Article

Young people's Perception of Group Climate in Juvenile Justice Centers in an Australian State, a Pilot Study

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Abstract

There is ample evidence to demonstrate that a positive group climate in juvenile justice centers contributes to improvements in motivation for positive behavior and reducing incidents and even recidivism. Being provided opportunities for growth and development and being actively supported by well-trained staff creates a positive atmosphere and minimal repression. Such a pedagogical group climate is strongly related to fulfilling the basic psychological needs of the young people and is promoted by relational security. Following a series of challenging situations inside youth justice centers in Australia, we explored the opportunities for investing in staff training on awareness of basic psychological needs of these young people and introducing the concept of an open, positive group climate. This study reports the results of an explorative measurement of perceived group climate in four units of two juvenile justice centers in Victoria (Australia). The young people ($N = 57$) were provided with the Prison Group Climate Instrument. The results of the group climate research and a cross-cultural comparison show that there are inherent strengths but also important opportunities for improvement in the group climate experienced by young people. Recommendations to improve the group climate are discussed in this paper.

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Introduction

Juvenile delinquency and recidivism constitute serious problems in society (Loeber & Farrington, 1998). In most countries, young people who are convicted for severe offences are send to juvenile justice centers. The aim of incarcerating young people in most Western societies is to serve the goals of punishment and deterrence, but it is also aimed at rehabilitation, socialization, and recidivism reduction (Gatti et al., 2009; Liebling & Maruna, 2005). In these secure facilities there is a fixed day structure and the young people participate, as much as possible, in (educational) activities.

The vast majority of young people are characterized by a long history of adverse childhood experiences, including maltreatment and neglect (Lamers-Winkelman & Visser, 2009; Prinzie et al., 2008; Spinhoven et al., 2010) and they face a the prospect of living in a criminogenic environment after detention and with little support and supervision after their release. These factors reduce the likelihood of young people making sustained positive changes in their behavior and attitudes and increase the likelihood of them reoffending after their release and in the community behavior (Biehal, 2010; Farrall et al., 2010; Loeber et al., 2008; Pritikin, 2008; Wikstrom & Butterworth, 2006). Ideally, a stay in a juvenile justice center can break the cycle of reoffending and enhance a young person's wellbeing and positive participation in society. This experience will decrease the likelihood of them reoffending after they leave custody (Gatti et al., 2009; Liebling & Maruna, 2005). In other words, youth justice services have a pedagogical responsibility to provide incarcerated young people with an environment that stimulates this positive change. Effective and well-run centers offer young people opportunities for developing life skills, undertaking education, and developing prosocial attitudes. Typically, these centers have well-trained staff who are supportive but firm and provide young people with an individual package of interventions and support which helps them develop self-agency and develop prosocial social networks and lifestyle upon release. Effectively implementing a positive climate is premised on centers ensuring that young people feel and are safe. That their basic psychological needs, according to Self Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2012; Ryan & Deci, 2017; Skuse & Matthew, 2015) are fulfilled, that is an environment that offers a safe place in physical, psychological, and socio-emotional sense. The latter concerns the physical characteristics of the environment as well as the prevailing culture and the social climate.

Fulfilling Basic Psychological Needs in a Juvenile Justice Center

The Skuse and Matthews' (2015) Trauma Recovery Model for youth justice centers, posits that healthy growth can only occur when basic psychological needs have been

fulfilled. Therefore they believe that it is essential to provide a structured safe environment with regular meals, bedtimes, school times, boundaries and consistent caregivers, and expectations on behavior: "The focus on routine and structure effectively puts the brake on the often disorganised lifestyles that the children experience prior to a period in secure accommodation" (Skuse & Matthew, 2015, p. 21).

Similarly, failure to provide adequate service levels, education and provide for the needs of young people generally frustrates their basic psychological needs of relatedness, competence, and autonomy (Self Determination Theory, Ryan & Deci, 2017; Van der Helm et al., 2018) and generally leads to further low self-esteem, despair, a motivation and a brain-induced focus on immediate gratification (drugs and alcohol; Popma & Raine, 2006; Raine, 2008; Romero-Martínez & Moya-Albiol, 2013). This lack of motivation leads to more violence, recidivism, and a coercive cycle by authorities and staff, resulting in a deteriorating cognitive, social-emotional, and personality development (children become hardened).

There is an increasing international consensus that a safe, supportive, open institutional climate (also referred to as "group climate") is conditional for the effectiveness of interventions and treatments available in a juvenile justice center. Extensive research in secure forensic facilities for both adolescents and adults has shown mere imprisonment will produce criminogenic outcomes, but an open group climate in a secure setting can be effective in reducing recidivism and improving outcomes for youth and young adults with severe behavioral and criminal problems (for an overview see: Soeverein et al., 2013; Stams & Van der Helm, 2017).

Group Climate

Group climate has recently been defined as "the quality of the social and physical environment in terms of the provision of sufficient and necessary conditions for physical and mental health, well-being, contact and personal growth of the residents, with respect for their human dignity and human rights as well as (if not restricted by judicial measures) their personal autonomy, aimed at recovery and successful participation in society" (Stams & Van der Helm, 2017, p. 1). The concept of group climate is consistent with that of therapeutic communities (De Leon, 1979, 2000; Jones, 1953) of which several studies have shown the possible benefits (Day & Doyle, 2010) and effectiveness in for example prisons (Newton, 2011; Wexler & Prendergast, 2010) and institutions for persons with co-occurring substance use and mental disorders (Sacks & Sacks, 2010).

The group climate in an institution can be relatively open (rehabilitative and pedagogical) or closed (repressive; Van der Helm et al., 2009). A structured, safe, and rehabilitative environment at the living group is designated as an "open" climate (Van der Helm et al., 2011b). According to Self Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017), an open group climate with sufficient support from staff, ample opportunities for growth, and a safe atmosphere, fulfills basic psychological needs of young people (Van der Helm et al., 2018). These basic needs are relatedness (contact with staff), competence (growth), and autonomy (decision-making and self-expression). The

needs have a close connection with the climate and predict for behavioral and treatment motivation (Van der Helm et al., 2018) and is thought to foster affiliation, perspective taking, treatment motivation, and empathy (Barrett & Wager, 2006). Research has shown how a positive, open social climate (Harding, 2014) or open group climate could even reduce occurring depriving effects of staying in an institution (Stams & Van der Helm, 2017; Van der Helm et al., 2009, 2018). Also, an open group climate is thought to buffer against aggression at the living group by eliciting prosocial behavior, which counteracts aggressive tendencies resulting from instable- and callous and unemotional personality traits (Heynen et al., 2016; Janzing & Kerstens, 2012).

A repressive group climate at the living group is characterized by deprivation (e.g., little possibilities for growth, high levels of boredom, a poor physical environment, and lack of autonomy), distrust among young people and between young people and staff, contributing to mutual hostility (De Valk, 2019) and is associated with recidivism (Drago et al., 2011; Listwan et al., 2013). Also, deprivation expresses itself in criminal cognitions, reactance (Liebling & Maruna, 2005), brutalization, deviancy training (Shapiro et al., 2010), learned helplessness (Huizinga & Henry, 2008; Loughran et al., 2009) and internalizing and externalizing behavorial problems (White et al., 2009; Witvliet, 2009). A repressive group climate has been shown to result in low self-worth, low empathy levels, and high levels of aggression and anxiety in young people (Heynen et al., 2016, 2017; Ostrowsky, 2010; Thomaes, 2007) as well to maladaptive coping strategies, negative emotionality (Wolff & Baglivio, 2017), decreased treatment motivation (Van der Helm et al., 2009) and internalizing problems like depression and self-harm, and even suicide (White et al., 2009).

Hostility among inmates is associated with aggression and violence and is used as a way of enforcing autonomy and control (Cheng et al., 2010; Thomaes et al., 2008; Van der Helm, Boekee, et al., 2011). While a young person's aggression can elicit repression by staff to maintain control, a repressive response can compound and increase aggression in the young people. This transactional mechanism (Sameroff, 2009) has been designated as a "deviance amplifying feedback cycle" (Patterson & Bank, 1989), a "coercive cycle with reciprocal negative reinforcement" (Granic & Patterson, 2006), or a "pathology amplifying cycle" (Bugental, 2009) and can result in a rapid deteriorating group climate, resulting in severe violence and self-harm for both the staff and young people. Often this coercive cycle, aimed at maintaining order, is reflected in a greater need for security, control, more rules, and more punishment in secure (forensic) facilities (De Valk et al., 2015; Patterson, Capalbi, & Bank, 1991). Research has shown that the level of coercive control experienced by young people in custody is also positively correlated to the levels of violent misconduct by staff and young people (Day et al., 2015).

All in all, there is ample evidence that negative interpersonal interactions and depriving environmental conditions can have a negative impact on the behavior and well-being of young people in institutions, especially if they suffer from psychiatric vulnerability. These findings are in line with the acknowledgment that aggression within institutions often is as an expression of complex interpersonal interactions and

the environmental conditions (Foltz, 2004; Fonagy et al., 2002; Fraser et al., 2016; Samerhof, 2009).

Security and Safety

Traditionally, security manifested itself in strong bars and steel doors in order to protect staff and inmates. This is often called "environmental or physical security" (Kinsley, 1998). In these institutions staff learn to give orders to prisoners and to lock doors in order to provide safety. However, recent advances in research point to the need and efficacy of "relational security" (Chester & Morgan, 2012) to replace physical security.

Relational security is a concept that is widely used within mental health institutions in Western countries. In these institutions, this approach relies more on staff-patient contact and less on coercive measures (Chester & Morgan, 2012; Klatt et al., 2016; Van der Helm & Stams, 2012). Relational security is where the staff have a meaningful professional engagement with the young people. In this approach, staff understand the developmental and criminogenic needs of young people and intervene with skill and confidence. On the quantitative side, it prescribes having sufficient "staff-to-inmate ratios" of in order to facilitate meaningful contact and interaction. On the qualitative side, it fosters the need for genuine trust between inmates and staff (Kinsley, 1998). In summary, both sufficient staff-to inmates ratio and the quality of their working relationship or alliance is essential for this approach to be effective.

Ros et al. (2013) demonstrated that approximately 60% or more of all incidents in secure mental health facility for adults could have been avoided by staff making better contact with patients, treating them fairly, and thus providing for an "open" social climate (group climate). Also, they showed that increased contact between staff and forensic patients is related to less incidents (and less separations). Similarly, research of Sparks & Bottoms (1995) and Liebling (2008, 2011) shows that the inmate-staff interaction is important to avoid inmate misconduct in terms of the importance of fair procedures and legitimate exercise of control and authority by staff.

Working on Group Climate

In the Netherlands, the juvenile justice centers worked with a longitudinal study design to measure group climate (Van Miert et al., 2018). The results of this longitudinal study give an insight in changes in the experienced group climate over 5 years and showed that the group climate has sustainably improved. These improvements have been infomed by organizing feedback meetings after each measurement, where results were discussed with staff and young people, but also with managers and policy makers (Van Miert et al., 2018). Based on this experience, Germany, Belgium, and Estonia asked the Dutch research group of Van der Helm is to introduce the concept of group climate into their centers. To that end, the researchers measured the improving group climate in the respective centers by performing periodically measurements followed by providing feedback sessions on several levels in the organization.

Following a series of challenging situations inside youth justice centers in Australia in where safety of both young people, staff and the community was compromised, the amount of safety measures and the security level increased (i.e., intensify focus on environmental security). These high-profile incidents led to increased interest in the concept of an open group climate as a measure to positively affect young peoples' behavior and decrease recidivism.

In this study we explore the opportunities for investment in staff training on awareness of basic psychological needs of these young people and introduce the concept of an open, positive group climate. This pilot study is performed in two juvenile justice centers in Victoria Australia.

Victorian Context

The Victorian *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* (the Act) was the principal legislation for Victoria's youth justice service. The Children's Court had jurisdiction to hear and determine charges against children and young people aged 10 years or over but under 18 years at the time of the alleged offence and aged under 19 years when court proceedings begin. The legislation had a strong tenor of meeting developmental needs of young people and diverting them from custody, preferring that young people remain at home with their family and attend school. Section 482 of the Act set out the entitlements for the young people including the responsibility of Youth Justice to meet their best interests and cater of their developmental needs—physical, social, emotional, intellectual cultural, and spiritual.

The Children's Court was not required to have regard to general deterrence as a relevant sentencing factor, in contrast to the sentencing of adult offenders. About a third of the 18 to 20 year old who were sentenced to custody in adult courts were detained in a juvenile justice center instead of an adult prison—if the court believes the young person had reasonable prospects for rehabilitation, or is particularly impressionable, immature or likely to be subjected to undesirable influences in an adult prison (Grover, 2017). This "Dual-track" system reflected the key policy objective of diverting young people from the adult prison system.

At that time of this study there were two juvenile justice centers which provided 260 beds for 10 to 20 year old males and females. There were 16 units across both centers, with an average of 15 beds in each unit. Each of the units had a designated security level. Levels of security is reflected in terms of the numbers of staff who worked in the unit and the levels of independence allowed for the young people when on the unit. Young people were classified to a unit depending on their assessed security needs. Each unit was managed by a unit manager and has up to nine staff rostered on during the "unlock" daytime hours. The staff were responsible for the care and supervision of the young people in the units. Each unit also had a unit coordinator who was responsible for the case planning and case management of the young people. A practice leader was allocated to two units. Their role was to develop the skills and capabilities of the staff in their work with young people on the units. This included live

coaching, clinical group supervision, training, and co-developing behavior support plans for young people.

There was a public government school, Parkville College (http://parkvillecollege.vic.edu.au/) which provided education to the young people in custody. Teachers at Parkville College were trained to use a therapeutic approach when teaching in the juvenile justice centers. This acknowledges the importance of predictable, supportive relationships with trusted adults for these children and young people who may not have experienced these in their lives before custody. There was a bespoke reward/consequences model Achieve Challenge Encourage (ACE) which is used in the juvenile justice centers.

The 2016 Sentencing Advisory Council (Ritchie & Hudson, 2016), an independent research statutory body, found that between 2010 and 2015, the number of children sentenced in the Children's Court decreased by approximately 43%. The number of offences committed per offender, however, increased from a consistent average of around 4.5 charges per case for years 2010 to 2013 to an average of 5.2 charges per case in 2014, and 6.4 charges per case in 2015 (Ritchie & Hudson, 2016). The Crime Statistics Agency found that the 1.6% ($n = 182$) of offenders who were high offending (those whose offending increases rapidly from 12 years of age with an average of 76.5 offences, Sutherland & Millsteed, 2016) accounted for 23.6% of all 13,914 offences recorded across an 8-year period. The CSA observed that this equates to an average of 76.5 offences per individual offender in the high group from the time of their 10th birthday through to their last day as a 17-year-old. This suggests that that there was a small proportion of chronic offenders who were responsible for a disproportionately large amount of crime in Victoria (Sutherland & Millsteed, 2016). It is this cohort with high criminogenic needs who constitute the majority of the young people in the State's secure juvenile justice centers.

In addition to their prolific offending and highly problematic behavior, the results of the annual survey of young people in custody (Department of Justice and Regulation, 2018) demonstrated that a high proportion were born into homes with high levels of disadvantage and high incidence of childhood abuse, mental illness, disability (lack of relatedness), early school disengagement (lack of competence), and alcohol/drug use. Behavioral- and other problems tend to be handed over from generation to generation (intergenerational problem transmission). These disadvantages have resulted in a serious accumulation of Adverse Childhood Experiences and trauma (Vervoort-Schel et al., 2018) which have seriously compromised further cognitive, social-emotional, and personality development (empathy and conscience).

Also, there was high overrepresentation of young Aboriginal people (15%), Maori and Pacifica young people (15%), and young African Australian people (19%) (Department of Justice and Regulation, 2018). In 2016 and 2017 normal operations at both the centers were severely disrupted by riots and disturbances. Failing physical infrastructure, staffing shortages, and the resultant overuse of lockdowns was given as explanations at the time (Grover, 2017).

A comprehensive review of the whole Victorian juvenile justice system (Armytage & Ogloff, 2017) recommended:

- improve the way that criminogenic needs are assessed and addressed according to individual risk profiles of young people
- link young people with services for disabilities, health, education, and employment to reduce reoffending
- develop appropriate interventions that reflect young people's cognitive abilities, gender, and cultural background
- ensure education and primary and mental health needs are central to any interventions that occur.

Similarly, a report from the Victorian Auditor General's Office (2018) found that young people in juvenile justice centers have not been receiving the rehabilitation services they are entitled to and that are necessary to meet their needs. As a result, youth detention was not having an impact on reoffending rates. The report identifies the following interrelated causes of this, including:

- inadequate service levels and facilities;
- a focus on security that impairs access to education and health services;
- a lack of complete and focused case management and needs assessment by unit and health service; and,
- failure to fully assess and provide for the needs of young people in custody.

This Study

This study was part of a joint research project between University of Applied Sciences Leiden (the Netherlands) and Victoria Department of Justice and Community Safety (then Department of Justice and Regulation). Focus of this research project was to explore the feasibility of making staff aware of basic psychological needs of these young people and making them aware of the group climate quality in the institutions. At the time of this project, in 2017, the work in Juvenile (Youth) Justice in Victoria was underpinned by the strategic plan named *A Balanced Approach to Juvenile Justice in Victoria* (Campbell, 2000), which focused on three priorities:

- diverting young people from entering the youth justice system, or progressing further into a life of crime;
- providing better rehabilitation of high-risk young offenders; and
- expanding pre-release, transition, and post-release support programs for custodial clients to reduce the risk of reoffending.

The juvenile justice system was split between the juvenile justice teams who supervise young people on statutory orders residing in the community and the juvenile justice centers.

The aim of this study was to gain insight in the perceived group climate of young people at four units of two Victorian juvenile justice centers, to subsequently explore

whether investing creating a safe and rehabilitative living environment in Victorian juvenile justice centers will improve rehabilitative and health outcomes for young people in these centers.

Method

In December 2017 a group of three experienced researchers from the Netherlands conducted group climate research at four units in two juvenile justice centers in Victoria, Australia.

At that time, there were two juvenile justice centers with the following bed configurations:

- Juvenile justice center 1 which had 125 beds and accommodates 10 to 17-year-old males and 10 to 20-year-old females in eight 15-bed secure units
- Juvenile justice center 2 which had 135 beds which accommodates 15 to 20-year-old males in five 15-bed secure units and 18 to 20 year old males in three open (unlocked) 20-bed units

We used a climate questionnaire Prison Group Climate Inventory (PGCI; Van der Helm, Stam, et al., 2011). The research has been ethically approved by the institutional review board of the University of Applied Sciences in Leiden. Before the questionnaires were handed out to every participant the researchers had a group activity with the young people. During this activity we gave explanation about the research and the group climate. A poster was used for the non-verbal explanation. An informed consent form, explaining anonymity and disclosure of results only on a group level (no individual cases were reported), was carefully explained to the young people. Each form was signed by the young person before they participated in the research. Subsequently, the young people individually filled in the questionnaire (PGCI) in the presence of the researchers so explanation could be given if needed. At every unit there was a staff member present to support if there were any language problems. In the questionnaire there was also space allocated for additional comments and researchers to put in personal observations. To thank the young people and workers the researchers handed out candy with permission from the centers as a surprise to all the young people and staff, regardless if they had joined the research. After 2 weeks the research group from the Netherlands analyzed the results and organized feedback meetings with the management, staff, and young people. Together they reflected on the results and formulated goals focused on the group climate for the future.

Measures

Questionnaire: Prison group climate inventory. The group climate was measured with translated- and back translated English version of the Prison Group Climate Inventory (PGCI; Van der Helm, Stam, et al., 2011). A confirmative factor analysis was performed over the data which provided evidence for good validity and reliability

(RMSEA = 0.048, CFI = 0.91, TLI = 0.90, χ^2 (586) = 748.9, $p < .00$). The PGCI consisted of 4 scales and 36 items rated on a five-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 = "I do not agree" to 5 = "I totally agree." The support scale (12 items) assessed professional behavior and in particular the responsivity of group workers to specific needs of the young people. Paying attention to young people, taking complaints seriously, respect and trust were important characteristics of support. An example of a support item is: "group workers treat me with respect." The growth scale (nine items) assessed learning perceptions, hope for the future and giving meaning to the prison stay. An example of a growth item is: "I learn the right things here." The repression scale (seven items) assessed perceptions of strictness and control, unfair and haphazard rules, and lack of flexibility at the living group. An example of a repression item is: "You have to ask permission for everything here." The group atmosphere scale (seven items) assessed the way inmates treated and trusted each other, feelings of safety toward each other, being able to get some peace of mind and having enough daylight and fresh air. An example of an atmosphere item is "We trust each other here." All scales had sufficient reliability (Cronbach's Alpha of the scales: Overall group climate: .93, Support: .89, Growth: .88, and Repression: .66). In the questionnaire, the 36 items of the PGCI are followed by a section in were young people are asked to rate elements of the living group climate with a grade from 1 to 10 (1 being the most negative grade and 10 being the most positive grade).

Data analysis. All quantitative data was analyzed with the program SPSS 24. A scale score was generated by cumulating all relevant items and subsequently dividing the sum through the number of items the scale contained (only when at least 80% of the items in the scale were answered). Respondents were motivated to complete the total questionnaire, however they were allowed to skip questions. Therefore, the number of respondents can differ over scales. The average of the units was compared to the Dutch reference group existing of data from seven youth prisons in the Netherlands from 2016 ($n = 262$). To make these comparisons, the effect size Cohen's d was used (Cohen, 1992). With this measure, averages of different samples can be compared.

Sample. Two juvenile justice centers in Australia participated in the research. From each center, two units were randomly chosen and involved in the research. In total 57 young people participated in the research ($n = 57$), this were 11 girls and 46 boys. The average age was 17 years (Maximum = 21, Minimum = 12, $M = 17.31$, $SD = 2.89$) based on 52 young people who listed their age. Most of the young people were Australian ($n = 37$), the other young people were born in different countries ($n = 15$), the other young people ($n = 5$) did not identify their cultural background.

Results

The results of the group climate scales showed differences when compared to the Dutch reference group (Table 1). The overall group climate in the Australian juvenile justice centers was less positive in comparison with the average of the Dutch reference

Table 1. Average Scale Scores of the Young People on the Group Climate Inventory (GCI) ($N = 57$) in Contrast with the Dutch Reference Group ($N = 262$).

Youth Justice Centers Australia						
				M	*SD*	
	N	*M*	*SD*	Ref. group	Ref. group	Cohens'*d*
Support	57	3.10	0.72	3.56	0.92	−0.56
Growth	57	3.08	0.87	3.31	1.08	−0.23
Repression	57	3.81	0.55	3.11	0.77	1.05
Atmosphere	57	2.82	0.83	3.55	0.95	−0.82
Overall group climate	57	2.82	0.58	3.33	0.79	−0.74

group ($M = 2.82$, $d = -0.74$). The young people experienced more repression ($M = 3.81$, $d = 1.05$) and a less positive atmosphere at the units ($M = 2.82$, $d = -0.82$). They also experienced slightly less support from group workers and slightly less possibilities for growth ($M = 3.09$, $d = -0.23$). The following items from the scale repression showed high scores: "You have to ask permission for everything ($M = 4.05$, $SD = 1.06$) and "I sometimes get really bored here" ($M = 4.21$, $SD = 1.16$). From the scale Atmosphere the following item scores were noteworthy: "You can trust everybody here" ($M = 2.32$, $SD = 1.09$) and "I get some piece of mind at the unit ($M = 2.61$, $SD = 1.25$).

The results of the grades for the elements of the group climate (Table 2) showed that the young people were slightly satisfied with the support they get from group workers ($M = 6.0$) and the things they can learn in the juvenile justice center ($M = 5.9$). Young people's own safety and the safety of others at the unit were graded slightly negative ($M = 5.6$, $M = 5.7$). The other elements: atmosphere at the unit ($M = 4.9$), honesty at the unit ($M = 4.7$), and the rules at the unit ($M = 4.5$) were all evaluated negative by the young people.

Discussion

The results of the group climate research showed that there are some strengths but also important issues in the climate experienced by young people in secure units. This study showed that the perceived group climate is mainly characterized by high levels of repression, average levels of support and growth, and low levels of atmosphere. Compared to the Dutch reference group, we found little to average differences in the levels of Growth and Support and significant differences in levels of repression and atmosphere. The grades, where young people could express their appreciation of element of the group climate and safety, pointed out that they are satisfied with the support they receive from the staff, what they can learn in the institution and the safety for

Table 2. Average Grades Given by the Young People for Seven Elements in the Group Climate.

Youth Justice Centers Australia			
Elements of the group climate	*N*	*M*	*SD*
The support the group workers are giving you	55	6.0	2.34
The things you learn here	55	5.9	2.49
The atmosphere at your unit	55	4.9	2.50
The honesty at your unit	54	4.7	2.60
The rules at your unit	55	4.5	2.67
Your own safety at the unit	55	5.6	3.20
The safety for other young people at your unit	53	5.7	2.74

themselves and others. The feedback meetings with staff and young people were used to interpret these findings and understand them in the Victorian context.

Both staff and young people pointed out that they generally have a good rapport with each other. Staff explained that they try to pay attention to individuals at the group. Young people stated that they have pleasant informal talks with the staff. Regarding levels of growth and the grade for "what you can learn here," staff pointed out that they daily face a logistic challenge to meet the requirement of the daily structure due to strict safety measures (e.g., escorting young people to their [educational] activities that take place at different sections of the center with permission of the central control room).

Education activities ranged from school to creative workshops, cultural programs, and individual one on one treatment. In practice, young people were often missing their activities which forced them to spend more unstructured time at the unit. This meant they complained of feeling bored as there was not much to do at the unit. Furthermore, both staff and young people complained that the physical environment is poor and not well equipped.

For most of the time, the good rapport between staff and young people created a positive and informal atmosphere in the units. This atmosphere deteriorated however, when young people showed submissive or disruptive behavior. Disruptive behavior frequently led to aggressive situations that were unsafe for both staff and young people. Attendees of the feedback meetings described how safety measures increased in response to incidents at the units (e.g., more security staff and higher fences), but highlighted that these measures did not necessarily make the units safer.

Based on the findings regarding these four units, simple practical recommendations were shared in the feedback meetings in order to improve the group climate and create an environment that does more justice to the basic psychological needs of the young people. This included normalising the environment by, for example, putting enough chairs and tables in the units so everyone can sit down to have a meal together. It was explained how young people need opportunities to develop the basic life skills and

social skills, such as eating at a table, preferable with a fork and a knife, and use a napkin. Eating together, which currently is practically not possible on the unit, also enhances important social skills like turn-taking (self-control) and having a meaningful conversation without swearing and shouting. Furthermore, when the units can establish a tightly structured day, starting the day on time with a well-structured meeting in which the needs and state of each young person are explored, in addition security and safety issues. Structure and predictability help make young people feel safe. Staff should set clear schedules and timetables for the week and any changes should be made after consultation with the young people (shared decision making) and providing plenty of notice (Griffin et al., 2012).

Given the complex presentation and behavior of the young people who are in juvenile justice centers, it is essential that the staff understand the many developmental facets of a young person which may contribute to their behavior that is: cognitive, emotional, social, and moral. Most of these young people have a splintered development and fragmented lives where they are very mature in some facets but immature in others (especially social-emotional and personality development, Van der Helm et al., 2018). Staff should be educated with respect to these developmental problems.

A more realistic time schedule underlying to the day structure will also facilitate staff to fulfill the logistic challenge of escorting young people to their educational activities. This will also help to reduce unstructured time spent on the units in where young people often get bored. As mentioned before, boredom and minimal opportunities for growth are examples of deprivation which, as discussed in the introduction, is undesirable.

Furthermore, the researchers recommended that a range of normal activities and programs for young people—sport, music, and games—that should be made available and commonplace. These activities address the issue of boredom and provide sufficient opportunities to develop their locus of control and empathy and be given chances to make the right decisions. Staff can assist young people in improving and applying self-regulation skills when they are upset in secure settings (Ford & Russo, 2006).

Notably, the effect of the centers' focus on environmental security was evident in the results of this study. Results of this study show young people experienced repression, were bored and they did not feel safe due to high rates of aggressive incidents that were taking place. This was ironic given the considerable emphasis on the safety of group workers and high security levels. It is likely that a lack of safety might have led to more repression and use of power by staff giving evidence to a "deviance amplifying feedback cycle" (Patterson & Bank, 1989) or a "coercive cycle with reciprocal negative reinforcement" (Granic & Patterson, 2006).

Negative reinforcement in secure institutions such as juvenile justice centers can be seen as a lack of support, hinders development of young people, and promotes negative behavior of individuals, negatively affecting the group dynamics (i.e., a negative group climate). This is undesirable, as a negative social climate (e.g., perceptions of lack of safety and disempowering) will counteract rehabilitation effects of therapeutic programs during imprisonment (Harding, 2014). Increasing levels of security restricts flexibility in secure institutions and often creates reactance in inmates who try to

maintain some sort of self by "playing the system" (Haralambos & Holbourn, 1995), gang-activities, misconduct, and even violence (Van der Helm, 2011). Staff have to cope with these behaviors to maintain order and prevent chaos. However, problematic behavior of young people can be positively influenced by the presence of prosocial staff and supportive environmental conditions (Heynen, 2016; Soeverein et al., 2013; Stams & Van der Helm, 2017).

This suggests that relational security could apply to the professional relationship between staff and young people in secure juvenile justice centers. We stipulate that relational security is more than just having a good rapport with young people, but having a good rapport is fundamental. Relational security resides in "soft" skills like having contact with inmates or young people, building a working alliance, being physically on the premises in order to know what is happening and supporting them at difficult times. It takes training, coaching, and clinical supervision for staff to develop these "soft" skills and confidence to put them into practice. This is a very difficult job for staff in a hierarchical structure of highly secure prisons (Clark Craig, 2004; Ibsen, 2013) and can run counter to prevailing punitive cognitions and the need for control of current staff (Kteily et al., 2015; Van der Helm, Boekee, et al., 2011).

Skuse and Matthew (2015) believe that once a structured safe environment is established the young people can begin to develop healthy relationships with adults and develop alternative templates. In turn, relational therapy can mediate the impact of trauma before the cognitive interventions targeting offending behavior and attitudes can gain traction. They believe that the staff who work in secure accommodation need a highly complex set of skills strongly recommend that the staff are provided with high quality training and opportunities for time on a one-on-one basis with young people in a safe environment.

Limitations of the Study

The study was a small-scale study to explore if practice-based research was feasible within the prison environment of Victoria, Australia. This study gives a result at one moment in time, but results suggest it is favorable and promising to implement a large-scale implementation of group climate measurements at all units Subsequently, a longitudinal research design is needed to detect improvement and changes over time in the experienced group climate in where i.g. incident rates and recidivism rates are taking into account as well. This study design is already used in facilities in the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Balkan countries, and Estonian. The Dutch youth prisons even work with a longitudinal study design to measure group climate in prisons for over 5 years (Van Miert et al., 2018). The results of this longitudinal study give an insight in changes in the experienced group climate. Changes have been provoked by organizing feedback meetings after each measurement, where results were discussed with staff and young people, but also with managers and policy makers (Van Miert et al., 2018). This multi-level approach, combined with the perseverance (i.e., the length of this study) is probably decisive for the sustainably realized improvements in the group climate.

The positive reactions of staff and young people in the two Victorian juvenile justice facilities to the project and their willingness to participate in the research activities and discussions give hope for future improvements in the climate quality and thereby stimulating the development of young people and reducing recidivism.

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