Research Brief

Assessment and experience of prison climate in NSW correctional centres

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AIM

To examine assessments of prison climate using the Essen Climate Evaluation Schema (EssenCES), and inmates' experiences of prison climate, in the context of NSW correctional centres.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The EssenCES and other measures were administered to 208 men and women housed at two correctional centres in NSW, using online surveys delivered through in-cell digital tablets. The EssenCES showed signs of good psychometric properties, including strong internal consistencies within factors, and modest correlations between factors that each contributed to a higher order construct of global prison climate.

Respondents gave the most positive ratings for the safety factor of the EssenCES, followed by inmate cohesion and staff support respectively. Compared to other factors, the staff support factor was relatively dynamic and showed associations with multiple individual and situation variables, including respondents' age, assessed risk of recidivism, previous experience of custody, and time served during the index custodial episode.

Factors on the EssenCES were found to be statistically marginal predictors of post-release recidivism outcomes, with ratings of inmate cohesion having a positive association with reoffending and ratings of safety having a negative association with reoffending. Follow-up analyses indicated that associations between ratings of safety and reoffending persisted after adjusting for actuarial indicators of the respondents' recidivism risk. Scores on the EssenCES were not predictive of program completion outcomes in custody.

We concluded that the EssenCES shows promise for application as an index of prison climate in NSW correctional centres. The results give preliminary insights into idiographic factors that may be important towards developing flexible and responsive prison climates, while also highlighting a need for best practice approaches to measurement and analysis in order to integrate assessments of climate into an understanding of correctional centre performance.

INTRODUCTION

Prison climate refers to the "social, emotional, organisational and physical characteristics of a correctional institution as perceived by inmates and staff" (Ross et al., 2008, p.447). It is considered to be a multidimensional construct (Tonkin, 2016) with many factors contributing to overall perceptions of a prison's climate, including primary domains of relationships in prison, safety and order, contact with the community, centre facilities, availability of meaningful activities, and personal autonomy (Boone et al., 2016). While prison climate can be impacted by objective markers of quality, such as overcrowding or time out of cells (e.g., van Ginneken & Nieuwbeerta, 2020), it is fundamentally a subjective phenomenon that is moderated by the personal attitudes, beliefs and experiences of the individual.

Understanding and managing the climate of prisons has been an area of growing interest to correctional agencies, given the potential for supporting key objectives relating to correctional centre safety and effectiveness (e.g., Bennett & Shuker, 2018). For example, prison climate has been associated with the level of disorder within a centre, with poorer climates associated with increased inmate misconduct and instances of physical and verbal aggression (e.g., Bosma et al., 2020; Day et al., 2011; Gadon et al., 2006; van Ginneken & Nieuwbeerta, 2020). Features of the climate may also have a role in potentially problematic staff behaviours in forensic contexts, such as resort to use of force (Griffin, 1999) and absenteeism (Eggert et al., 2014). Further, climate has been associated with subjective wellbeing (van Ginneken & Nieuwbeerta, 2020) and behavioural correlates such as the likelihood of self-harm (Liebling & Ludlow, 2016); these factors are particularly relevant to effective correctional centre management considering the high rates of mental health difficulties among people in prison (e.g., Fazel & Seewald, 2012).

Prison climate is also an important factor in reference to the developing literature and correctional agency focus on fostering conditions that are conducive to rehabilitation. A positive social climate has been identified as a critical precondition for the effectiveness of therapeutic interventions (World Health Organisation, 1953). Therapeutic community models of treatment have gained traction in prison and other in-patient settings, whereby outcomes are proposed to be moderated by the quality of the living-learning context in which members are situated (e.g., Casey et al., 2007). In this regard, social climate may be considered an external responsivity factor that impacts on people's perceptions of the viability of a therapeutic intervention and their motivation to engage in that intervention (Casey et al., 2007; Day et al., 2011). Extending beyond the immediate therapeutic context, there is increasing recognition of the capacity for correctional officers and broader correctional environmental influences to act as agents of rehabilitative change (Barkworth et al., 2021, 2023; Mann, 2019; Mann et al., 2018). Underlying this, features of prison climate are argued to contribute to engagement in both therapeutic and other processes of change (Galouzis et al., 2023). Consistent with these observations, higher quality social climates have been associated with individual readiness for change and engagement in treatment in forensic settings (Beech & Hamilton-Giachritsis, 2005; Day et al., 2011; Tonkin et al., 2012). As a potential expression of these effects on rehabilitative outcomes, there is some evidence to suggest that variation in prison climate has a relationship with the likelihood of post-release recidivism (Auty & Liebling, 2020; but see also van Ginneken & Palmen, 2022).

Considering the emerging evidence base it is not surprising that monitoring of prison social climate has become a priority for correctional agencies across jurisdictions. For example, routine measurement of climate has been adopted by the Federal Bureau of Prisons in the United States as well as Her Majesty's Prison Service in the United Kingdom, and is also a feature of monitoring processes for forensic hospitals managed across the United Kingdom (Tonkin, 2016). Within the context of Corrective Services NSW,

measures of prison social climate have historically been used in more discrete circumstances, including to assess an innovative correctional centre design and operational model (Howard et al., 2022), and experiences of people in prison following introduction of in-cell digital technologies (Barkworth et al., 2022). In line with other jurisdictions, however, Corrective Services NSW has identified objectives to improve perceptions of correctional climates as a key priority of its current Towards 2030 strategic plan, corresponding with regular measurement of prison and other climates as experienced by people under the agency's care.

AIMS

Given the increasing interest in prison climate, it is important that correctional agencies have access to appropriate methods of measuring related factors. However, it has historically been difficult to operationalise the construct of prison climate, which has been associated with limited options for measuring climate or evidence for the validity of those measures (Day et al., 2011). For example, a recent review by Tonkin (2016) identified twelve current measures of prison climate in the literature, and concluded that a single measure was distinguished by relatively sound empirical support for its psychometric properties: the Essen Climate Evaluation Schema (EssenCES: Schalast et al., 2008), which is the subject of the current study. The author also identified gaps in the evidence base for this and other measures, however, which was consistent with an underdeveloped field of research and validation overall. While assessment of prison climate has continued to evolve in recent years (e.g., Bosma et al., 2020), there is a need for more research to support agency applications of relevant measures and outcomes.

The aim of the current study was to examine the properties and outputs of the EssenCES measure of prison climate, as administered in the context of Corrective Services NSW correctional climates. To do this we conducted online surveys with men and women housed at two public correctional centres in NSW. A range of analytical approaches were used to assess the psychometric properties of the measure, including those relating to reliability, factor structure, and convergent validity with factors relevant to individuals' experiences of prison and rehabilitation. We also explored how experiences of prison climate varied as a function of demographic and other individual differences, which has implications for the generalisability of the EssenCES and may also give preliminary insights into targets for development of dynamic and responsive prison climates (e.g., Dickens et al., 2014). This study is intended to support Corrective Services NSW and other correctional agency decision making related to the measurement, interpretation and management of prison climate.

METHODS

The sample for this study included men and women in prison who completed a survey on in-cell digital tablets in August 2021 as part of the pilot implementation of the tablet technology at two NSW correctional centres. A total of 208 people completed the survey.

The average (mean) age of respondents at the time of completing the survey was 35.27 years (SD = 10.32 years). Half (49.5%) of respondents were women, and more than a quarter (26.4%) identified as being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander cultural background (hereafter referred to as Aboriginal). At the time of the survey, respondents had been in prison for the index custodial episode for 1.27 years (SD = 2.16 years).

A detailed overview of the survey methodology can be found in Barkworth et al. (2022). In brief, links to online surveys hosted on the Alchemer platform were distributed to all people in custody at the pilot correctional centres. Respondents were first asked a series of questions relating to their experience of using the new digital tablets. They then completed a number of psychometric measures which assessed their experiences of the social climate of their prison in addition to other factors.

Our primary measure of prison social climate was the Essen Climate Evaluation Schema (EssenCES: Schalast et al., 2008). The EssenCES assesses essential characteristics of the social atmosphere of prisons and other forensic settings. It includes 15 items which assess three identified dimensions of social climate: support from staff (5 items; e.g., "Staff members take a lot of time to deal with inmates"); inmates' social cohesion and mutual support (5 items; e.g., "There is good peer support among inmates"); and experienced safety (5 items; e.g., "There are some really aggressive inmates in this unit"). Additional opening and closing items are included in the EssenCES to give a total of 17 items; however these items are not used to calculate factors of interest. Cronbach's alpha statistics indicated good internal consistency of EssenCES factors in this study, with values of .90 for cohesion, .77 for safety, and .71 for support.

Respondents who completed the survey were asked to give identifying information, which allowed for extraction of additional variables from the Corrective Services NSW Offender Integrated Management System (OIMS). OIMS is a central Corrective Services NSW administrative database which is used to collate and maintain a range of information about people under supervision in custody and in the community. Variables of interest extracted from OIMS included demographic and custodial episode characteristics, actuarial assessments of recidivism risk, and program completion outcomes.

Data on reoffending were derived from the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR) Reoffending Database (ROD). Reoffending was defined as any finalised reconviction following release from the index custodial episode where respondents completed the survey. To be eligible for reoffending analyses, respondents were required to have been released from custody at least 3 months prior to the data censoring date, and to have been recorded as convicted to a custodial sentence during the index episode. This gave a subsample of 115 respondents who were included in reoffending analyses. Among this group, 31 (27.0%) were observed to reoffend over the follow-up period.

Analyses of the relationships between EssenCES measures and other variables of interest were largely conducted using a series of bivariate correlations and univariate means comparisons. Binary logistic regression models were used to assess associations between EssenCES factors and program completion outcomes. A multivariable Cox proportional hazard model was applied to examine predictive relationships between the EssenCES and reoffending outcomes.

FINDINGS

What are people's experiences of prison climate?

Table 1 gives descriptive statistics about respondents' average (mean) ratings for items on each of the EssenCES factors, in addition to the aggregate EssenCES total score. Given that item scores ranged between 1 and 5, the value for the aggregate EssenCES total score indicated that respondents had a slight tendency towards agreement with or positive sentiments about their prison climate, on average.

In reference to individual factors of the EssenCES, respondents tended towards the most positive perspectives of safety within their prison climate. Average perspectives became progressively more

moderate when referring to inmate cohesion, and to staff support, respectively. A series of paired sample t-tests showed that ratings of safety were significantly higher than ratings of cohesion (t = 9.45, p < .001, d = .72) and ratings of support (t = 16.65, p < .001, d = 1.05) with moderate to large effect sizes; in turn, cohesion scores were significantly higher than support scores with a moderate effect size (t = 8.80, p < .001, d = .65).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations between EssenCES measures

Measure	M (SD)	1	2	3
1. Inmate cohesion	3.22 (.90)			
2. Safety	3.84 (.77)	.44**		
3. Staff support	2.57 (.79)	.27**	.12	
4. EssenCES total	3.20 (.59)	.81**	.72**	.63**

Note. *p<.05; **p<.01

Table 2 shows average scores on each of the EssenCES factors as a function of gender and Aboriginal background. It can be seen that ratings on the EssenCES had minimal variation across these groups. There was a slight tendency towards more favourable ratings across each of the factors for non-Aboriginal respondents compared to Aboriginal respondents, with particular disparities between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal men. A series of 2 x 2 ANOVAs indicated that for each of the EssenCES factors as well as the aggregate EssenCES total score, there were no significant differences in ratings as a function of gender (ps > .6), or of Aboriginal background (ps > .1), and all interactions between these factors were statistically non-significant (ps > .4).

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for EssenCES measures as a function of Aboriginal background and gender

Measure	Aboriginal				Non-Aboriginal			
	Men		Women		Men		Women	
	n	M (SD)	n	M (SD)	n	M (SD)	n	M (SD)
Inmate cohesion	24	3.13 (1.09)	22	3.24 (0.80)	68	3.29 (0.88)	71	3.18 (0.88)
Safety	21	3.69 (0.88)	24	3.69 (0.76)	66	3.95 (0.74)	67	3.84 (0.76)
Staff support	22	2.46 (0.69)	24	2.54 (0.64)	68	2.56 (0.85)	70	2.62 (0.83)
EssenCES total	20	3.08 (0.73)	22	3.16 (0.45)	66	3.24 (0.60)	65	3.19 (0.59)

Additional analyses examined whether perceptions of the prison social climate varied as a function of the respondent's age at the time of assessment. Bivariate correlations can be interpreted so that Pearson r values of between 0 – .29 indicate a weak or small association; values of between .3 – .49 indicate a moderate association; and values of over .5 indicate a strong or large association (Cohen, 1988).

Results indicated that age had a small to moderate, and statistically significant, positive correlation with ratings of staff safety (r = .26, p < .001). As can be seen in Figure 1, this indicates that as age at assessment increases, perceptions of staff safety also tended to increase. This relationship appeared to be curvilinear, with ratings of staff safety remaining steady or declining among younger respondents before steadily improving among respondents who were aged in their mid-30s and older. Correlations between age at assessment and the inmate cohesion (r = .003, p = .97) and safety factors (r = .03, p = .68), as well as the EssenCES total score (r = .14, p = .07) were each weak and statistically non-significant.
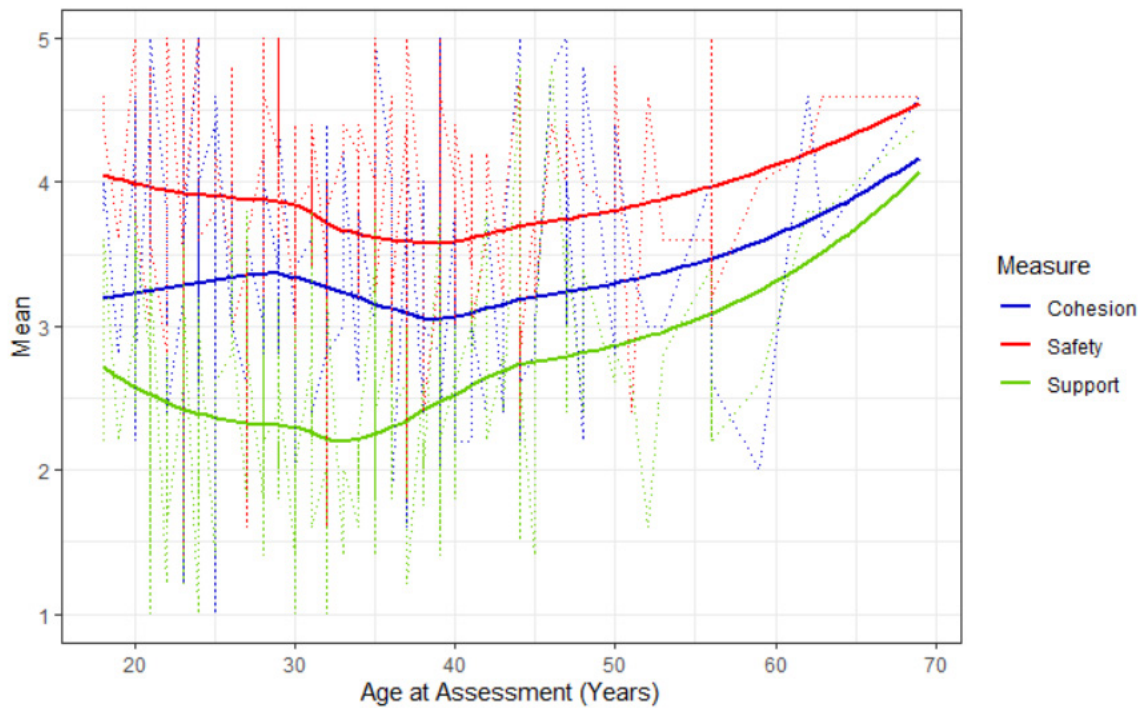
Figure 1. Associations between EssenCES factors and age at assessment

What are the associations between prison climate factors?

Table 1 also gives bivariate correlations between each of the EssenCES factors as well as the aggregate total score. The factors showed reasonable signs of discriminant validity, in that each had relatively limited shared variance. There was a moderate correlation between the safety and inmate cohesion factors, whereas correlations between safety and staff support, and between inmate cohesion and staff support, were in the weak ranges. Correlations with the EssenCES total score indicated that this global aggregate index of prison social climate had the greatest shared variance with ratings of inmate cohesion, followed by ratings of safety and ratings of staff support respectively.

How do perceptions of prison climate relate to experiences of custody?

A series of bivariate correlations indicated that ratings of staff support had a positive and significant association with how long the respondent had spent in custody for the index episode at the time of assessment (r = .24, p = .001). As illustrated in Figure 2[1], perceptions of staff support remained stable for respondents who had been in custody for up to approximately a year, and progressively improved among respondents who had been in custody for more than a year. There was also a marginally significant positive correlation between ratings across all items of the EssenCES and time spent in custody (r = .13, p = .09). Correlations between time spent in custody and ratings of inmate cohesion (r = −.04, p = .60) and ratings of safety (r = .10, p = .21) were each statistically non-significant.

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[1] To assist interpretation, Figure 2 shows data for respondents who had up to 2 years since reception into custody. The total sample ranged between 1 – 4992 days in custody at the time of the survey.
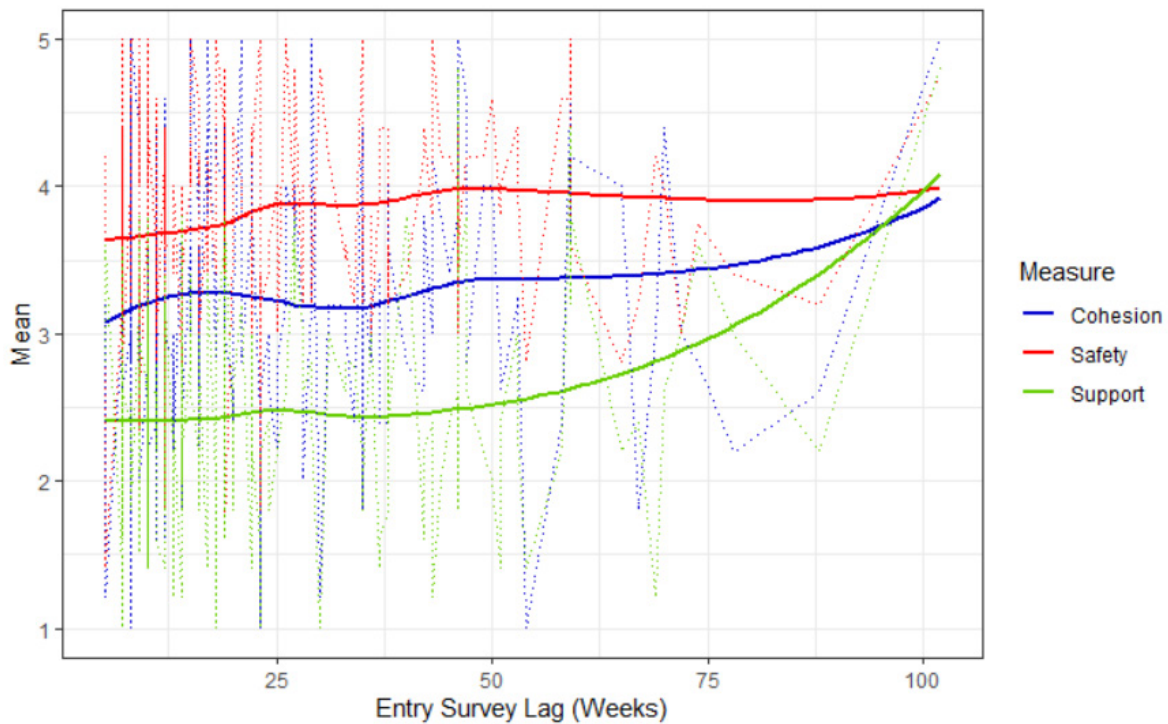
Figure 2. Associations between EssenCES factors and weeks since reception into custody

Additional independent samples t-tests were used to assess whether respondents who had previously been in custody had different perceptions of prison climate compared to those who were in custody for the first time. People who had not been imprisoned prior to the index custodial episode gave significantly higher ratings of safety (M = 4.00, SD = 0.63 vs M = 3.72, SD = 0.85; t = 2.51, p = .01) and ratings of staff support (M = 2.68, SD = 0.88 vs M = 2.47, SD = 0.70; F = 1.86, p = .03) compared to people who had been imprisoned previously. Correspondingly, people who were in custody for the first time also gave significantly higher ratings on the EssenCES overall (M = 3.29, SD = 0.58 vs M = 3.12, SD = 0.58; t = 2.02, p = .02). Ratings of inmate cohesion did not appear to vary as a function of whether the respondent had previously been in custody (M = 3.26, SD = 0.90 vs 3.19, SD = 0.90; t = .51, p = .31).

How are perceptions of climate associated with indicators of recidivism risk?

To explore how perceptions of prison climate corresponded with individual recidivism risk, we first examined correlations between scores on the EssenCES and actuarial estimates of risk. To do this we applied risk scores derived by the Custody TRAS, which is an automated tool used by Corrective Services NSW to estimate individuals' probability of return to custody with a new conviction within 2 years among people serving custodial orders (Raudino et al., 2019). Relationships between EssenCES factors and Custody TRAS scores are also illustrated in Figure 3.

Analyses showed a marginally significant negative correlation between Custody TRAS scores and ratings on the staff support factor (r = −.13, p = .07). It can be seen from Figure 3 that ratings of staff support declined rapidly among people who were assessed as relatively low risk of recidivism (which can be interpreted as 0 – 20% estimated likelihood of return to custody within 2 years) and remained stable for respondents who were assessed as being at higher ranges of risk. No significant correlations were found

between Custody TRAS scores and ratings on the inmate cohesion (r = .03, p = .71) or the safety (r = −.08, p = .26) factors of the EssenCES, or the global composite score on the measure (r = −.06, p = .41).
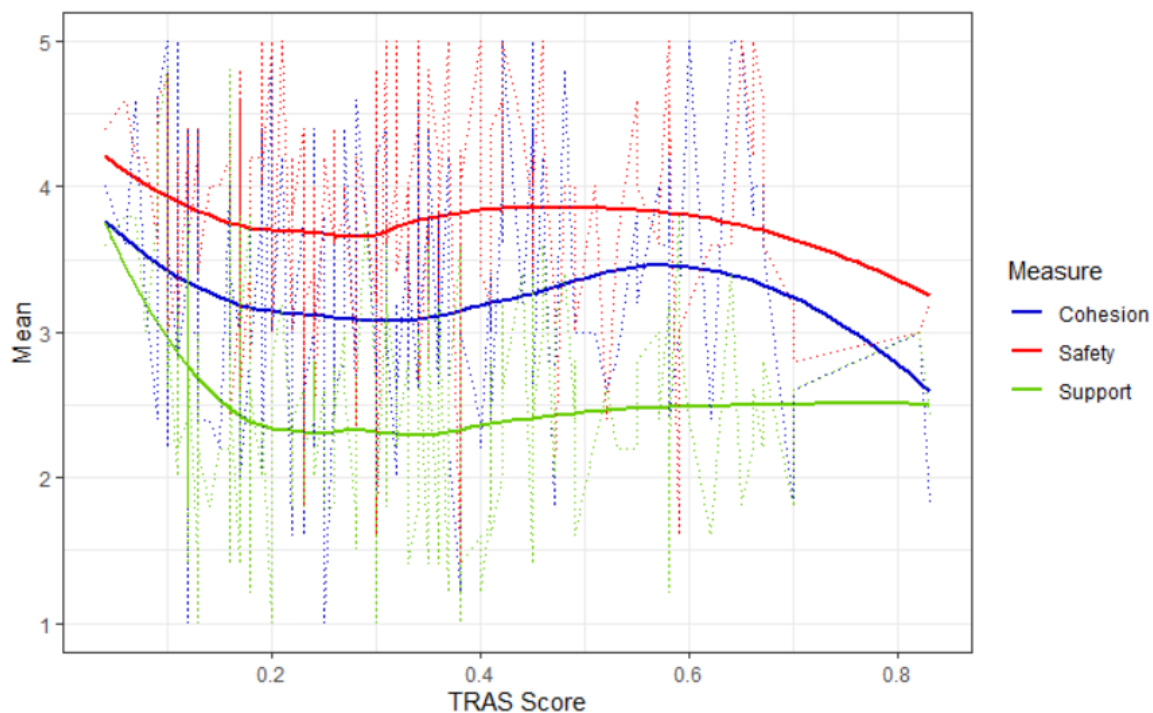

Figure 3. Associations between EssenCES factors and estimated probability of recidivism as assessed by the Custody TRAS

Our second test of the risk relevance of EssenCES scores involved assessing their predictive validity for observed recidivism outcomes, defined as any reconviction following release from the index custodial episode. For the purposes of this analysis, we conducted a Cox proportional hazard regression model where each of the three EssenCES factors were entered simultaneously to estimate their independent association with recidivism. The aggregate EssenCES total score was omitted to limit effects of predictor variable multicollinearity on coefficient estimates.

The results of this model showed a statistically marginal positive association between the inmate cohesion factor and time-adjusted odds of reoffending, as well as a marginal negative association between the safety factor and reoffending. Hazard ratios[2] indicated that each unit increase in average score on the cohesion factor was associated with approximately a two-thirds increase in odds of recidivism (HR = 1.63, 95% CI [0.92 – 2.89], p = .09), whereas each unit increase in average safety score was associated with almost a 50% decrease in odds of recidivism (HR = .55, 95% CI [0.29 – 1.04], p = .07), after adjusting for survival period. Ratings of staff support were a non-significant predictor of recidivism after controlling for other factors (HR = 1.42, 95% CI [0.77 – 2.62], p = .25).

Additional post hoc analysis was conducted to explore the extent to which predictive relationships between EssenCES factors and recidivism are accounted for by the pre-existing risk profile of

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[2] Hazard ratios (HR) and odds ratios (OR) can be interpreted so that values higher than 1 indicate increases in the predictor are estimated to correspond with increased likelihood of the outcome, and values lower than 1 indicate increases in the predictor are estimated to correspond with decreased likelihood of the outcome.

respondents. To do this we replicated the above Cox proportional hazard regression while including respondents' Custody TRAS scores as an additional covariate. Results showed that as expected, Custody TRAS score was a significant predictor of recidivism (HR = 16.15, 95% CI [1.72 – 150.96], p = .01). After adjusting for Custody TRAS scores, ratings on the safety factor continued to have a marginal negative association with reoffending (HR = .57, 95% CI [0.31 – 1.07], p = .08), whereas ratings on the cohesion factor (HR = 1.48, 95% CI [0.85 – 2.60], p = .17) and the support factor (HR = 1.45, 95% CI [0.76 – 2.77], p = .25) had non-significant positive associations with reoffending.

Do experiences of prison climate have a relationship with program completion?

The following analysis explored whether respondents' perceptions of prison social climate had a relationship with their completion of behaviour change programs. To achieve this, we identified the program most recently entered relative to completion of the study survey, among those who had commenced programs during their index custodial episode. To account for the context- and time-specific nature of respondents' experiences of prison climates, we only considered program entries and completion outcomes that occurred within 6 months of the survey completion date. A total of 107 respondents had valid program activity data, with 24 being recorded as completing their program and 83 failing to complete the program.

A binary logistic regression model was conducted to estimate multivariable associations between EssenCES factors and likelihood of program completion. Both the staff support factor (OR = 1.31, 95% CI [0.71 – 2.42], p = .38) and the safety factor (OR = 1.07, 95% CI [0.51 – 2.21], p = .86) had positive odds ratios, indicating that more favourable ratings were associated with increased likelihood of program completion. Conversely, higher ratings on the inmate cohesion factor were estimated to be associated with lower odds of program completion (OR = .83, 95% CI [0.44 – 1.57], p = .57). Each of the factors were statistically non-significant predictors of program completion, however.

CONCLUSIONS

This study aimed to conduct a preliminary exploration of the assessment of, and inmates' experiences of, prison climate in the context of NSW correctional centres. We found evidence for sound psychometric properties of the EssenCES, including strong internal consistency within and modest correlations between factors. This is consistent with other research on the factorial structure of the measure (Day et al., 2011; Howells et al., 2009; Milsom et al., 2014; Schalast et al., 2008; Tonkin et al., 2012) and reinforces the value of considering each factor as relatively distinct constructs within the context of the broader prison climate.

Ratings between factors were positively correlated, which is in contrast to a recent study in NSW prisons which reported inverse patterns in scores between the safety and other EssenCES factors (Howard et al., 2022). Considering that the safety factor exclusively contains reverse coded items, this pattern may have been attributable to careless or insufficient effort responding styles (e.g., Curran, 2016). A potential explanation of these differences is that the current study required respondents to be identified, whereas the previous study administered surveys under conditions of anonymity. While the literature on prison climate identifies best practice as allowing for anonymity at the time of measurement (Tonkin, 2016), a possible implication of our results is that identification may act to address data quality issues associated with response bias to some extent.

Each factor of the EssenCES also had strong positive correlations with total composite scores across all items on the measure. Total scores on the EssenCES were most strongly associated with inmate cohesion, followed by safety and staff support, respectively. Interestingly, the same order of associations was observed elsewhere between EssenCES factors and experiences of psychological wellbeing in prison (Howard et al., 2023). These results give indirect support for a multidimensional and hierarchical view of prison climate, whereby multiple factors make differential contributions to a global experience of prison climate, in addition to subjective responses to that climate (Tonkin, 2016; van Ginneken & Nieuwbeerta, 2020).

Respondents in our study tended to give the most positive ratings for the safety factor of the EssenCES, followed by inmate cohesion, whereas endorsement of the staff support factor was relatively poor on average. Overall, it appears that perceptions of staff support were both more critical and also subject to greater variability compared to other EssenCES factors. Ratings of staff support were relatively dynamic and showed a range of associations with other variables, including significant correlations with respondents' age, and marginal correlations with time in prison and actuarial assessments of recidivism risk. Respondents who had not previously been imprisoned also gave significantly higher ratings of support, as well as perceived safety, compared to those with histories of imprisonment. While this is a complex series of interacting relationships, the results suggest that perceptions of support may be responsive to both individual factors (relating to age and potentially its correspondence with trajectories of desistance) and situational factors (relating to acclimatisation to the custodial environment)[3].

Findings for an association between Custody TRAS scores and ratings of staff support add to the complex and understudied intersection between recidivism and perceptions of prison climate. We are aware of one other study of relationships between the EssenCES and respondents' assessed risk, which found negative correlations between HCR-20 scores and inmate cohesion (Dickens et al., 2014). Higher risk individuals also tend to have poorer engagement with correctional agents of change (Howard, 2016; Larochelle et al., 2011), which may be expressed in ratings of staff support; however, it is noted that we did not find significant associations between EssenCES scores and program completion outcomes, which may be partly attributed to sampling limitations and the influence of logistical as compared to individual factors on attrition in custodial therapeutic settings (e.g., Mahajan et al., 2021). In addition, our study found marginal results whereby ratings of inmate cohesion predicted greater odds of reoffending, and ratings of safety predicted lower odds of reoffending post-release. It is possible that perceived inmate cohesion partially reflects pre-existing risk factors such as identification with antisocial peers (e.g., Gendreau et al., 1996; Mills et al., 2002), whereas perceived safety has a relationship with involvement in cycles of within-prison conflict and victimisation that have been observed among inmates who are at risk of institutional and other misconduct (Howard et al., 2020). At the same time, ratings of safety continued to have a marginal association with recidivism outcomes after adjusting for Custody TRAS scores, with potential implications that experiences of safety while in prison may have a bearing on reoffending outcomes beyond that explained by pre-existing risk alone (see also Auty & Liebling, 2020; Listwan et al., 2013).

Conversely, scores on the EssenCES were not found to have significant associations with key demographic factors, including gender and Aboriginal cultural background. There is some previous research to indicate that women tend to give higher ratings on the EssenCES than men (Dickens et al., 2014). Our results give positive indications about the generalisability of the measure and related experiences of climate across key demographic groups in NSW prisons, and could potentially point to success in accommodating cultural

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[3] While omitted from the final report in the interests of brevity, follow-up post hoc analyses indicated that age and time in custody over the index episode were significant multivariate predictors of staff support ratings whereas Custody TRAS score and prior imprisonment were not.

diversity considerations within the assessed correctional centres. It is noted, however, that findings for non-significant differences in EssenCES scores as a function of gender also indicate that the climate was indistinguishable among the two centres sampled in this study, where men and women were housed separately. A related limitation of the study is that sampling at two locations may have reduced variability in perceptions of prison climate and corresponding EssenCES ratings across respondents, and precluded site-level analyses exploring differences in shared experiences of climate across correctional environments.

While some limitations are noted, the current study gives promising indications for application of the EssenCES within NSW correctional centre contexts. The study also provides preliminary insights about the potential value of flexible correctional practices that tailor climates to people under their care, with a focus on individuals' characteristic and situational factors that may influence their experiences of prison. At the same time, the results highlight that perceptions of prison climate have idiographic as well as shared components, which could influence how measures such as the EssenCES are integrated into assessments of correctional agency performance. For example, clustering of higher risk people in particular correctional centres or units has implications for the extent that climate scores could be compared with other locations, in the absence of appropriate statistical adjustment (Camp et al., 2003; van Ginneken & Nieuwbeerta, 2020; van Ginneken & Palmen, 2022). Concordant with the growing focus and interest in prison climate among correctional agencies, there is a need for ongoing research that informs best practice methods for its measurement and analysis, in addition to an understanding of underlying causal mechanisms and change management strategies.

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