UNITED KINGDOM: Staff-prisoner relationships are key to managing suicide risk in prison, say researchers

July 24, 2015
News Type:  Weekly Spark,  Weekly Spark News

Medical Xpress [1]

Seeking ways to reduce suicide deaths among 18- to 24-year-olds in custody, a government-sponsored research team asked prison staff for their observations on risk and protective factors specific to the staff-prisoner relationship. The researchers reported that while some prison staff considered it unrealistic to try and prevent suicides, many were invested in understanding and reducing the risks for vulnerable prisoners — and that these efforts had a positive effect. “The prison officers who recognized the complex interaction between prisoners' imported vulnerabilities — such as addiction or illiteracy — and their environment and situations, felt more empowered to gauge the risks of self-harm or suicide and intervene to prevent situations from escalating,” said lead researcher Amy Ludlow of Cambridge University's Prison Research Centre. Recommendations drawn from the input of prison staff include better training, investment in respectful and personalized staff-prisoner relationships, and a focus on the learning process that can follow from incidents of self-harm and suicide.


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