

Dementia and mild cognitive impairment in prisoners aged over 50 years in England and Wales: a mixed-methods study

Katrina Forsyth,¹ Leanne Heathcote,¹ Jane Senior,^{1*}
Baber Malik,¹ Rachel Meacock,¹ Katherine Perryman,¹
Sue Tucker,¹ Rachel Domone,² Matthew Carr,¹
Helen Hayes,¹ Roger Webb,¹ Laura Archer-Power,³
Alice Dawson,¹ Sarah Leonard,¹ David Challis,⁴
Stuart Ware,⁵ Richard Emsley,¹ Caroline Sanders,¹
Salman Karim,² Seena Fazel,⁶ Adrian Hayes,⁷
Alistair Burns,¹ Mary Piper⁵ and Jenny Shaw¹

¹Offender Health Research Network, University of Manchester, Manchester, UK

²Lancashire and South Cumbria NHS Foundation Trust, Preston, UK

³Cheshire and Greater Manchester Community Rehabilitation Company, Manchester, UK

⁴Division of Psychiatry and Applied Psychology, Institute of Mental Health, University of Nottingham, Nottingham, UK

⁵Restore Support Network, Exeter Council for Voluntary Service, Exeter, UK

⁶Department of Psychiatry, University of Oxford, Oxford, UK

⁷Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust, Bath, UK

*Corresponding author Jane.Senior@manchester.ac.uk

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Plain English summary

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Plain English summary

Over recent years, the number of people going to prison in later life, or growing old there, has increased. Older prisoners often have a lot of health problems, including dementia and confusion, and prison staff struggle to give them the care they need.

We wanted to find better ways of helping confused people in prison. The first thing we did was to conduct tests on some older prisoners to see if they may have dementia. We then asked prison staff how they cared for older people and we spent time in prisons to find out how older people cope with prison life. We also asked staff and prisoners what training they needed so that they could help older people better.

We found that just under 1000 people in prison in England and Wales probably have confusion or dementia. This number is greater than the number estimated by the interviewed staff.

We found that prisoners with memory problems or confusion struggle to remember what they should be doing and that this sometimes gets them into trouble with staff. It was clear that prisoners and staff should receive training to help them know when someone may need help with their memory. This training would allow people to be helped sooner than happens now and it would also help staff understand what a confused prisoner is going through.

Finally, we developed a step-by-step guide of what should happen when an older person in prison may have confusion or dementia. We think that if the steps are followed, then people will get better care.

We would like the prison service and the NHS to use our step-by-step guide and training in prisons. We would then be able to see if these make a difference to people's lives.

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