detainees think the different services of the DGV important. Followers of the little denominations not always find the desired services. This is due to the small number of spiritual counsellors that work in judicial institutions. The Jewish, Buddhist and Hindu spiritual counsellors work nationwide (because they are not employed by only one institution) due to the small numbers of followers in their denomination. That is why they are less present and visible in the institutions.

Although follow-up care is not an officially offered service by DGV, the detainees think this very important.

Some remarkable differences within spiritual care in custody exist between the departments in detention centres, forensic psychiatric hospitals and institutions for juvenile offenders:

- Detainees in detention centres think that contact with family is more important than the ones in forensic psychiatric hospitals;
- One fourth of the detainees in detention centres or forensic psychiatric hospitals is unable to celebrate religious events, this applies to one fifth of the youths;
- The day program hampers the use of spiritual care of fifty per cent of the detainees in detention centres and forensic psychiatric hospitals. In institutions for juvenile offenders this is one third;
- One of seven detainees in forensic psychiatric clinics is threatened because of his religion or convictions, this applies to one of ten detainees in detention centres and to one of twelve in institutions for juvenile offenders;
- The largest denomination in detention centres is Roman Catholic, in forensic psychiatric clinics Protestant and in institutions for juvenile offenders Islamic.

The size of the denominations differs per department, but the three biggest are always Roman Catholic, Protestant and Islamic. The other denominations are indicated as 'small'. The group detainees without any religion or conviction are in all departments bigger than the groups with a denomination, namely 29% in detention centres, 27% in forensic psychiatric hospitals, and 38% in institutions for juvenile offenders.

- Almost one fifth of the detainees without a religion or conviction believe in God;
- Two thirds of the detainees without a religion or conviction want to celebrate religious holidays, one fourth want a frequent conversation with a spiritual counsellor.

Many differences stem from the denominations' characteristics. Striking finds concerning denominations are:

- Muslims regard contact with relatives most often as important for their religion or convictions, Humanists and Hindi least often;
- When detainees skip a service although they feel the need to go, according to them they themselves are mainly to blame. Muslims (28%), Jews (38%) and Hindi (28%) indicate more

often than the other denominations that factors within the institution are to blame. In the other denominations this is nine to 23%;

- Detainees of 'small' denominations indicate more often that they are bothered by the guards' attitude to disregard appointments;
- It is more difficult for a detainee of a small denomination to speak to a spiritual counsellor or to attend a service of his choice;
- One fourth of the Jews are laughed at because of their religion and more than one third is threatened because of their faith. In the other denominations this is around ten per cent.

To conclude

This study started by investigating the need of detainees for spiritual care in custody and how need and supply could be connected. It is a unique study, since the research questions were examined from the detainees' perspectives.

The institution's day program and the evening closure time were found to be hampering factors for the detainees' use of spiritual care. The supplied spiritual care in custody appeared to function adequately. However, discrepancy exists between detainees and spiritual counsellors' visions on what need the detainees have to practice their religion or convictions. Spiritual counsellors mainly mentioned, in the conversations for this study as well as in the literature, needs in relation to religiousness, spirituality, and finding or restoring contact with God. The detainees on the other hand have more 'earthly' needs when practicing their religion or convictions, and living through their time in detention.