Probation Institute

A qualitative exploration of factors which influence rapport between participants and facilitators of the Building Better Relationships programme, in the community, from the perspective of participants

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Sir Graham Smith Award 2023

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Foreword by the Probation Institute

"A qualitative exploration of factors which influence rapport between participants and facilitators of the Building Better Relationships programme, in the community, from the perspective of participants".

The Probation Institute is delighted to present the Research Report *"A qualitative exploration of factors which influence rapport between participants and facilitators of the Building Better Relationships Programme, in the community, from the perspective of participants."* Produced by Fliss Holmes as a holder of the Sir Graham Smith Award offered by the Probation Institute. The Sir Graham Smith Award sponsors small practice based research projects to encourage practitioners to develop research skills whilst they are close to practice.

In this project the researcher seeks to understand how a positive rapport can develop in group work with perpetrators of domestic abuse. In the research report including extensive literature review, academic background to her subject, interviewing and report preparation Fliss Holmes shows her range of skills in research and analysis. The Probation Institute welcomes and values the report which we will publish and launch in the early Autumn.

We would like to thank HMPPS for supporting this project by enabling the research to take place and allowing appropriate time to complete the research and produce the report. Thank you to the people on probation who contributed to the research interviews.

The Sir Graham Smith Award Scheme is managed by the Probation Institute Research Committee in collaboration with our Academic Advisory Panel through which we are able to offer an academic mentor to the research projects. For this project we would like to record our thanks to Nicole Renehan, Assistant Professor at Durham University.

We will be pleased to offer the scheme again from Autumn 2023 inviting applications for small practice based research projects across justice organisations.

Probation Institute August 2023

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Thank you to my manager Lilly for supporting my research application to Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) to conduct this research and helping create space for me to carry it out.

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Abstract

Literature in criminology and psychology clearly links rapport to successful treatment outcomes in therapeutic (Freud, 1914; Brenner, 1979; Ardito and Rabellino, 2011; Nahouli et al., 2022) and criminal justice environments (Barry, 2007; Lewis, 2014; Collins and Carthy, 2019; Nahouli et al., 2022), especially with change-resistant clientele (Polaschek and Ross, 2010; Yousseff, 2017). However, research about rapport in behavioural change programmes is lacking, despite significant reliance on them to reduce criminal behaviour (Renehan, 2021). This intersection of rapport and behavioural change programmes highlights the gap which this research has successfully contributed to. The aim of this study was to uncover programme participants' perspectives of what impacts rapport on the Building Better Relationships (BBR) programme. BBR is a domestic abuse perpetrator programme (DAPP) run by HMPPS for men who have committed intimate partner violence (IPV). BBR operates in custody and the community, however this project focussed on the latter. This collectivist, qualitative project draws upon data from a small sample of semi-structured interviews with BBR participants. All five men had completed at least one module of BBR for sufficient experience and were all convicted of IPV, for which they acknowledged responsibility. Findings revealed three key themes of factors that influenced rapport: feeling physiologically safe, space to explore their experiences and communication style including tone of challenging and the use of humour. This highlighted the importance of transcending the rigidity of professional communication to cultivate more meaningful bonds. As such, recommendations include centralising rapport in ongoing facilitator training, cultivating space for exploration within DAPPs by optimising flexibility within sessions (Hughes, 2017), and further research to deepen knowledge on how to effectively engage men in DAPPs.

Key words

Intimate partner violence, domestic abuse perpetrator programmes, rapport, desistance, group interventions.

Section 1 – Introduction

1.1 The impact of IPV

The ubiquity of IPV is highlighted in the estimated 45,000 women and girls killed globally by intimate partners or family members (femicide) in 2021 (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2022). In the United Kingdom (UK), the Femicide Census (2020) found that femicide rates averaged 124-168 women per year since 2009, 62% of whom were killed by current or former partners. Despite being dubbed the second pandemic of 2020 (Weil, 2020; Dlamini, 2021), femicide numbers reduced to 110 that year, attributed to fewer women being able to leave during the lockdowns - a key trigger in femicide (Femicide Census, 2020). The Femicide Census (2020) also highlights the prevalence of femicides staged as accidents, disappearances, and suicides to contextualise that the true figure is likely much higher (Biderman and Reiss, 1967). Additionally, Walklate and Fitz-Gibbon (2023, p. 29) highlight the non-fatal ways women's lives are lost to the violence of some men, such as the autonomy-suffocation of coercive control, and the "slow-femicide" or "living death" in the lead up to a fatality. The financial impact of femicide is seen in the £66billion cost to the UK government in 2017: £47billion attributed to physical and emotional harms, £14billion cost to the economy from lost work, £2.3billion on healthcare and £1.3billion on policing (Oliver et al., 2019). Though there are benefits to financial quantification to highlight the enormity of the issue (Walklate and Fitz-Gibbon, 2023) some harms, such as fear and trauma, are difficult to measure (Stark, 2009). These data highlight the importance of research into IPV.

1.2 Theoretical Considerations

Though IPV is present across all genders, and there is contention about its cause (Johnson, 2011), the gender disparity in its prevalence and severity (Kelly and Johnson, 2008) supports perspectives which point to patriarchal societal pressures being the predominant influence on IPV (Pence and Paymar, 1993; Dobash et al., 2000; John et al., 2020). This perspective posits that global, intergenerational, gendered belief systems place pressure on men to perform masculinity (Ross et al., 2022) via means which include the oppression of women (Hall, 1996). Though previously considered a conscious, deliberate and rational vehicle for asserting power (Dobash and Dobash, 1979), men's violence against women is more recently seen as an, often subconscious, projection onto women of unresolved emotions born of the pressure of rigid gender roles (Gadd and Jefferson, 2007). This perspective recognises the damage that investment in these roles also does to men, such as pressure to abstain from traditionally feminine behaviours such as emotional communication or processing, contributing to higher male suicide rates (Adinkrah, 2012; Barker, 2016). Explaining why not all men prescribe to harmful gender roles is social learning theory, which positions IPV as a re-enactment of behaviours witnessed in role models in childhood (Capaldi and Clark, 1998). This, and other adverse childhood experiences, have been linked to adult perpetration of IPV (Thulin et al., 2021), highlighting the complex nature of men who engage in abusive behaviours as both traumatising and traumatised (Renehan, 2021). This is the theoretical climate into which domestic violence perpetrator programmes (DAPPs) were introduced as a mechanism for IPV reduction (Renehan and Fitz-Gibbon, 2022). The next Section will explore DAPPs in more

depth, but first, this section will outline the specific DAPP relevant to this project: Building Better Relationships (BBR).

1.3 Building Better Relationships

BBR was conceptualised in the wake of the "rehabilitation revolution" which centralised rehabilitation in reducing offending and protecting the public (Ministry of Justice (MOJ), 2010, p. 88). BBR is a court-mandated, cognitive-behavioural intervention for adult men who have been convicted of IPV crimes, and whose risk of harm is considered moderate to high (Hughes, 2017). It is a 33-session programme, consisting of 24 group sessions, six 1-1 sessions and a final handover meeting including their probation officer (National Offender Management Service (NOMS), 2015). Group sessions are split into four modules: Foundation Module, My Thinking, My Emotions, and My Relationships, which can be undertaken in any order after the Foundation Module (NOMS, 2015). Unlike its predecessor, the Integrated Domestic Abuse Programme (IDAP) which was rooted in the feminist 1981 Duluth model, BBR is rooted in desistance theory (Maruna, 2004) and What Works principles (NOMS, 2015). Both desistance and What Works are rooted in Maruna and King's (2009, p. 8) "moral redeemability" concept, which postulates that criminality is impermanent and offenders are capable of creating an offence-free future. Desistance theory considers the journey away from offending and what impacts this, whereas What Works is specific to the efficacy of rehabilitation programmes, based on scientific evidence (Maruna and Mann, 2019), which will be explored in Section 2. The operation of this in BBR means that BBR applies What Works, according to other violent offending, to IPV to support desistance (Felson and Lane, 2010). Additionally, BBR operates within a psychobiosocial model (Walton et al., 2017). This model posits that a range of interplaying social and individual factors combine to create conditions for IPV (McKenry et al., 1995; Walton et al., 2017), acknowledging the heterogeneity of men who engage in abusive behaviours (Renehan, 2021).

1.4 The General Aggression Model

Central to exploring this on BBR is the general aggression model (GAM), whose template overlays any past interaction to disassemble it into its components (Bushman and Anderson, 2002). Learning history, beliefs/expectations, situational factors (alcohol, stress, tiredness, other peoples' behaviour) all influence an individual's current internal state, which is their thoughts, emotions, and emotional arousal (physiological intensity of an emotion) (NOMS, 2015). These collective factors influence an individual's behaviour, whose successful achievement of a goal (whether conscious or subconscious) will determine the likelihood of behavioural repetition, informing the individual's learning loop (Bushman and Anderson, 2002). BBR works by using this tool (alongside many others) to help men analyse their incidents and explore skills to manage each section of the GAM to change thinking, manage emotions and improve behaviour (Hughes, 2017). BBR positions strengths-based working, alongside participants, as key in promoting desistance from offending behaviour (NOMS, 2015). Conversely, programmes such as Ahimsa take an emotion-centred approach and use feminist-theory-informed, licensed therapists to support men in working through the challenging emotions linked to their abusive behaviours (Renehan, 2021). There is a dearth of data or consensus about which intervention framework is most effective (Hughes, 2017; Renehan, 2021) and the answer to that is outside the scope of this project. However, literature on this will be explored in Section two.

1.5 Project Aims

Rapport can be defined as an interpersonal, harmonious, bidirectional connection (Zetzel, 1956; Bourdin, 1979; Leach, 2005), which should not be confused with collusion (Blagden and Pemberton, 2010), which is the reinforcement of pro-offending attitudes (Reeves and Cowe, 2012). In fact, there is myriad data on the centrality of rapport to treatment outcomes in a range of settings (Joe et al., 2001; Leach, 2005; Abbe and Brandon, 2013; Knight and Modi, 2014), including reducing recidivism (Sturm et al., 2021). However, application of this to DAPPs has been almost non-existent, despite the BBR Theory Manual acknowledging that positive outcomes can be attributed to therapeutic relationships (Simmons, 2009). This centralisation of rapport in treatment outcomes is supported in recent literature which will be explored further in the next Section (Fowler et al., 2021; Nahouli et al., 2022). Understanding the specific phenomena which influence this alliance could offer information to support best practice, keep group participants engaged and optimise their experience of BBR and their process of change (Holdsworth et al., 2017). As such, this project will answer the following research question: what factors influence rapport between facilitators and participants of BBR in the community, from the perspective of participants? In doing this, the project will platform the voices of BBR participants and consider how findings can be operationalised in training, practice, and further research (Doak and Taylor, 2013). This research involved conducting semi-structured interviews with a small sample of BBR participants and deduced themes of factors which influence rapport, as explored further in the methods section of this project. Additionally, this research was carried out as a recipient of the Sir Graham Smith Award in collaboration with the Probation Institute (Worrall, 2016) and will be published on other platforms in addition to this dissertation.

1.6 Project Overview

This project answered the question "what factors influence rapport between facilitators and participants of BBR, in the community, from the perspective of the participants?". It commenced with an introduction outlining the historical context within which this project sits. The next Section is a literature review which will critically explore the existing literature in areas relevant to this project. It will open with a critical investigation of DAPPs, starting with differences in their underpinning frameworks, accreditation rubrics and assessment metrics. The second half of the literature review will explore the role of rapport, how it manifests and how this links with DAPPs, highlighting the topical convergence within which this project sits. Then, Section 3 will outline the methods used for this project, the philosophical standpoint within which it resides and offer explanatory justifications for these choices. It will progress to sampling, recruitment and ethical issues, and conclude with data analysis and a Section summary. Section 4 will present the project findings in themes deduced from the data analysis, including feeling physiologically safe, space for exploration and communication style, including tone of challenging and the use of humour, and consider how these relate to the literature. The project will conclude with a final Section, summarising the project findings and how they answered the research question, culminating with recommendations to centralise rapport in facilitator training, optimise exploratory space within sessions and to conduct further research.

Section 2 - Literature Review

This Section will critically explore the existing literature pertaining to this project, about the factors which impact rapport between facilitators and participants of the BBR programme. The literature review will explore both key concepts of this project: DAPPs and rapport. It will begin by continuing from the introduction to DAPPs, first by briefly outlining comparative perceptions of perpetrator programmes. Then, critically exploring literature about their efficacy, beginning with their theoretical frameworks and regulation, then their methods of success measurement. Next, the Section will explore literature on rapport and its role in treatment outcomes, and how it manifests. The second half of the Section will conclude by exploring the intersection of rapport on DAPPs, how the sparse data on this intersection materialised as a divagation to other research questions and how this project will build upon these data.

2.1 Perceptions of Perpetrator Programmes

Perpetrator programmes have been positioned by some as somewhat of a panacea to recidivism (Morran, 2016) and others as the product of short-sighted blame culture which pathologizes the behavioural by-product of neoliberalism (Fox, 1999). In particular, CBT-based programmes have been criticised for decades for the perceived inference that crime is solely a behavioural manifestation of cognitive distortions, insufficiently considering the environmental context within which such behaviours take shape (Fox, 1999; Maruna and Mann, 2006). Further, such programmes have been dubbed a tool of ideological control, situating facilitators in the role of unknowing vessels for the agenda of the state (Fox, 1999). Yet, to position facilitators or programme participants as social receptacles who acquiesce to their environment, is reductive and removes their autonomy (Deci and Ryan, 1987). Additionally, it juxtaposes myriad literature on the power of attuning to the subconscious core beliefs (Leder, 2017), and following biases and emotions which colour the perspectives and experiences of all humans (Haselton et al., 2015), not just those on programmes. The evidence-base for CBT interventions across a range of needs is vast (Hofmann et al., 2012), however, the way the material is delivered is paramount. For example, participants of Fox's (1999) study of a CBT-based DAPP, saw through the "non-judgemental façade" of facilitators who failed to validate their experiences surrounding their abusive behaviour, resulting in performative compliance (Gadd and Jefferson, 2007, pp. 10).

Additionally, previous confessional methods, where participants were made to share details of their offence in groups, have been recognised for how traumatic they were for participants and highlighted a false dichotomy between retributive and rehabilitative justice in those instances (Fox, 1999). Additionally, some types of offending increased for participants who engaged in the failed Sex Offender Treatment Programme (SOTP), which used this method (Mews et al., 2017). Conversely, the inception of DAPPs was met with resistance and scepticism by victim-focused organisations who deplored the idea of sitting and talking with (and sometimes supplying coffee and biscuits for) men who had engaged in IPV (Phillips et al., 2013). As such, the perceptual terrain in which DAPPs reside highlights the difficulty of 'getting programmes right': acknowledging environmental context without removing individual accountability and generating an environment conducive to introspection, without colluding (Phillips et al, 2013).

2.2 DAPP Efficacy

a) Framework

As aforementioned, the underpinning theoretical framework of DAPPs is considered important in dictating how participants are viewed and responded to (NOMS, 2015). For example, IDAP and BBR are often polarised in their approaches, the former positioned as having an adversarial, feminist rhetoric, compared to the therapeutic and collaborative BBR (Hughes, 2017). However, this dichotomising fails to acknowledge the role of facilitation style within such frameworks (Hughes, 2017) or the collaborative, community response the Duluth approach was intended to be (Phillips et al., 2013). This shift in the underpinning framework demonstrates a change in the understanding of a) what causes IPV and b) how to address this in an intervention (Graham-Kevan and Bates, 2020). This can be seen in the difference in approach between BBR and Ahimsa, the latter's framework centralising emotional identification and processing, exploring vulnerable and difficult emotions such as shame, jealousy and fear under the premise that these are normal parts of the human experience which influence behaviour (Loeffler et al., 2010; Renehan, 2021; Respect, 2022). Further, facilitator qualification thresholds differ from that of BBR, in that all Ahimsa facilitators are qualified therapists, with the programme process seen as highly therapeutic and requiring extensive, individual therapeutic risk-focused work prior to acceptance onto the group, whereas BBR is open to facilitators from a range of backgrounds, offering training after onboarding (Renehan, 2021). Additionally, though gender is not a central focus in Ahimsa like it was in IDAP, gender-informed elements and understanding are required for accreditation by Respect Standards (Respect, 2022), who are Ahimsa's accrediting body.

b) Accreditation

DAPPs are required to meet certain standards to gain accreditation (Hughes, 2017). However, accreditation frameworks lack consensus (Renehan, 2021). For example, the Respect Standard (2022), compared to the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) accreditation (Renehan, 2021). NOMS was introduced in 2003 to optimise supervision quality for people on probation, including programmes (Raynor and Maguire, 2006). Similarly, the 2008-born Respect Standard is a quality assurance rubric, aligned with the Home Office Standards for DAPPs, designed to uphold DAPP best-practice and consistency (Respect, 2022). Both frameworks require programmes to meet seven standards, which overlap in championing supported and skilled programmes staff and working in collaboration with other agencies, such as police and victim support (Respect, 2022; NOMs, 2023). However, Respect (2022) accreditation requires staff to be licensed therapists working in alignment with the aforementioned gender-informed literature, which NOMs (2023) does not require (Renehan, 2021). This lack of consensus means that, whilst BBR is accredited by NOMs (2023), it does not meet Respect accreditation standards (Respect, 2022). Currently, there is disagreement in the realm of DAPP regulation and this is mirrored by the lack of consensus about data on their success (Renehan and Henry, 2023).

c) Assessment

The history of assessing the success of DAPPs is rife with contradicting data and methodological issues (Renehan, 2021). In 2015, Kelly and Westmarland published the final report for Project Mirabel, which explored the efficacy of DAPPs and championed a new approach to DAPP research, after a historical reflection. They reflected that first-generation assessment was based on unreliable measurements such as participant self-reports and reconviction data (Farrall, 2022). Though the subsequent data showed a reduction in violence, this stood in stark discrepancy to survivors' accounts which formed another part of the first-generation assessment (Gondolf, 1999; Dobash et al., 2000; Renehan, 2021). Second generation assessment experimentally compared outcomes of those engaged in DAPPs against those without, when randomly assigning men who committed IPV, finding little difference (Labriola et al., 2008). However, the assumption that DAPP outcomes can be tested independently of other variables is logically flawed (Gondolf, 2007) and the potential harm of withholding interventions to create these data raises ethical concerns (Gondolf, 2001; Klevens et al, 2008). Another arm of the second-generation assessment was the use of multi-site evaluations such as Gondolf (2002), which found that DAPPs alongside integrated community services were most effective (Kelly and Westmarland, 2015). However, Westmarland et al. (2010) highlight the limitations of measuring success with the "blunt instrument" of reconviction rates (Farrall, 2022, p. 224), whilst disregarding other quantifiers of change which programmes could inculcate (Renehan, 2021; 2022). Kelly and Westmarland (2015) catechize this reductive, binary measure of success and request more sophisticated and nuanced measures in research which they labelled the 'third generation' of assessment. Recently, a report by Teasdale, Sorby and Elliott (2023) found that BBR delivery quality in 20 of 21 areas in question was too low for a feasibility study to generate meaningful data regarding the impact of BBR on IPV-related reconvictions, highlighting another issue in efficacy measurement. Currently, there is a notable omission of qualitative, nuanced data regarding DAPPs, such as the exploration of therapeutic characteristics of facilitating change (Lilley-Walker et al., 2018; Renehan, 2021), such as rapport between practitioner and participant (Nahouli et al., 2022).

2.3 Rapport

a) The role of rapport

Rapport has long been centralised in treatment outcomes in psychotherapy (Freud, 1914; Brenner, 1979; Ardito and Rabellino, 2011; Nahouli et al. 2022). Additionally, its utility in fostering cooperation within investigative interviewing has been well documented (Collins and Carthy, 2019), with it being dubbed "the heart of the interview" (St Yves, 2006, pp. 104). Its importance in probation practice can be seen historically in the 1907 Probation Act, which championed the assisting, advising, and befriending of people on probation (Healy, 2012). This approach is espoused by researchers such as Barry (2007), who blamed financial cuts and the What Works movement for disassembling probation's holistic, relationship-centred, socially contextualised perspective and replacing this with a dehumanising, assembly-line approach. Barry (2007) frames this as a shift from working with the whole person, to working with their label (Bernburg, 2019) and advocates prioritising rapport between probation

workers and people on probation, considering this crucial in supporting desistance (Lewis, 2014). This is reflected in Dominey's (2019, p. 283) concept of 'thick' supervision, centralising relationship networks in supporting people on probation. Similarly, Nahouli et al. (2022) recently reinforced the significance of rapport in reducing recidivism, with Youssef (2017) further prioritising this for resistant forensic cases.

Similarly, Polaschek and Ross (2010) centralise rapport in behaviour change for those who score highly on the psychopathy checklist, whose engagement and change is particularly challenging to engender. Though its role in supporting desistance and positive treatment outcomes in a range of contexts is evident, the mechanisms via which it facilitates this are not overt (Travelbee, 1963). Some scholars attribute its significance to its echoing of a healthy child-parent relationship and modelling healthy attachment (Freud, 1913; Bowlby, 1988; Holmes, 1996; Winnicott, 1984; Garfield, 2007), which is particularly pertinent for clients who have been exposed to adverse childhood experiences (Baller and Lewis, 2022). Others, such as Carrola (2021), consider rapport as a vehicle for establishing the trust required for a service user to share their most shameful experiences, thoughts, or behaviours. Similarly, Nahouli et al. (2022) simply credit the facilitation of a comfortable and collaborative environment which promotes communication, but highlight a dearth of data on the dynamics of this.

b) What creates rapport?

Although there is little data on the specific constituents and quality of rapport in the CJS, there are some frameworks which link with rapport-building in use in probation work (Nahouli et al. 2022). For example, the concept of Motivational Interviewing (MI) is a rapport-supportive framework, which champions empathy and collaboration to reach collective goals of behavioural change (Miller and Rollnick, 1991; Westra and Aviram, 2013). MI skills consist of expressing empathy, rolling with resistance, developing discrepancy and encouraging "change talk" (Miller and Rollnick, 2004, p. 300). Additionally, characteristics to facilitate these skills include the use of open questions, reflection, summarising, and affirmation (Miller and Rollnick, 2012). Miller and Rollnick (2012) position these factors as central to a collaborative, positive and respectful relationship between practitioner and client, with a focus on supporting the process of change. However, Nahouli et al. (2022) acknowledge there will be some contexts where service users are minimally motivated to change and highlight the lack of research into practitioner and service-user perspectives of rapport. As such, Nahouli et al. (2022) used focus groups and thematic analysis to collect practitioner perspectives on the process of building and maintaining rapport. From this, they identified themes of verbal and non-verbal behaviours such as personal conversation and handshaking, being responsive to individuals such as acknowledging respective progress and consistency of key workers to optimise feelings of reliability (Nahouli et al., 2022). Not only do these findings support links to attachment (Bowlby, 1988; Garfield, 2007), but they begin to outline quantifiable manifestations of rapport in probation practice.

c) Rapport in DAPPs

Extending this to voluntary UK DAPPs, Fowler et al. (2021) conducted a mixed-method study to explore rapport. This involved focus groups with facilitators, quantitative data collection regarding facilitator characteristics and alliance measurement, observation, and a systematic international literature review (Fowler et al., 2021). From this, Fowler et al. (2021) identified factors such as facilitator skills, collaborative communication, and participants' propensity for introspection as impactful on rapport. They also linked mindfulness and vulnerability to rapport, attributing "significant symbolic value in the repeated ritual of creating a safe space" (Fowler et al., 2021, p. 76). Transcending the symbolism of safety, research in the field of polyvagal theory positions feelings of emotional and physiological safety as a critical precursor to cultivating rapport, by subconsciously enabling neural pathways which notify the central nervous system (CNS) that it is safe to connect (Procyk, 2020; Porges, 2022). This process, known as "neuroception" (Porges, 2004, p. 19), is informed by cues such as facial expressions (Sharpley et al., 2006), body language, voice tone (Geller, 2018) and room layout (Flores and Porges, 2017). This concept of emotional safety was also present in DAPP research by Garfield (2007), which acknowledged the importance of creating an environment conducive to safely exploring vulnerable emotions, particularly those which were evoked by difficult material.

Juxtaposing this, Renehan (2021) found BBR participants felt misunderstood, judged, and unheard when strict adherence to programme material was prioritised over space for exploration. Similarly, Hughes (2017) found that facilitators and participants of BBR struggled with the rigidity of the session structure, with Holdsworth et al. (2016) positioning programme flexibility as a key constituent of rapport. Linked to this, Garfield (2007) identified active listening, infrequent interruption, respectful communication, appropriate challenging and appropriate humour as supportive of rapport in DAPPs. NOMs (2015) highlight the importance of respectfully challenging, to stimulate learning and reflection. Conversely, Foxx (1999) discussed the alienation of DAPP participants who felt their explanations of aggression were reframed solely as mechanisms of denial and blame – the invalidation of their experiences generating "bitterness" (Gadd and Jefferson, 2007, pp. 10). Yet, Garfield (2007) posited that unconditional positive regard (Rogers, 1951) without supportive, consistent boundaries (Winnicott, 1984) and challenging would be collusive and harmful by undermining accountability (Blagden and Pemberton, 2010), so balance is required. Similarly, humour required a careful approach so it supported rapport, rather than damaged it, and perspectives on its use and intention varied between facilitators and participants (Garfield, 2007; Fowler et al., 2021). These data highlight a range of factors in DAPPs conducive to, and hindering of, rapport and are a starting point in the intersection upon which the current project aims to build, with a particular focus on participants' perspectives.

2.4 Summary

This Section has critically explored existing literature pertaining to the research question. It evaluated DAPP differences and inconsistencies, starting with ideological frameworks, then applied this to accreditation rubrics and finally modes and measures of assessment and a critical evaluation of data validity. The second half of the Section looked at rapport, beginning

with the role it plays in treatment outcomes across various realms, then considering how it manifests and finally applying this to DAPPs, highlighting the intersection where this project is situated. Within this, the Section identified themes of rapport constituents ascertained by previous literature, but recognised that these data were gathered either from voluntary DAPPS, perspectives of practitioners or materialised as an aside to another research question, highlighting the literature gap that this project contributes to. As such, this project will uncover the perspectives of BBR participants on what factors they think are important for rapport. However, before exploring the findings, Section 3 will outline and justify the methods used in this project and accompanying ethical considerations

Section 3 – Methodology

This research aimed to answer the question "what factors influence rapport in BBR, in the community, from the perspective of participants?". This Section will explore the methodological approach of this project and why this was best suited, alongside consistent acknowledgement of its limitations. It will start by identifying and justifying the ontological and epistemological lens through which the research was conducted. Then, the method, sampling and recruitment will be outlined. Next, ethical considerations will be explored in two parts: firstly, the complexities of practitioner research and the interplay and challenges of this dual role, then the ethical challenges of research with high risk populations and how this was addressed. Finally, the rationale and process of the data analysis will be critically outlined, and the Section will close with a summary, signposting to the results in the next Section.

3.1 Ontological and Epistemological Considerations

Philosophical grounding for research depends on the researcher's definition of what knowledge is and how it can be uncovered (Wincup, 2017). This project takes a constructivist stance, meaning that rather than seeking a single objective truth, the researcher aligns with the narrative that there is not a singular, objective truth to uncover from this research, but a range of subjective perspectives whose validity is relative to the individual (Wincup, 2017). This attribution of value to individual perspectives aligns with qualitative methodology, whose focus is to gain understanding and meaning about a subject, as opposed to focusing on gathering numerical data (Miller and Palacios, 2015). The researcher's aim of platforming the voices of BBR participants championed the storytelling and nuance-uncovering capabilities of qualitative research from a constructivist stance as the only suitable approach for this project (Liamputtong, 2023).

3.2 Method

The chosen qualitative method was face to face, one to one, semi-structured interviews, lasting up to one hour. Whilst structured interviews offer optimal replicability (Stanley, 2018), they also inhibit natural diversion from the schedule, creating a rigidity which suffocates the conversation and damages the integrity of the data (Wincup, 2017). Alternatively, semi-structured interviews facilitate a balance of replicability and structure (Wincup, 2017), whilst not inhibiting the organic flow of conversation. This is necessary to elicit meaningful, unabridged responses, optimising participant-researcher rapport (Tewksbury, 2009), which is of key importance in this project. The interviews were guided by the schedule in Appendix A, designed with open questions to champion the voice of participants, rather than the researcher-led narrative that closed questions would create (Siedlecki, 2022). Questions were carefully considered to avoid leading participants' answers and imposing the researcher's views, as aligned with the constructivist lens (Cairns-Lee, Lawley and Tosey, 2022).

Additionally, private one to one interviews allowed participants to share experiences without the social pressure of a focus group (Sim and Waterfield, 2019), linked to the potential performance of hegemonic masculinity eroding the validity of data collected in such contexts (Allen, 2005).

3.3 Sampling

Participants were recruited from a purposive convenience sample, selected by participants' geographical accessibility to the researcher whilst meeting the sample requirements (Boeri and Lamonica, 2015). Requirements for this sample included being a BBR participant, residing in the community and having engaged in at least one module of the programme, so as to have accrued enough experience of the programme. Additionally, the suitability parameters for admission onto BBR ensure that this projects' sample were males assessed as moderate to high risk of reoffending with an index offence of IPV (Hughes, 2017) as assessed by the Spousal Assault Risk Assessment (SARA) tool (NOMS, 2015). BBR eligibility criteria also mean that the sample only included men who agreed to actively engage in BBR and acknowledge they have engaged in abusive behaviours, as denial would render them unsuitable for the programme (NOMS, 2015). Participants ages ranged from 20s to 60s, with offences varying from actual bodily harm to stalking. With the aim of recruiting approximately 10 participants owing to time constraints, an exhaustive sample of 16 men were invited from the target location, with an expectation that even with a 100% response rate, there would be some sample atrophy (Wincup, 2017). Of the 16 invited, seven agreed to participate, signed consent forms and booked appointments. Of these seven, five attended, resulting in a 32% attendance rate. Owing to the small sample size, data collected will not be representative of all men who engage in abusive behaviours or all BBR participants. However, the purpose of this research was not to yield representative data, but to unearth nuance, for which this sample size is suitable (Staller, 2021).

3.4 Recruitment

Respondent recruitment was facilitated by the researcher attending a BBR group in the target location and verbally inviting volunteers. This began with an informal conversation explaining the research aims and methods to the potential participants. It was explained that participation was voluntary and that there would be no detriment to their place on BBR or their sentence in the community. They were also informed that the research aim was to platform their voices and that all accounts would be anonymised. Then, the information sheet (Appendix A) and consent form (Appendix B) were disseminated and discussed in detail, allowing participants to ask questions, raise concerns and accept or decline participation. Facilitating recruitment in the group environment could have raised issues regarding masculinity and talking in front of other men in other contexts (Seaton et al., 2019), however in the context of the BBR programme, it was a familiar and safe environment within which they were used to having open, vulnerable conversations (Hughes, 2017), which supported this recruitment method. Interviews were scheduled at times which suited participants to minimise inconvenience and optimise attendance (Wincup, 2017). Additionally, flexibility was facilitated when one participant asked to reschedule his appointment and this was

accommodated, acknowledging the humanness and dynamic needs of participants (Wincup, 2017).

3.5 Ethics

With the process of research comes the responsibility of the researcher to do their best not to cause harm to the participant, themselves, or others (Maxfield, 2015). The Probation Institute Code of Ethics (2020) outlines the importance of respecting the dignity, well-being and safety of people on probation and the British Society of Criminology Statement of Ethics (BSCSE) (2015) consider ethical guidelines to be a vehicle which supports research integrity by offering codes of practice to protect the researcher, participants and others through the research process. The ways in which these values were embodied are outlined below.

a) Anonymity and Confidentiality

Prior to their interviews, participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time, to not answer questions, to ask that their data be excluded and that there was no financial incentive (Wincup, 2017). These considerations aimed to reduce pressure to participate and their understanding that securing their consent was an ongoing process over which they had control, rather than a singular, unretractable event (Wincup, 2017; Xu et al., 2020). Additionally, they were informed about how their data would be used, stored and disposed of to uphold their anonymity but that a request to retract their data should be submitted prior to 10th February 2023, after which their data would be anonymised. Discussing confidentiality, participants were informed that disclosing an intent to harm themselves or others would necessitate sharing this with their Probation Practitioner/ necessary authorities (Surmiak, 2020). This was particularly relevant in working with this participant demographic who have committed serious offences and whose risk of reoffending is at least moderate (Woodward, 2018; Surmiak, 2020). In support of this, the above information was clearly outlined in the aforementioned information sheet and consent forms they signed. However, there were no disclosures during the research process which required the researcher to invoke the disclosure clause of the consent agreement.

b) Researcher safety

As mentioned, research with individuals who have committed serious offences comes with a level of risk of harm to either the participant or the researcher, be it emotional or physical (Wincup, 2017). Interviews were booked for an hour in a private, uninterrupted space in a probation office aided by a door whose entry required a key card, which helped avoid interruptions (Wincup, 2017; Woodward, 2018). Additionally, the probation building's inherent safety policies helped to mitigate operational risk (Renehan, 2021). These included the signing in (and out) process, CCTV, card-locked doors, emergency buttons in all interview rooms, positioning the researcher nearest the door to facilitate a swift and safe exit if necessary (Renehan, 2021). Additionally, managers' and colleagues' awareness of the researcher's location and timing of interviews, and the option to debrief with the researcher's Sir Graham Smith Award mentor and/or Arden supervisor supported researcher safety and wellbeing.

c) Participant safety

As aforementioned, it is known that men who commit IPV often witnessed IPV in childhood, which constitutes ACEs, linked to trauma and vulnerability into adulthood (Baller and Lewis, 2022). In this case, the aforementioned training linked to the facilitator role helped to protect the participants and researcher respectively, through practice in identifying and responding to distress (Renehan, 2021) and experience in discussing and processing emotionally difficult topics (Dickson-Swift et al., 2008). Had it been necessary, participants would have been offered to pause or end the interview if they appeared to become distressed or disclosed this themselves. However, this was not necessary. After the interview, participants were presented with a debrief sheet (Appendix D) with details of support services and asked to reflect on their experience of the interview and if they had any concerns. All participants reflected positively on their interview experience and this information was not included as part of this dissertation. Additionally, the familiarity of the space supported the emotional safety of participants as they attended it frequently for BBR and other probation appointments (Hughes, 2017; Woodward, 2018). This also supported management of the inherent power dynamic of practitioner-researcher and participant (Lumsden and Winter, 2014; Wincup, 2017).

d) Researcher Positionality

Though this dual role of a practitioner-researcher can present issues regarding bias, it also offered the researcher contextual knowledge of the programme which an external researcher would not have benefited from (Hughes, 2017) and practice in MI as discussed in Section 2 (Clark, 2021). Though these roles cannot be fully separated, a consistent, reflexive effort to "switch off" the facilitator role and "switch on" the researcher role was employed, which is both a challenge and a skill in practitioner research (Hendy, 2020, p.3). For example, reflexively noticing when a statement made by a participant would have been challenged by the researcher's facilitator role, but the researcher role was maintained, and the line of questioning aligned solely to the research question. Additionally, the complexity of dual-role research manifested when, after the first round of recruitment, the researcher was required to step in as an emergency cover for the group from which participants had just been recruited. However, participants from this group did not attend their interviews so this did not impact the data in this project.

Additionally, interviews were conducted at a different probation office to ensure no prior relationship with participants (Toy-Cronin, 2018). The shared experience of BBR, though from different angles, positioned the researcher as an insider, conversely, the researcher was positioned as an outsider to the experience of participants as people on probation (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). Additionally, it was not lost on the researcher that participants' offences were against women, when considering researcher positionality as a young female (Chiswell and Wheeler, 2016; Lefkowich, 2019). However, the practitioner position of the researcher played a supportive role in experience working with the target demographic (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). However, it was necessary to reflexively consider these factors and how they could impact the research process (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2010; Reis, 2011), such as participants' trust of the researcher not to share their feedback with facilitators – any suspicion of which

could have inhibited their disclosures. Additionally, supervision and mentoring by researchers with similar experience aided the researcher in identifying and mitigating ethical issues such as those pertaining to power dynamics and optimising researcher and participant wellbeing (Waters et al., 2020), which is particularly important when conducting high risk research (Wincup, 2017).

3.6 Data Analysis

Interviews were recorded using voice recording devices, then transcribed and saved in a VPN-protected MOJ laptop. Two devices were used in case of technological errors, to avoid data loss (Vanden Bosch, Wesley and Strouse, 2021). Transcripts were compared to recordings to check for errors, during which process, identifiable information was anonymised, and pseudonyms operationalised to maintain the humanness of participants, as opposed to 'othering' through numbering (Allen and Wiles, 2016). Therapeutic alliance theory created the lens through which reflexive thematic analysis was undertaken for this project (Braun and Clarke, 2006; 2019). The researcher perspective centralised rapport in optimising DAPPs, yet took an inductive approach when generating codes, then deducing and labelling themes (Braun and Clarke, 2019). However, the researcher acknowledges that perfect objectivity is unobtainable and that subconscious biases will still influence data interpretation (Hughes, 2017; Panfil, 2021). The thematic analysis uncovered three key themes of subconscious safety features, non-judgemental space to explore and communication style, which will be explored in the findings and discussion section.

3.7 Summary

In summary, the researcher's constructivist, qualitative approach optimised the research framework for platforming the participants' voices by allowing participants to paint their own pictures, unmarred by perspectives held by the researcher (Panfil, 2021). The complexity and limitations of practitioner research and researcher positionality were critically explored and kept in mind throughout to optimise data validity through consistent reflexive practice to manage bias (Reis, 2011). This was supported by the method of semi-structured interviews, which offered a framework to keep the interviews on topic through careful, open questioning to avoid leading or constraining conversation through rigid structure (Wincup, 2017). A small, purposive sample was obtained, from which nuanced, unrepresentative data (Hughes, 2017) and three core themes were gleaned, which are detailed in the next Section.

Section 4 - Findings and discussion

During their interviews, after defining rapport as the positive relationship between themselves and their facilitators, participants were asked what factors they thought influenced this, both positively and negatively. The data coding process uncovered three main themes in their responses: feeling safe, space to explore, and communication style, with the latter split into 1) tone of challenging, and 2) use of humour. These themes outline the rapport-building journey at three main points: the signs of safety subconsciously noticed upon entering a room, the listening space created when a participant is sharing their thoughts and experiences, and finally the response and development of conversation after the participant has spoken. Each participant's answer will be outlined under relevant themes to platform their individual voices clearly, whilst maintaining a thematic presentation.

4.1 Feeling safe

One theme identified during the analysis was that of feeling safe, engendered by factors such as facial expressions, body language and the physical environment, such as seating and group size.

Sam spoke about the importance of the verbal and non-verbal cues exhibited by facilitators and how this positively impacts rapport:

> *"Their body language… smiling and making you feel calm and at ease… it's the nicest thing... and it makes for a calmer atmosphere and environment and an easier place to feel that you want to talk and open up.....obviously you pick up on their body language and how they are doing things and it's quite often a smile or a calm voice."*

Dennis shared this sentiment, highlighting the impact of the mood of the facilitator and how this manifests physically. He also spoke about the impact of the room and the number of people in it, and how this influences the likelihood of his open and active engagement in BBR:

> *"The smile, their attitude you know, they're not like grumpy you know I don't know how to explain, it's the faces you know the smile I don't know for me. I feel really comfortable, that's why I've been open talking. Otherwise, if I'm not comfortable, I don't talk about my life to everybody. That's why if we were in a big room or something and big people I wouldn't be talking about my life or anything."*

Chris concurred, highlighting how the facial expressions of facilitators impact the environment. Similarly to Dennis, Chris expressed that the physical layout of the room, such as the seating arrangement and number of participants influenced the degree of comfort in the room:

"I mean it's quite important because otherwise the person who might be speaking might get the wrong impression because if they are looking grimly at them, then he might feel that, you know, even if they weren't saying it, that they were being judgmental. They have always been friendly and, as I say, because they're being non-judgemental, it obviously deflates any feelings of anger or whatever from the participants. We sit in a circle; we don't sit behind desks… It would make it feel more intrusive…. you would destroy the whole purpose because… if they thought they were in a teacher-pupil relationship… I think they would tend to be more cagey about what they're going to say…"

Participants' attribution of "comfort" and "calm" to warm facial features, body language and a non- "invasive" environment reinforces myriad literature on polyvagal theory (Porges and Dana, 2018), as aforementioned in Section 2. Signs such as facial expressions, body language, voice tone and room layout subconsciously alight neural pathways which indicate environmental safety to the CNS through "neuroception" (Porges, 2004, p. 19). As aforementioned, neuroception of safety is a critical precursor to rapport by creating an environment conducive to vulnerability (Porges and Dana, 2018), particularly for neurodivergent participants (Goodall and Brownlow, 2022).

4.2 A non-judgemental space for exploration

Another factor which participants found important in developing rapport was creating a safe space for exploring participants' experiences (Garfield, 2007; Fowler et al., 2021). Dennis spoke about facilitators being present and attuned to the conversation, allowing uninterrupted space for participants to share:

"They always concentrate on the group, you know, the conversation what we talk about the scenarios you know and pay attention what we saying and we do pay attention what they're saying and we don't interrupt when they talk or anything."

Similarly, Chris spoke about the value of this space being empathetic and non-judgemental to support openness and the importance of each participant having enough time to share:

"Well I think the most important one is empathy so they can actually try to put themselves in the place of the people they are dealing with no matter what it is they have done… they do listen without interruption… it's non-judgmental so people are allowed to say exactly what it is they feel, even if you don't agree with them you are allowing them to tell it the way they feel it…. [if] they're talking to someone who is at least prepared to listen… then they are likely to get more out of them… Six was fine, but I think more than six would be counterproductive because obviously it's important that everybody gets their chance to say what they want to say and if you, let's say it went up to ten, and the sessions only two hours long then because you would have another four voices then the time allotment would go down."

Levi added to this by identifying ways that facilitators can show that they are listening and allowing time to explore "the bigger picture":

> *"When you're speaking to someone, they tend to have eye contact with you or show that they're listening, they'll be like "mmhmm" … and then if they've got any questions about it they can ask …. not just OK you've finished talking we're going to move on… brushing it underneath the carpet… look at the bigger picture of what's actually happened."*

Participants' perspectives aligned with literature by Garfield (2007), Hughes (2017) and Renehan (2021) regarding the importance of a safe space in DAPPs, but built upon this by identifying this as central to rapport. Participants acknowledged feeling shut down if this space was not created, adding depth to previous literature by considering the impact on the relationship between facilitator and participant when the latter do not feel heard. This consolidates Renehan's (2021, p. 206) championing of "time and space for the unthinkable to be said", to process and share challenging and pivotal emotions such as shame (Braithwaite, 1989; Brown, 2004). Offering a space which accepts and humanises men as whole individuals rather than reducing them to the stigmatising label of their offending behaviour (Barry, 2007), was important to participants in building and maintaining rapport.

4.3 Communication style

Another rapport-influencing factor highlighted by participants was the communication style of the facilitators (Garfield, 2007; Hughes, 2017). To help, this section is split into two parts: firstly, the tone of challenging and secondly, the use of humour.

a) Tone of challenging

In Section 2, challenging was identified as key in supporting introspection in BBR (NOMs, 2015). Participants developed on this by highlighting the importance of its tone in maintaining rapport with facilitators. Sam identified helpful characteristics in challenging:

> *"Good ways of asking questions and putting you at ease… It's done in a calm way that's not patronising or condescending, it's honest and open and you can see the thought that goes into the questioning and you can see the person thinking about what they want to say and see them listen to you prior to answering that question."*

Leonard seconded this sentiment about facilitator's style of questioning, suggesting a non-confrontational, "seed-planting" approach is easier to take onboard:

> *"It's so well-mannered that you kind of have no other opportunity but to take it on and they make it interesting, they put a little slant on it and it does open up a lot of sort of theories in my head about how, you know, I could have gone about life a little bit differently."*

Chris shared a similar perspective of facilitators' questioning style and the importance of being inquisitive rather than intrusive:

> *"They don't question other than perhaps to try to get a bit deeper into the psyche of the person who is actually telling them about the events they are describing, but they don't do it in such a way as to be prying."*

These accounts support literature by Gondolf (2007), Garfield (2007), and Hughes (2017) which position challenging as integral to programmes whose MI frameworks are based on developing discrepancy whilst rolling with resistance, to encourage participants' critical introspection about their thinking and behaviours (NOMS, 2015), whilst avoiding accusatory or hostile tones which can create defensiveness and damage rapport (Carrola, 2021). The success of this with the project participants can be discerned from participants' reference to "questioning" rather than "challenging", highlighting their perception of a co-creative exploration as outlined by Lømo (2018), where practitioners challenge with curiosity, in a way which feels collaborative to participants. However, Fowler et al., (2021) highlight that a strong bond can set a foundation for more direct challenging without eroding rapport, yet this still highlights the reciprocal relationship of challenging and rapport on DAPPs.

b) Use of humour

Another factor highlighted by participants was the use of humour to reduce tension and optimise rapport with facilitators and other group members (Garfield, 2007; Fowler et al., 2021). Dennis highlighted the temporary nature of humour, before returning the group's attention to the subject at hand:

> *"Sometimes we have a joke you know for a minute or something, but always back on the page."*

Chris spoke about humour reducing tension but recognised a boundary of not directing humour at anyone:

> *"They are prepared to have a laugh and a joke while they are doing it… it just helps to lighten the atmosphere … if someone is getting a little bit wound up and maybe feels stressed, then if you can make a joke… as long as it's not a joke aimed at him, then obviously if he can laugh along with it, it will help him to de-stress… it gets very much like you're talking to a couple of friends and that's important because it keeps the dynamic of the group at a reasonable level and it tends to deflate if somebody is getting tense."*

Similarly, Sam recognised it can reduce tension and should not be "personal" but reflected on the importance of clear and consistent boundaries within humour. He also reflected how recommitments, which are formal agreements for participants to re-engage with the programme conditions if facilitators feel they have not been met (NOMs, 2015), can impact rapport:

> *"Well I think it can help relax each other … it's not getting too personal and you've got to remember that you are not in a group of close friends and so you can't have that same sense of humour… We had that recently with jokes we have made in group me and another guy in a group made a couple of jokes and we had to do a re-commit… having to re-commit for it felt very difficult but I understand to a point that they want to keep things a certain way, so that was fine it was just that then in that same group session they went and did a joke of the similar nature and it's like where are the boundaries?… It was also like oh, they can do that but we can't… it impacted me a fair bit in the group session afterwards I went really quiet and I felt like in order to reign it was better to say not anything at all."*

Leonard's views mirrored Sam's, highlighting the positive impact humour has on rapport but the opposite effect of unclear boundaries around this and the impact of recommitments on rapport.

> *"There has to be a little bit of a breakup of it and everyone is entitled to a laugh… you know that's how people deal with things… I just think, just have a quiet word with us instead of making us recommit, like guys I understand that you love a bit of banter and love a joke and I understand it's very light hearted and not personal… a little word in private and that would have been the end of it… it creates distance, isn't it, you're gonna distance yourself away from the facilitator which is a shame because we've worked so hard on being honest and being you know upfront and respectful so it just kind of diminishes that little bit of that relationship you've got with that facilitator."*

Participants' positioning of humour to diffuse tension adds to extant literature such as Garfield (2007), Laursen (2017) and (Fowler et al., 2021), alongside ambivalence regarding its appropriateness, linked to its potential for subversiveness, to undermine serious topics or assert power (Foucault, 1982; Laursen, 2017). However, perspectives which consider humour unprofessional or trivial overlook its utility in permeating the rigidity of formal conversation to cultivate deeper bonds and humanise professional connections, even in critical situations (Dean and Major, 2008), yet this was clearly evident to participants. Participants' request for clear and consistent boundaries alongside this consolidated literature Garfield (2007) which positioned consistent boundaries as pivotal in the role of rapport in its demonstration of a healthy relationship dynamic. The complexities of this dynamic are highlighted in the opposing participant views of befriending in the facilitator-participant dynamic, as acknowledged by Hucklesby and Wincup (2014) in their exploration of the paradoxical nature of befriending clients in the CJS.

4.4 Impact of rapport

When asked what role rapport plays in BBR, Sam credited it for building an environment conducive to openness and engagement.

> *"So it's a big bit, because they need to be able to obviously relax the group and things like that to be able to be more open and you want people to when they are in the group to be able to communicate as best they can and talk as much about quite often personal things, and to be able to do that you've got to make people feel relaxed … so I would say the rapport for that is one of the most important things for the group is to be able to build that environment…"*

Similarly, Leonard volunteered its utility in engaging men to be open to sharing and receiving information.

> *"To sit in a room like I said and open up… took a massive, massive effort but what I will say about the facilitators is that they do make you feel at ease and they do try and sort of connect with you… I wouldn't have learned half the information that I have if it wasn't for them and I will always be thankful for that"*

These sentiments reflect myriad literature such as Maruna (2004), McNeil (2006) and Hughes (2017) who position the significance of the practitioner-participant relationship as no less than parallel to the content of an intervention.

4.5 Summary

This Section allowed the reader to follow a journey of participants' perspectives of rapport with their facilitators, from upon entering a room, to the space for their voices and then the responses given by facilitators. It explored how factors within this journey impacted rapport and categorised these factors into themes: feeling safe, space for exploration, and communication style such as tone of challenging and use of humour. Findings demonstrated that participants require neuroception of safety to share (Porges, 2004; 2022), then feel there is space to explore their experiences, thoughts and emotions (Garfield, 2007) without judgement or collusion (Philip, and Bell, 2017). Then, challenges must be facilitated in a way which feels inquisitive rather than interrogatory (Hughes, 2017; Carrola (2021) and allowance for humour within this to regulate tension (Garfield, 2007; Fowler et al., 2021) and transcend formalities to humanise the professional bond (Dean and Major, 2008). Within these themes ran continuous threads of creating emotional safety through verbal and non-verbal cues, coupled with clear boundaries (Porges, 2004; Garfield, 2007; Fowler et al., 2021). Further research is required to glean deeper insight, yet these findings have implications for training and practice, as explored in the recommendations in the conclusion.

Section 5 - Conclusion and Recommendations

This project set out to answer the following research question: what factors influence rapport between facilitators and participants of the BBR programme, in the community, from the perspective of participants? Participants identified factors such as facial expressions, body language, room layout, active listening and communication style, such as tone of challenging and use of humour, as of key importance in cultivating rapport with their facilitators. These findings consolidated extant literature on the importance of rapport in treatment outcomes (Nahouli et al. 2022) and developed upon this by unearthing data linking rapport and BBR. In this vein, it uncovered new information about the specific factors which engender rapport by platforming participants' voices (Doak and Taylor, 2013). These factors were organised into themes, whose components and aligning evidence are summarised below.

5.1 Conclusions

Participants spoke about facial expressions, body language, room layout and group size as being impactful to how comfortable they felt in the group room. They spoke about feeling calm and at ease when facilitators smiled or spoke in a calm voice and how this would make them feel better able to open up and build rapport with their facilitators. They also spoke about the feeling of the room, linked to its layout and the group size, and how these factors would influence their comfort, which they linked to rapport-building. Similarly, they shared that more people, a bigger room, or different seating would feel "intrusive" and they would be less "at ease". When asked how important this was for rapport, they shared that it would damage it by making people feel more closed-off and less able to connect and share their experiences in a meaningful way. These sentiments align with literature on polyvagal theory which positions the aforementioned as a prerequisite to rapport in therapeutic relationships (Sharpley et al., 2006; Flores and Porges, 2017; Geller, 2018). These signs such as facial expressions, body language, voice tone and room layout subconsciously alight neural pathways which indicate to the central nervous system that the environment is safe, through a process known as "neuroception" (Porges, 2004, p. 19). As such, these factors identified by participants are scientifically supported as being important in fostering rapport.

Following the initial neuroception when entering the room, a non-judgemental space for exploration was highlighted as of key importance in cultivating rapport, particularly in response to participants sharing their experiences (Garfield, 2007; Renehan, 2021). According to participants, demonstration of this by facilitators included active listening through verbal and non-verbal cues such as maintaining eye contact, attending to the present moment without interruption, and giving a platform to explore participants' experiences in sufficient depth that they do not feel shut down, as this would damage rapport (Hughes, 2017; Renehan, 2021). Listening without interruption was a resounding theme within this and allowing participants to share their experiences exactly as they interpreted them, without judgement. Chris spoke about the importance of empathy, highlighting that it was important for men to feel safe to share what may be anti-social thoughts and past behaviours without fear of judgement or criticism (Renehan, 2021). Additionally, Levi introduced the importance of "seeing the bigger picture" around their behaviours, which links with Barry's (2007)

championing of working with the whole person, not just their presenting behaviour or label (Bernburg, 2019).

Linked to this, another factor that participants deemed central to rapport with their facilitators was the tone of challenges. Whilst challenging is essential to supporting introspection on BBR, participants positioned the tone of this as pivotal to rapport maintenance, as aligned with the literature (Carrola, 2021). Participants spoke about supportive challenging being calm and thoughtful, not patronising or condescending. They spoke about being able to see the thought that went into the questions and how they were respectful and would build upon what the men had shared, showing that facilitators had been listening, linking back to creating exploratory space. They spoke about how the "well-mannered" questioning style of facilitators supported rapport by demonstrating that they were trying to understand the men more deeply, rather than feeling like they are "prying" or criticising them. This aligned with Carrola's (2021) crediting of practitioners' questioning tone to offenders trusting them with stigmatised thoughts, beliefs and behaviours, of which they are ashamed. This offers a platform for inquisitive exploration on a level which they may not have experienced before, linked to the labelling and stigmatising of IPV perpetrators (Crowe et al., 2021).

The second part of the final theme was about humour, whose use was positioned as auspicious in optimising rapport by reducing tension (Laursen, 2017). Participants spoke about how humour could support rapport by positively impacting the atmosphere and group dynamic, particularly during moments of tension or stress. On a deeper level, it appears that participants were picking up on the ability of humour to transcend the rigid, formal social infrastructure of professional communication to humanise both parties and engender a deeper bond, which is often overlooked in the CJS for fear of collusion or unprofessionalism (Dean and Major, 2008; Laursen, 2017). Conversely, participants spoke about recommitments linked to humour and how recommitments impacted rapport with their facilitators negatively because they felt boundaries could have been implemented in a less formal way, and because when facilitators used similar humour to what participants received recommitments for, this made them feel like the boundaries were unclear and that this "diminished" their rapport with facilitators. When discussing humour, one participant likened the group dynamic to being around friends, whilst another highlighted the importance of remembering "you are not in a group of close friends" as a way to regulate how he used humour. As such, clear boundaries for humour were central to how it impacted rapport (Garfield, 2007), alongside awareness of its potential to be used subversively to assert power (Laursen, 2017) and because inconsistent boundaries regarding humour were found to damage rapport by leading to participants feeling they were being treated unequally.

Underpinning the rapport-influencing factors identified by participants, was an interlinking thread of emotional safety and how comfortable the men felt with being vulnerable with their facilitators. After identifying themes in the ways that facilitators cultivate this environment, participants also identified the centrality of rapport in this, crediting it for supporting their openness and vulnerability in sharing their experiences in the group (Carrola, 2021), but also in facilitating them in taking information onboard (Zheng et al., 2022). These data align with

the myriad data on the role of rapport in treatment outcomes and developed upon extant data by applying the importance of rapport to DAPPs and unearthing how to cultivate this. Though some findings are unsurprising, such as the thoughtfulness of challenging and engendering safety through facial features and body language, this project platformed the role of humour in a way which has been under researched in this context. Concerns about collusion are understandable (Miller, 2017), however, the positioning of humour as one of the key constituents in human connection and rapport as found by this project, suggests that more research into this area would be beneficial.

5.2 Limitations

A key limitation of this project is the role of the researcher as a BBR facilitator as this inherently impacts researcher impartiality and necessitated consistent, reflexive awareness and deliberate, conscious, role-shifting (Hendy, 2020). Despite this effort, it is recognised that this dual positionality acts as a potential hindrance to the integrity of the research as per point two of the BSCSE (2015) and the researcher's facilitator position could have impacted participants' feelings of safety in talking about their relationships with their own facilitators. Aligned with this was the inherent power imbalance of the researcher being an MOJ employee, juxtaposed with participant positions as people on probation (Wincup, 2017). To manage this, the researcher's role as a student researcher was made clear from the start of the project and participants were made aware that their participation was voluntary, unrelated to risk and would have no impact on their relationship with probation, however the researcher acknowledges these measures do not erase the imbalance of power (Hendy, 2020). Additionally, the chosen method of semi-structured interviews presented a logistical issue in time constraints, which limited the sample from which data could be collected. Though this project had no aim to be representative, its small sample can act as a starting point from which further research can be generated.

5.3 Recommendations

The first recommendation is about centralising rapport-building in facilitator training. Though some aforementioned factors align with MI training offered at the start of facilitators' employment, rapport is not centralised, nor is its significance highlighted in depth. Considering the ways facilitators have been achieving rapport already, the researcher envisions the potential outcome of centralising rapport in training as an ongoing practice. Much like Ahimsa's gender-informed facilitators, despite this not being a central point of the material (Renehan, 2021), training for BBR facilitators should emphasise the role of rapport in the process of change (Nahouli et al., 2022). Training should be engaging and focus on factors which BBR participants have deemed important, whilst avoiding outlining a rigid rubric for facilitators. For example, exploring how facilitators can navigate the complex balance between giving enough space to men's experiences and to the use of humour to form stronger rapport (Dean and Major, 2008), whilst avoiding collusion (Blagden and Pemberton, 2010). Not only should rapport-centrality be incorporated into initial training, but ongoing workshops specific to rapport should be implemented regularly to stay aligned with latest research on rapport and refresh facilitator skills. Within this, facilitators should be given the opportunity to explore their concerns or barriers they perceive, such as available time,

confidence, or support (Morran, 2008; Renehan, 2021). The fear of colluding with participants could pose a barrier to this, however trauma-informed working and behavioural justification are not synonymous (Renehan and Henry, 2023). In support of this training, consideration should be given to the working environment within which facilitators operate (Barry, 2007), particularly in the context of research by Renehan (2021) and Hughes (2017) which unearthed themes of disillusionment among facilitators. This calls into question the ways facilitator experiences manifest in the bidirectional performance of the facilitator-participant relationship on DAPPs (Renehan, 2021), mirroring the often-challenging social environment within which group participants are expected to employ BBR skills. As such, facilitators' feedback on barriers to cultivating a rapport-conducive environment can inform further recommendations and research.

As such, the second recommendation pertains to optimising space for exploration on BBR by reducing programme rigidity and limiting the number of participants per group. This project develops upon a small body of literature which champions exploratory space within DAPPs (Hughes, 2017; Renehan, 2021) and considers the challenge for facilitators to balance this in materially volume-heavy sessions (Hughes, 2017; Renehan, 2021). Additionally, the assessment of facilitator performance based upon programme integrity and standardisation constrict this exploratory space (Hughes, 2017). Though programme integrity is necessary to ensure interventions are delivered as intended (NOMS, 2015), pockets of exploratory space could be cultivated between integral parts of the framework, such as by spreading the material over more sessions. This could balance integrity and space, whilst relieving pressure on facilitators. Whilst the researcher recognises that an entire structural upheaval of BBR lays outside the scope of this individual project, this and future projects could help to inform the next generation of accredited programmes, whose development is already underway (HMPPS, 2021). As such, this project presents a channel via which BBR participants' perspectives could be incorporated into the restructuring of interventions such as BBR (Doak and Taylor, 2013). Secondly, the space available to BBR participants is also linked to the number of men in the group, as mentioned by this project's participants. Not only would this optimise the space for them to share, but it also addresses their feeling of safety in the room, both of which were positioned as important by this project's participants.

This project unearthed BBR participants' perspectives and platformed their voices (Doak and Taylor, 2013) regarding rapport and what helps or hinders this. It uncovered key themes of factors which are impactful to rapport. However, as recognised above, the sample was small and unrepresentative and although qualitative research aims not for representative data, but for rich data, the more voices that can be platformed by research, the more informed researchers can be (Boddy, 2016). Therefore, the third recommendation revolves around the need for a larger, more representative study asking the same research question, involving more BBR participants across more locations to optimise geographical reach and diversity. To facilitate this logistically as a lone researcher, focus groups could be used for time efficiency. Whilst the researcher recognises the limitations of focus groups in relation to masculinity performance (Seaton et al., 2019), this being carried out in a BBR group room could support the facilitation of a vulnerable, open conversation (Hughes, 2017).

5.4 Reflections

As outlined in the first Section of this project, research into IPV is crucial in informing the government response to femicide (Renehan and Henry, 2023). Since DAPPs constitute a significant part of this, continued research into what supports their efficacy is essential (NOMS, 2015). More specifically, the dearth of consensus on DAPP efficacy further highlights the need to build upon knowledge regarding concepts like rapport, which have been widely researched and found to be central to change (Lilley-Walker et al., 2018). This project has platformed the voices of BBR participants, answered the research question and evoked actionable recommendations. Whilst it consolidated some established data such as the importance of rapport, it unearthed new information about how BBR participants feel this can be engendered and offered direction for training, practice and future research. Its findings consolidated the vulnerable, dual positionality of participants as both traumatising and traumatised (Renehan, 2021). It also facilitated a rich research experience, offering the researcher an opportunity to practise balancing roles and to consider how to build upon learnt skills in future research. One key piece of learning is to logistically optimise future research to support a larger sample, such as the aforementioned idea of using focus groups to minimise the impact on time for participants and logistically optimise time for the researcher to visit more sites. Overall, the project has been an insightful and rewarding challenge. The main message this project has found is the importance of connecting in a way which transcends the separating categories of men and women, or facilitators and participants, and unifies individuals in their shared humanness.

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Legislation

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