

LGBTQ+ Informed Care and Treatment in Women's Prisons: Tentative Lessons for Youth Justice?

➤ Dr Kayleigh Charlton
(She/Her)

Research Associate, Children and Young People's Centre for
Justice
CYCJ Webinar
23/09/25



Overview

- Context
- Findings
- Implications for LGBTQ+ informed care
- The 'problem'/limits of LGBTQ+ informed care
- How does this translate to youth justice?



Context

- Increasing calls for LGBTQ+ informed approaches or entire prisons
- Italy announced a transgender prison back in 2010
- In 2018, Scotland costed a non-binary prison
- HMP Downview transgender wing
- Turkey attempted to operationalise what was known as the 'Pink Prison'



Context (cont)

- Growing conversation about LGBTQ+ informed approaches
- Key principles: safety, trust, transparency, collaboration, empowerment and cultural relevance (Levenson et al., 2023)
- Adopting LGBTQ+ informed care in prison spaces
- Existing literature on LGBTQ+ experiences in prison (Carr et al., 2016; Maycock, 2022; Suhomlinova and O'Shea, 2023)



Findings

Findings from a letter writing study conducted in 2022

- Bullying and discrimination
- Lack of LGBTQ+ specific support
- Uncertainty and belonging



Bullying, Discrimination and Rights Violations

- Participants reported experiencing and/or witnessing high levels of bullying and discrimination
- Staff using incorrect pronouns/name, lack of administrative flexibility meant non-binary prisons became invisible, inappropriate questioning of the nature of their friendships
- Reports of physical assaults, staff 'watching' rather than interfering, diversity and equality officer 'outed' a prisoner



Lack of LGBTQ+ Support

- A distinct lack of LGBTQ+ specific support and resources (little to no in person support)
- Participants describe advocating for themselves and using 'get to know your rights' packs
- Endless paperwork involved in accessing support
- Access to gender-affirming products is limited i.e., boxers, binders, wigs, make up
- Disparity in access due to financial reasons



Uncertainty and Belonging

- Uncertainty over current and future housing if you are non-binary or trans
- Cell confinement for all trans prisoners on the back of a specific incident concerning one trans prisoner
- Changing political landscape leaves these participants feeling worried about their future in prison



Implications for LGBTQ+ Care

- Staff training on LGBTQ+ issues
- LGBTQ+ support and resources
- Addressing and preventing violence



The 'Problem'/Limits

- Accounts of staff issues exceed 'a lack of understanding'
- Support and resources requires unequivocal institutional support and financial backing
- Lack of continuity in the community
- Addressing and preventing violence goes well beyond the prison walls
- Hard to imagine this being prioritised



LGBTQ+ Youth

- Evidence gap around LGBTQ+ youth experiences in conflict with the law
- Drawing parallels - overcriminalisation, marginalisation, and vulnerability among LGBTQ+ youth
- A moral and material urgency to do this work



LGBTQ+ informed care in YJ?

Bringing it back to the key principles: safety, trust, transparency, collaboration, empowerment and cultural relevance

How would this look in -

The children's hearing system

Courts

Secure care and residential settings

Community-based support



How Does this Translate to Practice?

- Where can we do this work in youth justice?
- What does it mean for your service/organisation?
- Do you have success stories of supporting LGBTQ+ children? Or specific challenges in mind?
- What are the gaps? What are the practice needs?



Support and Resources

- [Free resources - LGBT Youth Scotland](#)
- [Supporting LGBTQ+ young people | Stonewall](#)
- [LGBT+ young people | Barnardo's](#)
- [Welcome - FFLAG](#)
- [Homepage - Mermaids](#)
- [Prisoners who are LGBT+ | Prisoners' Advice Service](#)
- [CYCJ Diversity Chapter](#)



Thank You



Please follow us and stay updated



[@cycjscotland.bsky.social](#)



[@cycjyouthjustice](#)



[@cycjscotland](#)



[@cycj_scotland](#)



[@cycjscotland](#)

