



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

AWARE: Cross sectoral awareness-building on mental health needs in the criminal justice system and on release

Staff Training 6-8.10.2020

Day 2, Workshop 2: 12.30-13.25

What resources do I have?



Der Senator für
Justiz und Verfassung



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- From the 364 AWARE respondents who work with prisoners and/or ex-offenders, an alarming 85% reported that they are aware of prisoners facing some form of mental health problem inside their secure facility.
- This was true of every staff role, from medical doctor to prison officer, from psychologist to probation workers. Over one third said that this problematic behavior occurred at their workplace on a daily basis.
- AWARE respondents talked about substance abuse-related issues (22%), depression (21%), self-harm behaviors (22%) and personality disorders (18%), though these may be characterized as symptoms and not disorders in themselves.
- In fact, the majority of the staff who responded were not qualified to diagnose elusive constructs such as personality disorders, which are hard to identify even by trained professionals (Hopwood et al., 2018).

What resources do I need?

AWARE respondents identified similar needs to those we found in our literature review, that provision is lacking:

- Train staff and volunteers to **identify** first signs of mental ill health
- Deliver comparable mental health resources (compared to public health resources available on the outside)
- Training and strategy to do a **triage diagnosis** of a potential mental health need
- If a condition does become more serious, general lack of **referral possibilities for expert support.**
- Prison and probation staff stress related to the prison organisation and environment increases, and can negatively affect the mental health of prisoners, developing into **cycles of stress.**



Where did AWARE prisoners say they most need support?

- **Listen to prisoners:** Slightly more than half of prisoners felt that they were taken seriously asking staff for psychological help,
- 42% did not.
- Similarly, 40% of prisoners said that they were afraid their request for psychological help would not be treated confidentially
- Nearly half (49%) said they would be afraid this request would somehow be used against them.
- **Train staff and provide regularly updated information:**
 - *Information for prison and probation staff:* all correctional staff need information on how to recognize a need for psychological support, whether in their fellow colleagues or an inmate.
 - *Information for prisoners on what good mental health is, what they can expect to experience in prison and how, how to request psychological help if they think they need it and what that process would look like.*



What prisoners said (part 2)

- **Support links with families and local community groups**, specializing in either mental health, drug or wellbeing issues, or providing a wider support network for families, children and partners of prisoners.
- Community as a key part of the mental health and wellbeing picture: AWARE found – even in prisons where access to psychiatric resources were available – prisoners overwhelmingly said that the first person they would speak to about their feelings would be their partner or their families.
- Build a bridge from the prison to organisations which support families with someone in prison, with substance abuse issues or who provide practical support with issues around money, housing and schooling.
- **Make the process for requests more transparent:** 41% of AWARE prisoner-respondents do not know who to turn to if they are feeling sad or depressed
- One in five respondents had asked for professional help but had not received it (had not make the request in the correct way, or to the correct staff member)
- how requests for psychological help are made, how, to whom, how long these take to process, how confidentiality is ensured and how they will receive a response.
- Answer every request even if only to notify of long delays or to say on what grounds the request has been declined.



Sources of support

www.aware-project.org

References

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Thanks for your attention!

