

Evaluating the Thinking Skills Programme (TSP): A Qualitative Study

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BACKGROUND

- Cognitive skills programmes are cognitive behavioural programmes designed to help offenders solve problems and make decisions more effectively by targeting impulse control, emotion regulation, consequential thinking and problem-solving skills (Travers et al, 2014; Papalia, 2020).
- One of the most widely used cognitive skills programmes in England was the Enhanced Thinking Skills programme (ETS) which was phased out and consequentially led to the development of the Thinking Skills Programme (TSP) to address issues surrounding the ETS programme such as having a clearer focus on protective factors.
- Quantitative evaluations have found improvements on psychometric scales after TSP completion; however, recent qualitative evaluation has been lacking (Gobbett and Sellen, 2014).

OBJECTIVE

- Explore the views and experiences of women and men on the responsivity of TSP. Focusing on what learning or skills participants have acquired, levels of readiness and engagement, responsivity issues and the wider context of the programme.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

Total of **50 participants**:

- 44 male, 6 female.
- Aged 22-65 (M= 36.72, SD= 9.40).
- Had completed the TSP up to 12 months prior.
- Recruited from 8 UK prison and young offender institution sites



Data collection

One-to-one interviews were conducted guided by a semi-structured interview schedule consisting of open-ended interview questions and prompts.

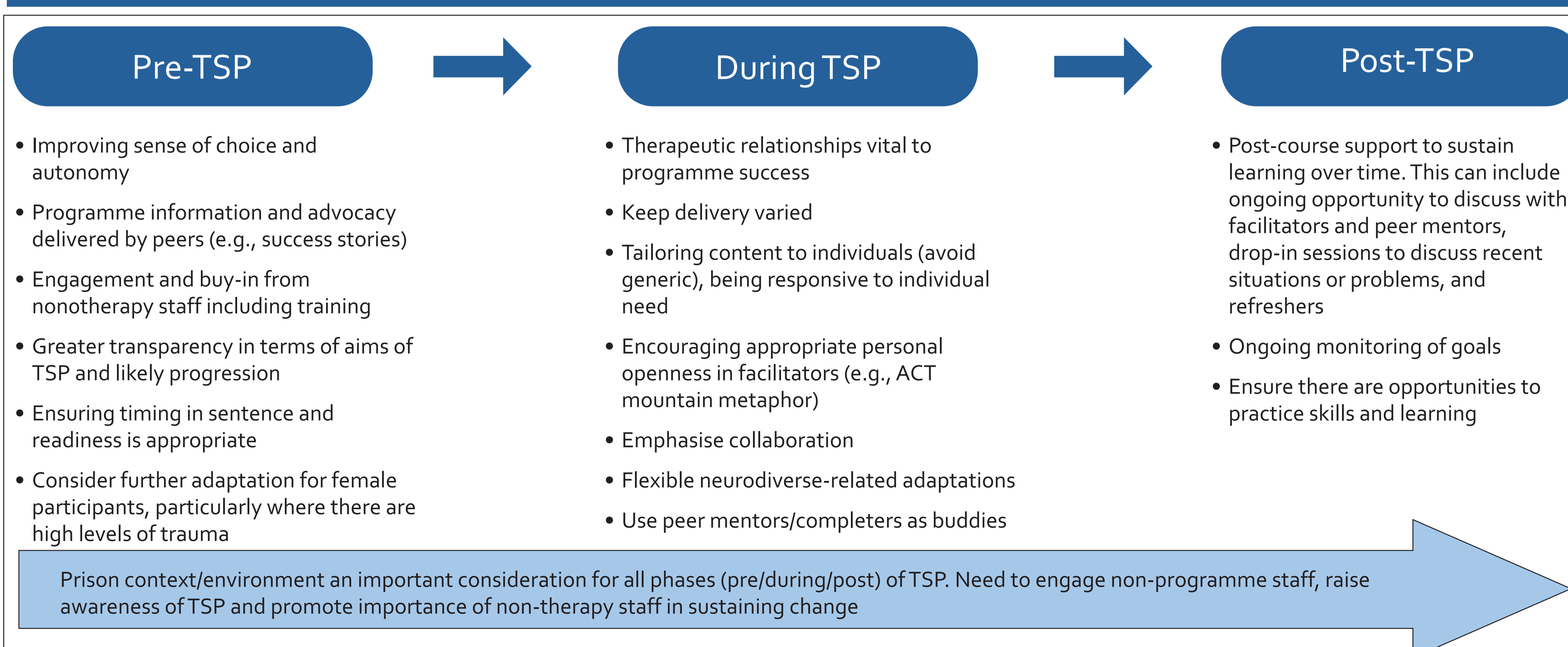
Semi-structured interview:

1. Background questions (e.g., "How did you find out about TSP?")
2. Programme experiences and personal relevance (e.g., "What part of TSP had the least impact on you?")
3. TSP motivation (e.g., "How motivated were you to engage and join in with the programme?")
4. Safety, support and inclusivity (e.g., "How supported did you feel by the facilitator in the group and individual sessions?")
5. Relationships and opportunities to change (e.g., "How do you think the TSP has changed your thinking, attitudes, and behaviour?")

FINDINGS

Theme 1: Groundwork to cultivate change	Readiness and motivation to change was found to be critical for programme success. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some participants needed time to mentally adjust to their sentence and circumstances before feeling ready to engage with the programme. • Many participants engaged due to external requirements (e.g., sentence plan). Some were authentically motivated to engage with TSP but were prevented by systemic barriers (e.g., waiting lists).
Theme 2: Facilitators of change	The role of facilitators was fundamental in assisting participant learning. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Genuine, reciprocated relationships with facilitators increased participant engagement. • Participants found the interactive learning approaches helped maintain interest, this was particularly appreciated by neurodivergent participants.
Theme 3: Seeing life through a new lens	Exploring the different ways in which TSP prompted change in participants thinking. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants found reflecting on their past during exercises was impactful and meaningful. • Participants found TSP helpful in identifying and reevaluating potentially damaging relationships they had previously considered beneficial. For some this led to positive action and life changes.
Theme 4: Applying learning, reflections and 'doing' change	Participants were able to apply TSP skills in their everyday lives. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants used TSP skills to interrupt their own aggressive reactions 'in the moment', seek more pro-social solutions, and address conflicts through dialogue before they escalated, thus avoiding instances of prison misconduct. • Partners, family, or prison officers sometimes noticed and pointed out positive changes in participants, which helped confirm and support their progress.
Theme 3: Seeing life through a new lens	The prison environment interacted with TSP learning outcomes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants sometimes feared being open in sessions could impact parole/probation prospects or impact their safety and standing on the wing. • Respectful and supportive behaviour from staff, and post-course support such as TSP refreshers, were found to be significant in supporting TSP learning.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE



KEY REFERENCES

A full list of references is available upon request.

- Gobbett, M. J., & Sellen, J. L. (2014). An evaluation of the HM prison service "Thinking Skills Programme" using psychometric assessments. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 58(4), 454-473.
- Papalia, N., Spivak, B., Daffern, M., & Ogloff, J. (2020). Are psychological treatments for adults with histories of violent offending associated with change in dynamic risk factors? A meta-analysis of intermediate treatment outcomes. *Criminal Justice and Behaviour*, 47(12), 1585-1608.
- Travers, R., Wakeling, H. C., Mann, R. E., & Hollin, C. R. (2013). Reconviction following a cognitive skills intervention: An alternative quasi-experimental methodology. *Legal and Criminological Psychology*, 18(1), 48-65.