Living as new Me: Exploring experiences of offender management programme participation, an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of an Accredited Programme

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Abstract

The lived experience of men with learning difficulties and challenges (LDC) who have been convicted of a sexual offence has been under-researched. The present study examines the psychological world of this group of men and constructs that were identified from their participation in a purposely designed offending behaviour programme aimed to address their criminogenic needs called Living as New Me (LNM). A series of one to one semi-structured interviews were undertaken with four participants. The data analysis involved the transcription, coding and categorisation of descriptive information obtained through the use of semi-structured interviews with LDC men convicted of sexual offences and who had engaged in the LNM programme. Five themes were identified: experience, relationships, learning, motivation and responsivity. Recommendations were made by the participants as to how to improve the programme's structure. It is hoped that the results of the present study will help shape the future delivery of LNM. Further research is required to examine the lived experience of men with LDC on the different strands of the LNM and across the new suite of HMPPS adapted programmes.

Keywords: offending behaviour programmes, learning disabilities and challenges, sexual offending treatment.

The Sexual Offences Strand of the Living as New Me (LNM) Accredited Offending Behaviour Programme (OBP) is targeted at men aged 18 years and over who are convicted of a sexual offence, are medium risk or above, have an intelligence quotient between 60 and 80, and present with adaptive functioning deficits (Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service - HMPPS, 2018). LNM is a maintenance programme and men should have previously completed the Becoming New Me plus (BNM+) programme. A three-month minimum period is recommended between the end of BNM+ and starting on LNM. This is to allow time for participants to consolidate their learning and apply their skills. LNM is a rolling programme which aims to maintain treatment gains and comprises between 20 and 36 hours of treatment. The treatment approach has been specifically developed to meet the needs of a client group that presents with learning disabilities and challenges (LDC). It is recognised that this client group particularly benefit from support and repetition and therefore the programme heavily emphasises skills practice (Ministry of Justice, 2019).

Literature Review

The size of the LDC population is difficult to determine because of the many different definitions of Learning Disability and the range of assessments adopted. Nevertheless, recent data from the Ministry of Justice (2018) has indicated that 32% of females and 28% of males in community or custody care have a learning disability or challenge. Historically, there has been limited research exploring participants' lived experiences of offending behaviour programmes (Drake & Harvey, 2014). Especially of those participants with LDC needs who have committed a sexual offence. Previous research conducted on learning disabled prisoners and their access to treatment programmes whilst in custody has concluded that the custodial environment had neither the resources nor the expertise to meet the needs of this group (Carter & Mann, 2016).

In 2015, a joint inspection by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation and Prisons (HMIPP), found that offenders with learning disabilities were not getting the help they needed in prison (HMIPP, 2015). This was because according to independent inspectors, prison and probation staff were failing to identify people with learning disabilities which meant opportunities to help those offenders were missed. The term 'Learning Disability' was used to cover those people who had an intelligence quotient measured below 70, and those between 70 and 80, who are normally assessed as unsuitable to attend community and prison-based

accredited programmes. They found little evidence of programmes being adapted effectively to meet those offenders' needs.

Whilst it is clear that opportunities for this population have been scarce, in 2016 a bespoke programme for LDC prisoners was accredited, Living as New Me. The LNM is therefore a relatively new programme and forms part of the new suite of HMPPS programmes designed for men who have committed a sexual offence. The present study is the first one of its kind and it particularly focuses on the Sexual Offences Strand of the programme. A similar piece of research was commissioned by HMPPS Interventions Services in late 2019 for the evaluation of the Becoming New Me Plus (BNM+) General Violence Strand programme. This evaluation was aimed at exploring the experiences of young offenders with LDC however, the findings and conclusions are yet to be published.

Nevertheless, when considering previous research being undertaken in the field and recidivism, Taylor and Lindsay (2010) analysed the historical association between crime and low intelligence. They observed a growing interest in the development of offending behaviour programmes aimed to address recidivism among the male population with LDC. These had broadly utilised a cognitive behavioural approach. The authors found encouraging results regarding the prevalence of offending by people with LDC and recidivism rates after treatment. This finding contrasts with earlier work by Ashman and Dougan (2008) who concluded that the effectiveness of cognitive behavioural based interventions remained unclear.

The inconsistent and inconclusive findings in relation to recidivism and offenders with intellectual disability prompted Fitzgerald et al. (2011) to carry out a larger scale study of the population. They studied the behaviour of a large sample of offenders with LDC between 1990 and 2001. They found that this group, on the whole, shared the same lifestyle and criminal history factors which predict recidivism in the general offender population. They therefore proposed that offenders with LDC may benefit from the same cognitive behavioural interventions designed to address offending behaviour in the general offender population.

With regards to the effectiveness of cognitive behavioural interventions applied to the LDC population, Haaven and Coleman (2000) found that group interventions with offenders with LDC had a positive effect on this group of men in that it helped them to develop positive

peer associations and encouraged social learning. A key component for desistance from crime is a separation from a criminal identity. Group interventions help the development of a pro-social identity and sense of belonging in a population largely isolated in the community (Paternoster & Bushway, 2009). The evidence whilst mixed does suggest there may be potential benefits associated with cognitive behavioural interventions for individuals with LDC, in particular when those programmes include group delivery.

Purpose of the Present Study

The broad research aim of the current study is to explore the lived experiences of participants who have engaged in LNM. To establish what participation meant to them and their lives. It is anticipated that the findings will extend our understanding of how individuals within the LDC prison population experience offender behaviour programmes. The overarching research question was: How do participants make meaning of their experience of the LNM programme?

Method

Participants

The initial sample of medium-risk participants consisted of eight men with LDC who had been convicted of one or several sexual offences. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, allowing for criteria based on their characteristics or experiences directly related to the research question guiding the study. They had typically completed the programme within a 12-month bracket period before taking part in the research. Consent from participants was gained individually, having previously gone through the participant information sheet and written consent form, which had been designed using a multimodal approach. These included the use of visual prompts in line with HMPPS Interventions Services internal guidance on working with men on an LDC treatment pathway. The recruitment and prisoner access strategies had been discussed with and approved by the establishment's Governor in advance. Ethical approval for the study had been sought and obtained from HMPPS National Research Committee.

The participants' cognitive functioning had all been assessed, pre-programme, using the Wechsler Abbreviated Scale of Intelligence (WASI-II; Wechsler, 2011). This allowed for group homogeneity. One out of the eight participants, was identified as especially vulnerable

at the time the interviews were to be conducted, and excluded from the sample, in consultation with Treatment Managers. They had been experiencing symptoms of a serious mental health condition. A second participant, who had been released from custody days after the selection process had been concluded, was also excluded from the sample. The remaining participants were approached individually by the researcher, in agreement with relevant prison staff. With two participants being selected to take part in the preliminary research pilot study, the final sample size for the study was four participants. The mean age of participants was 50 years (SD=12.88).

Materials and Procedure

Interviews with participants were organised around an interview schedule prepared in advance. This enabled the researcher to cover key specific areas of interest while providing participants with the flexibility to explore them on their own terms, providing as much or as little information as they wished. The schedule (see Table 1) also included a series of prompt drawings relating to the different contents and stages of the programme to aid memory and understanding.

Table 1

Interview Schedule Main Topics

No.	Question
1.	What was LNM like for you?
2.	What did you like about doing LNM?
3.	What did you not like about doing LNM?
4.	What worked for you in the programme?
5.	What did not work that well for you in the programme?
6.	Is there anything else you want to tell me about LNM?

The interviews were conducted individually and arranged in line with the establishment's procedures. Consideration had been given to the participants' commitments relating to sentence planning and work/education engagements and notice given well in advance concerning the date, time and location. The interviews took an average of 45 minutes

each, and were audio-recorded using a Dictaphone, having secured site approval and the participants' consent. The audio-recordings of the four semi-structured interviews for the main study had a mean duration of approximately 17 min (SD=5.42).

The analytical approach consisted of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The assumption in IPA is that the analyst is interested in learning something about the respondent's psychological world (Smith & Osborn, 2007). This may be in the form of beliefs and constructs (Smith, 2003). IPA is purposely designed for very limited/small samples of participants whilst providing an entire framework for conducting research; it requires homogeneity within the sample group and the use of purposive sampling (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). IPA procedures help researchers to stay close to the research data as codes and themes are developed, and to focus on the unique characteristics of each individual participant (Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2006), but also on the patterning of meaning across participants (Langdridge, 2007). Smith and Osborn's (2007) IPA guidelines informed the process of analysis, which involved:

1. Data coding. Following the full transcription of participant interviews and reading of hand-written notes taken during the interviews, the interview transcripts were read through to identify points of interest. The meaning behind the most repeated words and phrases on interview passages were more significant than prevalence at this stage.

2. Identifying themes. Initial themes were developed, based on the codes identified in the stage above. This was done by clustering codes with a common meaning. Initial themes were developed in this way for each participant.

3. Connecting the themes and identifying overarching themes. As themes developed, initial patterns emerged. To the initial list of themes per participant, a clustering of themes was developed which forms the basis for the creation of a master table of themes for the group. On conclusion of the data analysis, overarching themes (broader generalisations) were drawn out and examined in relation to the existing body of research on LDC prisoners and programmes intervention.

4. Finally, writing up the themes. This stage is concerned with translating the themes into a narrative account. It is about presenting the participants' stories as they are told.

The process of analysis was inductive (based on the participant data) in achieving the goals of IPA. It has been recognised that conducting qualitative research with LDC participants can be a challenging progress (Nind & Vinha, 2016). However, there are some examples of previous research which illustrate this through the use of different strategies aimed to enable the meaningful and effective participation of people with LDC (Bullard, 2013; Isherwood, Burns, Naylor, & Read, 2007; Williams, Thrift, & Rose, 2018). Research exploring the lived experiences of people with LDC using a phenomenological approach and IPA has also been identified, these studies typically involved conscious adaptations by researchers to respond to participants' identified needs (Anslow, 2014; Jones, 2014; MacLeod, 2019; Pearson et al., 2019).

As the study involved the exploration of intensely personal experiences, to address the ethical concerns that could have emerged from the interviews with the participants, such as making them feel confused, angry or emotional (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008; Noon, 2018), debrief and signposted mechanisms were put in place by the researcher in consultation with trained staff.

Ethical Approval

HMPPS National Research Committee granted ethical approval for this research on 20th January 2020. The following ethical guidelines were followed: The Prison Service Instruction on Research Applications (2014); the Health and Care Professional Council Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics (2016), and the British Psychological Society Code of Ethics and Conduct (2018).

Pilot Study

A small pilot study (n=2) was conducted to examine the feasibility of the approach to be used in the main study. The sample of participants for the pilot was drawn from the main pool of participants. Following their feedback, the text written above one of the prompt drawings was changed as this had resulted in some confusion, this was prompt four, from 'Therapeutic Letters' to 'Review'. No further changes to the design of the interview schedule or prompts were made. Because contamination may arise where data from the pilot study are included in the main results (Leon, Davis & Kraemer, 2011), this data was not included in the

main study. A brief analysis of the pilot data did identify similar themes and subthemes to those identified.in the main study.

Findings

IPA was used to examine how participants privilege some experiences over others during treatment (e.g., skills practices, therapeutic letters, access to other sources of support). The lived experience of participants after treatment (skills maintenance and motivation) was also explored. The main research question and supporting questions, and the data obtained from the participants' interviews, guided the process of ideographic analysis. On identifying superordinate themes and subthemes, a final table was produced to aid interpretation and reinforce the links between the themes and the data (Smith & Osborn, 2007).

The results were subsequently organised in line with the five superordinate themes that were identified: the intervention experience, relationships, learning, motivation and responsivity. These themes were closely related to each other. The main intervention impacts described by participants related to learning and motivation. They also described how engaging with the intervention had positively influenced their relationships and eased their access to both internal and external sources of support. Subthemes were also identified, providing a more detailed account of the themes as illustrated in Table 2 below.

Table 2

Table of Superordinate Themes, Subthemes and Meaning

Superordinate Themes	Subthemes	Meaning
The programme	Positives Challenges Suggestions	BNM+; Duration; Environment; Feelings; Improvements; Learning; Skills; Pace; Relationships; Repetition
Relationships	Facilitators Group Members Others	Family; Mistrust; Peer support; Prison staff; Shared experience; Support or lack of professional support
Learning	Skills Reflection	Confidence; *Great 8* tactics; *New Me*; *Old Me*; Problem sharing; Progression; Speaking up
Motivation	Before Programme During Programme After Programme	Assessment; Better life; BNM+; Desistance; Engagement; Progression; Re-offending; Responsivity needs; Sense of purpose
Responsivity	Mental Health Learning Challenges	Dyslexia; Group environment; Self-harm; Suspicion

In particular, the first theme, the intervention experience, allowed the identification of positives, challenges, and areas for improvement in the form of suggestions. The theme, relationships, favoured the subthemes of relationships with programme facilitators, group members and others not directly involved in the intervention. Participants also raised matters concerning their learning and particularly the learning of new skills and reflection. The theme, motivation, focussed on the temporal sequence of the programme, before, during and after the intervention. The final theme, responsivity, identified the subthemes, mental health and learning challenges.

Table 3 below illustrates the themes and subthemes which were constructed during the IPA analysis with illustrative quotations.

Table 3

Table of Superordinate Themes and Subthemes with Illustrative Quotations

Superordinate Themes	Subthemes	Illustrative Quotations
The programme	Positives	"Everything is positive and everything that you do in the programme is always beneficial." (Mr B); "I felt a lot better with myself, instead of going back to the *Old* person." (Mr C)
	Challenges	"I felt like it was rushed, they had to fit a lot in..." (Mr A); "...it's tedious; it's so frustrating that you go over the same thing, over and over again..." (Mr B)
	Suggestions	"Living as New Me, the only thing is I don't think it should be done in this establishment... in a prison environment..." (Mr B); "I'd keep it as it is. Definitely, cos it worked, it works." (Mr D)
Relationships	Facilitators	"The way the facilitators spoke to you... I had some bad experiences with staff..." (Mr A); "I think it should be a lot more of supports, with the tutors come in and see you..." (Mr B)
	Group Members	"Difficulties with another member..." (Mr A); "I relied to a couple of people who were in the same situation (as me) ... helping each other..." (Mr B)
	Others	"Asking the doctors or the nurses, or police, or probation, or solicitors for help." (Mr C); "I just ask for help, always, I am always talking to my key worker." (Mr D)
Learning	Skills	"It's given me the tools to try controlling myself when I get out..." (Mr A); "It's just reverberating what it's already been said, it's good, it's always good." (Mr B); "Tactics, more tactics..." (Mr D)
	Reflection	"Skills practice... gives you the skills to deal with that situation a lot better." (Mr A); "When I was younger I didn't use to feel for anybody... and that (the *learning log*) made me open my thoughts..." (Mr D)
Motivation	Before Programme	"I wanted to better my lifestyle." (Mr B); "To make my life better. Try don't re-offend and coming back into prison." (Mr D)
	During Programme	"...I was going through a difficult period in time... I was feeling depressed at the time... I could hardly do it (*learning logs*)." (Mr B); "I used to put it my dad at the side of me, pushing me... 'you can do this, son'..." (Mr D)
	After Programme	"There is no way I'm going down to commit more offences because I am too old... so I'm retiring causing trouble... I won't go back to the *Old* person." (Mr C); "I use them all the time (the skills) ... The *New Me* tactics, I use them when in here... I became a mentor." (Mr D)
Responsivity	Mental Health	"The staff were okay but when you've got mental health issues where you think that the staff are laughing about you and talking about you, behind your back..." (Mr B)
	Learning Challenges	"...everybody is learning at different paces as it being an adapted course for people with difficulties." (Mr A); "...also doing the *learning logs* as well is a big challenge because I also suffer from dyslexia." (Mr B)

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The programme

Most of the participants reported finding their experience on the programme a positive one. Mr C found the programme to be easier than he had initially thought he would and felt a lot better with himself for completing it. Mr D "loved it" and found it very good and interesting. He especially enjoyed interacting with other group members, listening to them and trying to help them out with their problems.

On the other hand, Mr A felt that the programme "was just too rushed", that facilitators tried to fit everything into a three-hour session not leaving enough time for group members to talk. The other three participants also identified challenges. Mr C found doing the learning logs hard, "I found them, doing these, hard on my own. I've always had help with these", while Mr D struggled with the skills practices, reporting that he found them to be a "very intense" experience. He spoke about getting upset when talking about "my family and my past", as this is something he would not have chosen to do before, denoting a certain degree of guilt and shame associated to his past behaviour. Nevertheless, Mr D does acknowledge that the programme helped him to open up and this motivated him to continue to engage. Mr B found the programme tedious and frustrating because of its repetitive nature, stating that the facilitators went "over the same thing, over and over again", although he then reported this to be a "good thing" to do in terms of reinforcing learning, that others cannot see through. He reported believing that OBPs do not work in terms of reducing recidivism that it is only you, as an individual, who can stop yourself from re-offending, "what people don't understand on these courses is that you are the only one that is at fault, no one else".

Overall, neither Mr C nor Mr D would change anything about the programme. Mr D stated "I'd keep it as it is. Definitely, cos it worked, it works." However, Mr A would like the programme not to be rushed and thinks "it'd be best if the facilitators weren't staff members", meaning prison officers in uniform.

Mr B shared the belief that the programme should run weekly as opposed to fortnightly and "spread it out a bit longer", the reason for this is so you "could probably get more information" in. He also said that he thought that the prison environment is not the most appropriate for the programme to be delivered. He believes that "it should be done out in the community… because you are not living as a New Me in prison". In his view, this

environment would provide them with more opportunities to practice new skills and strengthen their New Me.

As other participants did, Mr B also found the learning logs difficult. He would propose to have a set day in between programme sessions "where a tutor or the assessors come in, come to you, on the wing and help you to do the learning logs... I think it would benefit the course a lot...." Similarly, he believes that the topic of discussion during skills practices should be left to the group member to choose. He believes that people tend to practice over and over again those scenarios they are comfortable with and that they would benefit more from the programme if facilitators come and see you the day before the next programme session and give you a scenario to develop into a skills practice in session. This would make group members think harder and take more from the learning experience.

Mr B finally reported that "getting someone as a guest speaker who has changed his way in life…" would benefit the group in that it can show them that change, in terms of desistance from offending, is possible.

Relationships

The way participants reported experiencing their relationships with the programme facilitators differs from each other. While Mr C and Mr D found them as helpful and supportive in that they were attentive to their learning needs, Mr A reported a different experience. Mr A did not like "the way the facilitator spoke to you" whilst Mr D liked "the way facilitators approached you, they are not in your face, they don't rush and they, they ask you not to rush and it also helps other people in the programme as well." Mr A did acknowledge that he had had some bad experiences with staff before. This is closely linked to Mr A's mistrust of prison officers and of those who take the role of programme facilitators and wear their uniforms during group sessions.

Most participants reported finding the experience of being part of the group a positive one, and a source of mutual support. Mr B reported that "I relied on a couple of people who were in the same situation… helping each other..." and Mr D said that "I know people shouldn't know about other people's problems… but in the programmes, in the LNM, or any programme, you help each other." Mr A, however, reported experiencing some difficulties with another group member "I had a couple of issues with him on the wing and obviously that

transpired into the group… You don't want to be in the same room with him…" Once the matter got dealt with, Mr A said that he managed to find some comfort within the group and that he learned from other group members about sources of support out in the community, he explained he intended to contact when outside.

During interviews, participants identified different sources of personal support other than that directly provided by facilitators and peers such as family members, health professionals, criminal justice workers and prison staff. Mr A stated that the programme had given him the tools to speak to his father and that "since I have been opening up to him, he has a better understanding, and then he said that he will be there for me when I get out…". This indicated that Mr A appeared to have found a way to reconnect or perhaps reconcile with those he felt he had disappointed in the past.

Mr A also reported having sought the support of a prison officer when struggling with emotions which he found helpful despite the initial mistrust he had previously shown towards prison staff. Mr D spoke about asking his prison key worker for help and having his family's support as well, which encouraged him to continue to engage in treatment, "I just ask for help, always, I am always talking to my key worker...", "plus I've got my family's back. That's another motivation why I did it."

Learning

Participants reported that the programme had either allowed them to learn something new or provide them with a further opportunity to practice the skills acquired through their participation in previous programmes such as the BNM+. Mr B said that LNM was "just reverberating what it's already being said" on other programmes but that this was a good thing in terms of "keeping them, the great eights in your mind..."; Mr C demonstrated his ability to name most of the great eight tactics during the interview; and Mr D stated that LNM "made me open my mind to things that I never ever knew about" and "…get confidence, more confidence with myself which I never had", that "I learned lots of tactics… coping mechanisms and that", "tactics, more tactics… and the feelings… and my thoughts, that especially (he pointed at the Old Me drawing on the learning log prompt)… gone!" They all reported that the programme had helped them to open up, to share their thoughts and feelings with others and ask for help and support.

Having been allowed to reflect on their learning, Mr A commented on skills practices stating that practicing skills "gives you the skills to deal with that situation a lot better than you would do in the past…". Mr B reflected on how he had found LNM very similar to BNM+, "we covered every same thing over and over again but it's like if you carry on doing something you get used to doing it and you get used to knowing how to do things". He also found that hearing other group members' stories and how they had dealt with their problems in the past, had made him think of different ways of dealing with certain things.

Mr C reported having developed an awareness of where he had gone wrong, "that's where the New Me is beating the Old person." Similarly, Mr D reflected on how "when I was younger I didn't use to feel for anybody. I used to think that I was the man… and that (the learning log) made me open my thoughts… That's why I used my thoughts a lot… I learned from my mistakes, really." He further added that "I'd not have done years ago (to use the new skills) … you're brainy a bit more" now. Mr D might have just discovered his ability to reflect on learning and past behaviours.

Motivation

Most of the participants reported that they had wanted to go on the programme because they wanted to improve their lives. Mr C stated that "I wanted to do it, I volunteered to do it… To make a better person of myself and get better so I can help other people when I get out"; Mr D said that he freely committed to doing the programme after finishing BNM+, as he wanted to make his life better, try not to re-offend and not to come back to prison.

Both Mr A and Mr B shared that they had struggled to engage in the programme due to some responsivity issues they had presented with. Mr B reported to have been going through a difficult period at that time: "I was feeling depressed at the time... I didn't open... all I wanted to do is just bury it... push it to one side and forget about it... I could hardly do it (the learning log)." On the other hand, Mr D said that he kept his motivation going during the programme by thinking of his family, "I used to put it, my dad, at the side of me, pushing me… 'you can do this son', you can do…".

All participants reported experiencing a sense of real achievement from graduating from the programme. Mr A stated that "after all the issues and stuff, I completed it..." and Mr C said "I praise and reward myself by doing this course."

Mr A went on to engage in another OBP. Mr D became a Programmes Mentor. He reported using the skills he learned and the New Me tactics "all the time" on his new role. He further explained that "I don't want to come back into prison… I am too old. I don't want that anymore… I want to better myself all the time." This was similar to Mr C's way of thinking when talking about desistance, "there is no way I'm going down to commit more offences because I am too old… so I'm retiring from causing trouble. I want to get on with my life and if there is any trouble I walk away and then ask for help…" He shared his belief that there was nothing else for him to do in terms of offending treatment, having completed the programme successfully, and stressed that "I won't go back to the Old person." He explained that he would like to get a job to help people keep away from prison. On this issue, Mr D commented that the programme would never stop you from re-offending if you do not want to "…cos you can't dictate to a person how to change their life, you can only give them the tools."

Responsivity

Mr A and Mr B shared some very sensitive issues they had experienced during their participation in the programme. Mr A reported "I had a couple of issues with him (another group member) on the wing and obviously that transpired into the group… You don't want to be in the same room with him…. I tried to take my life because I had enough of it." Mr A said that he did not feel supported by the programme's facilitators and resorted to seeking help from prison staff. He explained he felt that they had already formed an opinion of him because of his previous self-harming behaviour and "they put it down to manipulation". He shared his belief that the presence of this person in the group and the way the facilitators handled the issue did not allow him to fully engage in the programme.

Mr B reported finding the programme challenging because "I have mental health issues and I don't like being in crow, crowded classrooms..." He said that the support given by the facilitators was satisfactory to an extent, but that "when you've got mental health issues where you think that the staff is laughing about you and, talking about you, behind your back, and that's what you're hearing as well because I'm hearing voices..." it was difficult to concentrate on learning and get the most of the programme. Mr B also reported that he had dyslexia and had found it quite challenging to work through the learning logs without support.

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Discussion

The research aimed to provide a detailed perspective of the lived experiences of participants who have engaged in the LNM programme. The results of the IPA highlighted the different aspects of the participants' experience as grouped into the themes and subthemes that were constructed during data analysis. The themes were closely interlinked with each other which has, in turn, allowed the study to gain a more holistic account of the participants' experience.

In general terms, participants spoke positively of their experience of LNM. Throughout the interviews participants frequently referred to LNM's predecessor programme, BNM+. They were able to make links as to how one compares to the other and how the set of skills learnt on BNM+ are further rehearsed on LNM. Whilst some of them found repetition tedious, it was also regarded as necessary to refresh previous learning and maintain their skills over time. Previous studies have found that repetition and skills building have proved as successful strategies to use for the progress of individuals presenting co-occurring conditions through treatment (Peter, Sherman & Osher, 2008; Sacks et al., 2005). Participants were all very familiar with the interview schedule prompts which relate to previous learning, skills and concepts and showed a good understating of these (e.g. the *Great Eight Tactics*, *Success Wheel*). They reported that some of the skills, strategies and learning exercises were not necessarily practised by themselves personally on LNM although they had the opportunity to observe these being done by other group members.

Reflection or the power of hindsight was another topic often brought up by participants in the study. It would appear that their participation in the programme has provided them with the opportunity to reflect on previous behaviours. They were able to articulate during interviews how these were linked to an *Old Me* way of thinking and feeling. LNM seems to have provided them with ample opportunity to reflect on past behaviours through the use of *learning logs* and *skills practices*. In this regard, all participants communicated a sense of frustration of perceived non-success in dealing with these two activities. These were the most referred to as causing a struggle and they all found them both challenging at a cognitive and emotional level. The negative emotions generated by the revival of previous difficult experiences have been the subject of study on previous research which has found that although this is a challenging experience for individuals to go through, it

helps to develop emotional bonds with others by sharing experiences, the release of emotional tension, and the development of insight into the original sequence of events (Habermas & Berger, 2011; Oatley, 2009; Rimé, 2009; Roberts, 2009).

Participants valued the relationships they formed during their LNM journey, in and outside group sessions, despite not always being easy to deal with those who they disliked. They reported having found in these relationships a source of social and emotional support. The findings of this study support the relevance of perceived social support by group members, in that it helps access to others who can empathise with their experiences and struggles (Salinsky & Sackin, 2000; Davison & Moss, 2016). Similarly, Paternoster and Bushway (2009) found that group interventions help develop a pro-social identity and sense of belonging in a prison population largely isolated in the community, and specifically, group interventions with prisoners with LDC have helped them to develop positive peer association and encouraged social learning, a key component for desistance from crime (Haaven & Coleman, 2000).

In terms of motivation and engagement, participants reported having been primarily internally-motivated to attend the programme. They had committed to completing the programme in full whilst aware of the ongoing effort this would have required. Some participants thought of LNM as being the natural progression or the next step in their programmes' journey. They all appeared to recognise that the programme was only one of many ways they could make necessary positive changes in pursuing a *New Me* lifestyle. They commented on the importance of maintaining the new skills live through practice. They all presented with some sort of plans to make appropriate use of services after the programme. These were mainly aimed at keeping themselves occupied by getting involved in activities where they can support others, for example becoming a programmes mentor, joining a support group or doing charity work, in a conscious attempt to live a life free from crime. In line with Walji, Simpson and Weatherhead's (2014) findings, all participants were able to verbalise that they intend to use the learning made through the programme in the future, and although most of them felt confident about it, others questioned how useful the skills learned will be on the *outside*. For some participants, it would appear that motivation for desistance had also come as a result of maturation and ageing as found in a number of previous studies with sex offenders (Kazemian & Maruna, 2009; McAlinden, Farmer & Maruna, 2017; Sampson &

Laub, 2003). The participants' previous learning and experience with BNM+ might well have encouraged their participation in LNM and motivation to change.

Participants demonstrated insight into their learning difficulties and the fact that LNM was a programme purposely designed for people with LDC. It has previously been found that individuals with self-awareness are more able to engage in treatment and maintain their learning (Walji, Simpson & Weatherhead, 2014). With regards to how they experienced their needs being met, some participants felt that their responsivity needs could have been managed better. They felt that their on-going mental health problems and challenges emerging from their learning difficulties made it difficult for them to fully engage in the programme and benefit from it as much as they would have liked to.

Two of the participants felt that they could not keep up with the fast pace of programme delivery. They would have liked to see the duration and frequency of group sessions increased, and would have welcomed the availability of out of session tutorial support and more opportunities to practice what they had learned to aid the transferability of skills to the outside world. They also felt that their responsivity needs could have been better managed by the programme facilitators. The issues they raised were similar to those highlighted by Wilkinson and Powis (2019) in their evaluation of a mainstream OBP. Notwithstanding this, the other two participants reported wanting the programme to remain unchanged terms of content and delivery, as the programme's current structure worked for them.

A number of participants commented on perceived shifts in power balance by the presence of uniformed staff in group sessions. This is an issue that has attracted the interest of the research community with results showing that relationships between clients and those wearing uniforms are mediated by the perception of authority and power conferred to the garment by both sides (Johnson, 2001; Sim, 2008). In a prison environment, this issue has previously been explored by Beech et al. (2005). In their study on addressing the offending behaviour of sex offenders, they found prisoners reporting that, officer facilitators in uniforms created a barrier to their engagement and learning as this raised suspicion and mistrust.

Limitations of the Study

It was anticipated that the learning/cognitive barriers and learning challenges present within the group of participants might negatively impact on the quality/depth/richness of the interview data collected. However, all attempts were made to maximise the opportunity for participants with LDC to best represent themselves and their progress and to adapt how the researcher communicated during interview. For example, by making use of a multisensory approach to presenting information, as shown on the design of the research forms, and interview schedule and prompts. The findings of the study are based on interview data, grounded in subjective interpretations of the participants involved. This method is crucial to achieving the depth of data needed to adequately grasp the nature of the experiences of LNM participants but it makes the findings difficult to verify independently.

Conclusion

The detailed analysis of the outcomes of the group intervention supports the statement that the way LNM participants experienced their journey through the programme was a personal and unique one. In the context of psychological qualitative research, Given (2008) defines lived experience as the "representation and understanding of a researcher or research subject's human experiences, choices, and options and how those factors influence one's perception of knowledge" (p. 489). An individual's lived experience is acquired through their personal and direct involvement with the issue subject of study and not lived through the mind of others (Chandler & Munday, 2016). Therefore, there is a need to be cautious in terms of how much weight can be placed on the findings of the present study as these are subjective in nature and difficult to replicate. However, the study has been successful in providing a first insight into how men with LDC convicted of a sexual offence experienced their participation in a programme specifically designed for them. Future research may provide further insight into participants' lived experience on different strands of LNM or into their participation on any of the other HMPPS new suite of adapted programmes developed to address the criminogenic needs of men with LDC.

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