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A review of the literature concerning the Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP)

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Executive Summary

The Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) is a conflict transformation programme run by volunteers all over the world. Despite the difficulties evaluating interventions of this sort, especially for small organisations with limited resources, a **considerable number of evaluations** of AVP have been undertaken. Although there is coherence of approach across different countries, until now the aims, objectives and outcomes of AVP have not been clearly articulated, and **imprecise language** is used to describe one of the programme's core concepts, Transforming Power. Yet the evaluations reviewed found **evidence of effectiveness** using a variety of measures.

Most of the evaluations examined in this review refer to AVP workshops in **prisons**. This is perhaps unsurprising given that these institutions have a literally captive population to work with, as well as a host institution that requires evidence of effectiveness. All but Chinoya Mudari (2000), Hackland (2007) and Phillips (2002) focus primarily on **basic level workshops**. Only Hackland (2007) illustrates convincingly the value of attending successive steps of the AVP programme.

Sloane (2002) and Miller and Shuford (2005) demonstrate improvements in **prison infraction rates** and post-release **recidivism**. A number of reports show significant improvements in relation to **anger** (Francis, 2005; Sloane, 2003; Walwrath, 2001). Sloane (2002, 2003) and Walwrath (2001) both point to the **financial benefits** of AVP, in terms of the cost of running prisons, the desirability of reducing recidivism and infractions in prison, and the minimal cost to prisons of allowing AVP workshops to be run.

Many of the qualitative evaluations report **generally positive outcomes** for participants in several areas, including self-esteem and non-violent approaches to conflict. Of these evaluations, several are based on questionnaire returns and non-thematic analysis, which limit their usefulness in understanding why AVP is effective. Statistical analyses of these data by non-professionals do not lend rigour to the field. Three evaluations report **limited or negative outcomes** from AVP workshops (anonymous, 2006; Chinoya Mudari, 2000; Sloane, 2003). For two of these reports, the lack of rigour in the methodology limits the impact of the findings.

In conclusion, there seems to be considerable evidence, both quantitative and qualitative, for the **effectiveness of AVP** in bringing about change in relation to violence.

1. Introduction

Evaluations of conflict resolution and peace education interventions are difficult to undertake and hard to come by (Davies, 2004, p. 163; Tomlinson and Benefield 2005, p. 12). Where they are carried out, they are often unpublished, which both prevents others from reading and learning from them and prevents an assessment of quality (given that journal publications are usually peer-reviewed, providing an element of quality assurance). Conflict transformation interventions are often run by volunteers, coordinated by organisations with few, if any, staff and with small budgets. Evaluations and research into the effectiveness of such programmes are therefore not usually a high priority.

Remarkably, then, a considerable number of evaluations of AVP workshops have been undertaken over the past ten years. This is despite the fact that AVP is run largely by volunteers, and rarely charges more than cost price for running its workshops, leaving little if any resources to pay for independent evaluations through this route.

The evaluations reviewed for this report almost all show positive results for AVP on a number of measures of effectiveness. The evaluations themselves are of varying approach, including qualitative and quantitative studies, focussing on effects central to the AVP programme, as well as and logical but not specifically planned impacts. The quality of the evaluations reviewed also varies; the implications of this variation is discussed below.

This literature review has been undertaken to identify what it is that AVP aims to achieve, and to draw together evidence of the programme's effectiveness in achieving these outcomes.

2. What is AVP?

The Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) is a series of workshops designed to offer participants alternative ways to address conflict than resorting to physical, mental or emotional violence (Aubrey, 2007b). These workshops are run by teams of voluntary facilitators, usually over two or three days. Participation is also, at least in theory, voluntary. The workshops focus on 'experiential' learning; that is, participants bring and learn from their own experiences, both past and in the workshop context. As Phillips notes, because of the importance given to the learning and facilitation styles of an AVP workshop, a substantial portion of the AVP Manual is concerned with the workshop *process*, as well as its content (2002, p.5).

Phillips notes that AVP differs from many 'treatment' programmes that have as their aims the cessation of violence or anger management.

> '*Treatment approaches, usually delivered or at least developed by professionals, tend to have a focus on* teaching *the participant about causes of conflict, anger and violence, and seek to change specific associated behaviours and attitudes. In more recent years, such programmes are usually based on a cognitive-behavioural theory of psychology. The Alternatives to Violence Project differs, in that it is experiential rather than conceptual, and spiritual rather than behaviouristic (Garver and Reitan, 1995)*' (Phillips, 2002, p.5, original emphasis).

The Alternatives to Violence Project began its development in 1975, when prisoners in Greenhaven Prison in New York State, USA, asked a group of Quakers to develop a programme addressing violence among young offenders. According to Phillips, the Quakers were particularly appropriate people to take on this task, given their three hundred year history of non-

violent approaches to conflict, including their training of marshals at demonstrations in non-violent methods during the Vietnam War protests (2002, p. 3). The name was adopted after volunteer facilitators were referred to as *'those alternatives to violence people'* at the prison entrance (Bitel et al. 1998, p.1). AVP has since spread across the world, and workshops are held in prisons and with community groups on all continents. The AVP International gathering in 2006 was attended by representatives from 23 countries[1] (AVP International, 2006). All AVP workshops follow a similar structure and use similar content, developed to suit the local context where appropriate. While some AVP participants and facilitators are still Quakers, AVP is a secular programme, without affiliation to any particular faith.

AVP has developed in its 32-year history through practice, rather than being established as a result of research evidence or in response to any particular theory about conflict resolution (other than, in its developmental phase, Quaker commitments to non-violence). However, since its inception a number of evaluations have been undertaken to assess AVP's effectiveness. This literature review was undertaken to summarise these documents, with the aim of identifying the aims of AVP interventions, the theory base behind the programme, and to summarise any evidence of its effectiveness or otherwise.

2.1 The aims of an AVP intervention

AVP workshops structures, content and ethos follow a constant pattern across the world, although different country programmes develop their own manuals to adapt exercises to their particular cultural context (Shipler Chico and Uwimana 2005). And the values underlying AVP seem consistent across time and space. Descriptions of the Project often begin with an explanation of its origins: the request from inmates at Green Haven prison in New York State to a Quaker group for a workshop to help them to address violence. This 'founding myth' approach is further developed by AVP documentation, explaining that AVP trainings are run,

> *'Because we believe that a life lived with dignity and self-respect, and the opportunity for self-actualization, is the birthright of every person. We believe that only when this birthright is made real, for all of us, will we have a just and peaceful world'* (AVP Britain, p. 3; Shuford, undated b, p.2).

In New Zealand, AVP's goals are described thus,

> *We are working towards the creation of a non-violent society. We recognise that there is a serious problem with violence in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Our goal is to reduce the level of violence by reducing the need that we feel to resort to violence as a solution. Our process uses the life experience of participants as our main learning resource, drawing on that experience to deal constructively with the violence in ourselves and in our lives. It is our objective to empower men, women and youth to manage conflict in non-violent, creative ways.* (AVPA, c.1994, p. 2, quoted in Phillips, 2002, p.4).

This values-driven approach is replicated in much of the literature (Phillips 2006, Shipler Chico and Uwimana, 2005). It helps to explain the ethos behind AVP, as well as the reasons why volunteer facilitators remain so committed to giving their time and energy to run emotionally-draining workshops. But it also provides an evaluator (or anyone outside of AVP) with a

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[1] The countries represented were Angola, Australia, Brazil, Burundi, Ecuador, Germany, Hong Kong, India, Ireland, Kenya, Namibia, New Zealand, Nigeria, Russia, Rwanda, South Africa, Spain, Sudan, Uganda, UK, Ukraine, USA and Zimbabwe.

challenge when seeking to understand exactly what AVP aims to achieve, or to provide indicators against which progress might be measured.

AVP literature seems somewhat resistant to the language of aims or objectives; 'themes', 'emphases', 'values' and 'pillars' are used instead. For example, Walwrath lists three unchanged *'fundamental values'* of AVP, namely, to take responsibility for oneself and the consequences of one's behaviour; to serve as one another's community, and to find options other than fight or flight when faced with conflict (Walwrath, 2001, pp. 698-9)[2]. Also in the USA, Shuford states that *'the two primary emphases in AVP are the spiritual and the behavioural (or skills) aspects of conflict reconciliation'*. He adds that every AVP workshops is designed around the *'themes'* of affirmation, community building, cooperation, communication, problem solving (Shuford, undated b, p. 1). Similarly, AVP Britain's Manual lists the *'themes'* or *'building blocks'* of AVP as being,

- affirmation and self esteem
- communication (including listening)
- generating trust
- building community
- solving problems
- managing conflict (AVP Britain, 2006, p. 35, 37).

And Sloane states that AVP *'targets four psychometric factors: self-esteem, locus of control (self-efficacy), interpersonal trust and anger'* (Sloane, 2003, 5) – yet another formulation of what AVP seeks to change.

The terms used by these authors are not dissimilar; the same issues and phrases reappear. While the language and emphasis vary, the focus has essentially been consistent. But those assessing a programme's effectiveness are faced with a challenge when the language to describe it is inconsistent. In the descriptions above it is sometimes unclear whether these are activities in themselves, the objectives or the expected outcomes of the overall programme. Evaluating success requires a clear idea of what a programme intends to achieve, and such clarity is still missing in much of the AVP literature.

However, some work has been undertaken to consolidate the terminology. Hackland in South Africa comes close to defining the aims, objectives and outcomes of AVP, stating that *'it seeks to offer trainees the opportunity to learn about different ways of dealing with violence and conflict'*, and is a programme that rests on the '*five pillars*' with associated outcomes:

Pillar	Outcomes
Affirmation	Increased self-worth
	Increased self-esteem
	Validation of self and others
	Releasing negative attitudes
Co-operation	Capacity for team work/working as a group
	Tolerance for diversity
	Awareness of needs, rights and concerns of others
	Respect for self and other
	Cooperative attitudes that avoid competitive conflict
Communication	Enhanced relationships with others
	Development of emotionally-centred assertive communication skills

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[2] These values read as aims or objectives, but it is notable that Walwarth does not use them as the objectives against which AVP's effectiveness in a Maryland prison are measured (see below).

	Development of interpersonal skills
Community-Building and Trust	Practice/application of pro-social attitudes within the group environment
	Establishment of a safe place for group members
	Sense of unity/oneness with the group
Transforming Power	Ability to transform conflict in a non-violent manner in a way that builds rather than harms the relationship

(Hackland 2007, p. 5, 17)

In the UK, the first and only major evaluation of AVP included a process of developing and agreeing expected outcomes with AVP Britain (Bitel *et al.*,1998). This was an inclusive and resource-intensive process, involving a ten-member team of AVP facilitators meeting ten times over the course of ten months, not including their visits to prisons for data collection. Bitel and his colleagues were clear that in order to undertake a reliable and valid evaluation, they needed a theory to form a hypothesis, and a set of outcomes against which to measure progress. In order to make the process participatory, they included AVP inmate participants in this process, by asking inmates to select which of eighteen pre-identified outcomes they felt the evaluation should focus on. This list of eighteen outcomes was thus narrowed down to ten, which were used as the focus of the evaluation.

selected outcomes	unused outcomes
develop conflict resolution skills of active listening, assertiveness, cooperation and empathy	have an opportunity to practice alternatives
recognise that they always have choices	use Transforming Power (power to change)
experience affirmation	increase awareness of causes of violence (fear, stereotyping, power, etc.)
explore their own role and responsibility in confrontational situations and see possible alternatives	be conscious that they have already used some alternatives to violence
develop and experience trust within a supportive community environment	develop insight into violent feelings
recognise other people's point of view	value diversity of opinion, experiences and background
understand the relationship between feelings and actions	set their own personal goals
improve their understanding of the skills and spirit for dealing productively with conflict inside and outside the prison systems	experience cooperation within a community environment during workshops
resolve familiar problems in a non-violent/non-destructive ways by changing patterns of behaviour	
have possible opportunities to become AVP trainers	

(Bitel *et al.*, 1998, p.52)

Notably, although they are not included in the AVP Britain Manual (2006), these same ten outcomes are used as the focus for AVP Britain's business case for work in HMP Shepton Mallet (Aubrey, 2007a).

A commitment to participation is commendable, particularly of those who are not regular participants in developing research processes. However, the extent to which this process was truly participatory is questionable, and prisoners themselves questioned how valuable it was to be asked to select from a list of options. (That said, later evaluation participation rates suggest that those involved in this round of outcome selection were more likely to participate in the evaluation itself, (1998, p.29)). More significantly for the evaluation findings, outcomes that were dropped in the sifting process – notably the use of Transforming Power – were reported not to be raised by evaluation interviewees. And while including prisoners in selecting which outcomes

should be considered in a particular evaluation may be beneficial, then neglecting the non-selected outcomes for future understandings and development of AVP's work is unnecessarily limiting.

It is suggested here that despite the confusion of language, AVP has more or less already expressed its aims, objectives and outcomes. At its core, AVP **aims** to do what its name suggests: it aims to enable people to develop *alternative* ways to address conflict without resorting *to* physical, mental or emotional *violence*.[3] AVP's **objectives** are found within the language of themes, pillars and values, and consist of improvements to affirmation, self-esteem, communication skills, building community, building trust and conflict resolution and management (AVP Britain, 2006, p. 35). Thereafter, using Bitel *et al.*'s eighteen original outcomes and those proposed by Hackland (2007), **outputs** and **outcomes**[4] can be aligned to these objectives. This provides the beginnings of a logical planning framework (logframe) with which to plan activities, monitor the effects and evaluate the impact of AVP workshops:

aim: To enable participants to develop alternative ways to address conflict without resorting to physical mental or emotional violence

objectives	activities	outputs	outcomes
to develop participants' self-esteem		• experience affirmation • recognise that they always have choices • be conscious that they have already used some alternatives to violence • set their own personal goals • have opportunities to become AVP trainers	• increased self-esteem • release negative attitudes
to develop participants' communication skills		• recognise other people's point of view • develop skills of active listening, assertiveness, cooperation and empathy	• enhanced relationships with others • development of emotionally-centred assertive communication skills • development of interpersonal skills
to develop participant's capacity for trust and cooperation		• develop and experience trust within a supportive community environment • experience cooperation within a community environment during workshops • establishment of a safe place for group members	• value diversity of opinion, experiences and background • awareness of needs, rights and concerns of others • development of cooperative attitudes that avoid competitive conflict • a sense of unity with the group • respect for self and other

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[3] Note that AVP rarely explicitly aims to reduce the measurable incidences of violence within any particular context, whether that is infractions of prison rules, reduction of (re)offending rates, or reduction in school violence. These may be impacts resulting in part from attendance at AVP workshops, but given that these are not AVP's aims, they are not ideal as foci for evaluation. Nevertheless, they have been evaluated with positive results, as discussed below.

[4] 'Outputs' are the direct results of the activities, and are usually within the direct control of those running the project. 'Outcomes' are changes that occur as an indirect result of the activity. Expected outcomes relate to the objectives that were in mind when the activity was planned.

objectives	activities	outputs	outcomes
			• capacity for team work/working as a group
to manage and resolve conflict non-violently		• increase awareness of causes of violence (fear, stereotyping, power, etc.) • develop insight into violent feelings • understand the relationship between feelings and actions • explore their own role and responsibility in confrontational situations • have an opportunity to practice alternatives • resolve familiar problems in a non-violent/non-destructive ways by changing patterns of behaviour	• ability to transform conflict in a non-violent manner in a way that builds rather than harms the relationship

This logframe is a work-in-progress and needs further refinement, but it allows one to see that, despite differences in language, the ways in which AVP have been described mean something very similar. Moreover, it demonstrates that the themes, pillars and values that form the basis of AVP can be formulated in a way that aids systematic planning, monitoring and evaluation.

2.2 Understanding Transforming Power

Bitel *et al.* mention the AVP *'jargon'* term, Transforming Power, explaining that it is a process of practicing alternatives to violence through experiential approaches. It does not require people to suppress behavioural patterns but to acknowledge their feelings, particularly anger, and connecting this with *'what is good and of value in themselves in order that they express their anger in a more constructive and non-violent way'* (1998, p.17). As with other aspects of AVP terminology, this is but one interpretation of the term.

The concept of 'Transforming Power' was originally an interpretation of a verse in the Bible, Romans 12:2:

> *Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will[5].*

It was developed by Larry Aspey, one of the founder facilitators of AVP in Greenhaven in 1975. Aspey and Eppler explain that,

> *'By this term we mean to include all techniques for resolving conflicts by the persistent communication of 'conscientious concerns; through loving and non-violent action. It involves a readiness to modify one's beliefs as further light may indicate; but until so modified, one must be prepared to suffer every sacrifice to maintain them without violence'* (2001, p. 1).

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[5] Taken from the New International Version – UK of the Bible,
http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans%2012:2;&version=64;

The term, as used in AVP, is a development of Gandhi's phrase *satyagraha*, 'adherence to truth', or 'non-violence'. 'Transforming power' is used to focus on the positive actions of transforming a situation for the better (ibid). Transforming Power, and indeed the whole of AVP, is presented as secular, but understandably some see in it spiritual undertones. For some this is beneficial; for others it *'sounds like magic, superstition, the supernatural'* (AVP Britain, 2006, p.17).

Shuford, previously chair of AVP in the USA who has written widely on AVP, explains Transforming Power as,

> *"that power in each of us to change our attitudes in such a way as to disarm hostility and lead opponents to settle their conflicts to the satisfaction of all parties'. It requires a belief that nonviolent solutions are possible, that there is something good, or of God, in every human being and that we must begin by understanding ourselves and changing our behavior and attitudes before we can effectively resolve conflict nonviolently'* (C, p.1).

It is notable that nowhere does the AVP Britain Manual provide a definition of *what is* Transforming Power. Its handouts for participants include 'Guides to Transforming Power', 'Help along the way', 'What it feels like' and 'Queries on the Use of Transforming Power' (2006, 140-1). Even the notes for facilitators list the responses at an AVP national gathering to the question, 'What does Transforming Power mean to me?'. Responses included,

> *'A source of strength/of love creating new possibilities'*
> *'It means changing situations by listening, learning and then being creative'*
> *'A sense of connection with another so we recognise our common humanity; we are one and the same'*
> *'Staying open – remaining optimistic' (ibid, p.17)*

Transforming Power is often introduced in workshops using the 'mandala', a circular depiction of key skills or traits that form part of or contribute to Transforming Power, namely,
  • expect the best
  • think before reacting
  • look for a non-violent way
  • respect for self
  • caring for others (AVP Britain, 2006, p.23)

Notably the language around what each of these phrases is (building blocks, segments, components) is equally vague. It is clear that Transforming Power means different things to different facilitators, and indeed facilitators are encouraged to introduce the concept using their own personal experience of Transforming Power in action.

In their evaluation of AVP in British prisons, Bitel *et al*. report on low levels of understanding of Transforming Power (1998, p.46). Their conclusion is questionable, given that the evaluation did not explicitly ask participants about their understanding of Transforming Power. But it is notable that most evaluations avoid focussing on participants' understanding of this core concept. Shipler Chico and Uwimana's work on AVP in Rwanda is a notable exception. Here Transforming Power was the aspect most frequently given in response to the question, *'What do you remember most about your AVP workshop?'* (2005, p.10).

Sloane suggests that one explanation for how AVP works is through developing the notion of power, and particularly in the concept of Transforming Power. He states that, *'the workshops*

aim specifically to install the idea that the inmates do have the ability to control their lives and influence their environments', which is particularly influential with inmates who do not see themselves as 'actors' given their background of abuse and victimisation (2002, p.21). But Transforming Power as a factor in the effectiveness of AVP workshops is under-researched.

Given the vagueness with which Transforming Power is described in the AVP Britain manual, it is unsurprising if participants do not fully grasp its meaning, or report on its use in practice in post-workshop evaluations. It is unclear that such lack of clarity is beneficial, or that the central concept – essentially of every individual's power to bring about change without using violence – is as complicated as the lack of definition implies. It is recommended that, in order to help participants and potential partners understand what Transforming Power is, AVP Britain develops (through consultation) an agreed definition of Transforming Power.

3. Is AVP effective?

Unsurprisingly, those heavily involved in programmes such as AVP say very positive things about the impact that such workshops have. Often their comments are supported by quotes from satisfied participants (Shuford, 2001, p.6-7), or from staff in prisons, as in the following commendations.

> *'I saw AVP facilitate a dramatic reduction in the number of assaults between inmates in what had been a difficult maximum security unit. As the program continued to run and 'graduate' more and more inmates, the overall climate improved to a point where the inmates were actually seeking out ways to positively affect their environment.'* Stan Taylor, Chief of the Bureau of Prisons in Delaware (Shuford, 2001, p.2)

> *'Your program has been a mainstay contributing to the lowering of violence in the Facility. Time and time again, we have witnessed the effectiveness of the Alternatives to Violence Project through changed behaviour of inmates, who might otherwise have committed violent acts which would have lengthened their period of incarceration. It is my sincere hope you are able to continue providing the Alternatives to Violence Project here at Eastern. We have no substitute program; we must rely on you and your staff for this vital support.'* Philip Coombe, Superintendent, Eastern Correctional Facility, New York. (Shuford, undated a, p. 1)

Such accolades, while impressive, are insufficient to rigorously assess the effectiveness of AVP workshops. Yet their sentiments are mirrored in almost all of the evaluations examined for this review, both qualitative and quantitative. Some of the evaluations are methodologically problematic, reflecting the difficulties involved in assessing impact of experiential learning programmes designed to bring about change in individuals.

3.1 AVP's impact on prison discipline and recidivism

A number of researchers have examined the extent to which AVP participation leads to improved conditions in and outside of prisons. These evaluations are largely quantitative and use psychological measures.

One particularly rigorous evaluation of AVP was undertaken by Sloane, examining outcomes from participation by inmates in the Delaware Department of Corrections (2002). Sloane critically

reviews previous research on recidivism[6] and educational programmes in prisons. In particular he notes that many studies make *'the great leap from correctional education to recidivism measurements'* without considering the many other external variables that affect whether or not someone re-offends (the ability to obtain employment, family support structures, access to mental health services, marriage stability, etc.) (2002, pp. 6-7). He also notes the scarcity of research on the effectiveness of social skills trainings in prisons, wondering whether this is because many of the programmes are provided by volunteers without official standing. Rather, *'prison systems seem to be preoccupied by concerns about education, not social skills, a curious paradox, since most prisoners are incarcerated for anti-social behaviour… not for being uneducated'* (ibid, p.8).

Sloane does not attempt to link AVP with reduced recidivism; instead he looks at more immediate changes in the prison environment. Randomly drawing a sample of 31 inmates from approximately 600 who participated in AVP workshops at least 12 months prior to the research, and using a control group of 37 inmates of the 125 or so who had volunteered for, but not yet attended, AVP workshops, Sloane examines the incidence of 'write-ups', or infractions of prison rules, in the preceding twelve months. As the control group had also volunteered for AVP workshops, he was controlling for self-selection bias; additionally all inmates assessed were serving sentences of over fifteen years for multiple offences of violent crimes. As he explains, *'the control and experimental groups were similar enough that before and after measurement for one group would be valid for another'* (p.9).

His results are striking. The control group had committed a mean of 4.35 (median 3) infractions, while the AVP participants group had committed a mean of 1.81 (median 1) infractions. Sloane further illustrates that AVP is effective for those under 40 years of age, but not significantly effective for older prisoners, and is more effective when the participants hold a high school diploma or above. After making some suggestions as to why the younger population is more susceptible to AVP-induced change, he notes that this is,

> *'the segment we would most want to help modify their behaviour, as they are most likely to be released at some point. Inmates who are in prison after the age of forty tend either to be habitual offenders or serving very long sentences. In either case they are less likely to be released'* (p. 13).

One limitation of Sloane's methodology is that he included all types of infractions, however serious, in his analysis. He argues that *'it is probably fair to assume that an inmate with an inability to follow prison rules would also be unable to follow societal rules in the outside world'* (p. 10). It could be argued, however, that a prisoner who breaks the rules by keeping a paper coffee cup in his room is following the AVP principles of self-esteem and speaking from a position of truth, in that – in the outside world – being denied the right to have a paper coffee cup in one's possession would be a denigration of rights and choices. This could therefore be seen as less a case of *inability* to follow rules than *unwillingness* to follow rules that seem unfair and illogical, in respect for one's own self-esteem. Moreover, prison rules and societal rules are very different things – the former being imposed, written down and not up for negotiation, the latter being learned and lived, unwritten and negotiable. This means that Sloane is evaluating something that AVP does not set out to achieve: the extent to which participants follow prison rules.

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[6] Recidivism is defined in Wikipedia as *'repeating an undesirable behaviour after they have either experienced negative consequences of that behaviour, or have been treated or trained to extinguish that behaviour'* (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Recidivism, retrieved 27 June 2007).

This questionable assumption aside, Sloane's research is a model of research rigour. It is somewhat unfortunate that the research that attempts to build on Sloane's findings does not heed his warnings about the need for consideration of external variables. In Miller and Shuford's 2005 study, recidivism statistics were developed for a random sample of 300 AVP participants from 1993-2001 at the Delaware Correction Centre (DCC). Three years after release, only 11.5 per cent of AVP participants had new felony convictions, only half of which were for violent offences. This group consistently outperformed 34 men who had been selected to form the control group of the Life Skills Program at DCC. Miller and Shuford argue that the difference between the groups *'on both cumulative recidivism and cumulative returns to prison for any reason are striking'*, and as a result suggest that *'AVP is effective in reducing recidivism'* (2005, p. 9). But despite quoting Sloane's 2002 study, the later study make no attempt to control for external variables which might impact on recidivism rates.

Two evaluations of AVP workshops in New Zealand were reviewed by Phillips (2002): Curreen's (1994) evaluation of the Basic Workshop at Auckland Prison East Division in October 2003, and Watts' (1998) evaluation of Basic Workshops in three New Zealand prisons. Curreen used a psychological measure (State-Trait Anger Expression Inventory) as well as a questionnaire that was delivered before and after the workshop. He found evidence of *'moderate changes in behaviour as an outcome of the workshop,'* as well as noting that participants spoke very highly of the programme, which was seen to be an achievement in itself (Phillips, 2002, p.8). Watts also used a questionnaire to measure violent attitudes and behaviour, and also incorporated a psychological assessment tool (Violent Incidents Scale). He did not find statistically significant evidence that AVP workshops had affected the number of violent incidents recorded, but did note other positive outcomes reported in questionnaire responses from staff and participants, including openness, sharing, conflict resolution and non-violent strategies. Phillips criticises both these evaluations for seemingly assuming that AVP is a self-contained anti-violence treatment programme, and therefore for evaluating AVP against aims that it does not set out to achieve.

While Curreen, Miller and Shuford and Sloane demonstrate that AVP workshops are effective in reducing anti-social behaviour in prisons, and at reducing re-offending and re-imprisonment rates, there is an inherent problem with such evaluations. While they demonstrate the value of AVP, they are not actually evaluating what AVP sets out to achieve. Although, as discussed above, defining AVP's aims in the language of objectives and outcomes is an ongoing task, what is clear is that it is focussed on providing individuals with alternatives to violence, through building skills in affirmation/self-esteem, communication skills, building community and trust and conflict resolution/management (AVP Britain, 2006, p. 35). These are areas of individual, personal development, and evaluating AVP's progress in achieving its aims must logically examine these areas.

3.2 AVP's impact on individuals

Walwrath's evaluation of AVP workshops in a medium-security state correctional facility in Maryland, USA used a study packet of four tools to measure anger (Spielberger et al.'s 1982 Anger Expression Scale), self-esteem (Rosenberg's 1965 Self-Esteem Scale), locus of control (Rotter's 1966 Locost of Control Inventory) and optimism (Scheier and Carver's 1985 Life Orientation Test), as well as assessing inmate behaviour through self-report. The study packet was given to AVP participants and a control group of inmates who had volunteered for, but not yet attended, AVP workshops, pre-AVP workshop and six months thereafter. A 40 per cent attrition rate left completed packets from 32 AVP participants and 24 non-AVP participants, but Walwrath states that reliable statistical analyses were still possible. Her findings show that AVP participants had significantly lower levels of expressed/experienced anger, and report

significantly lower rates of confrontations six months post-intervention, compared with the control group. She additionally found that all inmates had significantly lower self-esteem but a trend towards higher levels of optimism six months on (2001, p.707).

To explain these latter findings, Walwrath refers to other literature showing that, as time passes, inmates' perceptions of self worsen, but that this may represent a reduction in an over-inflated sense of self, a possibly positive change for aggressive groups. She suggests also that hope is a mechanism that carries inmates through their sentence, and suggests that an increase in optimism represents a learned coping strategy among inmates. Having pointed out the limitations of her research, Walwrath points to other literature demonstrating *'the difficulties associated with implementing appropriate interventions with incarcerated populations'*, and concludes that AVP *'did have a positive impact on participants'* (ibid, p.708-9). Given this impact, the high levels of violent recidivists, and the fact that AVP is implemented with little or no cost to the prison, Walwrath recommends that such interventions have *'potential worth considering'*.

Walwrath's research is rigorous, carefully designed, and provides research-based evidence to explain her results. It is also unusual among evaluations of AVP in being published in a professional journal, suggesting that it has also been peer-reviewed. Yet the evaluation methodology is not particularly sympathetic to the AVP approach, and the attrition rate of participants may be due to the literacy requirements of those participating in the evaluation. However, it does seek to measure aspects closer to the objectives of AVP rather than research looking only at infractions and recidivism.

Sloane, in his quest to understand why AVP is effective, undertook further research similar to that of Walwrath, into self-esteem, locus of control, interpersonal trust and anger. He developed a conceptual model, hypothesising that the treatment (AVP) improves self-esteem, self-efficacy and interpersonal trust, leading to a reduction in anger and hence improved behaviour (Sloane, 2003, p. 25). His focus on anger is prompted by *'ample evidence that reduced anger levels should result in reduced incidences of violence, hence the interest in determining whether or not AVP training reduces anger'* (ibid, p.15). Again controlling for self-selection in randomly selecting AVP participants and control group participants from those volunteered but not yet selected for AVP, and using recognised assessment measures (Spielberger's 1996 State-Trait Anger Expression Inventory (STAXI), Rosenberg's 1989 Self-Esteem Scale, Moe and Zeiss' 1982 Self-Efficacy Questionnaire for Social Skills (SEQSS) and Rotter's 1980 Interpersonal Trust Scale), Sloane like Walwrath required completion of questionnaires before and after AVP training. As he felt anger to be the most important dimension of the study, only inmates with completed STAXIs were included in the analysis, leaving 32 control group and 31 AVP participant cases from an initial 125 study cases.

Sloane's findings are that,

> *'neither self-esteem, self-efficacy, nor interpersonal trust is affected by AVP trainings, nor are any of these variables mediators between AVP and anger. AVP does not affect the total anger index score, but it does affect state anger and tendency to feel angry. The affect of AVP is direct and not mediated by any of the other variables'* (Sloane, 2003, p.29).

He seeks to explain these results by arguing that the sample size was too small to obtain an observed effect, and that because the study group contained more hardened criminals than those not included in the study, the effectiveness of AVP *'may be under-represented'* (ibid, p.33). He concludes somewhat optimistically that *'this study should offer encouragement that the*

training is effective, on at least one dimension. Additional research is called for' (ibid, p.35). Based on his previous work on AVP he clearly wanted to find a positive result and is disappointed that he did not.

An evaluation of AVP at HMYOI Glen Parva (Francis, 2005) also found a significant reduction in anger expression in a number of areas, although with caveats. Improvement was found in how often an individual experiences anger over time, and tendency to experience anger without provocation. An improvement was also found in the intensity of feeling in relation to verbal expression of anger, although this was not maintained three weeks later. Unfortunately only the executive summary of this evaluation was available for this literature review, so the methodological rigour cannot be fully assessed. But Francis concludes that the findings show *'significant impact and value of the AVP on institutional behaviour'*, and makes a number of recommendations to facilitate further workshops. This evaluation was undertaken by a member of HMYOI Glen Parva psychology department, which provides an interesting change from outside evaluations undertaken by researchers who are also AVP facilitators or persons unaligned with either prison or AVP.
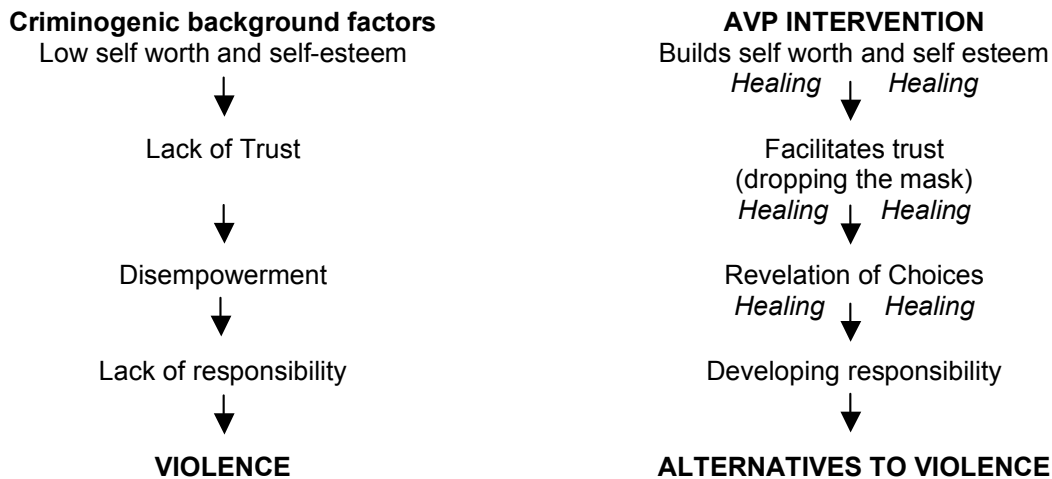
The studies discussed so far have all used quantitative analysis to assess the effectiveness of AVP, and have not all focussed on measuring outcomes that AVP aims to achieve. Other evaluations have approached the matter qualitatively, sometimes in an explicit move to mirror an AVP approach. Phillips suggests that, in order to address the competing interests behind many evaluations of social programmes, they should be based on the stated philosophy, aims and objectives of the programme under appraisal. This requires that,

> *'the evaluation method and criteria have to be consistent with the theoretical perspective of the social programme. This requires the researcher to clearly establish the underlying theoretical framework being utilised… This has not always been the case in previous studies of AVP'* (Phillips, 2002, p. 2)

He suggests that Curreen's study, undertaken by questionnaire and psychological assessment too, *'intruded on the dynamics of the workshop, compromising the integrity of the workshop programme and processes'* (ibid, p.8). In comparison to the Curreen and Watts evaluations, Phillips provides a more positive critique of an Australian study of AVP undertaken by Joy (1995) with sixteen participants in Long Bay, a maximum security prison in Sydney, New South Wales. Joy used a self-reporting questionnaire (The Way I See It, TWISI) designed in the USA for use by young people in evaluating a conflict resolution programme, as well as follow-up interviews on a monthly basis. She found that *'the group overall made significant changes in their attitude toward conflict [particularly] in the use of language as the preferred means to deal with conflict instead of fighting'* (Phillips, 2002, p.9). Additionally, her case notes illustrated *'substantial positive changes over a period of time,'* notable for being *'strikingly idiosyncratic'*, in that participants drew on AVP in different ways to make these changes, depending on their differing life circumstances (ibid, p.9-10). Such idiosyncrasy would appear to be appropriate, given that AVP aims to empower people to change their own lives, using their own experience to enable them to do so.

Taking a similar approach to Phillips, in the first and only major evaluation of AVP in the Britain, Bitel *et al.* argue that because reducing measurable variables such as reconviction rates and violent incidents are not the explicit aims of AVP, evaluating against such measures may be of interest to other parties, they are inappropriate (or even irrelevant) to the evaluation (1998, p.10). Bitel *et al.* refer extensively to other published literature, developing the case for an evaluation that is participatory, inclusive and responsive, seeing the evaluation process itself as

having the potential for being an *'agent of change'* (ibid, p.5). The authors examine what works in terms of prison interventions, and how to examine programme success. They conclude that effectiveness must be evaluated by measuring a programme's outcomes, and hence undertook a process of developing outcomes for AVP (as discussed above). They also conclude that it is necessary to construct a theory of *how* AVP works in order to assess *whether* it does, and thus developed the following model:

Criminogenic background factors	AVP INTERVENTION
Low self worth and self-esteem	Builds self worth and self esteem
	Healing ↓ *Healing*
↓	
Lack of Trust	Facilitates trust
	(dropping the mask)
	Healing ↓ *Healing*
↓	
Disempowerment	Revelation of Choices
	Healing ↓ *Healing*
↓	
Lack of responsibility	Developing responsibility
↓	↓
VIOLENCE	**ALTERNATIVES TO VIOLENCE**

(Bitel et al. 1998, p. 15; see also Moore, 2007, p. 26)

It is, however, unclear from the evaluation report how this model has been used in the evaluation, if at all, and how it helps to measure the effectiveness of the intervention. It seems to be an attempt to understand *why* AVP is effective, without an associated methodology to examine this. The authors themselves note that *'subsequent evaluations might want to structure the area of questioning to follow the theoretical progression towards alternatives to violence'* (p.40), although without providing a clear indication of why this particular model fits AVP.

Both Phillips and Bitel therefore both approached evaluation of AVP workshops in a manner that is sympathetic to the aims and style of the programme, and start their data-collection process from the identified objectives of AVP. Phillips points this out, stating that *'the principles of consultation, voluntarism, and privacy have been paramount in the implementation of this evaluation'* (p.18). Unfortunately, the research methods they then used to collect the data do not fully allow this approach to continue. Phillips analysed end-of-workshop evaluation sheets, and circulated a questionnaire. The results of the latter are largely provided quantitatively, and respond to questions about the 'helpfulness' of AVP (not a particularly accurate or defined measure). He does include six open-ended questions, whose aim is *'not to obtain an objective reality as seen by* other *people, but to obtain information on personal change for which* participants themselves *perceive AVP has been pivotal'* (p.17, original emphasis). However, where such qualitative data was collected, its analysis is limited, and comments are provided in somewhat anecdotal fashion. Additionally, where participants report changes, there was insufficient space for them to provide concrete examples of these changes.

However, Phillips' quantitative data, obtained from 146 returned questionnaires, show an impressively positive pattern of responses, across all questions, a distribution illustrated to good effect in his graphs. In his own words,

> *'94% of AVP workshop participants reported that their workshop experience has helped them to take steps toward living peacefully. A consistent feature of the results for each question requesting a rating was that the median (or middle ranked) response for helpfulness is 'almost always''* (Phillips, 2002, p.30).

That over two thirds of his respondents had completed more than just the basic workshop is notable, given that advanced and training-for-facilitator workshops are fewer. This may indicate that people who had just attended a basic workshop were less impressed and hence less interested in putting energy into completing a questionnaire, or that participation in a series of workshops has greater impact than a one-off dose of AVP. But these are simply conjectures. Phillips himself notes that a more positive response from this group is understandable, given a greater understanding of the material.

Phillips argues that respondents' written responses

> *'very clearly show the importance respondents have placed on* experience *as a way of* understanding *how to act and find alternatives to violence. This clearly supports the value that AVP workshops have placed on this mode of learning'* (p.31, original emphasis).

He argues that his results indicate that AVP does have the potential to make a *'considerable impact'* on the issues that Bitel *et al.* (1998) see as criminogenic background factors, and that the responses around respectfulness, building community and responsibility for behaviour demonstrate that AVP workshops would positively contribute to programmes facilitating inmates returning to the community.

Bitel and his colleagues used rather more open ended questions than Phillips, using volunteer researchers drawn from the pool of AVP facilitators to carry out interviews. The questions are framed around the ten outcomes selected for evaluation, and at times are a little leading (for example, *'Do you think that different people can have different points of view?'* (1998, p.26)). The analysis was said to be thematic, leading to conclusions such as *'AVP is successful in helping participants develop a broader understanding of violence'* because 65 per cent of respondents said that violence was more than just physical (*ibid*, p. i, 30). It is not really possible to tell how much these changes are reflected in practice, although occasionally examples are given. It is the kind of evaluation that may be usefully reflected on to change practice in the prisons concerned. For example, given that only 43 per cent of respondents understood that feelings and actions were connected, with the same number stating there was no relationship between the two (p.37), facilitators may be advised to adapt future workshop agendas to focus more on this relationship. It is unclear whether the evaluation report was used in this way.

The authors conclude that, *'the findings from this evaluation show that AVP has much to be proud of with its work in prisons in Britain'*, and that AVP was *'highly successful'* in achieving six of the ten prioritised outcomes. In only one area was it felt that AVP had achieved low success: *'improve their understanding of the skills and spirit for dealing productively with conflict inside and outside the prison system'*. While, as the authors indicate, this is possibly the most difficult outcome to achieve, it is also one of the most important, in being linked closely to the overall aim of AVP. Indeed it could be argued that what Bitel *et al.* consider to be outcomes are rather *outputs*, that is, the direct results of the activities. Outcomes require further action on the part of the participants after the workshop, and it is in achieving these that AVP can be shown to effect behavioural change. It is suggested that AVP Britain develop the planning framework begun

above that takes into account these differences, to enable better monitoring and evaluation of the differing levels of change.

Others have attempted qualitative evaluations to record the impact of AVP workshops. An anonymous *'qualitative evaluation'* of the an AVP workshop in HMPYOI and RC Glen Parva undertaken in 2006 is fairly negative about the impact of the workshop, with questions around the value of the workshop receiving average ratings of between 2.58 and 3.5 out of 5, and a considerable number of criticisms about the facilitators and superficiality of the course. Many of the aspects liked were the social aspects (perhaps unsurprisingly), and interviews with two participants who received adjudications for fighting and disobeying lawful orders shortly after the workshops. Their comments in interview were notably rather violent. Unfortunately, the evaluation is of a very basic nature, based simply questionnaire responses which are listed rather than analysed. The report only covers end-of-workshop responses rather than any longer term assessment of impact. While there is certainly validity in reporting aspects of workshops that did not work well (indeed it would be preferable if more evaluation reports did just this), this evaluation is not of high methodological quality, thus jeopardising its value. It also contradicts the findings of a more rigorous quantitative evaluation of AVP in Glen Parva undertaken the previous year (Francis, 2005, discussed above).

An evaluation of AVP London's facilitator training programme also attempts a qualitative approach, using a questionnaire and telephone interviews to gather data (Chinoya Mudari, 2000). However both research instruments are short, and do not allow space for development of ideas. Questions were asked around expectations, best and worst things about each workshop. These questions and the resulting analysis are not themed, with the result that responses are provided in a short list, rather than a rounded view of different aspects of the course. Notably this evaluation is critical of several points of the programme, including the difference between the AVP London facilitator training and that experienced by other facilitators in Britain; 'non-AVP' agendas, and a lack of understanding of the ethos of AVP London. It is unclear from the way the data is presented whether these present concerns of the majority of participants, or are of concern to individuals only.

The problem with quantifying qualitative data, as many of the above mentioned evaluations do, is that the analysis provides the worst of both worlds. The data are not examined for statistically significant outcomes, and therefore the analysis is insufficiently rigorous to prove that something is effective. On the other hand, the analysis is usually not around themes or providing the depth of description to understand why something works. Despite good intentions, both Bitel *et al.* (1998) and Phillips (2002) fall into this trap, listing the numbers or percentage of respondents who gave particular responses.

A more successful evaluation is that of the seven workshops run for over a thousand Gacaca court judges in Rwanda. The participants had the responsibility of deciding on lower-level cases related to the genocide of 1994. AVP workshops were thus firmly located in the context of moving on from horrendous national violence. The evaluators interviewed 37 judges, government leaders, AVP facilitators and community members, and found responses were, *'without exception, glowingly positive'* (Shipler Chico and Uwimana, 2005, p.4). They sought to get beneath this praise to understand why AVP was effective, using a range of methods to gather data, including interviews of between one and ten people, pre- and post-workshop verbal surveys, and observations of AVP workshops. Their report is written around the themes that arose from the data, and they assert that *'after twenty-five interviews we had reached a saturation point, where the same themes were repeated without significantly new themes emerging'* (p. 9). They thus feel their results to be reliable and comprehensive.

Shipler Chico and Uwimana report that respondents reacted positively to the unusual approach of AVP, stimulating learning not only on an intellectual level but also emotionally, spiritually and even physically. It is interesting that certain exercises (particularly the tree of violence), had great resonance with the Rwandan participants. Notably the concept of Transforming Power was cited in almost every interview, possibly relating to what the authors see as a deep belief in the power of transformation (ibid, p.10,15). Certain aspects of the workshops were challenging, including the push for equality in a hierarchical society, and the adjectival name exercise that fitted neither the local language Kinyarwanda, nor the tremendous cultural importance of names. But while recognising the cultural specificity of AVP, the authors report extensive support for spreading AVP widely within AVP and beyond. The title, '*peace cannot stay in small spaces,*' reflects this.

Hackland's recent and extensive evaluation of AVP in a South African prison takes the qualitative approach further. In developing the evaluation framework she draws on the five pillars of AVP (affirmation, cooperation, communication, community building and trust and transforming power), along with associated expected outcomes (p.17), but also a model of 'tracking footprints, changing streams'. She uses a wide range of qualitative tools to gather data, including a personal questionnaire, anonymous violence survey, essays and written reflections, projective drawings, and focus groups and interviews with participants and staff (p.22). While the number of evaluation participants decreased over time, this reduction mirrors the decreasing numbers participating in each step of the AVP process (as, for various reasons, some participants did not continue on to later stages of the process) and she is able to continue to interact with the participants as a group.

Hackland's study has problematic methodological flaws. In its literature review and academic discussion of concepts of violence it relies on very few items, without indicating why these books were chosen as the focus. As a result the review is sketchy, concluding that treatment dosage, treatment integrity, who facilitates the programme, programme content and alignment to the needs of the target population are important factors in effective prison interventions (p.11); telling us little that could not be guessed ourselves. While the qualitative analysis it claims to draw on data from multiple sources, it does not specify which data derives from which source. Hackland also highlights the proximity of the intervention to the timing of the parole board, indicating the potential existence of 'other agendas' than self-development for inmates volunteering for AVP and evaluation participation.

These problems aside, Hackland's research is particularly valuable in following a group of participants through all stages of an AVP programme, beginning with a baseline study and returning to the group after basic and advanced workshops, and following their experience as facilitators themselves, having been trained in this skill also. As a result Hackland is able to chart the changes both in individuals and in the group as a whole, and to identify how the changes between workshops differ. Hers is the only study to do this (despite Phillip's (2002) claims to have obtained data from participants at a range of levels, he does not disaggregate their responses, thus making this claim somewhat meaningless). She also reports on her own observations of the group during their discussions, and provides considerable helpful contextual information about violence in the correction centre and other influences on inmates' lives. For example, offenders can have less than 1m² to themselves (p.15), and despite (in a group) claiming that little violence occurred in the facility, questionnaire data showed 47.2 per cent of inmates feeling scared, and 60 per cent having experienced violent interactions in the prison (p.30). She also highlights (participants' views on) the aggressive or violent behaviours of prison staff, which did not encourage alternative behaviour among inmates.
Her executive summary is worth quoting at length:

'During the basic course participants bought into an alternative way of conceptualising not only violence but themselves and their relationships as well. The advanced course allowed for consolidation of the gains achieved in the basic course and provided greater impetus for change in the realm of interpersonal interactions. The training for facilitators and the assumption of the role of facilitator provided not only skills and knowledge but also a boost to self-esteem, and enabled the practice of new ways of engaging with others, and becoming change agents within the facility. Staff reports corroborated these changes' (Hackland, 2007, pp.5-6).

Her study includes interesting insights into shifts in how participants perceive violence, from a somewhat glamorous and extreme violence, to violence being controllable and not inevitable (p.38), to – after the advanced workshop – losing control being accompanied, for some, by a sense of *'having let one's self down'* (p.48). Finally, they started to see themselves as potential change agents within the prison, with their responsibility as facilitators to model non-violence strengthening their own view of its importance (p.54). This lead to a real change in behaviour, as described by one inmate:

"Interaction with the people in the prison courtyard has changed. I now have a number of guys who meet with me and chat with me wanting to know what is AVP and what are the benefits…I try to apply AVP concepts and show them the alternate ways of living without any violent conduct" (p.56).

Other shifts identified include the move from a collection of individuals who mock or laugh at one another's vulnerabilities to maintain distance (p.34), to *'radically different'* after the first workshop, *'more open and engaged and certainly more at ease'* , validating rather than mocking one another (p.40-1). Offenders also changed from seeing themselves as worthy of love and respect by virtue of being human while requiring others to show respect before reciprocating (p.35), to seeing all people as worthy of respect (p.50). Hackland records a shift in communication skills, to following on from the previous speaker rather than just speaking their minds – an illustrative example of a skill developed in a way rarely illustrated in these evaluations (p.50). And she concludes that *'becoming a facilitator of AVP has enormous benefits for offenders'* in terms of self-esteem gains and interpersonal outcomes, thus illustrating the narrowness of studies that focus only on measuring reduced infraction rates.

She reports on difficult emotion and discomfort during focus group discussions, indicating that the evaluation methodologies mirror both the themes and the difficulties that participants experience during AVP workshops. This is a rare hint at the fact that, while outcomes are often reported positively, the experience of undertaking AVP can be (perhaps necessarily is) uncomfortable and challenging. Hackland records that the new facilitators found sharing their new belief in violence not being necessary with other offenders *'rather daunting'* (p.53). However, she suggests that the AVP experience facilitates a *'therapy readiness'* (p.65) among participants who might previously have attended only in order to pass the parole board. Seemingly AVP enables participants to face personal mental discomfort.

4. Why does AVP work?

Given the considerable, some might say remarkable, amount of evidence of positive changes brought about by AVP workshop attendance, unsurprisingly some have questioned how it achieves these results. Research specifically on why AVP works is not as developed as evaluations indicating that it does, though a wider examination of literature on experiential learning and life skills programmes may provide more theoretical and evidence-based answers.

The insights provided here are on occasion speculative, but they do provide pointers that further research might follow.

Sloane (2002) follows his quantitative research with an attempt to understand *why* AVP *'had a noticeable effect on the participants'*, despite that fact that 50% of both the control and experimental group will never leave prison. He interviews seven prisoners with no near-term chance of release (to avoid bias from those with a potential ulterior motive, to obtain parole). He explicitly states that he does not wish to generalise from this small sample, but provides some suggestions as to the reason AVP is successful. He notes that all his interviewees had experienced physically and sexual abuse as children, and *'simply did not have a normal childhood development'*, meaning that these AVP participants start from a position of deficient social skills. He suggests that *'AVP may provide the first opportunity for many of its participants to see pro-social behaviours in practice'* (p.17). In this context, he highlights the significance of AVP in providing space and skills for inmates to communicate and trust one another. *'The notion that they can trust someone else is, for most, a totally new concept'*. Sloane sees this development of affective trust as the basis upon which other pro-social skills are developed, including a development of self-esteem and hence begin to see themselves as more equal and more in control of their situations. AVP workshops provide them with a safe environment in which they receive positive feedback showing that conflict-resolving techniques can work in practice.

Hoppe, the Chief Psychologist at Deuel Vocational Institution, reports on an Outcome Study evaluating Creative Conflict Resolution (CCR), a three-day group workshop aimed to facilitate a re-orientation of violent offenders toward a more non-violent adjustment while in prison. CCR was adapted from AVP, and seems to closely follow the AVP model. Sixty-four known violent offenders were pre-tested, participated in CCR, and then post-tested, rating their agreement with twenty violent statements. Their statements were compared with those of a control group of thirty non-inmate recovering alcoholics, and resulting data was tested using the Kruskall-Wallis test, and *'found to contain highly significant differences'*. Pre-test ratings differed significantly from post-test and control group ratings, and the post-test and control group ratings did not differ significantly. Hoppe concludes that *'the CCR workshop was effective in facilitating a significant shift toward non-violent attitudes'* (p.1).

While using a non-prison control group is questionable, Hoppe does provide some interesting suggestions as to why AVP-type workshops work so fast with violence-prone individuals who have developed maladaptive personality traits early in life and been persistently violent since their teens. He states that research has shown that around their mid-thirties, *'about half of these psychopathic offenders become dissatisfied with their life styles'*, although he does not provide references for this research. Hoppe argues that anti-social people do not experience 'dissonance' between their mental concepts and the experience of violence, whereas *'a socially mature person is non-violent because a hostile urge causes so much dissonance that violence is unthinkable'* (p.3). He argues that while traditional counselling or psychotherapy approach dissonance reduction very slowly, unreliably and without cost benefits, *'the CCR model creates dissonance in a socially immature participant, and then experientially guides him to a more mature resolution of the situation. This can happen in minutes.'* He concludes that this shift of attitude will occur in 35 to 45 per cent of participants, and will not be as successful in more psychopathic participants, but is a *'reliable and valid remedial intervention for some violent offenders'* (p.5).

Shuford has a slightly different explanation for why AVP works, less directly grounded in research evidence but following a similar approach to Sloane and Hoppe. Shuford argues that

the USA education system fails to consider the interdependence of the left and right sides of our brains, and as a result young people become *'disaffected and emotionally illiterate'* (A, p.1). He asserts that AVP workshops contain the elements necessary to bring together the survival-focussed right, and rationality and verbal communication-focussed left brain. This combination of types of activity – taking into account that individuals learn in different ways – enables a *'paradigm shift' to* occur in AVP workshops, enabling people to see situations in entirely different ways. '*It is like a light bulb turns on in their heads and illuminates areas inaccessible before due to darkness. Once this happens, everything changes.'* (Shuford B, p.3) He goes on to provide examples of the significant changes that participants report in themselves. Walwrath's work in South Africa confirms this change. She reports *'a noticeable finding'* of her evaluation being *'the repeating theme of adopting a new perspective and seeing things in a different way from what had become routine and unquestioned'* (2007, p.59).

Several authors have noted, and sought to explain, the speed at which change occurs in or as a result of AVP workshops. Sloane notes that the rates and degree of behavioural change within the workshops is high, despite the workshops only lasting two or three days. He argues that this is not particularly surprising, as the shift from anti-social to pro-social behaviours does not develop linearly, but reaches a 'tipping point', which occurs when a certain level of affective trust is reached in the group.

> *'The tipping point is characterised by a noticeable change in level of interaction, increased communication and behaviours that suggested increased levels of intra-group trust and comfort (e.g. laughing, conversation level, handshaking, story exchanges). Past the tipping point, development of trust, social skills and other-regarding behaviour accelerate quickly'* (p. 21).

In a similar vein, Hoppe states that, *'the ability of [such workshops] to produce the shift in attitudes towards non-violence so quickly is unremarkable when explained as an instance of the induction and reduction of cognitive dissonance'* (p.5). Moreover, he asserts that willingness to participate is not essential, as *'a reluctant participant experiences dissonance reduction just as does a willing participant'*, and that this involves the realignment of mental concepts, but *'may not involve significant subjective distress'* (p.6).

This issue of the non-essential voluntarism is mirrored in the evaluation of Experiential Conflict Resolution and Team Building trainings, adapted from the AVP model and provided to 65 per cent of the staff of the Philadelphia Prison System. A six-month follow up evaluation showed that 71 per cent of staff were using new skills with inmates, 84 per cent with co-workers and 87 per cent with family and friends, despite the majority (an estimated 75 per cent) being originally unwilling to attend the training. In addition to beneficial approaches to listening and problem solving, Shuford and Spencer report on improvements in morale and cross-disciplinary interaction (1999).

A central theme to Shipler Chico and Uwimana's analysis is that of rebuilding after the genocide. They state that, *'In Rwanda, truth is a keystone to healing'* (p.11) and highlight the vital role the AVP participants-as-Gacaca-judges have in discerning the truth. AVP's approach to listening and consultation, looking for the reasons behind violence and seeking good in others all were seen to help participants in developing skills to do their job better. Many also reported on impacts on community conflicts – where they stepped in as third parties – and in reducing violence at home, as AVP had become *'a quiet and unassuming advocate for women and children's rights'* (p. 4).

The Rwandan evaluation includes multiple quotations from participants; it is written around the stories that people told the researchers. As such it will not satisfy readers who seek statistical evidence of AVP's effectiveness. But the combination of anecdote with reference to the key themes emerging, and the context in which they emerge helps deepen understanding as to why AVP has played the role it has. For example, a reference to AVP encouraging people to take responsibility, as well as the challenge that AVP provides to hierarchy, leads to a comment about a cultural inclination to believe authority, rely on top-down decision-making and obey orders, *'literally fractured peoples' consciences, so that responsibility for the acts of violence always lay elsewhere'* (p.19). Given the overwhelmingly positive reports about AVP, this methodological approach helps to understand why, in a particular cultural context, AVP is effective.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this review has found considerable evidence for the effectiveness of AVP in bringing about change in relation to violence. This evidence is found in both quantitative and qualitative studies. While some of the quantitative evaluations demonstrate particular rigour, they measure outcomes that AVP does not explicitly set out to achieve. Sloane (2002) and Miller and Shuford (2005) demonstrate improvements in prison infraction rates and post-release recidivism. A number of reports show significant improvements in relation to anger (Francis 2005, Sloane 2003, Walwrath 2001). Sloane (2002, 2003) and Walwrath (2001) both point to the financial benefits of AVP, in terms of the cost of running prisons, the desirability of reducing recidivism and infractions in prison, and the minimal cost to prisons of allowing AVP workshops to be run.

Many of the qualitative evaluations report generally positive outcomes for participants in several areas, including self-esteem and non-violent approaches to conflict. Of these evaluations, several are based on questionnaire returns and non-thematic analysis, which limit their usefulness in understanding why AVP is effective. Statistical analyses of these data by non-professionals do not lend rigour to the field. Three evaluations report limited or negative outcomes from AVP workshops (anonymous 2006, Chinoya Mudari 2000, Sloane 2003). For two of these reports, the lack of rigour in the methodology limits the impact of the findings.

Most of the evaluations examined in this review refer to AVP workshops in prisons. This is perhaps unsurprising given that these institutions have a literally captive population to work with, as well as a host institution that requires evidence of effectiveness. All but Chinoya Mudari (2000), Hackland (2007) and Phillips (2002) focus primarily on basic level workshops. Only Hackland (2007) illustrates (and illustrates convincingly) the value of attending successive steps of the AVP programme.

There is, as ever, further research that may be undertaken. For those evaluating AVP in the future, it is suggested that a mixture of assessment techniques would provide the most comprehensive information. Quantitative research using psychological measures, beginning with a baseline study prior to the provision of AVP workshops and using an appropriate control group, would increase the evidence base as to whether AVP is effective. But in order to understand how and why AVP is effective, in-depth qualitative research is likely to provide the best results, particularly if it is undertaken over an extended period of time. Additionally, qualitative research of this sort uses a methodology more in tune with the spirit of AVP. Evaluations that attempt to bridge these approaches – using questionnaires to ask semi-open questions, with a basic statistical analysis of the data – are less convincing in their evidence of either effectiveness or reasons for effectiveness.

As this review has shown, internationally there is an evidence base for AVP effectiveness in prisons. But as there exist few evaluations of AVP workshops in community settings, and none to date that look at specialised circumstances, including as workshops run for mental health organisations (such as MIND) or for young people, this is an area worthy of further investigation.

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