

# **EXPLORING INFORMATION BEHAVIOUR IN THE SMALL WORLD CONTEXT**

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## Declaration

This dissertation is submitted in part fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of MSc of the University of Strathclyde.

I declare that this dissertation embodies the results of my own work and that it has been composed by myself. Following normal academic conventions, I have made due acknowledgement to the work of others.

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this study is to provide us with a better understanding of the information behaviours of those living in the small world context. One group which was felt to offer the ideal small-world population for this research was prisoners and, with earlier research suggesting that the small world of the prison has a negative impact on the information behaviour of prisoners (Chatman 1999), another aim of this study was to determine the extent to which prisoners are living in information poverty in modern times.

This study attempts to identify the information needs, factors influencing engagement with information sources and any barriers to information seeking in the prison environment. In response to the minimal indicative literature on this topic, this study was intended to be exploratory in approach. Therefore, in order to gather rich qualitative data, interviews were conducted with twelve prisoners who attend education classes in the Learning Centre at HMP Shotts, followed by a series of interviews with education staff to triangulate data and incorporate another perspective.

It was discovered that prisoners experience a complex range of interwoven emotional and coping needs related to the prison environment and respond to these through various self-protective measures, such as secrecy, deception and risk-taking; previously identified as signs of information poverty (Chatman 1996). Prisoners actively sought information with a clear preference for interpersonal sources, such as teachers, family and other prisoners, often selected for their trustworthiness or pragmatic reasons. A variety of barriers to information seeking were identified, including expected practical access barriers, along with more significant cognitive and affective barriers such as distrust, low self-esteem and fear of stigma or prejudice.

In conclusion, although most prisoners felt confident of their information seeking abilities, they exhibited clear signs of living in information-impoverished circumstances. The small world of the prison was characterised by an atmosphere of distrust that, when coupled with extensive monitoring and feelings of low self-esteem, results in a sense of isolation and helplessness among prisoners who are consequentially unable to address their information needs.

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# **Chapter 1: Introduction**

## **1.1 Chapter overview**

This chapter provides an overview of the nature of this study, including the problem statement (section 1.2) and research context (section 1.3), following by an outline of the aims and objectives (section 1.4), research questions (section 1.5) and methodological design (section 1.6). Finally, the anticipated research deliverables (section 1.7) and learning outcomes (section 1.8) are presented.

## **1.2 Problem statement**

Britz (2004) describes information poverty as,

That situation in which individuals and communities, within a given context, do not have the requisite skills, abilities or material means to obtain efficient access to information, interpret it and apply it appropriately (Britz 2004, p.194).

Related small world concepts describe the common characteristics of individuals living in information-impooverished circumstances; such as secrecy, deception, risk-taking and situational relevance (Chatman 1996). While information poverty is recognised and often highlighted as of significant societal concern (Facer & Furlong 2010; Trauth & Howcroft 2006; Chatman 1996), it is a relatively understudied area within information behaviour (Buchanan & Tuckerman 2016), with arguably few studies involving participants who might be deemed as living in small worlds. Prison was identified as a suitable environment for this study, which also provided opportunity to further explore findings and propositions put forward by Chatman (1999) in an earlier study.

For any individual, imprisonment is a life-changing experience. There are many challenges prisoners face when trying to come to terms with their new environment and this small world often results in high levels of anxiety (Chatman 1999). There have been few studies of information behaviour in the prison context to date (Rafedzi & Abrizah 2014; Campbell 2005; Akerstrom 1987; Chatman 1999; Burt 1977) and while findings from these can be used to guide and inform the current study to a certain extent, the various limitations of each study warrant the need for further research.

Examining the information behaviours of prisoners from a small world context recognises that this group may experience greater uncertainty and anxiety when trying to address their information

needs as they have access to a limited number of information sources (Chatman 1999), and through exploration of relevant theoretical frameworks (Chatman 1999, 1996; Wilson 1996; Kuhlthau 1991), offers an opportunity to better understand how the small world of the prison environment contributes towards information poverty in this context.

This study aims to provide insight into the information behaviour of prisoners; their needs, preferred sources of information, and barriers they experience when seeking information; by conducting a series of qualitative interviews with a small group of prisoners who attend education classes, followed by a focus group with prison staff. This study also aims to explore the ongoing validity of existing propositions relating to small world and information poverty theory (Chatman 1999, 1996) and seeks to provide a greater understanding of how small worlds influence information behaviour in order to subsequently identify appropriate assistive intervention strategies and services.

### **1.3 Research context**

In a study by the World Prison Brief, Scotland ranked 15th out of 39 countries for prisoner population per 100,000 of the national population (Scottish Government 2015, p.11). During 2014-2015, most of the prison population consisted of sentenced adult males and the average cost per prisoner place was a substantial £34,102 (Scottish Prison Service 2015a, p.9). With population figures predicted to remain steady over the coming years (Scottish Government 2015, p.4), it is unlikely that this demographic and cost will change dramatically, meaning that research into this group will be of particular interest.

The Scottish Prison Service (SPS) runs a total of fifteen prisons; thirteen of which are publically run including HMP Shotts which is a maximum security prison catering to long term adult male prisoners (Scottish Prison Service 2016b). The SPS website states that its key purpose is to “provide a secure, safe, caring and productive environment, while providing opportunities for offenders to come to terms with their sentences and address their offending behaviour” (Scottish Prison Service 2016c). One of these opportunities is the option to attend educational classes in the Learning Centre, with subjects ranging from basic numeracy and literacy, to secondary level education, right up to university level (InsideTime 2014).

This research aligns with recommendations put forth in SPS’s Organisational Review (2013), which stated that in an effort to encourage desistance, they would aim to provide “improved information and education for offenders” (Scottish Prison Service 2013, p.58) but without greater understanding

of prisoner interaction with these services, it is difficult to identify how they can be improved. The researcher has experience of working with prisoners and a key motivation in the conception of this study was the desire to improve information services offered by prisons and therefore, one outcome of this study will be a set of recommendations which will help inform SPS on how to tailor information services to ensure the information needs of prisoners are met.

#### **1.4 Research aim and objectives**

The research aims to explore information behaviour in the small world context through an investigation of the information behaviours of prisoners.

In order to achieve this, a number of research objectives were identified:

- This study seeks to advance our understanding of the information behaviours in the small world context through a qualitative analysis of the information needs, seeking preferences of prisoners and challenges they face in the prison environment.
- To identify factors influencing engagement with prison information services and resources, and the appropriate assistive intervention points and methods.
- To find out what measures can be put in place by the prison service to support the information needs of prisoners.

#### **1.5 Research questions**

This study will address the following research questions;

1. What information needs do prisoners have?
2. What information behaviours do prisoners demonstrate when trying to fulfil these information needs?
3. What problems do prisoners encounter when trying to fulfil these information needs?
4. What interventions or services are necessary to help prisoners overcome these problems?

The research questions were developed to best address the research objectives and will help guide all aspects of the research design, ensuring a consistent research focus throughout.

## **1.6 Methodology**

In order to gather data on a topic with minimal indicative literature, this research incorporates a cross-sectional survey design, consisting of a series of qualitative interviews with a purposive sample of twelve adult male prisoners who regularly attend education classes. Focusing on this specific group of prisoners will enable the researcher to investigate small world theory at a granular level. Interviews with prisoners will be conducted over a span of 2-3 weeks and following this, results will be triangulated with data from a focus group with staff from the same institution.

The design also incorporates case study elements due to the fact that the participants are housed at a single institution, HMP Shotts, and with Scottish prisons varying greatly in terms of modernity, aesthetic design, security level and capacity (Scottish Prison Service 2016b), it is likely that conducting research on prisoners from this institution only, will yield results which are representative of the prisoner-type residing there, limiting the generalisability of the results and this will be considered during the analysis of data and the conclusions drawn from this study.

The theoretical framework of this study incorporates Chatman's (1999) small world theory as outlined in her study of 'Life in the Round' and information poverty theory outlined in her (1996) 'The Impoverished Life-World of Outsiders'. This interdisciplinary framework will also draw upon elements of Wilson's (1996) 'Model of Information Behaviour' focusing on the intervening variables which might affect a prisoner's ability to address information needs, and Kuhlthau's (1991) 'Information Search Process Model', focusing on the cognitive and emotional aspects of information behaviour exhibited by prisoners.

## **1.7 Research Deliverables**

This aim of this study is to produce the following deliverables:

- To expand upon existing information behaviour theory in the small world context.
- To assess the ongoing reliability and replicability of Chatman's theory of 'Life in the Round' and 'Information Poverty' in the prison context.
- To offer a set of recommendations to SPS on how to best tailor information services available to the prison population, thereby better meeting the information needs of prisoners.

## **1.8 Learning Outcomes**

During the course of this study, the researcher aims to obtain a deeper understanding of information behaviour theory, acquire and develop interviewing skills, and learn how to deal with the challenges of conducting research in a restrictive environment.

## **1.9 Chapter summary**

This introductory chapter offers an overview of an important and understudied area in information behaviour theory. It describes the overall purpose and expected outcomes of this study. The lack of indicative literature on information behaviour studies regarding prisoners is highlighted, as is the extent to which this study can further our knowledge in the field of information behaviour and small world theory, whilst also validating the ongoing relevance of existing theory in this field.

A group of prisoners who attend education classes in prison are identified as being an ideal sample for this study as they represent a group of individuals living in the small world context. Key facts and figures regarding this small group are also presented, helping to justify the importance of research into this particular demographic group and to offer background context.

A planned methodology is also provided to illustrate how a series of interviews with prisoners, followed by a focus group with education staff will be carried out in order to address the research aim and objectives provided. Finally, a set of deliverables are listed to demonstrate the predicted tangible results of this research, including expansion of existing theory and the formulation of recommendations to the prison service, along with the researcher's anticipated learning outcomes.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **2.1 Chapter overview**

This chapter covers the key concepts relating to information behaviour (section 2.2), followed by an overview of theoretical models relevant to this study (section 2.3). Our current state of knowledge concerning the information behaviours of prisoners is discussed in detail (section 2.4), with an emphasis on identifying research gaps and how the current study will attempt to address these.

### **2.2 Information behaviour**

Case & Given (2016) give the following definition of information behaviour,

Information behaviour encompasses information seeking as well as the totality of other unintentional or serendipitous behaviours (such as glimpsing or encountering information), as well as purposive behaviours that do not involve seeking, such as actively avoiding information. The term also included the broader context of how individuals "deal with" information in their lives, so accounts for situation, time, affect, culture, geography, and other contextual elements in understanding people's information behaviour (Case & Given 2016, p.6).

In order to fully appreciate the broad applicability of this term and to carry out any research in the field of information behaviour, it is first necessary to gain a firm understanding of key concepts and these are discussed below.

#### ***Information***

Case & Given (2016) define information as "any difference you perceive, in your environment or within yourself" (p.6), highlighting the problematic task of defining information due to the vast expanse of meaning and form that it can take; news on the television, scientific data in a report, or simply hearing about what friends or family have been up to (Case & Given 2016; Ford 2015; Wilson 2000). For the purposes of the current study, information will be assumed to be anything used by the prisoners to address their information needs; whether verbal advice from other prisoners, printed text from health or education leaflets, or even observing the interactions of others through sight; anything which causes them to perceive themselves or their environment differently and informs subsequent behaviours.

## ***Information Needs***

Simply put, information needs are “the motivations people think and feel to seek information” (Cole 2012, p.3) and Taylor (1962) states that there are four types of information needs,

- The ‘visceral’ need - the actual, but unexpressed, need for information
  - The ‘conscious’ need - the conscious within-brain description of the need
  - The ‘formalized’ need - the formal statement of the question
  - The ‘compromised’ need - the question as presented to the information system
- (Taylor 1962, p.392)

Information needs arise when an individual recognises that they lack the knowledge required to achieve a particular goal (regardless of what that might be) and are sometimes preceded by ‘unconscious precursors’ such as curiosity. In order to address this knowledge gap, individuals normally begin to actively seek out that which they require in order to fulfil this goal in a process known as *information seeking*. However, information is also encountered on a daily basis when there is no information need present and this can happen “through serendipity, chance encounters, or when others share information that they believe may be useful to you” (Case & Given 2016, p.6).

Taylor’s (1963) theory has the potential to offer insight into the extent to which an individuals are is aware of their own information needs and can be used to formulate theories on why an individual might face problems in addressing these needs (i.e. if they are unable to express it to the information source). This may be of particular use when determining barriers to information seeking in the current study.

## ***Information Use***

Another interesting concept to consider for this study is that of *information use*. While information can be sought or acquired in a number of ways, whether *actively* or *passively* (Wilson 1996), it is important to bear in mind that it will not always be utilised and may instead be disregarded (Ford 2015, p.15). The application of this concept to the prison environment may yield insight into what information is determined, by prisoners, as relevant to their situation, potentially highlighting differences between how *insiders* and *outsiders* perceive the significance of certain information. It may also offer some insight into what sources of information prisoners prefer to use in the prison environment, as while information from one source might be plentiful, they may choose not to use this information for a number of reasons. This study will attempt to identify factors which influence use of information and engagement with information sources.



### ***Information Avoidance***

Namuleme's (2013) ethnographic study of 40 individuals with HIV/AIDS found that these individuals would often actively avoid, hide or ignore information which could cause them to face stigma or emotional distress and this is known as *information avoidance*. This may be a useful concept to consider when exploring small world and information poverty theory in the prison context as individuals may wish to avoid any additional distress or possible exclusion in the already challenging prison environment which is often "high in stress, low in opportunities for decision-making, and socially isolating" (Campbell 2005, p.18).

### ***Recent trends in information behaviour research***

In order to contextualise the current study in the wider field of information behaviour, it is necessary to examine recent research in this field. Ford's (2015) analysis of recent information behaviour studies highlights a number of growing trends in this field, including; a shift in focus from individuals to groups resulting in the potential for findings to have an impact on a greater number of individuals, a greater number of investigations into the importance of the environment in which IBs occur and a greater emphasis on marginalized groups with greater attention on the challenges faced in trying to address these (p.5).

Case (2012) offers his perspective on utility of recent information behaviour studies explaining that,

The origins of today's investigations lie in earlier 'information needs and uses' research aimed at improving the performance of an institution's operations... Yet to read some of today's information-seeking research it would seem that we have now reached the point where the scholarliness of the studies correlates with their degree of uselessness for institutional purposes (Case 2012, p.370-371).

It is necessary to bear this in mind, as a decrease in the quality and *usefulness* of information behaviour research may be detrimental to the progression of theory in this field and negatively impact the number of institutions willing to collaborate on such research projects or allow researchers access to their facilities.

As discussed in the following section, there is limited research in the small world context in relation to information behaviour theory and this is significant, given that such research might inform how we can better meet the needs of marginalised communities such as prisoners.

## 2.3 Theoretical Frameworks

Childers and Post (1975) define information poverty as a "culture" marked by three characteristics,

1. A low level of processing skills, marked by reading, language, hearing, or eye-sight deficiencies;
2. Social isolation in a subculture, leading to unawareness of information known to a larger public, reliance upon rumour and folklore, and dependence on entertainment-orientated media like television; and,
3. A tendency to feel fatalistic and helpless, which in turn reduces the likelihood of active information seeking (Childers & Post 1975, cited Case & Given 2016, p.11)

One key goal of this research is to establish the ongoing validity of Chatman's propositions of information poverty (Chatman 1996) and assertion that the small world of prisoners will ultimately have a negative impact on their information seeking behaviour (Chatman 1999). A review of Chatman's studies and other theoretical models applicable to this research are outlined in the following section.

### 2.3.1 Chatman's (1996) Impoverished Life-World of Outsiders

Information poverty is a theory which has been developed from the initial studies of information in the 1970s. The concept of information poverty is particularly prevalent in research concerning marginalised groups and an example of this is Chatman's (1996) study of information poverty across three demographic groups; elderly females, single mothers and janitors. Whilst focusing on the information behaviours of three small groups of females, the concept of information poverty is also useful in exploring the idea of the small world in the prison context. Chatman's study of information poverty was based upon a theoretical framework consisting of concepts, such as *insiders* and *outsiders*, drawn from Merton's (1972) 'sociology of knowledge' theory (Chatman 1996, p.194-197) which were used to draw comparisons on the information behaviour of individuals living in the small world (*insiders*) to those living outside of it (*outsiders*).

Results of the study included the identification of four key attributes exhibited by those existing in information-impooverished circumstances; secrecy, deception, risk-taking and situational relevance and it was revealed that these were self-protective measures employed by individuals in an attempt to shield themselves from the negative consequences of sharing information (Chatman 1996, p.195-202). Interestingly, it was generally found that individuals with a greater need for information would often attempt to mask, distort or avoid facing these needs rather than addressing them directly. The

problematic result of this is that unaddressed needs might potentially contribute to further, more serious needs and without intervention, assistance or other means to appropriately satisfy these, individuals exist in information-impoverished circumstances.

Findings from Chatman's study were further developed into six propositional statements which summarise her theory of information poverty;

Proposition 1: People who are defined as information poor perceive themselves to be devoid of any sources that might help them.

Proposition 2: Information poverty is partially associated with class distinction. That is, the condition of information poverty is influenced by outsiders who withhold privileged access to information.

Proposition 3: Information poverty is determined by self-protective behaviours which are used in response to social norms.

Proposition 4: Both secrecy and deception are self-protective mechanisms due to a sense of mistrust regarding the interest or ability of others to provide useful information.

Proposition 5: A decision to risk exposure about our true problems is often not taken due to a perception that negative consequences outweigh benefits.

Proposition 6: New knowledge will be selectively introduced into the information world of poor people. A condition that influences this process is the relevance of that information in response to everyday problems and concerns.

(Chatman 1996, p.197-198)

The concepts of secrecy, deception, risk-taking and situational relevance, and Chatman's six propositions of information poverty are particularly interesting when applied to the prison context where individuals must carefully consider how to address their information needs, given the limited sources available to them and potentially strong influence of other prisoners. It is unsurprising then, that Chatman revisited her earlier theory and carried out a later study on the information behaviours of prisoners which forms a key component of the theoretical framework for this study and is discussed in the following section.

### 2.3.2 Chatman's (1999) Theory of Life in the Round

Chatman's (1999) qualitative study of 'The life in the round' examined the information behaviours of adult female prisoners in the US and expands upon her earlier work, using the concepts of insiders and outsiders in this small world context. She notes that "in its small worldness a prison, for many, is not an uncomfortable place to be" and that "the routine of prison life gives a certain degree of security and even protection" (p.207).

Findings also included observed differences in the information behaviours of those successfully integrated into prison life, the *insiders*, to those who are not, the *outsiders*. Insiders were found to be more focused on their day-to-day prison life than with information regarding the larger society because, for insiders "the prison is their world" (p.208) and "the world outside the prison has a secondary importance" (p.225). Overall, reassurance and guidance from prisoners already integrated into the small world of the prison, the *insiders*, was found to be of particular use to those newly imprisoned, predominantly due to their familiarity with the prison environment (p.212).

This theory of life in the round incorporates several key concepts, including small world, social norms, social types and worldviews, which influence the way in which information flows and is handled within the prison environment. From the findings of this study, Chatman produced six propositions which describe life in the small world of the prison,

Proposition 1: A small world conceptualization is essential to a life in the round because it establishes legitimised others (primarily 'insiders') within that world who set boundaries on behaviour.

Proposition 2: Social norms force private behaviour to undergo public scrutiny. It is this public arena that deems behaviour – including information seeking behaviour – appropriate or not.

Proposition 3: The result of establishing appropriate behaviour is the creation of a worldview. This worldview includes language, values, meaning, symbols, and a context that holds the worldview within temporal boundaries.

Proposition 4: For most of us, a worldview is played out as life in the round. Fundamentally, this is a life taken for granted. It works most of the time with enough predictability that, unless a critical problem arises, there is no point in seeking information.

Proposition 5: Members who live in the round will not cross the boundaries of their world to seek information.

Proposition 6: Individuals will cross information boundaries only to the extent that the following conditions are met: (1) the information is perceived as critical, (2) there is a collective expectation that the information is relevant, and (3) a perception exists that the life in the round is no longer functioning.

(Chatman 1999, p.214)

All six propositions contribute to Chatman's conclusion that the impact of living in this small-world ultimately has a negative impact on the information seeking of prisoners and this is a significant statement, as information seeking is a skill necessary, not only during imprisonment when prisoners might experience emotional and mental health needs, but also upon release, when they may, for the first time in months or even years, need to independently seek out the information and associated services necessary for them to successfully reintegrate into the community; such as employment, finance, and housing advice.

Originally conducted in 1999, Chatman's study of life in the round is nearing almost two decades old and current research is required to confirm the ongoing validity of these findings in modern times, particularly given that the internet is now used by the large portion of the UK population to satisfy information needs (Office of National Statistics 2016). It may also be interesting to investigate the information behaviours of prisoners deprived of such technology, particularly those with a reliance on the internet prior to imprisonment. Another issue that brings into question the validity of this research with regards to the general prison population, is that Chatman's study focuses solely on adult female prisoners, whose needs may be vastly removed from those of male prisoners. In order to validate whether findings from Chatman's study are applicable to other small groups existing within the prison environment, it is necessary to conduct research into another demographic group using similar qualitative methods.

### **2.3.3 Wilson's (1996) Model of Information Behaviour**

Wilson developed a number of information behaviour models over two decades but for the purposes of this study, Wilson's (1996) revised general model of information-seeking behaviour (see figure 2.1) is most relevant and will form part of the theoretical framework. This model drew on research from not only information science, but a number of other fields such as decision-making, innovation, psychology, health communication, and consumer research (Wilson 1999). Still evident is a focus on information-seeking behaviour of the individual, information needs and barriers to

addressing these, but introduction of the term *intervening variables* suggests that factors which influence information-seeking behaviour are not exclusively negative. The intervening variables of environment and psychology will be of particular interest in the current study as these tie to small world theory and can be explored through a multidisciplinary framework.

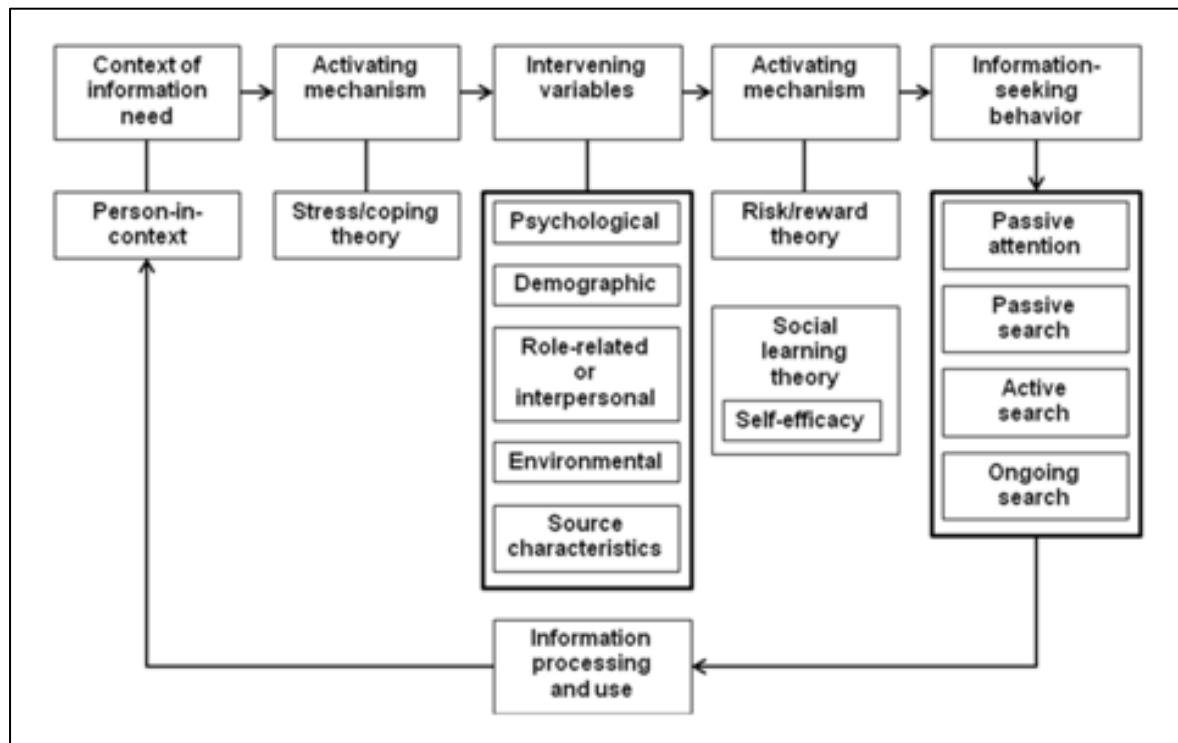


Figure 2.1 Wilson's (1996) Model of Information Behaviour (Wilson 1999, p.257)

This model will also allow us to determine the types of information-seeking behaviours exhibited by prisoners; for example, do they encounter most information through *passive attention* whilst watching television or through *passive searching* where they encounter unexpected information? In particular, the concepts of *active search* and *ongoing search* are of interest as they may prove useful in determining to what extent prisoners *purposefully* seek out information in the prison environment and may offer some insight into how this impacts on prisoners' sense of self-efficacy.

This model was utilised by Campbell (2005) in her study which sought to identify the information behaviour of prisoners in the US from an analysis of previous studies by mapping findings to a number of concepts from Wilson's (1996) model (intervening variables, social learning theory and self-efficacy). However, given that this study consisted of a review of existing literature mapped against this Wilson's model, it is difficult to ascertain the granularity of the findings linked to Wilson's model and replicating the mapping of specific aspects of the model against findings from the current qualitative study will produce results which are more evidenced and up-to-date.

### 2.3.4 Kuhlthau's (1991) Information Search Process Model

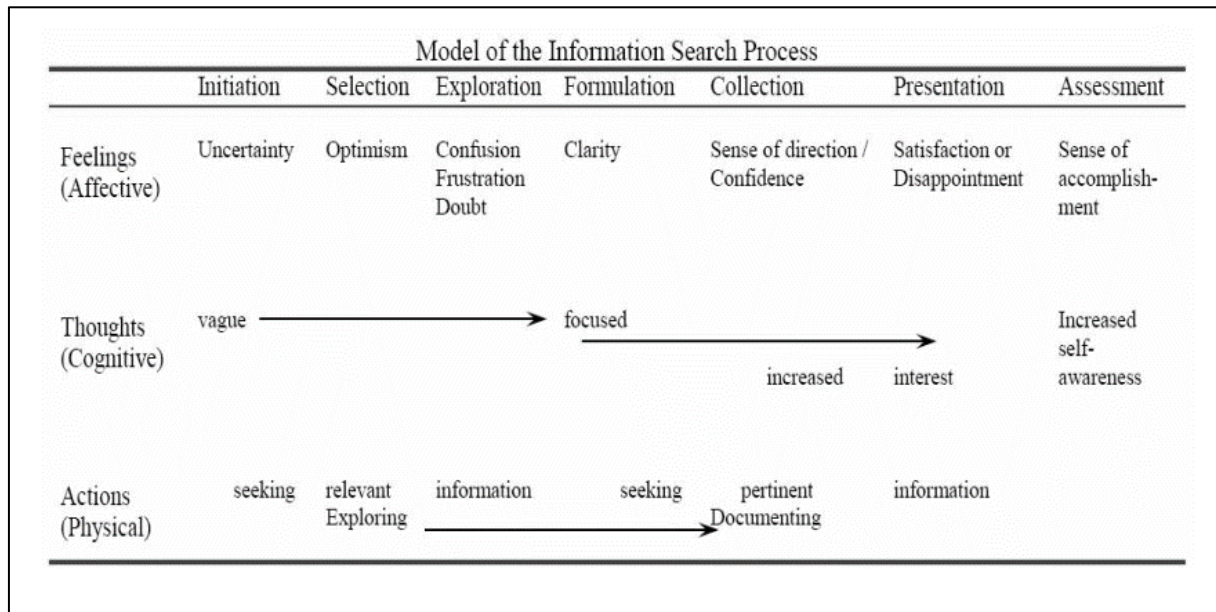


Figure 2.2 Kuhlthau's (1991) Information Search Process Model (Kuhlthau 2004, p.82)

Kuhlthau's (1991) Information Search Process Model was developed through a series of qualitative studies. Preliminary findings were verified and refined to the current model (see figure 2.2) through further quantitative and longitudinal studies of diverse library users. This model is specifically targeted at examining the behaviours of an individual trying to accomplish a task which requires information they do not already possess. The model identifies six distinct stages in the information search process, each accompanied by the associated affective, cognitive and physical normally characteristics exhibited by the user during this stage. A summary of the each stage is given below,

1. **Initiation** - a general area, topic, or problem is identified and initial uncertainty often gives way to a brief sense of optimism and a readiness to begin the search.
2. **Selection** - a general area, topic, or problem is identified and initial uncertainty often gives way to a brief sense of optimism and a readiness to begin the search.
3. **Exploration** - inconsistent, incompatible information is encountered and uncertainty, confusion, and doubt frequently increase and people find themselves "in the dip" of confidence.
4. **Formulation** - a focused perspective is formed and uncertainty diminishes as confidence begins to increase.
5. **Collection** - information pertinent to the focused perspective is gathered and uncertainty subsides as interest and involvement deepens.

6. **Presentation** - the search is completed with a new understanding enabling the person to explain his or her learning to others, or in some way put the learning to use.

(Fisher, Elderlez & McKechnie 2005, p.230-231)

While we will not be observing prisoners carrying out a specific task, it is expected that prisoners may describe situations where they have had to seek out information in order to address a knowledge gap. Using Kuhlthau's model, with an emphasis on the *affective* stages, we can identify when prisoners experience heightened anxiety and stress and recognize *zones of intervention* (Kuhlthau 1994, p.63) where the prison services can assist and support prisoners to better achieve their information-related goals (as outlined in the research objectives).

This model also allows us to test whether or not information seeking in the prison is a recursive, iterative process; for example, do prisoners experience uncertainty in the early stages and abandon the information search, or do they persist, moving between stages in the model in attempt to overcome affective or physical barriers to their goal? The issue of self-efficacy in the prison environment, juxtaposed with the proposed link between information seeking and an increase in self- confidence (Campbell 2005), demands further investigation.

## **2.4 Imprisonment as a research context**

A relatively low number of studies into the information behaviour of prisoners have been conducted. Few are qualitative studies, many are outdated (calling into question ongoing validity) and none are focused on Scottish, or even prison establishments in the UK. Despite these limitations, we can glean some useful information which will act as a guide and inform the methodological approach of the current study. A summary of these findings is presented below, followed by an analysis of each study, including research scope, methodological approach and any factors limiting generalisability.

Generally, the most common information needs of prisoners related to health, educational and legal concerns (Rafedzi & Abrizah 2014; Chatman 1999; Burt 1977). Burt (1977), drawing on Maslow (1943), explains that while "food, safety and shelter" are the basic physical needs of prisoners, they experience higher psychological needs of "belongingness and love" and "esteem and self-actualisation" that must be fulfilled (Burt 1977, p.27). Furthermore, the isolating effect of the prison environment is particularly interesting to consider here as it may present a barrier to these significant emotional needs. Studies have also recognised a number of information sources commonly used by prisoners to address their information needs; including books, librarians,



teachers, and other prisoners (Rafedzi & Abrizah 2014; Campbell 2005; Chatman 1999; Burt 1977); but there is still little understood about why these sources are selected and what barriers are faced when attempting to address information needs in the prison environment.

Burt (1977) conducted a review of existing literature on the reading interests and function of prison libraries in the US with the aim of identifying the information needs of prisoners in order to inform stock development in prison libraries. It was found that reading interests often corresponded to education level, with educated prisoners requesting information on psychology, sociology and philosophy and less educated prisoners being more interested in fictional materials (p.29). It was also found that the prison library generally facilitated and promoted information flow within the prison through various book, magazine and newspaper discussion groups (p.28). While this study offers some insight into the information needs of prisoners, the geographic setting, dependence on (now) outdated literature and specific focus on the prison library limit the overall value of findings.

Akerstrom's (1987) study of how prisoners in Sweden identified 'snitches' found that prisoners would cooperate in identifying likely informers "through a process of accepting and rejecting pieces of information until a final consensus in the group has been reached" revealing how strongly relationships and group norms govern the perceived reliability of information (p.155). This sequential, evaluative approach of sifting through information highlights the complexity of prisoner information behaviour. It was found that relationships with staff members were also important, as prisoners often sought information from prison guards they considered "reliable, trustworthy" sources because the information they shared was felt to be "extracted rather than volunteered" (p.738). However, given that this study does not offer a comprehensive overview of prisoner information behaviour and is predominantly focused on exploring sociological theories, findings have limited applicability to the current study.

Campbell's (2005) examined the information behaviours of prisoners in the US by mapping findings of earlier studies against Wilson's (1996) Model of Information Behaviour in order to identify aspects of this information behaviour model present in earlier data. This study revealed that prisoners experienced activating mechanisms, such as identifying 'snitches', and that their information behaviours were influenced by a range of intervening variables, for example educational level (demographic) or trust (interpersonal) (Campbell, p.23-24). It was found that risk/reward theory was particularly evident in the information behaviour of prisoners as the cost of gaining information was sometimes considered too high, particularly when there was a perceived risk of violence (p.29). Self-efficacy was found to be almost non-existent in the studies analysed, with most literature reporting 'passiveness' and 'powerlessness' (p.29). One problem with this study is that – like Burt's (1977)

study – it relied solely on existing literature, not all of which concerned the information behaviour of prisoners and again, was predominantly focused on the purpose of the prison library.

Glennor (2006) wrote an article on how to tailor library services to meet the needs of disadvantaged groups, with a focus on prisoners in the US. Of relevance to the current study, she notes that “prisoners have the same information needs as persons in regular society, but with a greater number of them having low education skills, they experience difficulties in articulating their information needs or in their attempts to seek information” (p.2). It is also acknowledged that the lack of internet access in prisons will most likely have a negative impact on a prisoner’s ability to seek information, particularly if imprisoned for a long period of time (p.5). Unfortunately, this article offers little other information relevant to the topic of information behaviour.

More recently, Rafedzi & Abrizah (2014) investigated the information behaviour of juvenile prisoners who attended education in Malaysian prisons and found that they experienced information needs relating to prison operations, family, sex, health, recreation, legal support and their academic studies (p.7). The most frequently used sources of information were friends, teachers, families, televisions and books (p.10). As most juvenile prisoners had lived with parents or guardians before coming to prison, they experienced additional familial needs due to their lack of independence and required additional support when trying to adapt to prison life. While many adult prisoners may have been independent prior to imprisonment, some may have had similar dependencies on relatives or support agencies before coming into prison and this will be kept in mind for the current study. Although not explicitly outlined in the study, findings revealed several barriers to the prisoners’ information seeking, including not being able to approach prison staff for fear of judgement (p.10) and being unable to read library books due to low literacy levels (p.12). Whilst useful as a guide for the current study given its qualitative approach, the generalisability of this study is limited by its geographic location and prisoner sample and as such, findings cannot be assumed to represent adult prisoners living in another country.

Barreiro-Gen & Novo-Corti’s (2015) quantitative study into how the lack of internet access in Spanish prisons consequently impacts prisoners’ ICT skills, found that social exclusion in the prison environment was compounded by the lack of internet access and digital exclusion. As a result, prisoners generally had poor ICT skills and as consequence, they were likely to face difficulties seeking employment upon release (p.1173). Whilst not an information behaviour study, this lack of internet access (and consequent impact on prisoners ICT skills) demonstrates a clear barrier to prisoners’ information seeking and is pertinent given that internet access is not permitted in SPS institutions.

Regarding the nature of most information behaviour studies in the prison context, Campbell (2005) explains that “the information studies field has not ignored the prison population, but very few articles found were user-focused and strictly observational” (p.19). While information behaviour research is now moving towards an emphasis on the user, there is still a severe lack of qualitative research into prisoners’ personal experiences of information in the prison context (Ford 2015). Of the few articles in existence, none identify the key intervention points at which the prison service might help prisoners who require information or suggest how information services in the prison can be improved, with most simply listing findings regarding a set of common information needs or behaviours, or the suggestion of *improvement* of current services with little guidance as to how to achieve this (Rafedzi & Abrizah 2014; Campbell 2005; Burt 1977).

With many countries now making the move from ‘prison *for* punishment’ to ‘prison *as* punishment’, alongside an increased emphasis on rehabilitation (McArthur 2014), it is essential that the information needs of prisoners are appropriately supported by the prison service, to ensure that prisoners have the self-efficacy and skills to seek out and utilise the information they need. SPS’s Organisational Review (2013) recognise this, stating that in an effort to encourage desistance, they would aim to provide “improved information and education for offenders” (Scottish Prison Service 2013, p.58). The aim to improve information and education services is put forth as means to increase chances of successful rehabilitation during imprisonment, with the hope of reducing re-offending rates. However, with limited knowledge as to how prisoners process information and interact with these services, and any challenges they experience, it is difficult to design and provide programs with guaranteed successful use and uptake amongst prisoners. The outcome of research in this area could provide prisons with recommendations on how to better tailor and design information services to improve chances of rehabilitation and successful reintegration into society.

In conclusion, there are very few up-to-date studies on the information behaviour of prisoners, with the minority focusing on the adult male demographic (which accounts for the largest demographic portion of prisoners in the world (Walmsley 2015), and none having investigated the information behaviour of prisoners in the UK. Chatman’s (1999) study of ‘Life in the Round’ (as discussed in section 2.3.2) was found to be most relevant to the current study but as findings do not relate to the largest proportion of prisoners (sentenced adult males) and are roughly two decades old, further research into this area is required.

## **2.5 Chapter summary**

This chapter presents an overview of existing literature on the topic of information behaviour in the prison context. While recent studies have investigated the information behaviours of juvenile and female prisoners, there has been little research into the information behaviours of adult prisoners who account for the majority of the prison population worldwide.

There is a clear research gap in the existing range of literature concerning the information behaviours of the largest demographic of prisoners (sentenced adult males) and a general lack of research building on the small world theory presented in Chatman's (1999) 'A Theory of Life in the Round'. Furthermore, while we have some understanding of basic needs such as healthcare from the prisoner perspective, we have limited understanding of more aspirational needs such as furthering education and developing vocational skills. It can be argued that while the former are essential to general health and wellbeing during imprisonment, the latter not only contribute to the former, but also to rehabilitation upon release. A more holistic examination therefore appears warranted.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **3.1 Chapter overview**

This chapter outlines the methodological approach taken in this study. The research topic and context are introduced; incorporating limitations presented by the MSc format and the researcher's previous experience of working in prisons (sections 3.2 and 3.3). The following section provides an overview of the research design (section 3.4). Next the research methods are considered (section 3.5), including search strategy and literature review, selection of data sources and data collection techniques, and the planned methodology. This is followed by a detailed overview of the ethical considerations (section 3.6) and risk analysis necessary for the study (section 3.7). The chapter concludes with an outline of how research tools will be piloted (section 3.8), field adaptations (section 3.9) and how data analysis will be conducted (section 3.10).

### **3.2 Research problem**

This study investigates the information behaviour of a group of individuals living in the small world context. Prisoners were selected as the sample group for this research as they represented a group of individuals all living in a small world context. All participants were sentenced adult male prisoners, who represent the largest proportion of prisoners in Scotland (Scottish Prison Service 2016a), and all were involved with the Learning Centre to some extent. As a result of, it was realised that these factors might result in this sample exhibiting different information behaviour to those of the general prison population.

From a review of literature, it was clear that the number of existing small world studies is relatively low, particularly in the prison context. It was also noted that no study has focused on adult male prisoners in the UK or offered significant expansion on Chatman's work on information poverty and small world theories (Chatman 1996; 1999). In response to these research gaps and the limited amount of guiding literature in this area, it was expected that the research would take an exploratory approach.

For this reason, a qualitative cross-sectional survey approach was taken. This consisted of twelve single interviews with prisoners followed by a series of interviews with education staff to triangulate results. A demographic questionnaire was also included as part of the interview process, allowing for

the analysis of the relationships between prisoner demographic traits and their information behaviours. For example, while it is known that prisoners experience greater needs during the initial stage of their sentence (Campbell 2005), little is known about their information needs as they near the end of their sentence and this may be particularly interesting to consider as part of the rehabilitation process (subject to participation).

### **3.3 Research context**

As mentioned earlier (section 1.3), the prison population in Scotland is predicted to remain steady over the coming years and with the majority of prisoners being adult male, research focused on this demographic group was felt to be of particular interest. This research aligns with SPS's Organisational Review (2013) which stated that in an effort to reduce reoffending, they would provide "improved information and education for offenders" (Scottish Prison Service 2013, p.58). Participants for this study were recruited from the Learning Centre and by focusing on the educational context, it was felt that the research would not only help expand existing information behaviour and small world theory in the prison context but also produce results which would feed into a set of recommendations to SPS on how to improve information services.

The researcher had previous experience of working in two SPS establishments and was granted permission to conduct this study in HMP Shotts where they previously worked as librarian in the Learning Centre. This was felt to have a positive influence on the research as previously established relationships with staff and prisoners made the recruitment of participants relatively straightforward. Previous experience of working within the prison also meant the researcher was aware of all health and safety risks and how to conduct themselves professionally within the environment. From previous experience of hosting reading groups and debate clubs where extended conversations often occurred between prisoners, the researcher also possessed an awareness of common prisoner perspectives and challenges faced in the prison environment.

Although this prior knowledge was identified as a potential source of interviewer bias, it was deemed to be an invaluable tool in providing context to the interview data. Acknowledging the issue of potential bias, the researcher took steps to ensure a professional, objective approach was maintained throughout the research and any preconceptions regarding results were strictly segregated from the study.

### **3.4 Research design**

In order to gather data on a topic with minimal indicative literature, this research utilised a cross-sectional survey design, consisting of a series of qualitative interviews with a sample of twelve adult male prisoners who regularly attend education classes. Focusing on this specific and small group of prisoners enabled the researcher to investigate small world theory at a granular level.

It was felt that adopting a similar research approach to Chatman's (1999) 'Theory of Life in the Round' would be preferable in order to test the validity of her findings in the modern prison environment with a different demographic prisoner group. However, it was realised that attaining similar numbers (Chatman interviewed 80 female prisoners) would be impossible within the time frame. Therefore, twelve prisoners were recruited to ensure an adequate sample size that would produce valid qualitative results. Also, the researcher would have preferred to conduct a series of interviews over a span of several months in order to build trust with participants and also to allow prisoners time to reflect on their information behaviours but the time constraints of the MSc dissertation project led to necessary limitations in scope, sample size and time spent with participants. Therefore, single interviews with twelve participants were conducted across three weeks and following from this, results were triangulated by conducting a focus group with staff from the same institution in order to validate and expand upon earlier results, thus showing rigour in the research approach (Bryman 2015, p.386).

It is important to appreciate the case study elements incorporated by this research approach, as this may impact the results of the study. Considering that participants were recruited from the Learning Centre at a single SPS institution and, as previously mentioned, Scottish prisons vary greatly in terms of modernity, aesthetic design, security level and capacity (Scottish Prison Service 2016b), it seems reasonable to presume that the results of this case study will offer limited generalisability in terms of overall Scottish Prison population. This, however, was not considered to be detrimental to the overall purpose of the research which was to investigate small world theory and the information behaviours of a specific group of prisoners.

### **3.5 Research methods**

#### **3.5.1 Search strategy and literature review**

Bryman (2015) states that the aim of the literature review is "to establish what is already known about the topic and to frame the review in such a way that it can act as a background and

justification for your investigation” (p.91). Therefore, a systematic review of the literature regarding information behaviour in prisons was conducted in order to determine the level of existing research in this field. Initially, the search parameters were restricted to only prisoner information behaviour studies based in the UK after 2010. However, due to a lack of results arising from this initial search, it was necessary to greatly expand these search parameters to include all geographic regions and any studies after 1970 in order to find relevant literature.

This search strategy involved the use of the University of Strathclyde’s SUpriMo ‘Articles and Databases’ searching facility and specific databases such as ProQuest, EBSCO and the Wiley Online Library. Terms such as ‘information’, ‘seeking’, ‘needs’ and ‘behaviours’ were used to search for recent information behaviour studies and, to focus the search on the prison context, terms such as ‘prison’, ‘prisoner’ and ‘imprisonment’ were included to limit results to only those relevant. After initial searching, the researcher realised that incorporating other terms into the search strategy such as ‘inmates’ and ‘jail’ were necessary to ensure the inclusion of results pertaining to research conducted in other countries where terminology relating to the prison service is different. This helped to broaden results significantly as the majority of studies were not based in the UK.

The researcher also consulted various SPS and government publications, available online, to gather background and demographic data about the prison population in Scotland and the scope of research conducted by SPS itself. Also, little relevant information was available in printed format which indicated that there was a minimal amount of existing literature and research in the information behaviour field relating to prisoners.

Findings from the various sources were then synthesised in order to identify emerging connections between previously unlinked studies. These connections were then used to create a start list for the coding of data for the current study and to help construct interview questions. While it was found that the majority of publications agreed upon a set of general information needs and preferred sources, in addition to highlighting some barriers to information access in the prison (predominantly the arguably more obvious physical barriers and lack of internet access), no papers were felt to be highly relevant to the current study as none were based in the UK or Scotland in particular, and some were outdated by several decades. However, several were useful in offering a guide on how to approach the current study and to construct a rough coding scheme for analysis of results.

### **3.5.2 Data sources and sampling**

For the initial interview stage, the researcher requested access to prisoners from any SPS establishment and was granted approval to conduct the current study at HMP Shotts, where the



researcher previously worked as a librarian. This prison holds adult male prisoners serving long-term sentences of normally four years or more (Scottish Prison Service 2016). Potential participants were identified by the Learning Centre manager who helped facilitate the research within the prison. The researcher was then able to approach these prisoners with a further explanation of the research in order to confirm their willingness to participate. Given the maximum prison capacity of 553 and that only a portion of these prisoners would attend education regularly, it was felt that twelve was an acceptable number of participants for the purposes of this research and as Crouch and McKenzie (2006) argue, conducting qualitative research with a sample of fewer than twenty may improve the researcher's opportunity to become closely involved with interview participants and may help produce more fine-grained data. It was also felt that this number would offer some of the different viewpoints of prisoners attending education and therefore, present some degree of *saturation* in the data collected (Bryman 2015, p.417). This number also factored in the time-constraints of the study and any resource demands that would be placed on the hosting prison.

The desired number of participants was met without issue and, notably, it was felt that the researcher's previous relationship with many of the prisoners in the Learning Centre was beneficial in the recruitment of participants as prisoners who had interacted regularly with the library service during the researcher's employment were, in particular, very willing to approach the researcher to express their interest and to discuss the research. The researcher attempted to include a variety of prisoner demographics in this study to ensure that the prisoner group attending education was best represented. A key method of ensuring this was to request participants from a range of classes and to ensure that the sample group included participants at varying educational levels.

For the focus group, six members of the education staffing team were selected to represent a range of roles within the Learning Centre including; the manager, the librarian, two lecturers and two SPS prison officers who supervise the department; as it was hoped that this would represent the main group of information gatekeepers available to prisoners attending education. The recruitment of participants for this stage was conducted by the Learning Centre manager as this was most logistically simple.

### **3.5.3 Data collection techniques**

Qualitative data collection techniques were utilized due to a lack of existing indicative literature on the sample group; adult male prisoners attending education classes in Scottish prisons. Semi-structured interviewing with open questioning was selected as a suitable research tool for the purpose of this study as this style of interviewing offers greater flexibility than structured interviews,

the potential for both exploratory and reflective discourse, and places an emphasis on the participant's perspective (Bryman 2015, p.468). This was felt to be particularly suitable for this study which is both exploratory and qualitative in nature. Examples of questions include;

- What information do you seek for on a regular basis?
- Where do you usually go to for that information and why do you use that source?
- Has there ever been a time when you needed to know something but couldn't find it out?
- Are there any questions you have that you feel you can't ask?

Interviews were conducted with a sample of twelve prisoners who regularly attend education and lasted for approximately one hour in total with the main portion of the interviews being audio recorded to allow the researcher to focus on tracking the conversation rather than taking notes. Given that this research focuses on the small world of prisoners who attend education, holding the interviews in the Learning Centre was felt to be both appropriate and also logistically simple for the prison to organise as there was no need for additional security checks to move prisoners around the prison when they were already present for classes.

A series of interviews with prison education staff was also conducted in order to incorporate another perspective into the research. This allowed the researcher to, not only, triangulate results by allowing focus group data to confirm or challenge earlier interview data, but also increased the overall *comprehensiveness* of findings by presenting another, equally valid, perspective in the research data (Mays and Pope 2000) and thus ensured a rigorous research approach by allowing staff to offer their view on the information needs and preferred sources of prisoners who attend education. These interviews were conducted in the Learning Centre during the afternoon break period to ensure staff were available and not taken away from other responsibilities. The lack of prisoner presence during this time was also felt to make it a suitable time to conduct research.

It was felt that carrying out twelve interviews with prisoners and a follow-up focus group with staff would ensure a rigorous approach to solving the research problem whilst allowing for the relatively straight-forward replication of this research in other prisons. The simplicity of this approach should allow for future research in this area to be carried out using the same model in order to further our understanding of the information behaviour of other small prisoner groups.

#### **3.5.4 Planned methodology**

Due to the nature of the environment in which the research was conducted, it was anticipated that participants might be nervous about the interviewing process. In order to combat this, an informal

chat was the first step in the interviewing process. An information sheet (Appendix 1) outlining the research purpose and scope was presented during this initial stage and the informal chat allowed the participant time to relax and ask any questions before being presented with the consent form (Appendix 2). This was followed by a short demographic questionnaire in order to allow for results to be mapped against demographic variables in the analysis stage (Appendix 3).

The recorded portion of the interview began with a discussion of information needs that they commonly experienced and fed into how these needs were addressed and why particular sources were used or avoided. Participants were also asked where they experienced any barriers or challenges to their information seeking in the prison in order to determine where information services could potentially be improved. Given the semi-structured interviewing technique, these questions were not posed in any specific order to allow the interview to follow a natural and conversational style which would hopefully lead to more qualitative results. Interviews ended with the researcher presenting a summary of the topics discussed in order to ensure that no miscommunication or misunderstanding had occurred and to allow the participant to reword or further explain any topic.

Staff interviews started with a similar informal discussion and presentation of an information sheet (Appendix 4) followed by a consent form (Appendix 5). The recorded interview stage began with the researcher asking members to discuss their point of view on education-attending prisoners' needs, preferred sources and information seeking barriers they experienced in the prison environment. This was followed by the presentation of results from the interview stage to stimulate discussion and to encourage the participants to provide their own perspectives, based on their personal experiences. The staff interviews ended with a final portion where they were asked to discuss personal examples of when they have played an information gatekeeper role in the prison and their experience of this, such as;

- What information were they approached for?
- Were they able to assist or did they direct prisoner elsewhere?
- Why do they think they were approached rather than other staff?

### **3.6 Piloting**

Bryman (2015) states that when conducting pilot tests it is best to "find a small set of respondents who are comparable to members of the population from which the sample for the main study will be

taken” (p.261). However, for the purposes of this study this was not possible as the participants (prisoners who attend education classes) presented such a specific sample that there were no such individuals outside the prison environment who could appropriately represent this group in a pilot test. Therefore, the initial two interviews with prisoners were considered to be interview pilots.

During these pilot interviews it was realised that questioning with a pre-designated structure or order was not the most ideal method of conducting interviews in such an environment, as prisoners responded with much more detail to more open questions or when left to talk at their leisure regarding an open subject. Given that a greater level of detail was preferred for this qualitative study, the remaining interviews consisted of open questioning and simple prompts throughout, to create a more conversational and relaxed interview process, and this was felt to yield better results as this approach appeared to create a feeling of trust and equality between the interviewer and participant. This might be due to prisoners’ often facing routine structured questioning in formal situations such as Integral Case Management (ICM) meetings where comments are recorded on the prisoner’s file (Scottish Prison Service 2007, p.14).

As Bryman (2015) points out, another benefit of piloting the interview is that it enabled the researcher to highlight any concepts or terminology which required greater clarification ( p.260) and this was found to be useful in this particular study where the concept of ‘information’ posed several issues due to its diverse range of definitions. The researcher found that starting the interviews with an overview of this concept was a useful accompaniment to the information sheet (Appendix 1) which was presented to participants before the recorded portion of the interviews.

### **3.7 Ethical considerations**

Given the nature of the prison environment, ethical considerations were extremely important in securing permission from the SPS Research Access and Ethics Committee (RAEC) to conduct research in a maximum security prison facility, where extremely sensitive information and potentially dangerous prisoners are held. In addition to proving that all ethical considerations were made, an enhanced disclosure was also required as part of the research access agreement to ensure the researcher held no convictions and was not barred from work with vulnerable adults.

#### **3.7.1 Stakeholder approval**

Ethics approval was obtained via University of Strathclyde Departmental Ethics Committee, with all interviews run in strict accordance with the guidelines set out by the University Code of Practice on

Investigations of Human Beings in compliance with the ESRC Framework for Research Ethics. The researcher also adhered to all ethical guidelines set forth by Scottish Prison Service Research Access and Ethics Committee (RAEC).

### **3.7.2 Privacy**

For confidentiality purposes, names of participants were not stored with data and, instead, unique identifiers were assigned. Direct quotations with the potential to identify participants were anonymised. All conversations between the participant and researcher remained private other than for the purposes of the research. However, given the researcher's experience of working in prisons, it was recognized that only a limited degree of confidentiality could be assured – i.e. if a prisoner stated that they intended to harm themselves or someone else, the researcher acknowledged that they were obliged to report this and was aware of the procedures to do so.

### **3.7.3 Informed consent**

Before interviews were conducted, all participants were given an overview of the research in which they were participating, including use of the data gathered and expected outcomes (Appendix 1, 4). Participants were informed that they were able to withdraw from the interview process at any point and had the right to request that all data gathered thus far be erased. Participants were then presented with a consent form which they read and signed if acceptable (Appendix 2, 5). This was stored securely and separately from research data by the researcher as proof of informed consent.

### **3.7.4 Data Security**

Due to the sensitive nature of the participants involved, security of data was paramount. Data collection, management, and disposal strictly adhered to the Data Protection Act 1998. All data was stored on a secure drive on the university network and backed-up on an encrypted USB stick.

### **3.7.5 Harm**

The researcher had previous experience of working with prisoners and an understanding of the sensitive nature of certain discussion topics in the prison environment. As the research posed questions which might result in discussions regarding information needs relating to family, mental and physical health, prisoner relationships, and other sensitive topics, particular attention was paid to the participant's emotional status during the interviewing process. If a participant had shown any signs of emotional distress or exhibited inappropriate behaviour the interview would have been brought to an end with the relevant member of SPS staff being contacted for assistance. Participants

themselves were also made aware at the outset that they did not need to answer a question if they did not want to, and could withdraw at any point during the interview.

### **3.8 Risk analysis and contingency plans**

In any study, it is essential to conduct a thorough risk analysis before conducting field work as such events may have a negative impact on the success of the research. By planning ahead with consideration to these possible risks and unforeseen events, through various contingencies the researcher was able to minimise the potential impact of such events. This was particularly important in an environment such as the prison, where sudden changes can occur without warning, including fights and security breaches which can lead to facility lockdowns (known as non-movements) and where the threat of physical harm is higher than normal. With previous experience working in the prison, the researcher had a reasonable understanding of what to expect in this environment, including possible disruptions that may occur during the course of the field work, and identified two main risks to the success of the research as below.

#### ***Risk: Drop-out of interview participants***

Contingency: Consciously over-recruit and request a minimum of twelve participants to ensure that enough prisoners take part to ensure valid results.

#### ***Risk: Physical harm to the researcher***

Contingency: Researcher had previous experience of working in two SPS establishments and has completed Personal Protection Training. SPS operational staff were in close proximity of the researcher at all times during the interviewing process, with the researcher being seated closest to the door in any enclosed room.

### **3.9 Field adaptation**

Fortunately there were few adaptations required during prisoner interviews which remained as outlined in the planned methodology. All interviews were conducted successfully following two initial pilots and it was felt that this was partially due to the researcher being previously known as a member of staff to all participants and having previous experience in the prison environment. This meant that a certain level of trust and openness was already in existence between the researcher

and participants, who were able to relax and chat to the researcher informally before beginning the recorded interview to only address any concerns or questions.

However, something that was not anticipated was that many participants wished to continue discussing certain aspects of the interview following the recorded interviewing process. These discussions often revolved around prisoners saying what they “couldn’t say” during the recorded interview. This was primarily related to the more affective aspects of the research, particularly after discussing the participant’s relationships with family, friends and other prisoners. The researcher felt it their responsibility to ensure that all interviews were brought to a close with the participant feeling comfortable with all topics discussed and found their previous training in the prison environment particularly useful in achieving this.

Despite, hoping to conduct a focus group with education staff, this was not possible as prison officers were not available to participate at the same time as teaching staff and the librarian was not available on the day. Therefore, a small group interview with three teachers and the Learning Centre manager was conducted (who were given ‘focus group’ information sheets and consent forms due to this last minute adaptation), followed by two individual interviews with prison officers. By demonstrating a flexible approach, data was gathered from these other perspectives and utilised to expand on the comprehensiveness of prisoner interview data.

### **3.10 Data analysis and interpretation**

#### **3.10.1 Transcription and data entry**

Permission was requested from both prisoner and staff participants to use an audio recorder as this allowed the researcher to focus more on posing questions and tracking interview progress instead of concentrating on taking notes. This also allowed the researcher to engage and show more interest in the conversation by maintaining eye contact with participants as much as possible (Bryman 2015, p.480).

Full transcription was initially preferred in order to allow for an in depth analysis of the data gathered but due to the number and length of interviews this was reconsidered. Bryman (2015) estimates that for every one hour of recorded data it will take five to six hours to transcribe this into a written format (p.481) and with this in mind, it was decided that selective transcription would be more suitable for the current study due to the time limitations posed by the MSc format.

After the relevant audio data was transcribed onto the computer into a Microsoft Word document, the data from each interview was individually imported into NVivo 8 software in order to conduct an analysis on emerging themes and to compare these to existing codes developed from an examination of other studies on information behaviour.

### **3.10.2 Coding**

The theoretical frameworks outlined in section 2.3 were used to create pre-structured coding sets (as start lists then added to as new data emerged) which were useful in the analysis of gathered data but also help to test the validity of existing theories regarding information behaviour and small world theory. These codes incorporated Chatman's theory of the small world as outlined in her (1999) study of 'Life in the Round' and information poverty theory outlined in her (1996) 'The Impoverished Life-World of Outsiders'. This interdisciplinary framework also drew upon elements of Wilson's (1996) 'Model of Information Behaviour', focusing on the intervening variables and self-efficacy which might affect a prisoner's ability to address information needs, and Kuhlthau's (1991) 'Information Search Process Model', focusing on the cognitive and emotional aspects of information behaviour which prisoners might exhibit.

Data from the interview stage was first analysed broadly using Nvivo 8 software to identify common needs, preferred sources, and barriers to information seeking in the prison context. It was expected that metathemes would emerge from the first six interviews and these will be refined in the analysis of the remaining six interviews (Guest, Bunce and Johnson 2006).

The results of this initial thematic analysis will then be coupled with the pre-structured coding sets drawn from the theoretical frameworks previously mentioned. A brief overview of these codes is as follows;

- *Small worlds, Social norms, Worldview and Social types.* (Chatman 1999)
- *Secrecy, Deception, Risk-taking and Situational-relevance* (Chatman 1996)
- *Intervening variables and Self-efficacy* (Wilson 1996)
- *Cognitive stages, Physical stages and Affective stages* (Kuhlthau 1991)

The second round of data gathered from the focus group with staff utilised codes developed from the initial interview stage and pre-structured coding sets. These two sets of data were then compared in order to highlight any deviations in results and to confirm any earlier findings, using the constant comparison method (Bryman 2015, p.573).



### **3.11 Chapter summary**

This chapter provides an outline of the methodological approach taken in the current study. It reiterates the research problem and provides details on the researcher's previous experience of working within the prison environment and how this affected the course of the research. The research design is also outlined with justification of the cross-sectional survey approach, acknowledgment of the case study elements of the design and selection of qualitative research methods utilised to gather data on the research topic.

The inability to pilot the study with individuals other than participants of the actual study is discussed and the extensive ethical considerations made by the researcher are described in detail. This was felt particularly necessary given the maximum security environment in which the research was conducted. Risks to the success of the study are then outlined, with the appropriate contingency plans constructed in advance of the field work and any necessary field adaptations are described following this.

The chapter concludes with an overview of how data analysis will be conducted and presents a summary of the pre-structured coding sets derived from relevant theoretical frameworks, in order to guide the researcher in coding the data and as a means to test the continuing validity of Chatman's studies of information poverty and the small world in current times.

## **Chapter 4: Findings**

### **4.1 Chapter Overview**

This chapter covers findings from the prisoner interview stage (section 4.2) with a summary of demographic data collected and the information needs, sources and barriers as identified by prisoners. Following this, findings from the staff interview stage are outlined (section 4.3) offering a validation of earlier findings and adding another perspective on collected data.

### **4.2 Interviews: prisoners**

#### **4.2.1 Demographics**

In total, twelve prisoners were interviewed; two (16.7%) 18-24 year olds, four (33.3%) 25-34 year olds, four (33.3%) 35-44 year olds, and two (16.7%) 45-54 year olds (grouped frequency median = 35 years old (estimate)). All participants were male and included a range of ethnicities; ten (83.33%) were White, one (8.33%) was Black, and one (8.33%) was Asian.

All participants were serving their prison sentence at HMP Shotts; nine (75%) were serving a sentence of over 10 years, and three (25%) were serving a sentence of 4-10 years. Three (25%) participants were the first third of their sentence, six (50%) were midway through their sentence, and three (25%) were in the final third of their sentence. For ten (83.3%) of the participants this was their first prison sentence, while two (16.7%) had previously served a prison sentence.

When asked about their education level prior to imprisonment, three (25%) stated they had no qualifications, three (25%) were at Standard Grade level, two (16.7%) were at Higher level, one (8.33%) was at Advanced Higher level, one (8.33%) had a College Diploma, one (8.33%) had an Undergraduate Degree, and one (8.33%) had a Postgraduate Degree. Ten (83.3%) stated that they had completed education qualifications during their sentence while two (16.7%) had not.

When asked about their employment status prior to the beginning of their sentence, four (33.3%) were unemployed, two (16.7%) were part-time employed, three (25%) were full-time employed, and three (25%) were self-employed. Job titles held included shoe clerk, bricklayer, electrician, scrap metal dealer, supermarket assistant and one prisoner was a full-time carer for a family member.

Participants were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed with a series of statements regarding their reading, writing and computer literacy skills. Results are shown in figure 4.1 below.

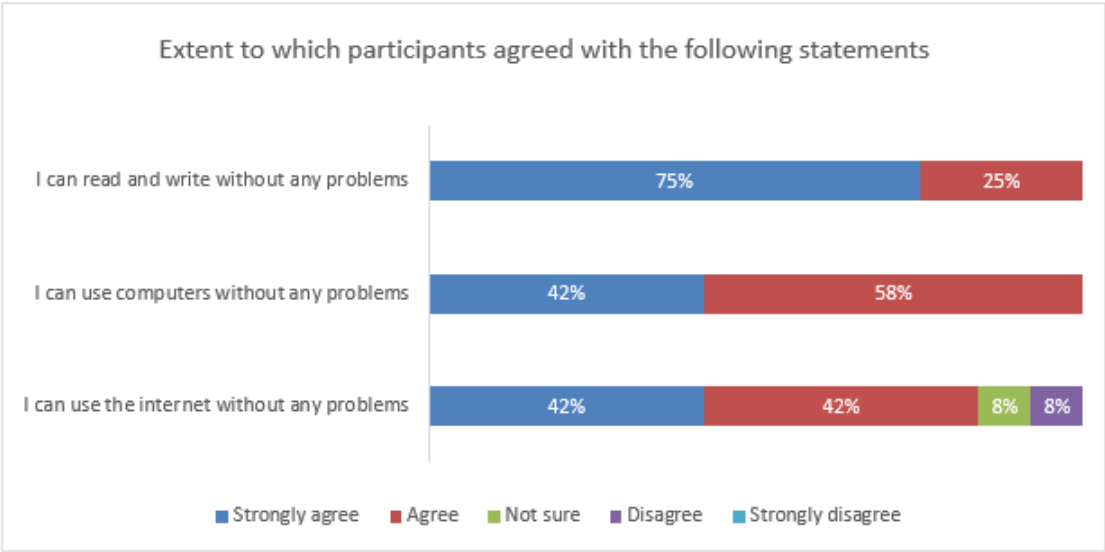


Figure 4.1 Participants' self-perception of various literacy skills

4.2.2 Information needs

Prisoners were asked to identify information needs they experienced as summarised in Figure 4.2.

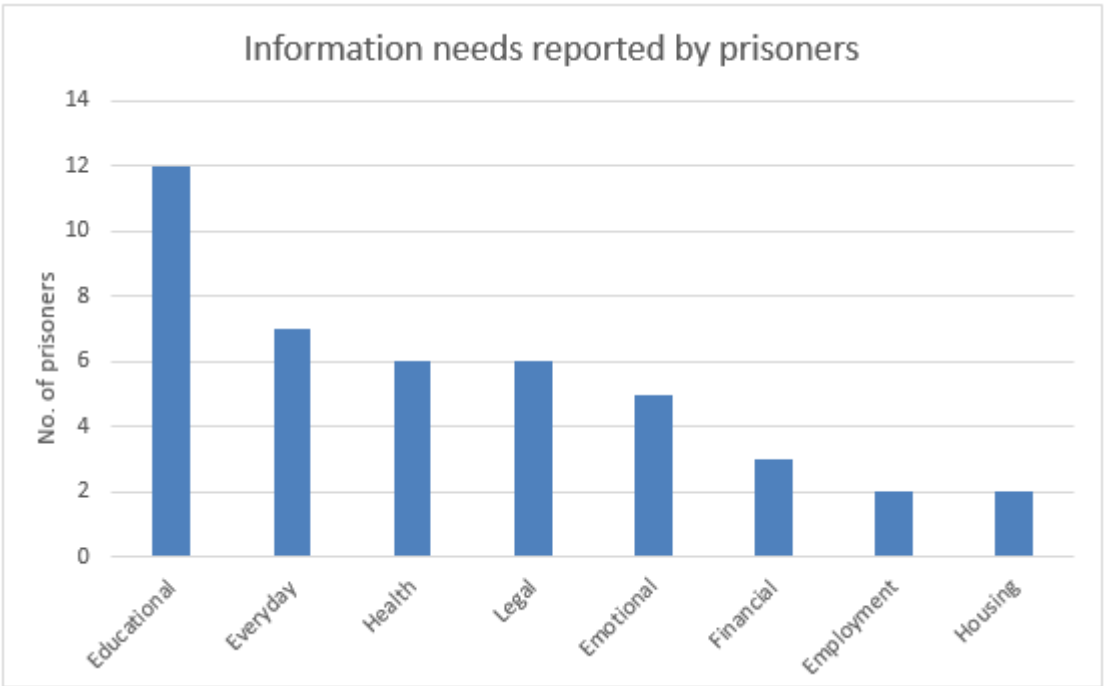


Figure 4.2 Information needs reported by prisoners

## ***Educational***

One of the most common needs identified by prisoners was educational. Information they often sought included basic information on attending education classes in the Learning Centre, “Well you can ask to find out how you go about signing up for classes and you can ask obviously what time education’s on... what qualifications or that you can get as well”.

One prisoner completing an Open University (OU) course explained “I often find myself going to my OU coordinator saying I need information on this, information on that because I want to find out more to build on what I know”.

Another prisoner completing an OU course mentioned that felt that attending education was a positive aspect of his life in prison and had helped him stay “engaged in something other than all the nonsense going on” around him. Seeking information was something that he felt confident about and explained “anytime I need information, if I don’t get it first time, I keep trying... You’ve got to be persistent”.

## ***Everyday***

Everyday needs relating to the operation of the prison environment were also frequently mentioned by prisoners. One prisoner listed some of the questions he asked on a daily basis such as “What time’s the sheds today? What time’s work? What’s for dinner today? What time I’m gonna phone my family? What time you put your washing out?”

Generally all information needs in this category related to practical needs in the prison environment and operations; such as the dinner menu, arranging visits, and laundry times. Several prisoners stated that the first questions they have when coming into prison or moving to a different prison were related to the prison regime, because “when you first come in to a new jail, obviously you don’t know the way things work ‘cause the laundry’s different, the library’s different, the education’s different”.

## ***Health***

Several prisoners also discussed information needs relating to their physical health. This included one prisoner who stated that he wished to become an organ donor but that he experienced problems when trying to seek out the information from the health centre about this, explaining “you

have long periods to wait and one of the things that I was interested in was organ donation. So I went down and asked them and they were like 'Well, good luck with that'".

Other prisoners stated that they generally required health information when feeling unwell, on managing ongoing health problems and advice on physiotherapy to ensure a proper recovery from injuries. One prisoner emphasised the importance of health information, saying "it's always good to know about your health as well so, knowing the information and that".

### ***Legal***

Information needs relating to legal advice and support were also highlighted in the interview process. Queries about prisoners' sentences and "move on dates" were common. Prisoners also required information about the rehabilitation courses run by the prison including availability and dates of courses. The completion of certain courses is mandatory before prisoners can progress in their sentence and one prisoner explained his impression of the "scattered" information provided about these courses; "I think the information regarding courses and what you'll be getting at certain times doesn't give enough information".

Another issue which was brought up were the difficulties prisoners face when trying to access information or "intel" stored on their prisoner records. One prisoner was aware that he had the right to access this information but felt that it would be possibly not worthwhile because it would take a long time and "you'd have to pay like a fee obviously and then they would make you wait the whole time to give you it and a lot of it would be like blacked out".

### ***Emotional***

Prisoners also discussed information needs relating to their emotional status and mental health. Several prisoners confided that they often experienced "down days" and one stated that despite his "tough skin" he found it hard to cope with his emotions in the prison environment.

Many of the emotional needs were connected to the physical barriers presented by the prison environment. Prisoners stated that they were often most anxious and at their "lowest ebb" when they are locked in their cells at night; "Aye, it's brutal... when you're sitting at night. It's that time at night when you've got nobody to talk to... So you're cut off..."

One prisoner went on to state that he felt that a lack of information regarding mental health lead to many prisoners not understanding why they were experiencing negative emotions or how to cope with this. He explained, “You could be depressed in here and not know you’re depressed... We’re all in the same boat. So we’re all having a mental breakdown but nobody’s picked up on it”.

Many prisoners also stated that being isolated from their family members caused them a great deal of anxiety. One prisoner stated, “The only thing that makes me anxious daily is my children... Not seeing my children every day is something that you think about continuously”.

### ***Financial***

Information needs relating to finance were mentioned by some of the prisoners and this related mostly to managing bank accounts and seeking debt advice. One prisoner stated that he felt the Scottish system did not provide the support necessary for him to prepare financially for his release; “We’re not allowed, here, to open bank accounts until you get to your open... then you’re only there for two years and at £18 a week, how the hell are you meant to save out of that?”

He went on to describe the kinds of questions he had about how he would afford to live after release without any savings; “How are you gonna pay for your driving test again? How are you gonna pay for licenses or home insurances or anything?”

### ***Employment***

Information on finding employment and what opportunities there were to develop job skills whilst in prison were also mentioned, as well as information on relocation and how to preparation for job-seeking on release. One prisoner explained, “[I] tried to speak about where I would be relocated on my release so I could then investigate what kind of jobs would be out there” and went on to add that he had been denied this information because he was “too far from the door”.

Two prisoners stated that they were disappointed that there was no vocational training (VT) program at HMP Shotts and that such a program would be useful given the time it takes to learn a trade; “Even guys that have been in prison, say, ten years, it can sometimes take two, three, four years to learn a trade in full... it could be teaching you all kinds of trades that you could make money from when you leave here”. Another prisoners agreed, adding that learning a trade in prison would give prisoners a “vision to go towards” as soon as they were released.

## Housing

Prisoners required information regarding housing on tenancy agreements, owning property whilst in the prison and relocation after release. One prisoner described problems he had ending a tenancy agreement after being sentenced to prison because he “couldn’t get access to [his] property” which contained “loads of stuff”. He felt that he couldn’t start his sentence until the problem was “dealt with” but as a result of being imprisoned, he felt “helpless” and had to go through various third parties to try to resolve the issue. He explained that he felt he was treated differently because he was a prisoner; “they were trying to say that because I got put to jail... that my 28 days gets wavered.” The prisoner finished by stating that the experience was still “clear as day” and caused him anxiety even now years after the incident first occurred as the “mess” had never been fully resolved and he would have to deal with it after being released rather than having a fresh start.

### 4.2.3 Sources of information

Prisoners were asked to identify the information sources they utilised when trying to address their information needs as summarised in Figure 4.3.

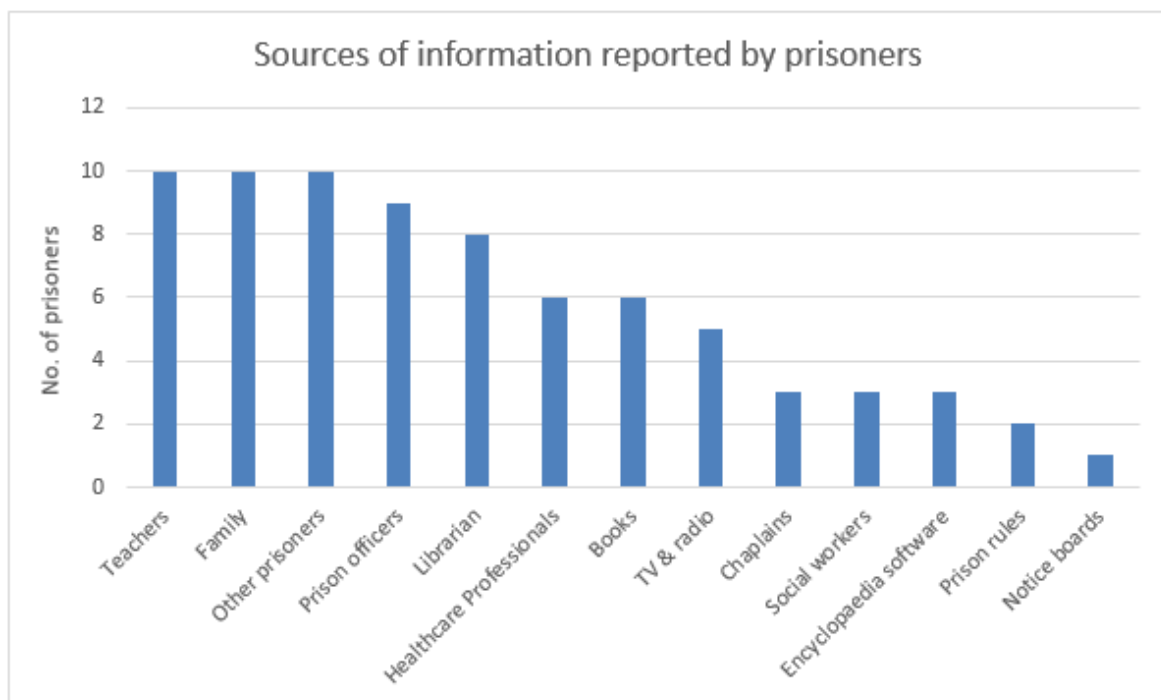


Figure 4.3 Sources of information reported by prisoners

## ***Teachers***

Prisoners felt that approaching a teacher was the most “practical” and “convenient” way to address an educational information need and some added that they felt teachers were the “only ones” who could help them with these information needs.

Prisoners also stated that the general atmosphere of the Learning Centre was more relaxed than the rest of the prison and most felt comfortable approaching teachers for information. One of the prisoner stated that most of the information he sought was from teachers and explained why he preferred this source; “What you find in the jail is that teachers, they’re more helpful; they want to work with people, whereas most other people that work in the jail don’t”.

## ***Family***

Many prisoners stated that they relied heavily on their family as an information source, particularly when seeking information regarding the outside world. One prisoner described his parents as his “outside network” and felt that it was his family’s duty to “keep [him] up to date” with changes in the outside world. Many prisoners also felt that maintaining this connection to the outside world through their family whilst in prison kept them “confident” in their ability to “fit back in” to their community and be able to reintegrate into society better upon release. One prisoner explained that if “anything has changed”, by regularly speaking to his family “it means I’m familiar with it when it’s time to get out”.

The emotional bond and trust regarding family members was felt to be a great influence when choosing this source, particularly when asking sensitive questions regarding health or emotional issues. One prisoner said that he didn’t feel alone because he could contact depend on his family, explaining “Everybody says you’re doing your sentence yourself but you’re no... Your family’s there. They’re doing your sentence with you as well.”

This was a particularly common feeling amongst prisoners but many felt that feelings of ‘shame’ and ‘guilt’ prevented them from relying too much on their family as they did not wish to be a ‘burden’. One prisoner stated “they’re ashamed. I’m ashamed. Why burden them with that?” and went on to add “I should be there helping them... not them helping me.”



Some prisoners felt their families withheld information from them, particularly information which could be upsetting. One prisoner preferred to know so that he could offer help when possible,

If I know they keep things back from us that makes me worse... I get upset with them for it, because there's no much I can do in here but I would like to help them when I can, as much as I can. So, if my family needs advice then I'd like to be able to give them that advice.

### ***Other prisoners***

Several prisoners stated that they sought information from other prisoners, especially at the beginning of their sentence, with one explaining that there were "lots of prisoners [he] looked to for advice". Another prisoner made a similar comment that "It was always cons who gave me information as to how things went day to day."

Many prisoners preferred to ask other prisoners due to the connection they felt based on their shared experience of the prison. One prisoner explained,

The best place you get information from is other cons... It's because they're going through it... They're not just applying or handing information out. They're actually going through the same process of trying to get information.

Many prisoners stated that they simply did not need to seek information because the information network between prisoners was so efficient. One prisoner explained, "prisoners actually have a far better network than anything you could get from British Telecom, from the internet, WIFI... and it's all done by word of mouth". He went on to add, "We tend to find out a lot more information about anything that's happening in the jail than any other party; that's SPS staff, college staff and civilian workers".

Other prisoners agreed, stating that even if an event occurred in a different hall, it would "be around the jail by the afternoon" and that information in the prison "travels faster than the speed of light", spread like "wildfire" and that it could be thought of as "a virus; it attacks and it branches out".

Despite the speed of this information network, it was generally felt to be plagued with misinformation and miscommunication. As information was passed through "word of mouth" from one prisoner to another, many felt that the game "Chinese Whispers" was an appropriate way to describe how the information grew "arms and legs" before reaching others in the prison; with one prisoner adding "unless you've been in the system for a while, don't believe a word that's said."

Another prisoner stated that prisoners would also “feed” information to those they wished to make friends with. He explained that they would “tell you what you wanna hear” and to always be sceptical if you have no proof what they are saying is true. One prisoner said that misinterpreting a conversation could be “serious” and that the prison was “no a nice place sometimes”.

### ***Prison Officers***

Several prisoners mentioned that they no longer felt that the relationship between prisoner and officer was “them and us” and that mutual respect was a better way of describing this relationship; “I fully understand that they’re just ordinary people doing their job and it’s a two-way street; you show them respect and they’ll show you respect back”.

However, some prisoners stated that they felt that the information they could get from officer was “very limited” and that there were certain prison officers “that you don’t dare ask” showing that not all prison officers were felt to be approaching. Some prisoners described the process which they went through of identifying which prison officers they could seek information from and which ones they could not,

I’ve been here for like three years or four years now and so, in that time, I think I’ve picked a couple of guys that most of the time I ask them something, they’re willing to help. And some of them are not willing to help, you understand. They give you an excuse or whatever.

The prisoner went on to explain that rather than approach an officer that he knew would be unlikely to help, he preferred to “wait for the right person to ask that question of, to get that information”.

Whilst most prisoners felt that they could approach at least some prison officers in the prison, a few added that they felt the prison officers were not there to help them with one stating that he felt it was “almost like Jekyll and Hyde with some of them” and that while a few were helpful, “some of them are here to just turn keys and lock you up”, describing them as “drones”.

### ***Librarian***

The librarian was another source of information used by prisoners, and (as with the teaching staff) the location of the librarian in the Learning Centre was felt to be an important factor in choosing to use this source. General information could be sought as the librarian offered an enquiry service, responding to any requests for information on general topics. One prisoner explained, “Well you

know the librarian? She's set up that you fill out a wee form if you're after any information and if she can get it, she will through Wikipedia".

Several prisoners also stated they would approach the librarian for information on classes and for recommendations on further reading for their classes. However, one prisoner felt that the service had gone "downhill recently" because the librarian was only available two days a week.

### ***Healthcare Professionals (HCPs)***

Prisoners often sought information relating to their health from healthcare professionals (HCPs) available through the prison Health Centre. One prisoner stated that he was interested in organ donation and had approached HCPs for more information but he was disappointed with their reaction,

It's like well, they looked at me like 'What are we meant to do?' – 'Well you're the NHS, how can you help me?'... I asked my mum and she sent it on but you just don't get anywhere with things like that.

Several prisoners stated that HCPs were often reluctant to believe prisoners and assumed that most were "scheming to get drugs" rather than being genuinely ill. One prisoner stated that even when a prisoner was diagnosed with an illness, they were normally "fobbed off" and offered Paracetamol or Ibuprofen tablets rather than the appropriate medication. One prisoner recalled that he had one suffered from stomach cramps and was given medication from HCPs but that it had no effect. Eventually he was approached by another prisoner who had suffered from something similar and suggested that he get checked out to see if it was the same illness,

Like it's took another con to say to me 'Go get yourself checked for Helicobacter' and right enough, that's exactly what it was and all it took was a week's worth of meds to get rid of it... I'd been suffering for months with that... I was annoyed at the health care for that.

One prisoner mentioned that he felt uncomfortable speaking to his doctor because there was always a nurse present in the room. He explained that the nurses were available in the prison all week but that doctors only visited at certain times, and that during appointments the nurses would be "sitting nodding to the doctor or kind of saying 'no' or whatever" and he felt this was unfair because "it's no up to them". He added that he felt it wasn't just the nurse's presence that influenced the doctor's actions and added "you can tell that most of the doctors are actually told what to do from the

officers” and that he felt that he was not entitled to patient-doctor confidentiality because he was a prisoner.

### ***Books***

Books were considered to be a useful source of information by many prisoners, particularly when looking for information relating to health or their studies. One prisoner stated that he felt the library offered a good inter-library loans service, explaining, “They’ve got a good system in place where if you’ve got a book that you want and you know the author and that then you just do a request, and if they can get it for you they will”.

While some prisoners considered the library to be “a fantastic resource”, others felt that there were barriers which prevented them from accessing information through books in the prison, including, outdated educational books, explaining that “in here we’re stuck with last year’s stuff”. One prisoner stated “I buy all my own books because the library here can’t assist” and he was particularly interested in legal and educational books so that he could “get somewhere for [his] release”.

### **TV and Radio**

Prisoner also sought information regarding the outside world from TV and radio. Many prisoners stated that they liked to “stay up to date on the news and current events” but some felt that as TV channels were restricted with aired programs being chosen through a majority vote of prisoners, they were sometimes unable to watch or listen to programs that they wanted to.

Another prisoner stated that TV and radio was good for keeping your “head out the jail”. He admitted that he felt that most prisoners preferred to keep their “head in the jail” but explained that “they still wanna read papers and look at the news and talk to people about the outside world” because “they don’t want to be institutionalised”.

### ***Chaplains***

Several prisoners mentioned that their chaplain was an important source of information. They would often ask questions relating to information needs outside of the religious context as they felt they could trust their chaplain because “there’s no prejudice”. Prisoners also stated that the chaplain’s

“help people to actually turn their lives around” and that they were seen as “good people” who “want to help everybody”. One prisoner described his own experience with the chaplaincy service,

I had a lot of demons as well and the chaplaincy helped me to... deal with them and get through it... If it wasn't for the chaplaincy team in here, I wouldn't be here. I would be dead or I would have killed somebody else.

Another prisoner who frequently interacted with his chaplain explained why this connection was so important to him; “It is a social support and it's also a moral support for me, you understand. You know, when I say to you that I speak to my chaplain, it is moral, you understand, and it is spiritual”.

### ***Social Workers***

One prisoner stated that he had trouble trying to end a tenancy agreement when he first came into prison because he felt “tricked” and “rushed into” signing forms. He added that received “one story from one person” then a “totally different story from another”, making the situation much more stressful than it needed to be. He felt that the social worker “just gave up” and explained that he was advised that this was the “wrong time” to be thinking about tenancy agreements and that he should instead “focus” on his sentence.

Another prisoner felt that since he was “too far away from the door” he was denied information through this service and that every year at his ICM, social workers would say “It doesn't matter the fact that your window's only four years away, it's still too early”.

One prisoner felt social workers stereotyped all prisoners as “bad” people and didn't take the time to get to know prisoners or understand the “mistakes” or “rush of blood” involved in their crimes.

### ***Encyclopaedia Software***

Several prisoners stated that they had consulted the encyclopaedia software available on the computers for information because it was easy to use and offered “a power of information”. However, some felt that the encyclopaedia software was “outdated” and “too Americanised” and one prisoner explained that he found it difficult to find material for his course; “It's because it's the encyclopaedia, that's no right up to date or anything so... it was hard to get the information...”

## Prison Rules

Prison rules were referred to by prisoners seeking information regarding their sentence or treatment in the prison and while this was felt to be useful for factual information, it was felt to be sometimes difficult to access and interpret; “I just had an adjudication which I got overturned... [SPS] said, ‘Well actually if it was *that* rule, that doesn’t apply’... if I had actually done that, *this* rule would apply”.

## Notice Boards

Only one prisoner stated that he referred to the notice boards in the prison halls for information when seeking information on the prison regime. It could be argued that due to their constant inert presence, prisoners may be desensitised to the subliminal nature of information provided through this source, thus reducing the likelihood of them identifying this as a key information source.

### 4.2.4 Barriers to information seeking

Prisoners were also asked to identify any problems they had encountered when trying to seek information in the prison environment as summarised in Figure 4.4.

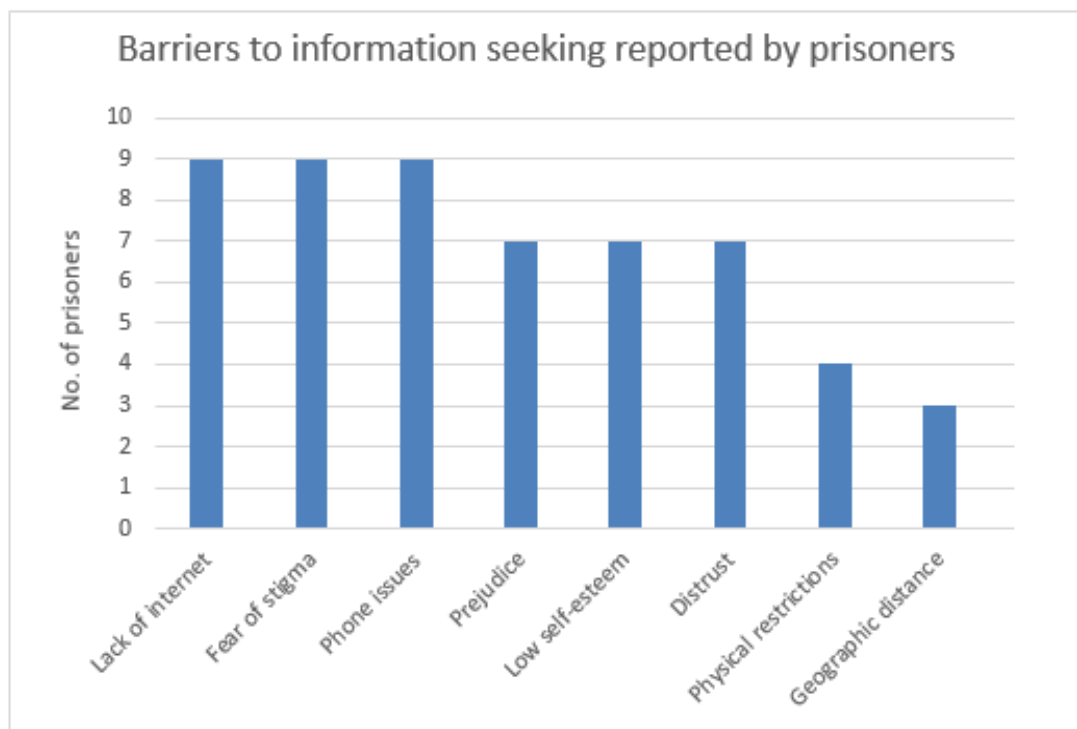


Figure 4.4 Barriers to information seeking reported by prisoners

### ***Lack of internet***

The lack of internet in prison was perceived to be a barrier by most prisoners, as one stated “not having that access is massive”. Many stated that it would enable them to look up information without having to ask for “permission” or burdening others. Many prisoners felt that it would be most beneficial to prisoners who were completing Open University courses as one explained, “It’s the boys who are doing university degrees; they need it more than most. I mean, it allows them to keep in touch with their tutor on a regular basis, access the student forums”.

Another stated that he knew a prisoner who had been unable to do a university course because he needed access to the internet. One prisoner completing a degree felt that he needed the internet to “make things happen” since the prison couldn’t provide the up to date information he needed.

Whilst generally feeling that the introduction of the internet in prisons would be beneficial to the majority of prisoners, it was also felt that there could be negative aspects as certain prisoners might “abuse” the privilege and “ruin it for others”. Prisoners stated that they understood that filtering software, remote monitoring and supervision might be necessary to ensure that this did not occur.

### ***Fear of stigma***

Many prisoners felt that fear of stigma from other prisoners was a significant barrier in their information seeking. Several explained that other prisoners frowned upon those who approached prison officers for information. There was also a risk of being labelled a “grass” for speaking too often with prison officers or sharing information about other prisoners. As prisoner explained “you don’t just open your mouth” in the prison; you need to be “coy” and “smarter” than other prisoners. While some prisoners felt this had changed in recent years, one prisoner mentioned that he felt it was “still kind of viewed like that” and that prisoners could be “under suspicion” for asking a simple question. Overall, many prisoners still felt that there was a certain level of risk involved in approaching prison officers for information.

Another form of stigma between prisoners identified was related to their job roles in the prison. One prisoner explained that because his job involved talking to staff every day, other prisoners felt he was being treated differently and called him a “would-be prisoner”. He explained that this caused him a great deal of anxiety and that he was “bombarded” with “rumours” from “every Tom, Dick and Harry” in the prison.

Some prisoners also felt unable to ask questions in education classes because they were afraid of looking “stupid”. One prisoner stated that he had once asked a teacher for feedback on an essay but instead of receiving feedback, he was told that he had dyslexia and needed to deal with it. The prisoner explained that he was aware of his dyslexia from a young age and felt that it was a “waste of time” to ask for help.

### ***Prejudice***

Some prisoners felt that they weren’t taken seriously and were treated with scepticism when approaching staff for information and that HCPs were “reluctant to believe” what prisoners were saying. Prisoners explained that when they requested medication or information from the Health centre, they were often seen as “scheming to get drugs” or “chasing medication” and were sent away with information needs remaining.

Prisoners also mentioned that they felt that social workers would judge them based on files rather than “getting to know a person” and that lead to them being treated unfairly. One prisoner stated that he felt he was labelled a “bad man” by all social workers because they weren’t willing to acknowledge that he had made a “mistake” and that he felt uncomfortable working with them because of this.

Two prisoners both emphasised that the term ‘information need’ did not seem applicable to prisoners. One explained that, as a prisoner, you are no longer “allowed to need” and you can instead “want”. However, the other prisoner felt that even “want” was too strong a word and instead said it could be better phrased as “you would like”. Both saw this as part of their “punishment” and they simply had to “find a way to deal with it”.

### ***Phone issues***

The phones provided by the prison for prisoners to make contact with families, friends and outside services were felt to have a number of drawbacks which lead to them being considered another barrier to information seeking. One prisoner felt that the phone system was unfair to his family, stating that he should be able to phone his family “when it’s *their* convenience, not when it’s the *prison’s* convenience”. Another explained that even though he wanted to have a “laugh” and “talk trash” on the phone to his friends, he felt unable to because phone calls are recorded. He explained “that laugh might be serious to the SPS” and another prisoner agreed with this, ... Part of your mind



is going, I've got to be careful what I say here, because even if I say something that's banter, it could be misconstrued.

Another prisoner added that he felt that the monitoring of phone calls had a "two way" effect meaning that not only prisoners felt unable to talk at ease because they were "under observation", but that those on the other end of the phone might not be able to either, leaving conversations feeling "awkward" or "boring".

Another issue with the phones related to the phones being positioned in an open area in the halls where the prisoners live. One prisoner explained that, "As soon as you go on the phone, no matter where you are, somebody will be shouting beside you and they see you're on the phone but there's nothing you can do".

Another prisoner agreed with this, stating that prisoners were not always "polite" or "considerate of other people" and that there was often "music getting blared, there's shouting going on, games of table tennis going on which be quite noisy" and that this meant that prisoners were unable to speak to children before they went to school or their wife in a "quiet" or "personal" way. Even when speaking to family members, some prisoners felt that sensitive or emotional information could be "used against" them. One prisoner felt that "You can't have an emotional bond with anybody 'cause it seems to be that if you say something, it is a likely chance that's it going down on your Intel".

Some prisoners also revealed that they felt unable to talk about emotional subjects over the phone and that this was mainly due to the lack of privacy when using the phones in the halls. One prisoner explained, "And you can't be happy every day and there's maybe something you wanna speak to somebody about but then you feel as if you can't because of that".

Another prisoner stated that there is "loads of things you can't say", especially if "the only person you want to know if the person you're talking to". He admitted that there were certain things he wanted to say but that he had "never had the chance to tell them because of the phone calls".

### ***Low self-esteem***

Emotions were considered to be another barrier to information seeking. Prisoners admitted that they often felt guilty when asking staff for information and that doing so made them feel like a "pest", "nuisance" or "burden". One prisoner stated that he sympathised with his teacher because he was aware that she had "twenty to thirty prisoners, all studying university, that she's got to juggle" as well as helping him. Many prisoners felt that they would prefer not to bother staff unless

necessary but admitted that they often felt they had no alternative because “at the end of the day you’re cornered”.

Several prisoners stated that they were concerned about what staff thought of them and one prisoner stated “you get further with sugar than you do with vinegar” but also warned that by being overly polite there was a risk that they would be considered “fake”, “false” or “manipulative” and that he would prefer not to ask simply to avoid this; “Even if you are being polite, then you worry am I being too polite? Am I taking advantage? And you don’t wanna be that person”.

Some also stated that they preferred not to ask too much of their family because it was *their* sentence and not their families. Many felt that while they could ask questions of their family, it was not their family’s duty to provide this kind of support and some stated that they felt “ashamed” and found it difficult to speak to family members, “I know if I phone my gran, I’m just opening a can of worms for the tears to come”.

### ***Distrust***

Another prisoner stated that he had never let his relationship with staff reach the point of trust because he felt that it could “backfire” and he reinforced that it was important to always “keep to that boundary”. One prisoner explained that he felt that many prisoners simply wouldn’t approach prison officers for information, not just because they were uncomfortable but because they were “scared of what might happen”. This appeared to be a trust issue because he explained that prisoners were worried that prison officers would make fun of them or “just fob [them] off”.

One prisoner summarised his feelings on becoming imprisoned as “everything’s out the window” and “just because you’re in the jail, [you’ve got] no rights, nothing”. Another prisoner felt “stuck”, explaining that he felt information was restricted by SPS who didn’t trust prisoners with it; “Access books? Nope. Try to get regulations, rules? Nope, you’re not getting it. Information is a tool and you’re not allowed to get tools because you can use it against us”.

These trust issues were not only between staff and prisoners, but also between prisoners with several stating that they had “acquaintances” rather than “close pals”. One prisoner stated “I don’t need any friends in here” while the majority stated that they had at least some friends in the prison. However, it was clear that all felt they could only trust these “friends” to a certain extent with some explaining that you could only trust them “at an arm’s length” or that there was “always something in the back of your head” and “you never trust anyone with your deepest darkest secrets in here”.

Many prisoners stated that they trusted their families more than any other information source and most felt that they could not trust members of staff or other prisoners with certain information, even if they had known the person for years; “You’ve got to wear a mask in here to a certain extent because it might be that you can trust certain teachers and trust certain boys to talk to but you can only trust them so far”.

### ***Physical Restrictions***

Several prisoners felt that by simply not being to “walk out the door” to see family or friends, they were cut off from the world outside more than simply physically but socially and emotionally as well.

Prisoners also felt anxious that at night when they are locked in their individual cells as they felt forced to rely on prison officers if something went wrong during this time. One prisoner described a recent incident which occurred during lock up time; “Like there’s somebody just the other day... he must have hit the buzzer at about ten o’ clock at night to say he’s in pain. Now he never got taken to the hospital ‘til five hours later”.

Another prisoner recounted a similar incident when a high-profile prisoner had fallen ill at night but had to wait hours before his cell was unlocked so that he could be taken to hospital. The prisoner stated that he understood that prison officers had to maintain a “balancing act for security” but that even that even though the unwell prisoner had been involved in some “heavy” stuff, he was “still entitled to healthcare” and should have been helped sooner.

Prisoners also experienced negative emotions due to the physical restrictions of the prison environment and many stated that these feelings were particularly distressing during “lock up” times when they are unable to communicate with others. One prisoner stated that he felt that this time was “brutal” and that being “cut off” and unable to “have an adult conversation” lead to extreme stress, upset and even suicidal feelings. He explained, “You could be on the border of wanting to kill yourself but you can’t do nothing... There’s nothing else you can do if you can’t get to sleep or you can cry yourself to sleep”.

### ***Geographic distance***

Many prisoners stated that it was not just physical restrictions that prevented them from seeking information but also geographic distance. Some prisoners had family that lived abroad and their only

method of contact was using the phone as visits were not possible. This meant that these prisoners could go years without seeing their family members and one prisoner described the reassurance he would feel seeing his family as opposed to just talking to them on the phone,

You just wanna see people... It's different than talking to someone and seeing them, you understand... seeing that kind of happiness oozing from them... You understand, you feel yourself sure that you're alright, even though you're far away from them.

Another prisoner mentioned that he sympathised with the families who travelled far to visit their relatives in prison. He explained that some prisoners find it "hard to get a visit" and that money was sometimes a barrier as some families simply couldn't afford the "petrol money" to come visit.

### **4.3 Interviews: education staff**

A group interview was conducted with four members of teaching staff, followed by individual interviews with two prison officers who regularly work in the Learning Centre. The purpose of this was to follow up findings from prisoner interviews in order to triangulate data and offer another perspective on prisoner information behaviour in the small world context of the prison.

#### **4.3.1 Information needs**

##### ***Educational***

One officer stated that prisoners would often approach him in the hall to ask for help getting information about classes and how to register for these. Questions included, "Boss, I want to get myself on this course... How do I get on it?" Unsurprisingly, all education staff stated that they felt prisoners have information needs relating to their education. Examples of questions they had been approached by prisoners with included; available class subjects and qualification levels, class timetables and where to seek study material.

##### ***Everyday***

Both prison officers agreed that they were regularly approached for information on visits, work times and other everyday events in the prison. An officer felt that prisoners were often concerned

about changes to the regime, for example if staff were being cut back in the “sheds” where a large portion of prisoners work. Teachers also felt that ‘timetabling’ was a common query with prisoners as they often had issues “fitting [education] into their daily routine” and ensuring that it did not “clash” with other departments in the prison. One teacher went on to explain that she felt prisoners wanted to do too many things at once, attending work, visits and the gym as well as education, and said that they needed to learn to ‘prioritise’ more. She explained “they want it all but don’t want to give anything up”.

### ***Health***

Both prison officers stated that the majority of prisoners asked questions relating to their health; “most of the time the guys speak to you it’s about healthcare or healthcare-related matters”. Questions about prescriptions changes, accessing medication, ongoing conditions and dealing with substance abuse were common. One officer also stated that prisoners would sometimes seek health information for other reasons, explaining “the health thing could cover outside information as well because maybe a family member’s been diagnosed with something and they need information on that”.

### ***Employment***

One teacher stated that prisoners in his class would often ask questions about how the course would be useful for future employment seeking. He said that a lot of them seemed to think a creative class was a “waste of time” and would ask “what good is this gonna do me?” He added that he felt prisoners needed to know how to use the skills they have gained in education for job interviews and required explanation on how to put themselves across, stating that he often explained to prisoners that, “somebody that has a creative background is going to think creatively, which is useful”.

## **4.3.2 Sources of information**

### ***Teachers***

All teaching staff felt that they were regularly approached by prisoners with questions regarding not only education, but a wide variety of information needs; including family, health, financial and emotional matters. One teacher explained, “I’m a teacher, a nurse, social worker, a mum, a granny,

a Listener. It's all rolled into one... You can't just be a lecturer while in here. You take on many different roles".

She went on to say that she felt that education staff not only provided educational guidance but also played a "pastoral" role in the prison. She explained that whilst teaching staff were bound to the same rules as other staff and had to report any threatening or dangerous behaviour but explained that if a prisoner was simply seeking advice on dealing with family matters, she felt a personal obligation to keep the discussion personal and would "never divulge that information".

Teachers explained that they felt they had "mutual respect" with most prisoners and one teacher explained that this was partly because teaching staff were "not there as part of any kind of punishment regime" and were instead there simply to "help them through their sentence". Another teacher agreed, adding that the lack of "formal distance" helped them do his job. He explained that, as opposed to prison officers, teachers were "trying to help them... we're not just telling them what to do.... So it is a different relationship. It's not so authoritarian".

### ***Family***

Education staff recognised that many prisoners depended on their family for information, with one teacher stating that this was a "useful" source for prisoners but that he thought this was normal behaviour for anyone and not unusual for prisoners because "that tends to be where most people, when they run into problems, where anybody would go". However, another teacher pointed out that a significant portion of prisoners did not have family or were estranged from their relatives, and that because of this, they were unable to depend on this source of information.

### ***Other prisoners***

All staff members felt that prisoners were most comfortable approaching other prisoners for information and that other prisoners would be "their first port of call". One teacher felt that "friendships" played a role in prisoners relying on each other for information and assistance; "A lot happens down here through friendships – 'My pal wants this. My pal wants that'".

An interesting topic which came up regarding prisoners sharing information is that teaching staff felt that prisoners knew things before they did. When asked why they felt this was they explained,

I think it's because they've always got a wee ear. They listen. They do listen to conversations. You might not think that they're listening to you... you don't know that they're taking it in but they do.

When asked about their view of the information network between prisoners, one officer admitted that they felt it was about "a hundred times faster" than their own information network. Another officer felt that "some of these guys know a lot more things than we do", explaining that "information travels very fast" in the prison and this was "just the nature of the jail".

When asked why this was, one officer pointed out that prisoners are there "24/7" whilst staff "only get eight hours a day" meaning that they are out of the information loop for the rest of the day. He also added that information could have an entirely different significance to each party,

Something that might seem tiny to us could be absolutely massive to a prisoner information-wise and vice versa; sometimes it could just be something trivial to them and we think 'How have we not heard about this?'

Staff agreed with earlier findings that this information network was unreliable as a source of information and also felt that "Chinese Whispers" was an appropriate way to describe how information travelled and changed as it moved through the prison. Staff members also felt that this information network could be abused as information could be purposefully manipulated by prisoners and used to target specific individuals, "that's why there's so many assaults; half the time it's false information or somebody stirring".

### ***Prison Officers***

Prison officers felt that they were approached regularly for information on a number of things, including health, education and everyday information regarding the prison operations. They were especially likely to be approached in the hall where prisoners had few other information sources available. Both prison officers felt that it was their duty to "relay" and "break down" complex information from other services in the prison, such as social work and health care, and stated that they felt it was their job to "care" for prisoners rather than simply "watching over them".

When asked why prisoners would approach an officer for information, one member of staff said that he felt it was "all about comfort" and that while some prisoners would show "genuine" interest in certain things, prison officers were also aware that prisoners would sometimes "fish for information".

After stating that initially most prisoners would prefer to ask other prisoners for information, one officer felt that prison officers would be the next source they would approach but that prisoners would “pick and choose which officer they would go to”. One teacher agreed with this and added that she felt it “was a known fact that” some prison officers were “more approachable than others”.

One officer admitted that when first beginning his role, he treated prisoners with prejudice and “did brand them all the same”. However, he went on to explain that after working in the prison for over a decade and meeting a wide variety of prisoners, he learned that “you can’t treat them all the same”. He explained that over time he had come to empathise with prisoners and see them as individuals because “there are guys with different health problems, different issues going on outside; you don’t know their circumstances”.

However, both prison officers were aware that some prisoners were not comfortable approaching prison officers for information because they risked facing prejudice from other prisoners. Both felt that due to a residual “them-us” philosophy in the prison, prisoners could be branded a “grass” for talking to prison officers too often and one officer said approaching an officer was probably still “frowned upon”.

### ***Healthcare Professionals (HCPs)***

One officer mentioned that while prisoners would consult HCPs for information on their health, this service did not always meet the information needs of prisoners. The officer stated that he recall a time when a prisoner was “kicking doors” because his medication was suddenly changed because a new doctor had started working in the prison. The officer took the prisoner to the side, “calmed him down” and listened to his concerns. Despite wanting to help the prisoner immediately, the officer explained to the prisoner that he could only give a “limited amount of information” because he “wasn’t a medical professional” and promised that he would try to find out why the change had occurred so that he could relay the information to the prisoner properly. The officer went to explain his view of the health service offered in the prison,

In my eyes, there’s not enough consistency for the guys at the health centre and it’s causing confusion for them.... Without any explanation – ‘You don’t need it. You’re not getting it anymore’.



He felt that it was not the change of medication and lack of consistency itself which was the bigger concern to prisoners but instead, it was the lack of explanation they were given when such changes occurred. The officer stated,

I think at times certain professionals don't realise some of these guys have got a bit of catching up to do in the understanding and explanations... Some of these guys need that in their life, they need the explanation in order to understand and move on.

#### **4.3.3 Barriers to information seeking**

##### ***Lack of internet***

Education staff all agreed that the lack of internet was a barrier to information seeking, particularly for prisoners who are studying Open University. One teacher pointed out that having access to electronic journals online through JSTOR and Athens would be beneficial for OU students and felt that not having this was a "real barrier" to their information seeking.

However, despite all staff agreeing that the lack of internet was a barrier to prisoner's information seeking, opinion on whether the introduction should be introduced into prison was divided. One prison officer stated that he was "dead against it" and that internet access could never be justified in prisoners because of the vast wealth of information available online, such as "bomb-making" and "weapon-making", and the fact that prisoners could potentially contact and threaten ex-prisoners, victims' families or find out details on staff members. He was adamant that there was "no place for the internet in jails for prisoners".

Some teachers felt that whilst it might be difficult to manage initially, they felt that the introduction of the internet would be a positive thing overall. One teacher said that it would be "straight-forward" to set up filtering software so that prisoners couldn't access social media, such as Twitter and Facebook. Another teacher agreed with this and explained that "education should always be arguing to do things rather than not to".

##### ***Fear of stigma***

Staff felt that prisoners were often hesitant to approach them for information for fear of facing prejudice from other prisoners. One member of staff stated that many prisoners would ask for

things in an aggressive or “combative” manor simply because they would be looked down upon by other prisoners for acting overly polite. He added that he felt that by asking this way, prisoners “are being polite in their own world” with another member of staff agreeing that prisoners had a “worldview” that was based on their experience of interaction with prison officers. He explained that between prisoners and prison officers “it’s a yes and no thing” and that being overly conversational or pleasant with staff wasn’t considered the right way to behave by many prisoners.

An officer also agreed that he felt that prisoners still felt wary of approaching prison officers as this was “frowned upon” and they would be looked upon with suspicion. One teacher felt that prisoners felt they had to “put on a face” and act like a “big man” even in front of “friends”. She said that they might be afraid of peers making fun of them and saying things like, “Oh look at the way you’re talking, you wee crawler. You’re this or you’re that”.

Staff also recognised that many prisoners were afraid of looking “stupid” by asking what might seem like obvious questions in class. One teacher stated that he tried to combat this by making topics which he think could be challenging to one particular prisoner into exercises for the whole class to avoid singling out particular prisoners.

### ***Low self-esteem***

Teachers recognised that prisoners often seemed to feel guilt when asking for information. One teacher explained that when asking for help, prisoners would start by saying, “I’m really sorry to bother you” or “there I’m bothering you again, I’m really sorry”. All teachers agreed that prisoners were often “apologetic” when asking for information or assistance from them. Rather than providing a service which is “expected” by prisoners, teaching staff felt that they were greatly appreciated by prisoners who did not want to “trouble” them, and that this was down to not just mutual respect but because prisoners fearing they would ask too much of staff.

Staff also felt that low self-esteem could result in a lack of motivation and confidence, thereby leaving prisoners feeling apathetic and unable to address their information needs. One teacher explained that there was “a culture of some of the guys... feeling disempowered or unable to use their initiative, even in the smallest way”. One member of staff added that she felt the “routine” of the prison is primarily to blame for this. Staff felt that activities which helped prisoners feel like they were leading “meaningful lives” helped to increase their confidence and overall sense of “initiative” and “self-efficacy”. Two teachers felt that work activities could be improved so that the outputs of prisoners’ labours contribute more to charitable organisations, such as building benches for care

homes, and that giving prisoners a greater sense of “agency” would lead to them “engaging” in the information seeking process, rather prisoners simply stating “give me that information”.

### ***Distrust***

One officer explained that he felt the biggest barrier to gaining trust with prisoners was his uniform and that he felt prison officers were often negatively associated with the police because of this.

I think the biggest barrier is... the white shirt and the tie. We’re still a uniformed service and I think until this goes, even though we’re prison officers we’re still seen as ‘screws’ as they call it... These are obviously guys who don’t see any difference between us and the police service.

However, another officer felt that the uniforms were not the real problem. He felt that this was “only a barrier to individual prisoners” and that “Some prisoners, no matter how much you try to be nice to them, just don’t like you because you’re a prison officer”.

### ***Physical Restrictions***

Staff members all felt that the physical restrictions of the prison environment had a negative impact on prisoners’ ability to seek information. They acknowledged that “lock up times” were when prisoners would be most likely to feel distress at not being able to seek information.

I think it’s just the whole prison system because they’ve got lock up times at certain times of the day and they might want some information when they’re locked up and there’s nobody in the hall. They’re on skeleton staff...

At such times when prisoners are isolated from communication, staff felt that this was when they most needed support. One teacher explained that having simple liberties taken away such as being able to “open the fridge and have a wee glass of orange juice” could lead to prisoners feeling “disempowered” and “dependant”.

One officer stated that even though the Learning Centre follows the same rules as the rest of the prison and operates under the same physical restrictions, it had a much more “relaxed” atmosphere. He explained that “down in the hall” prisoners feel the need to ‘watch their back’ and that prisoners could be friends one day and enemies the next and that “it’s just the way it is; that’s just the nature of being in jail”. He went on to describe the different atmosphere of the Learning Centre,

They're up here and they're up here trying to achieve something whereas down in the hall, there's not much for them to do.... whereas up here they're actually focused on something and enjoying it whether it be art, music, ICT, the library, chess...

### ***Professional Boundaries***

Both prison officers were 'local boys' and explained that they lived near the prison. Because of this, they admitted that they had connections to some prisoners previous to their imprisonment and that often prisoners would question them about friends or family outside. One officer explained that it came up naturally in conversation; "Where do you stay?... Oh, I know that area... Do you know him?"

While seemingly innocent questions, the officer felt that he always needed to be aware that prisoners could be "fishing" for information. Another officer described a situation when he felt that whilst he held information of interest to a prisoner, he was unable to share it with them; "Obviously it was a lad in here's relative who hadn't been keeping well... and I thought to myself really it's not my place to be saying this in case the family... didn't want him knowing". The officer went on to explain that he felt conflicted about the situation because he wanted to inform the prisoner that his relative was unwell but felt he had made the right choice.

## **4.4 Chapter Summary**

This chapter provides an overview of the findings from twelve individual interviews held with prisoners and a series of interviews with prison staff. Expected information needs relating to education, the everyday prison regime, and health were most common but broader emotional and coping needs were also evident in findings.

A clear preference for interpersonal sources of information was identified and several factors influencing engagement with these were apparent, such as convenience of location, trustworthiness and their willingness to assist.

A range of barriers to information seeking were identified, including expected physical barriers (internet access, phone call monitoring and isolation during lock up hours). However, it is clear that significant cognitive and affective barriers were also experienced by prisoners who responded by adopting a range of coping and self-protective measures, such as secrecy and deception. Findings will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

### **5.1 Chapter overview**

This chapter outlines adaptations to the methodology during fieldwork and analysis of data (section 5.2). This is followed by an in-depth discussion of findings, including an analysis of results from the demographic questionnaire (section 5.3), information needs (section 5.4), selection of sources (section 5.5) and barriers to information seeking in the prison (section 5.6). This chapter concludes with a summary (section 5.7), reiterating key discussion points.

### **5.2 Adaptations to the methodology**

The researcher originally intended to conduct a focus group with six members of education staff; including the Learning Centre manager, librarian, two teachers and two prison officers; but this was not possible as the librarian was unavailable and the two prison officers were unable to attend at the arranged time due to conflicting work schedules. Therefore, instead of conducting one focus group with all education staff, a group interview was held with three teachers and the Learning Centre manager who, through her simultaneous role as a teacher, was able to speak from both a teaching and managerial viewpoint. This was followed by two individual interviews with prison officers.

Another adaptation related to the coding of findings from the interviews. Despite hosting the interviews in the Learning Centre with participants who attend education classes, few prisoners gave detailed accounts of scenarios in which they had sought out specific information. This was felt to be due to participants relying on memory to recall examples of their information seeking (follow up interviews might have countered this). Unfortunately, there appeared to be minimal data correlating to Wilson's (1996) Model of Information Behaviour and Kuhlthau's (1991) Information Search Process Model and, as such, these theoretical frameworks were not utilised for findings analysis to the previously predicted extent.

### **5.3 Demographic Questionnaire**

Results relating to statement one 'I can read and write without any problems' were unsurprising given that all prisoners were involved to various degrees in the Learning Centre and the majority will

read or write as part of their class (with the exception of art). This also ties with the SPS 2015 Prisoner Survey which found that only 14% of prisoners felt they had difficulty with writing and 12% with reading (Scottish Prison Service 2015b, p.4). It is possible that the 14% and 12% are comprised of prisoners that paradoxically avoid education due to their low literacy.

Results relating to statement two 'I can use computers without any problems' were again, unsurprising given that computers are readily available in the Learning Centre, particularly in Graphic Design or IT classes. Computers are also used by prisoners in other classes, such as social sciences, as several prisoners stated that they regularly accessed the encyclopaedia software installed on these computers.

However, results relating to statement three 'I can use the internet without any problems' were found to be surprising when matched against other demographic details collected. Given that the vast majority of prisoners were serving a sentence of over 10 years and 75% of prisoners were at least halfway through their sentence, a large portion will have been imprisoned for at least half a decade. It is also worth noting the positive correlation between education and digital literacy (Deursen, Dijk & Peters 2011) since 75 % of participants had not, prior to imprisonment, attended education beyond high-school level. Upon consideration of these factors, it seems unusual that the vast majority of participants felt they could use the internet without any problems. There are a number of possible explanations requiring further exploration;

1. Participants may have used the internet regularly before coming into prison and assume that it has not changed significantly over the past decade, resulting in the perception that they would still be able to use it without problem. This is a problematic assumption given the extent to which the internet has developed and advancements which are being made regularly (The Telegraph 2016).

2. A more complex theory which might explain this unexpected result ties to Chatman's (1996) information poverty theory. Prisoners may simply choose not to acknowledge the fact that they are no longer be able to use the internet without problem and this could be deemed to be a sign of denial, described as a "coping strategy" (Chatman 1996, p.197). The aim of this may be to protect themselves from fear of the unknown and any dramatic changes to the world they may face upon release.

3. Another interesting theory relating to information poverty is that participants might have acknowledged that they were unlikely to be able to use the internet without problem but did not want to reveal this. This theory would suggest that prisoners deliberately attempted to deceive the researcher in order to hide their true level of ability (Chatman 1996, p.196).

## 5.4 Information needs

Most frequently reported were needs relating to education, everyday information on the prison regime, health, legal support, and family. Other information needs were related to finance, employment and housing. Generally, the information needs identified in the course of this research were found to be similar to those already identified in previous studies (Rafedzi & Abrizah 2014; Campbell 2005; Chatman 1999; Burt 1977) and as a result, this study has enhanced our understanding of information needs that are internationally shared by a range of prisoner demographic groups and across a number of countries.

With previous needs being to some degree *expected* in the prison environment, this study has revealed that prisoners experience interwoven emotional needs relating to family, mental health and coping with the prison environment. Separated from family and unable to discuss these emotional needs with others in the prison environment (often due to stigma or distrust), prisoners experience intense feelings of helplessness and isolation. To deal with this, prisoners exhibit a range of self-protective measures, including secrecy and deception as previously outlined by Chatman (1996) in her study of information poverty. It is also appropriate to acknowledge the potential occurrence of subconscious visceral needs of which prisoners themselves are unaware (Taylor 1968) and consequently unable to address.

Many prisoners appeared unwilling to reveal sensitive information to others, emphasising that you could only trust others in the prison environment to a “certain extent” and that they would never reveal their “deepest, darkest secrets” to anyone, even those they perceived to be friends. One reason for this secrecy was that there was often felt to be risk attached to sharing information (particularly sensitive, emotional information) as it could be used against them or revealed to others, resulting in stigma or ridicule. This process of weighing up potential risks and benefits of sharing information is categorised as *risk-taking* by Chatman (1960). To some extent, prisoners may have bottled up emotions in a similar way before imprisonment and, with a possible link existing between repressed emotions and increased aggression (Vohs et al. 2011), might have been a contributing factor to their crime. Rehabilitation may prove more challenging to prisoners who continue to ignore these emotional needs, in contrast to those willing to approach prison services for the information and assistance they require to overcome these emotions and to better cope with the prison environment.

Many prisoners revealed that they wear a “mask” in the prison environment which included acting happy when they were feeling down so that they would not have to reveal negative emotions or their inability to cope, demonstrating *deception* Chatman (1996). By hiding their negative emotions prisoners did not need to reveal their vulnerabilities and this deception was also evident in other aspects of prisoners’ behaviour, such as telling family they were coping well with the prison environment to prevent them from worrying.

Prisons are often viewed as intense, violent environments and there are several theories regarding the root cause of this violence. The *deprivation* model (Wortley 2002; Farrington & Nuttal 1980; Sykes 1958) is of greater relevance to this study as it claims that isolation and lack of freedom in the prison environment causes deep psychological trauma which prisoners respond to by adopting psychological self-preservation and “creating a deviant prison subculture that promotes violence” (Homel & Thomson 2005). Findings of this study, particularly those relating to the self-protective measures of secrecy, deception and risk-taking exhibited in prisoner information behaviour, support this theory as these unmet emotional needs could contribute to an intense and emotional-charged atmosphere where many individuals feels unable to approach others due to fear of negative consequences.

## **5.5 Sources of information**

Previous studies have revealed a number of sources consulted by prisoners seeking information and the majority of these findings are confirmed in this study. Prisoners appeared to show a clear preference for interpersonal sources of information and this may be because such sources are “typically easier and more readily accessible than the most authoritative printed sources” (Case 2002, p.142). However, this principle of choosing the source requiring the “least effort” to access may result in more useful information sources being overlooked (Childers 1975).

While it is understood that prisoners’ use of these sources is often determined by pragmatic factors and the perceived trustworthiness of an information source (Mitchell & Latchford 2010; Akerstrom 1987), this study offers greater detail regarding the factors influencing prisoners’ use of these sources and a discussion of sources identified in this study follows.

### **5.5.1 Interpersonal sources of information**

There were a number of interpersonal sources which prisoners appeared to be most comfortable approaching for information. These included teachers, family, the librarian and chaplains and



preference for these appeared to be influenced by their a lack of connection to the “punishment regime” of the prison (as opposed to prison officers) and a feeling that these sources could be better trusted because they “wanted to help” prisoners.

**Teachers** were normally approached for information relating to education and the majority of prisoners attributed this to an awareness of the role played by teachers and their convenient presence within an area of the prison in which educational information needs are generally experienced. Use of this source also appeared to be influenced by the fact that teachers were not simply telling prisoners what to do and were therefore, not linked to the “punishment regime” of the prison. Staff added that they were occasionally approached for advice on family or health matters and they felt that this was because they were trusted and respected by prisoners. It could be summarised that teachers play a multi-faceted role in addressing prisoner needs. The willingness of prisoners to confide in teachers and rely on them for information, other than that which they are paid to provide, perhaps sheds light on the sense of self efficacy displayed by the education-attending prisoners interviewed in this study. It could be speculated that, without such approachable, diverse sources of information, prisoners may not have been willing or able to act upon their information needs.

Many prisoners relied on their **family** as an information source, particularly for information relating to the outside world and this was particularly true of prisoners who did not have friends outside the prison as they felt this was their only “outside network”. Trust appeared to be the greatest factor influencing prisoners’ use of this information source. Many prisoners preferred to ask their family for information, particularly anything embarrassing or sensitive in nature, but many admitted that they felt guilty and ashamed of their dependence on family members, and would avoid asking anything of their family unless it was necessary. It was also found that prisoners who were imprisoned at a young age (and therefore heavily dependent on family members before this) appeared to be particularly reliant on their family for information during their sentence. Rafedzi & Abrizah (2014) found that imprisoned juveniles often required greater support from relatives when trying to adapt to prison life and it seems plausible that an increased dependency on family as a source of information could result from coming into prison at an early age (p.1).

**Chaplains** were a source of information not previously discussed by other studies. Some prisoners highly valued their chaplain as an information source and felt comfortable approaching them for a variety of reasons, with questions not strictly related to religion. The reason for this appeared to be due to the “spiritual” connection prisoners felt with their chaplain, coupled with the absence of prejudice. Again, prisoners appeared to value this support because chaplains seemed to genuinely

want to help prisoners and did not appear to be linked to any part of the “punishment regime” but further research into this is necessary to draw conclusions about how this relationship impacts the information behaviour of prisoners.

The **librarian** was generally approached for educational information which teachers did not have the time to provide. The convenient location of the librarian in the Learning Centre made this source practical but the factor which was found to have the greatest influence on prisoners’ use of this source was the librarian’s ability to access the internet at their desk. Prisoners were able to make general enquiries by filling out forms that would consequently be researched online by the librarian, who would provide the requested information to the prisoner. However, as the librarian was only present two days a week, prisoners acknowledged that they would often have to wait several days before getting a response to their queries. In a previous study, Campbell (2005) similarly found that prisoners often had difficulty seeking help from this source as librarians often had limited time available to spend with each prisoner (p.26).

Several other interpersonal sources of information were identified, including prison officers, healthcare professionals and social workers, and whilst these were all felt to be useful to a certain extent, there were felt to be many negative aspects to using these sources. Prisoners described their distrust towards these information sources and the prejudice and stigma linked to these services.

Prisoners most frequently approached **prison officers** for information relating to the prison regime, such as work and gym times, as this was felt to be appropriate to their role. However, prisoners would also request information relating to education if they were not able to access teachers (i.e. in the prison halls) or health if they had received particularly complex information from HCPs. The majority of prisoners stated that they had approached prison officers for information but emphasised that there were only *certain* prison officers that were approachable, as many were seen to be unwilling to help. Trust was also revealed to be a key factor influencing prisoners’ willingness to approach prison officers for information as there was felt to be a degree of risk associated with revealing sensitive information to prison officers. This links to Chatman’s (1996) information poverty theory and theory regarding “self-protective” measures, specifically “risk-taking” as prisoners may feel that the cost of sharing information is too great to be worthwhile (p.197). Several risks were highlighted by prisoners, such as the risk of stigma from other prisoners who might label them as a “grass” or the risk that an officer might reveal sensitive or embarrassing information about a prisoner to others. In general, it was found that engaging with prison officers was still “frowned upon” and acknowledged as unacceptable behaviour by the some prisoners. This links to Chatman’s

(1999) theory regarding “social norms” which determine what is considered to be appropriate behaviour within the small world of the prison (p.214).

Prisoners would often approach **healthcare professionals (HCPs)** for information relating to their health because they were unable to access it elsewhere. In studies of prisoners’ help seeking, it is recognised that prisoners approach HCPs for these pragmatic reasons but also found that prisoners often felt reluctant to approach HCPs due to a lack of trust towards formal health services (Mitchell & Latchford 2010; Howerton et al. 2007). Another factor which appeared to negatively influence engagement with this source, was the lack of privacy and confidentiality prisoners felt that had during doctor’s appointments because “you can tell most of the doctors are told what to do by officers” and many prisoners felt that they were unfairly judged and stereotyped by HCPs and seen as always “scheming for drugs”. Some prisoners also felt that waiting times were long, although findings from the SPS 2015 Prisoner Survey initially appear to contradict this with the majority of prisoners reported being seen by nurses within two days, this claim is further supported by findings that 25% of prisoners reported waiting ten days or more when requesting access to a doctor (Scottish Prison Service 2015b, p.7). This lack of trust and fear of prejudice might explain why this study found that teachers and prison officers were often approached for health information.

Another source not previously examined by other studies, are **social workers** available through the prison service. This source was mainly consulted for information on housing, employment and financial and, whilst some prisoners reported satisfaction with this service, others were reluctant to use this source of information. Some prisoners felt that social workers judged prisoners based on their files alone rather than treating them as individuals and others explained that conflicting information from social workers had put them off using this source of information in future. Such incidents could damage the overall reputation of formal information services in the prison environment and inaccurate or conflicting information could lead to prisoners making poor decisions regarding significant aspects of their life (i.e. accommodation or finance). It was also felt that assumptions about prisoners’ needs based on their sentence stage prevented them from accessing social workers (for example, for advice on ending a tenancy or accessing employment information shortly after imprisonment). Prisoners felt that this service was “cut off” due to incorrect assumptions on what information they *should* be looking for at the beginning of their sentence.

### **5.5.2 The information network of prisoners**

Another popular source of information was other prisoners who were approached in order to address a number of needs. Prisoners explained that coming into prison for the first time was a

difficult experience and stated that the only thing they could do was adapt to the new environment. They often did so by seeking out information on prison operations through interactions with other prisoners, as they were perceived to have valuable information based on their shared experience of the situation. This confirms the ongoing validity of Chatman's (1999) assertion that prisoners developed coping strategies in order to deal with their new environment and that "through observing others and talking to prisoners who have dealt with this problem, they become informed about how to respond to their problems" (p.209).

The selection of other prisoners as an information source based on their perceived connection through mutual experience strongly relates to Chatman's (1999) theory regarding insiders and outsiders (drawn from Merton's (1972) sociology of knowledge); as individuals who are already integrated into the life of the prison were felt to hold valuable information on how it functioned as opposed to staff who were simply tasked with giving out information.

Several prisoners described the information network between prisoners as superior to that of any other party in the prison and this was initially surprising given that information must travel through "word of mouth" and prisoners are often physically isolated from others in different halls. It was discovered that the possible reason this information network appeared to function so well was that prisoners, unlike staff, were in the prison 24 hours a day and it was found that prisoners from different halls would interact in the Learning Centre or whilst at work meaning that information could travel between these normally separated groups. Prisoners noted that as a result of this network, they did not often need to actively seek out information as they would normally encounter vast amounts whilst conversing with other prisoners, linking to Wilson's (1996) *passive attention* theory.

However, certain drawbacks to this information network were highlighted. Given that information travelled through "word of mouth", it was noted that by the time it reached an individual far removed from the original source, the information had often changed dramatically. This was compared to the game "Chinese Whispers" by prisoners, and members of staff who also recognised the negative aspects of this information network. In a similar vein, prisoners acknowledged that there was also the risk that information shared through this network could be purposefully misleading or targeted. One prisoner stated that while he could trust most prisoners, he was aware that some might "feed" him information in order to become his friend and others agreed, adding that false information could be "targeted" at specific prisoners in order to cause trouble.

Purposefully targeted information or false information is much more problematic in the prison environment, as it carries a much higher associated risk. As one officer pointed out, targeted misinformation could have dangerous consequences and cause violence to break out amongst prisoners. It is crucial to acknowledge that *deception* plays a different role in this situation, as opposed to functioning as a self-protective measure (Chatman 1996). By “feeding” false information to others, perhaps with the intent to cause violence or win favour with other prisoners, prisoners may be displaying deception for the purposes of gaining power. Whilst there is little that SPS can do to prevent such information circulating between prisoners, the dangers of this could potentially be minimised by making an effort to make prisoners aware that information passed to them by other prisoners could be done so with malicious intent and reinforcing the importance of remaining wary of this when acting on information they have received.

### **5.5.3 Other sources of information**

Prisoners reported consulting other sources of information during their information seeking activities. This included TV and radio when seeking *outside* information about events happening outside the prison and notice boards for ‘inside’ information regarding everyday prison operations. Some resources were perceived to be less useful as they outdated (i.e. encyclopaedia software and books available in the library) whilst others were allegedly difficult to access (i.e. Prison Rules).

## **5.6 Barriers to information seeking**

All prisoners who participated in this study felt they had no literacy problems, despite some revealing that they held no formal qualifications. The majority of prisoners felt they had no trouble articulating information needs and had the confidence to seek out information. This conflicts with previous research which states that prisoners are liable to face more barriers than other groups when information seeking due to their lack of education (Glennor 2006). However, it is important to bear in mind that the sample selected for this study were regularly engaged in Learning Centre activities and may feel that they are in a better position to seek information in this educational context. This study offers evidence that prisoners attending education classes experience self-efficacy to a greater extent to those who do not. These feelings of motivation and self-worth may be positively fostered in this educational context where they are encouraged to question and seek information independently. Therefore, it is plausible that prisoners who attend education classes regularly are less likely to feel that they are existing in the information impoverished world which Chatman (1996) proposes.

Prisoners also highlighted the need to be “persistent” when searching for information in the prison and stated that they would approach a number of sources until they were satisfied with the information they had been given. This links to Wilson’s (1996) model, which illustrates a feedback loop where information is processed and if it is found to be inadequate, the information search process is repeated. This was also felt to relate to Kuhlthau’s (1991) model, as prisoners appeared to adopt a recursive, iterative approach to information seeking, moving between feelings of anxiety and increased confidence as they approached a number of sources to gather the information necessary to address their knowledge gaps. However, due to the small sample size involved in this study and lack of extensive data which can be linked to these theoretical frameworks, further research is required to conclusively determine validity of these findings.

Despite many prisoners demonstrating that they felt confident in their information seeking abilities, a number of barriers were identified through an analysis of collected data and a detailed discussion of these follows.

#### **5.6.1 Practical access barriers**

The ***lack of internet access*** in prison was pointed out by many as a barrier to their information seeking. Many prisoners felt the internet would provide access to up-to-date information required for their courses and, in particular, both prisoners and staff felt that this resource would be most beneficial to those enrolled in university courses. Rafedzi & Abrizah’s (2014) study based in Malaysia highlighted that juvenile prisoners participating in higher education were allowed internet access and they used this resource for emailing, writing and submitting assignments, and accessing online libraries (p.12). With internet access being rolled out in a number of prisons worldwide, including Belgium (BBC 2015), Finland (Prisoners Education Trust 2015), and Germany (Deutsche Welle 2013), it is likely that prisoners in Scotland will only become increasingly interested in obtaining similar access. Several prisoners in this study argued that if internet access can be managed in other prisons through simple filtering software, then there is little reason why it could not be made available to prisoners in Scotland. Staff opinion on the matter was divided with some teachers feeling that it was the logical next move for prisons and others emphasising that there were too many dangers associated with this level of information access. Overall, it was acknowledged that access would be beneficial to many prisoners but that it may need to be reserved for certain groups, such as university students or those in the low risk category.

Prisoners reported a number of issues related to the ***prison phones***, with some explaining that they felt they could only call at a time convenient to the prison, rather than convenient to family or

friends. Others felt that the excessive noise and lack of privacy in the prison halls where the phone are located made it difficult to not only hear the conversation on both ends but to merely maintain a pleasant flow of conversation. One prisoner stated that being able to quietly talk to his children in the morning before they went to school or have a private conversation with his wife in the evening was almost impossible and likened the noise to that of a rowdy pub. Others felt unable to say things on the phone, whether humorous or emotional, because they were aware that phone calls are monitored by SPS staff. Some explained that they felt there was a risk this information could be misconstrued, put on their prisoner records and then used against them. SPS makes callers aware of the phone monitoring on their website and emphasise that “both sides of the conversation can be heard” (Scottish Prison Service 2016e) and it was felt that this might make those on the other end of the phone feel anxious about what they could and could not say, creating a two-way barrier in conversations. For those that had no alternate means of communication, these phone-related issues could result in an inability to discuss significant issues, contributing to greater feelings of isolation and resulting in further unaddressed information needs.

As expected, a number of **physical restrictions** were found to have a negative impact on information seeking in the prison. This was expected given the role of the prison establishment, as security is paramount and SPS aims to maintain “safe and secure custodial environments” (Scottish Prison Service 2016c). Such barriers included simply not being able to physically access resources or personally deal with problems outside of the prison, instead being reliant on others and at the mercy of ‘middle-man’ services. These physical restrictions not only affect prisoners’ ability to seek information but also have a negative impact on their emotional wellbeing. Many prisoners reported that being locked in their cells at night was particularly distressing. Being left alone with their thoughts with little to distract them, cut off from communication with others, many felt that this isolation only compounded their negative feelings further.

Although interrelated, **geographic distance** was acknowledged as a barrier fundamentally different from that of physical restrictions. Prisoners stated that it was not just their confinement within prison which prevented them from seeking information, but problems in contacting family often related to their geographic distance from the prison establishment. Prisoners felt that face-to-face interaction was preferable to communicating through phone calls or letters but given that some prisoners’ families lived overseas, they had to rely solely on contact through phone calls. Given that all phone calls are monitored (as previously discussed), prisoners admitted that there were many things they were unable to say as a result. Prisoners who had relatives living in Scotland also reported that they faced problems when trying to contact their family. Prisoners stated that the cost

involved in attending visits (such as time spent travelling and fuel) were sometimes too high for their families. The SPS 2015 Prisoner Survey found similar results, with 52% of prisoners reporting that their visits experienced problems when visiting them in prison; 61% due to the costs involved in getting to the prison and 57% due to the geographic distance of the prison from their home (Scottish Prison Service 2015b, p.15).

### 5.6.2 Cognitive & affective barriers

***Fear of stigma*** was felt to be a significant barrier to prisoners' information seeking. This was found to impact the sources utilised by prisoners to address their information needs. This ranged from less dramatic instances, such as the fear of being seen as "stupid" for asking questions in class to more serious situations. For example, although many prisoners said that they were comfortable approaching prison officers for information, they also emphasised this still was still scorned by other prisoners. Prisoners felt that if they approached prison officers too regularly, particularly in view of other prisoners, they would face even greater prejudice. This demonstrates the existence of *social norms* in the prison environment (Chatman 1999), as many prisoners consider this to be inappropriate behaviour and this view influences the actions of others existing in the same small world. As a result of these social norms, prisoners perceived a level of risk associated with deviating from these accepted behaviours. Prisoners would often weigh the perceived usefulness of information gained from approaching a prison officer, against the associated risk of being labelled as an informer, thus exhibiting signs of existing in information poverty (Chatman 1996).

Prisoners felt that they regularly experienced ***prejudice*** from certain members of staff and that this made them reluctant to approach these sources for information. In particular, HCPs and social workers were viewed as liable to treat prisoners unfairly based on assumed stereotypes of prisoners as always attempting to procure medication through deceit or that prisoners were simply all "bad men". However, prisoners stated that they felt the Learning Centre had a more relaxed atmosphere than the rest of the prison and it was here they were most comfortable approaching staff with any information needs. This might be attributed to the expected student-teacher relationships, but it may be the shared information needs of prisoners attending education classes which results in a more lax application of social norms in this context.

***Low self-esteem*** was also found to play a negative role in prisoners' information seeking. It was also found that prisoners did not want to "burden" others with their information needs and often felt that they were being a nuisance or pest when asking teachers for information, even though they acknowledged that this was expected in their job. They experienced similar feelings of guilt when



depending on family members to provide them with information. This was particularly evident in those who admitted they felt “ashamed” of being a prisoner and felt it was unfair to rely on family members for formation given that it was not *their* sentence. The SPS 2015 Prisoner Survey revealed that 47% of prisoners reported that they did not “feel loved”, 47% reported that they were not “interested in other people” and 34% reported that they did not feel “good about themselves” (Scottish Prison Service 2015b, p.8) With a vast portion of prisoners clearly experiencing low self-esteem and negative emotions, being aware of how this negatively impacts information seeking is crucial.

**Distrust** was found to be a major barrier to prisoners’ information seeking. When examining distrust between prisoners and staff, one perspective was that this stemmed from negative experiences with the police and other “white shirt” services from an early age, and this is supported by previous studies in the prison context (Howerton et al 2007). Gilligan’s (2000) study of violence in California prisons found that prisoners had a “profound” distrust of the prison environment and many took it “for granted that their complaints would neither be taken seriously nor held confidential” (p.15). It was also found there was an element of risk associated with trusting other prisoners, as they could be friends one day and enemies the next. Again, this relates to Chatman’s (1996) theory of *risk-taking* as prisoners often felt that it was too risky to share certain information (particularly that of a sensitive nature) with others in the prison environment because the potential consequences were too great to be considered worthwhile when weighed against the potential benefits. This was also found in Gilligan’s (2000) study, where prisoners were found to engage in risk-taking activities as they feared “they would gain nothing but could lose everything” by revealing certain information (p.15).

### 5.6.3 Other barriers to information seeking

Although **professional boundaries**, which determine appropriate and inappropriate topics of conversations between staff and prisoners, were highlighted by prison officers as being a potential barrier to prisoners’ information seeking, there are reasons this barrier must remain in place. Despite this meaning that some prisoners face undue suspicion when asking innocent questions (for example, asking where an officer is from because they can’t place an accent), it is crucial in the prison environment that staff remain in a heightened state of awareness as revealing such information, however seemingly trivial, could hold greater significance to the prisoner. For this reason, while professional boundaries are acknowledged by this study as a barrier to prisoners’ information seeking, no recommendations are made to counter this.

## **5.7 Chapter summary**

This chapter presents a discussion of findings, including information needs experienced by prisoners which were found to include complex emotional and coping needs which prisoners responded to by exhibiting a range of self-protective measures.

The preference for interpersonal sources of information is discussed, as are factors influencing engagement with information sources, such as distrust, fear of stigma or simple pragmatic reasons. The information network of prisoners is evaluated as a source of information.

Finally, a number of barriers to information seeking are identified, including the more expected practical access barriers, such as a lack of internet access and physical restriction, along with less expected, but significant emotional barriers experienced by prisoners, such as distrust, prejudice and fear of stigma. A set of recommendations to SPS on how to counter these barriers is presented in the following chapter.

## Chapter 6: Conclusions and recommendations for future work

### 6.1 Chapter overview

This chapter presents the main findings (section 6.2) and limitations of the study (section 6.3). Recommendations for future research are then outlined (section 6.4), followed by a set of recommendations to SPS on how to improve information services (section 6.5), with final thoughts and conclusions presented at the end (section 6.6).

### 6.2 Summary of findings

Prisoners all rated themselves highly in terms of literacy and computing skills, which was felt to be unsurprising given that all attended education classes in the Learning Centre. However, surprisingly, the majority of prisoners felt they could competently use the internet and, given that most had been imprisoned (without internet access) for five or more years, this seems unlikely to be a true estimation of their skills. Many prisoners expressed confidence in their information seeking abilities despite admitting that there were certain things they were unable to ask.

A range of *inside* information needs were identified that were felt to be expected, including those relating to education, health, legal support and the prison regime. Other anticipated needs, such as finance, housing and employment, typically experienced towards the end of prisoners' sentences as part of their preparation for release, were found to be not confined to a particular stage in sentence. It is apparent that incorrect assumptions about what information prisoners require, or should have access to, based on their sentence stage could lead to prisoners being "cut off" from information services and consequently, unable to address their information needs.

It was also discovered that prisoners experience complex interwoven emotional needs relating to their family, mental health and ability to *cope* with the prison environment. In order to deal with these needs, prisoners employed a range of coping strategies and self-protective measures, such as secrecy, deception and risk-taking, which Chatman (1960) defines as signs of those livings in information-impooverished circumstances. It was found that these emotional needs were predominantly unaddressed in the prison environment and that there were clear dangers of this, along with increased feelings of isolation and helplessness and the potential for violent behaviour as a result of *bottling up* negative emotions.

Prisoners showed a preference towards using interpersonal sources of information, such as teachers, family members and prison officers, and this was generally felt to be due to non-interpersonal (physical) sources such as books, encyclopaedia software and prison rules being viewed as “outdated” or “difficult to access”. Several previously identified positive factors influencing engagement with interpersonal sources were confirmed, including convenience and trustworthiness. Prisoners often felt that they could only trust family members and, therefore, relied on them for information. This was particularly true of those imprisoned at a young age.

A number of factors negatively influencing engagement with interpersonal sources was also highlighted, such as fear of stigma and prejudice. In particular, interaction with prison officers was often seen as risky due to the presence of social norms which classify this behaviour as *inappropriate* and as a result of this, prisoners felt they ran the risk of being labelled as a *grass*. Prisoners also appeared reluctant to approach healthcare professionals and social workers as they were often perceived as prejudiced towards prisoners. Other prisoners were viewed as a particularly useful source of information due to their status as *insiders* and their shared experience of *seeking* information in the prison context, as opposed to *distributing* it as most staff did.

Several barriers to information seeking were identified from the data collected. While some were to be expected in the prison environment, particularly those related to practical access issues and the security constraints of the prison, it was found that a considerable portion of these were linked to more significant cognitive and affective barriers, such as prejudice, distrust and low self-esteem. Overall, the small world of the prison was characterised by an atmosphere of distrust that, when coupled with extensive monitoring and feelings of low self-esteem, results in a sense of isolation and helplessness among prisoners who are consequentially unable to address their information needs.

## **6.3 Limitations of study**

### **6.3.1 Participants & sample size**

A sample of prisoners who regularly attended education classes in the learning centre were interviewed for this study as it was felt they would represent a group living in the small world context. In order to reach a number of participants likely to represent saturation in the research data, twelve prisoners were asked to participate in the initial interview stage. Several participants admitted that they were busy with classes but were willing to spare an hour to take part in the research. Every effort was made to ensure that participants were not taken away from important

classes or assessments but it is necessary to consider the impact of any disruption to the prisoners' routine, be it even at a subconscious level.

### **6.3.2 Location**

On several occasions, interviews were interrupted by staff or prisoners. This was either to pass on information about the regime (i.e. if the prisoners were to leave the Learning Centre shortly) or because staff had come from another area of the prison and did not know there was an interview taking place. On these occasions, the recording was paused and the interview did not proceed until the third party had left the room. Whilst it was found that this did not normally disrupt the interview too much and most prisoners would simply continue where they left off, for one interview in particular, it was difficult to get back onto what had been a sensitive topic.

### **6.3.3 Engagement with participants**

The researcher's pre-existing relationship with the majority of participants was found to be beneficial; an existing level of trust with participants and understanding of prisoners' colloquial language was useful given the limited time available to interview participants. Despite the advantages of this existing relationship, there were some situations where it challenged the researcher. One prisoner described a past occasion in which he had sought information in the presence of the researcher and, despite noting inconsistencies in his recollection of the event, the researcher did not intervene. This impartiality was maintained throughout the study when participants made disputable comments regarding SPS or the prison establishment as the focus of the research was on perception and opinion, rather than factual testimony. It is acknowledged that the researcher's previous experience of the prison environment and relationships with participants, limits the replicability of this study as others researchers are unlikely to have these previous experiences or connections.

### **6.3.4 Timescale**

The researcher would have preferred to conduct a series of interviews with prisoners to build trust with participants and allow them time to reflect on their information behaviour in the prison but time constraints of the MSc project meant that only a three-week window was available for fieldwork. Fortunately, the research was based in an SPS establishment where the researcher had previously built trust with prisoners in the Learning Centre and therefore, the time constraints did not affect this too much. However, participants had to rely on recalling past events regarding their information seeking behaviours and follow up interviews would have allowed for prisoners to record and accurately describe recent examples of their information behaviour in the prison.

### **6.3.5 Generalisability**

All participants were sentenced adult males and this sample was purposefully selected as 73% of the total prison population in Scotland were sentenced adult males as of 15.06.16 (Scottish Prison Service 2016a). However, participants were also all engaged to various degrees with education classes in the Learning Centre and the SPS 2015 Prisoner Survey found that less than half of prisoners had attended the Learning Centre whilst in prison (Scottish Prison Service 2015b, p.4) and participants were recruited from one SPS institution, with Scottish prisons varying greatly in terms of aesthetic design and capacity (Scottish Prison Service 2016b). Acknowledging the parameters of this study, it is likely that findings are generalisable to a limited portion of the prison population and that this will discount female or young prisoners, prisoners who have not attended the education classes while in prison, and prisoners at another SPS institution.

## **6.4 Recommendations for future research**

### ***1. Further explore information behaviour in the small world context of the prison***

Given the aforementioned limitations and exploratory approach of this study, further investigation using a wider, more representative sample of prisoners is warranted in order to determine the generalisability of findings and to further investigate the emotional and coping needs experienced by prisoners.

### ***2. Explore how outside networks influence the information behaviour of prisoners***

Some prisoners reported that they wanted to be able to offer support and advice to their family but that being imprisoned made this difficult to do. Questions of whether this feeling of helplessness could prompt prisoners to seek out more information in an attempt to help family or friends in any possible way, or instead cause prisoners to sink further into feelings of apathy due their inability to help cannot be answered by this study. Given that their response to this type of situation could allude to a more in depth understanding of how prisoners value their information seeking skills in assisting others, further research into this could be beneficial.

### ***3. Investigate the link between information needs and stage in sentence***

Findings of this study suggest that prisoners experience a range of predictable needs based on their stage in sentence (including needs relating to the prison regime and legal support at the beginning of their sentence, and financial, housing and employment information needs in the last stage of their

sentence in preparation for release). Although these needs did not appear to be solely confined to these stages in sentence, further research into how information needs change as sentences progress could help to inform SPS on how to better meet the information needs of prisoners throughout the entirety of their sentence.

## **6.5 Recommendations to SPS on how to improve information services**

### ***Practical access barriers***

- Prisoners suggested that having personal phones in their cell would be a good way to combat the lack of privacy offered by the current location of phones in the prison halls. However, considering practical and cost implications of this, it was clear that this would not be the most ideal solution for SPS. One potential adaptation would be installing small transparent shields on the wall around phones in order to offer prisoners some degree of privacy during phone calls and to help block out noise.
- Unfortunately, there is little that can be done to combat the barrier posed by geographic distance other than attempting to place prisoners in institutions local to their family. One potential solution could be offering accommodation and travel subsistence to families who wish to visit prisoners but live a great distance from the prison.

### ***Cognitive and affective barriers***

- Offer bibliotherapy and materials relating mental health through the prison library.
- Design staff training with an emphasis on adopting positive attitudes towards prisoners and continue to promote the SPS mission of “care” - encouraging all staff to support the wellbeing of prisoners, treating them with respect and humanity.
- Ensure that all prisoner-facing staff (regardless of their role) are trained to recognise signs of poor mental health, not only signs of suicide-risk.
- Ensure that prison services designed to support prisoners suffering from mental health issues (i.e. psychologists and the Listener service) are clearly advertised in all areas of the prison and are relatively quick and easy for prisoners to access.
- Offer access to Listeners or the Samaritans Helpline during lock up hours to minimise isolation and helplessness experienced during these times.
- Ensure information services are not ‘reserved’ for prisoners at certain stages in their sentence (particularly those viewed as relating to *preparation for release*).

## **6.6 Final thoughts and conclusions**

The prisoners that participated in this study, though diverse in educational level, all felt they possessed respectable literacy and computer skills. They actively sought information on a variety of topics with a clear preference for interpersonal sources, such as teachers and family members. The information network of prisoners, although efficient and well-developed, was felt to be plagued with misinformation and miscommunication with which associated dangers are clear.

Prisoners experienced unexpected and often intense emotional and coping needs which were compounded by the isolation and lack of self-efficacy associated with the prison environment. A range of self-protective measures were adopted by prisoners in order to shield themselves from the potential negative consequences of these information needs being discovered; including secrecy, deception and risk-taking, which indicate clear signs of information poverty in the prison environment (Chatman 1996; 1999).

Findings also revealed a variety of barriers to information seeking, including physical and security related barriers that one would expect to encounter in a prison environment, as well as unanticipated cognitive and affective barriers (predominantly associated with emotional and coping needs). One major barrier to information seeking was the distrust, generally considered reciprocal, many prisoners felt towards the 'system' and formal services offered within the prison.

Due to minimal indicative literature, this study was intended to be exploratory in approach with the purpose of identifying the information needs, sources and barriers of one group living in small world context. Prisoners were chosen as a suitable group for this research and the resulting findings have been utilised to create a set of recommendations to SPS on how to better tailor information services to meet the needs of the prison population. However, given the aforementioned limitations of the study, further investigation using a wider, more representative sample of prisoners is warranted.



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## Appendix 1: Interview Participant Information Sheet



### Information Sheet for Interview Participants

**Name of department:** Department of Computer and Information Sciences, University of Strathclyde

**Title of the study:** Investigating Information Behaviour in the Small World Context

#### Introduction

This study is being conducted by Cheryl Scott; a current postgraduate student at the University of Strathclyde. Details on how to contact the researcher are provided at the end of this form.

#### What is the purpose of this investigation?

This study will explore information behaviour in the small world context through an investigation of the information behaviours of prisoners who regularly attend education classes. This study aims to expand upon existing information behaviour theory in the small world context and to offer a set of recommendations to the Scottish Prison Service on how to best tailor information services available to the prison population, thereby better meeting the information needs of prisoners.

#### Do you have to take part?

Participants will take part in a one hour interview to discuss their information needs and any barriers they experience when seeking information in the prison environment. Participation in the study is voluntary and all participants are free to withdraw from the study at any time, up to the point of completion, without having to give any reason and without any consequence. If participants choose to withdraw and do not wish for their data to be used, all data collected will be destroyed.

#### What will you do in the project?

For the purposes of this study, participants will be required to take part in a one hour interview in the Learning Centre, where they will be asked to fill out a short questionnaire and then answer a series of questions relating to the topic of the study.

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**Why have you been invited to take part?**

This study requires a group of participants from the prison population who regularly attend the Learning Centre at HMP Shotts. There are no additional requirements for the selection process.

**What are the potential risks to you in taking part?**

There are no potential risks to participants involved in this study.

**What happens to the information in the project?**

All information recorded in this study will remain confidential and no information that could identify a participant will be made publicly available. Questionnaires and interview data gathered will be stored securely, separately from consent forms, with anonymised identifiers attached in place of participant names. All data will be stored on a secure drive on the University of Strathclyde network and backed-up on an encrypted USB stick.

The University of Strathclyde is registered with the Information Commissioner's Office who implements the Data Protection Act 1998. All personal data on participants will be processed in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998.

Thank you for reading this information – please ask any questions if you are unsure about what is written here.

**Researcher Contact Details**

Miss Cheryl Scott

University of Strathclyde, 16 Richmond Street, Glasgow, G1 1XQ

Phone no. 0141 552 4400

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This investigation was granted ethical approval by the University of Strathclyde Ethics Committee.

If you have any questions/concerns, during or after the investigation, or wish to contact an independent person to whom any questions may be directed or further information may be sought from, please contact:

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## Appendix 2: Interview Participant Consent Form



### Consent Form for Interview Participants

**Name of department:** Department of Computer and Information Sciences, University of Strathclyde  
**Title of the study:** Investigating Information Behaviour in the Small World Context

- I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the above project and the researcher has answered any queries to my satisfaction.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time, up to the point of completion, without having to give a reason and without any consequences. If I exercise my right to withdraw and I don't want my data to be used, any data which have been collected from me will be destroyed.
- I understand that I can withdraw from the study any personal data (i.e. data which identify me personally) at any time.
- I understand that anonymised data (i.e. data which do not identify me personally) cannot be withdrawn once they have been included in the study.
- I understand that any information recorded in the investigation will remain confidential and no information that identifies me will be made publicly available.
- I consent to being a participant in the project.
- I consent to being audio recorded as part of the project.

(PRINT NAME)

Signature of Participant:

Date:

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## Appendix 3: Interview Participant Demographic Questionnaire



### Participant Questionnaire

**Name of department:** Department of Computer and Information Sciences, University of Strathclyde

**Title of the study:** Investigating Information Behaviour in the Small World Context

This aim of this questionnaire is give a better perspective on interview data by allowing for the analysis of contextual information which may be relevant. Please complete the following questions to reflect your opinions as accurately as possible and to answer factual questions to the best of your knowledge. Your information will be kept strictly confidential.

**1. What age bracket do you fall into?**

18 – 24 years old [ ]      25 – 34 years old [ ]      35 – 44 years old [ ]  
45 – 54 years old [ ]      55 – 64 years old [ ]      65 + years old [ ]

**2. Which ethnicity bests describe you?**

White [ ]      Black [ ]      Asian [ ]      Arab [ ]      Mixed [ ]  
Any other ethnic group, please describe \_\_\_\_\_

**3. a) What is the length of the sentence you are currently serving?**

Less than 1 year [ ]      1 – 4 years [ ]      4 – 10 years [ ]      Over 10 years [ ]

**b) What stage are you at in the sentence you are current serving?**

First third of sentence [ ]      Midway through sentence [ ]      Final third of sentence [ ]

**c) Is this your first prison sentence?**

Yes [ ]      No [ ]

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4. **a) Highest level of educational qualification held prior to sentence**

No qualifications [ ]      Standard Grade [ ]      Higher [ ]  
 Advanced Higher [ ]      College diploma [ ]      Undergraduate degree [ ]  
 Postgraduate degree [ ]      Doctorate degree [ ]      Professional qualification [ ]

**b) Have you completed any educational qualifications during your sentence?**

Yes [ ] If yes, please name \_\_\_\_\_

No [ ]

5. **Employment status prior to sentence**

Unemployed [ ]      Part-time employed [ ]      Full-time employed [ ]      Self-employed [ ]

If employed, please provide job title \_\_\_\_\_

White [ ]      Black [ ]      Asian [ ]      Arab [ ]      Mixed [ ]

Any other ethnic group, please describe \_\_\_\_\_

6. **To what extent do you agree with the following statements?**

**a) I can read and write without any problems**

Strongly Agree [ ]      Agree [ ]      Not Sure [ ]      Disagree [ ]      Strongly Disagree [ ]

**b) I can use computers without any problems**

Strongly Agree [ ]      Agree [ ]      Not Sure [ ]      Disagree [ ]      Strongly Disagree [ ]

**c) I can use the internet without any problems**

Strongly Agree [ ]      Agree [ ]      Not Sure [ ]      Disagree [ ]      Strongly Disagree [ ]

**End of questionnaire**

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## Appendix 4: Focus Group Participant Information Sheet



### Information Sheet for Focus Group Participants

**Name of department:** Department of Computer and Information Sciences, University of Strathclyde

**Title of the study:** Investigating Information Behaviour in the Small World Context

#### Introduction

This study is being conducted by Cheryl Scott; a current postgraduate student at the University of Strathclyde. Details on how to contact the researcher are provided at the end of this form.

#### What is the purpose of this investigation?

This study will explore information behaviour in the small world context through an investigation of the information behaviours of prisoners who regularly attend education classes. This study aims to expand upon existing information behaviour theory in the small world context and to offer a set of recommendations to the Scottish Prison Service on how to best tailor information services available to the prison population, thereby better meeting the information needs of prisoners.

#### Do you have to take part?

Participants will take part in a one hour focus group to discuss their view of the information needs of prisoners and any barriers they experience when seeking information in the prison environment.

Participation in the study is voluntary and all participants are free to withdraw from the study at any time, up to the point of completion, without having to give any reason and without any consequence. If participants choose to withdraw and do not wish for their data to be used, all data collected will be destroyed.

#### What will you do in the project?

For the purposes of this study, participants will be required to take part in a one hour focus group in the Learning Centre, where they will be asked to discuss a series of questions relating to the topic of the study.

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**Why have you been invited to take part?**

This study requires a group of participants who regularly work as staff in the Learning Centre at HMP Shotts. There are no additional requirements for the selection process.

**What are the potential risks to you in taking part?**

There are no potential risks to participants involved in this study.

**What happens to the information in the project?**

All information recorded in this study will remain confidential and no information that could identify a participant will be made publicly available. Data will be stored securely, separately from consent forms, with anonymised identifiers attached in place of participant names. All data will be stored on a secure drive on the University of Strathclyde network and backed-up on an encrypted USB stick.

The University of Strathclyde is registered with the Information Commissioner's Office who implements the Data Protection Act 1998. All personal data on participants will be processed in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998.

Thank you for reading this information – please ask any questions if you are unsure about what is written here.

**Researcher Contact Details**

Miss Cheryl Scott

University of Strathclyde, 16 Richmond Street, Glasgow, G1 1XQ

Email: [c.scott@strath.ac.uk](mailto:c.scott@strath.ac.uk)

Phone: 0141 552 4400

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## Appendix 5: Focus Group Participant Consent Form



### Consent Form for Focus Group Participants

**Name of department:** Department of Computer and Information Sciences, University of Strathclyde

**Title of the study:** Investigating Information Behaviour in the Small World Context

- I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the above project and the researcher has answered any queries to my satisfaction.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time, up to the point of completion, without having to give a reason and without any consequences. If I exercise my right to withdraw and I don't want my data to be used, any data which have been collected from me will be destroyed.
- I understand that I can withdraw from the study any personal data (i.e. data which identify me personally) at any time.
- I understand that anonymised data (i.e. data which do not identify me personally) cannot be withdrawn once they have been included in the study.
- I understand that any information recorded in the investigation will remain confidential and no information that identifies me will be made publicly available.
- I consent to being a participant in the project.
- I consent to being audio recorded as part of the project.

(PRINT NAME)

Signature of Participant:

Date:

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