

CAF/NM/26/72 - Improving throughcare and reducing drug-related harms for men with opioid dependence leaving prison in Scotland: a mixed methods exploration of needs, service gaps, and transition

BACKGROUND

More people in Scotland die because of drugs than in any other country in Europe. Opioids, such as heroin or methadone, are involved in most deaths, and new, very strong synthetic drugs (like nitazenes) are making the situation even more dangerous. Almost half of men who die because of drugs have spent time in prison, and 1 in every 4 people who die from drugs have been in prison in the last month. Because of this, reducing drug deaths among people leaving prison is a major priority for the Scottish Government.

Men who break the law often go on to commit further offences. This is especially true for people who have been in prison for only a short time. The causes of reoffending are complicated. Many men lose their housing while in prison and are released with little support. Prisons are overcrowded and services such as the NHS, local authorities, and drug/alcohol support services often struggle to work together in a joined-up way to provide good-quality care for people leaving prison. We still do not fully understand how men with opioid dependence experience support when they leave prison, or what they feel helps or makes it harder to stay safe from returning to drug use or committing more crimes.

AIM AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The aim of this research is to understand the experiences and substance use outcomes (e.g. drug-related death, return to drug use, reimprisonment) of men with opioid dependence leaving prison.

The study will explore:

- What we already know from research about the experience of men with opioid dependence when leaving prison.
- What happens in the first three months after release in terms of drug use and reimprisonment.
- How men with opioid dependence experience support services, including what helps and what gets in the way.
- How professionals and organisations see gaps and challenges in the current service provided to men with opioid dependence leaving prison.

HOW THE STUDY WILL WORK

The research will have five parts:

1. Reviewing existing research.
2. Looking at prison and health records to see what happens after release.
3. Interviewing men recently released from prison to hear their experiences directly.

4. Surveying key professionals and organisations involved in providing support for men leaving prison.
5. Bringing the findings together and setting out recommendations that could improve current practice

By combining information from health records with the voices of men and professionals, the study will show what works, what doesn't, and what needs to change to help men with opioid dependence leaving prison avoid committing more offences, returning to illegal drug use, or dying from a drugs overdose.

SHARING THE FINDINGS AND IMPACT FROM THIS RESEARCH

The findings will help improve support provided to men with opioid dependence leaving prison in the Lothians and guide national policy and practice. This includes the Scottish Government's National Mission on Drugs (and later strategies), the Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) standards, and Scottish Prison Service Alcohol and Drug Recovery Strategy.