ARTICLE 1

The GRACE Methodology: building a safer and more effective approach to rehabilitation

How can rehabilitation programmes become more relevant to the people they are designed to support? How can correctional professionals be better prepared to address gender-based violence (GBV), while also creating safer pathways towards accountability and reintegration?

The GRACE project addresses these questions through an evidence-based and interdisciplinary methodology designed to support rehabilitation, professional development and safer reintegration. The approach brings together knowledge from criminology, clinical psychology, restorative justice, feminist theory and implementation science, combining these perspectives into a practical model for different stages of the rehabilitation journey. At the heart of the GRACE methodology are five technical pillars. Together, they provide a framework for developing learning activities, rehabilitation tools and professional training that are relevant, safe and responsive to the realities of correctional environments.

1. Participatory Co-Creation: designing with, not just for, people

A central principle of GRACE is that effective rehabilitation tools should reflect the experiences and realities of the people who will use them. For this reason, the project uses a participatory co-creation approach involving correctional professionals and people with experience of detention.

Structured workshops are organised across the participating countries to contribute to the development of curriculum outlines, learning modules and assessment tools. This process allows different perspectives and forms of knowledge to come together. Correctional professionals can contribute their institutional and practical experience, while participants with lived experience can highlight challenges, needs and barriers that may not always be visible from an institutional perspective. Co-creation also helps create a stronger sense of relevance and ownership.

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Rather than developing a standard programme and simply applying it in different contexts, GRACE aims to create resources that can respond to local realities while maintaining a common methodological foundation.

2. Restorative justice and peer-led accountability

Rehabilitation is not only about learning new information. It is also about taking responsibility, understanding the impact of one's actions and developing the skills needed to make positive changes. The GRACE methodology therefore incorporates principles of restorative justice and peer-led accountability. One of the key elements is the Restorative Ambassadorship Model, through which selected rehabilitated individuals can contribute to rehabilitation sessions and provide support during the post-release reintegration process. Peer involvement can offer an additional perspective that complements the role of professionals. People who have experienced rehabilitation themselves may be able to communicate certain challenges in a particularly relatable way and demonstrate that change and responsibility are possible.

The model is especially relevant in correctional environments where relationships between detained individuals and authorities may be affected by distrust. A peer-led component can help create spaces where participants feel more comfortable engaging with difficult topics, while keeping accountability and responsibility at the centre of the process.

3. A Modular and multi-tiered curriculum

People involved with the justice system do not all have the same needs, experiences or level of risk. A single rehabilitation programme cannot necessarily address these differences effectively. GRACE responds to this challenge through a modular, multi-tiered curriculum developed for three main profiles:

- At-risk or quasi-offenders, who may require early intervention and prevention-oriented support;
- Incarcerated GBV perpetrators, who need structured rehabilitation and support for behavioural change;
- Post-release individuals, who require continued support as they transition back into the community.

Each pathway includes specific learning outcomes, activities and evaluation tools adapted to the needs of the target group. The curriculum also incorporates trauma-informed exercises, recognising that experiences of trauma can influence behaviour, learning and engagement.

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Where appropriate, learning can be delivered through a blended approach, combining online and offline activities. A dedicated e-learning platform supports access to relevant learning resources and creates opportunities for continued engagement beyond face-to-face sessions. This flexible structure allows the methodology to follow the rehabilitation journey rather than treating rehabilitation as a single event.

4. Building the capacity of professionals

Professionals working in prisons and probation services play an essential role in supporting rehabilitation. They need not only knowledge about GBV, but also practical tools for responding to complex behaviours and situations.

GRACE therefore includes a strong focus on professional capacity building. Through a train-the-trainer model, prison and probation professionals are equipped with approaches and tools that can subsequently be shared within their organisations. The training addresses areas such as trauma-informed de-escalation, coercive control, gender-sensitive practices, victim-centred approaches and institutional empathy. These topics can help professionals better understand the dynamics surrounding GBV and respond to challenging situations in ways that promote safety, accountability and constructive engagement.

The learning process is assessed using Kirkpatrick's four levels of evaluation, which look at different dimensions of training impact - from participants' immediate reactions and learning to changes in behaviour and broader results.

In this way, GRACE does not focus only on delivering training. It also considers whether that training contributes to meaningful changes in professional practice.

5. Ethics, safety and survivor-informed oversight

Working with sensitive issues such as gender-based violence, detention and trauma requires a strong ethical foundation. The GRACE methodology therefore places ethics and safety at the centre of implementation. An ethics protocol provides guidance on issues such as confidentiality, voluntary participation and appropriate trauma management. These principles help ensure that participants can engage with the programme in a respectful and safe environment.

Another important element is the involvement of survivor liaison committees in each participating country. These committees contribute to the continuous review and validation of materials, helping ensure that the experiences and perspectives of survivors are considered throughout the development and implementation process.

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The project also uses risk-mitigation procedures covering both detainees and professionals. These measures are included in the Data and Ethics Management Plan, providing a structured framework for identifying and addressing potential ethical, safety and data-management risks.

A methodology designed for sustainable change!

The five pillars of the GRACE methodology are closely connected. Co-creation helps ensure that the programme reflects real needs. Restorative justice and peer involvement strengthen accountability and support. The multi-tiered curriculum adapts learning to different stages of the rehabilitation journey. Professional capacity building strengthens the people delivering support, while ethical and survivor-informed oversight helps ensure that the entire process is responsible and safe.

Together, these elements create a holistic approach to rehabilitation that goes beyond simply providing information or training. GRACE seeks to create opportunities for reflection, responsibility, learning and behavioural change, while also strengthening the capacity of professionals and supporting safer reintegration into the community. Ultimately, the methodology recognises that meaningful rehabilitation requires more than one intervention or one perspective. It requires collaboration, specialised knowledge, lived experience, professional skills and a strong commitment to safety and dignity.

Through this integrated approach, GRACE aims to contribute to more responsive rehabilitation practices and to long-term efforts to prevent gender-based violence!

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