Research Brief

Five Minute Interventions (FMI): Using situational judgement tests to examine skill acquisition and decay following FMI training

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AIMS

This study aimed to assess the impact of FMI training on FMI-related skill acquisition and decay among custodial staff and whether specific FMI skills are more readily applied in interactions with people in custody.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Data was drawn from a sample of 122 custodial staff who undertook FMI training at one of six correctional centres and completed assessment measures prior to commencing training and again at a specified interval of either 1, 3, 6, 9 or 12 months after training. Situational judgement tests (SJTs) consisting of job-related scenarios were used to examine skill acquisition based on how staff were most likely to respond to each situation.

Results indicated that most staff improved in their performance on SJTs from pre- to post-training. Among those who did not improve, high average pre-training scores suggest they were likely already using FMI-related skills in practice. Significant improvement in SJT performance occurred at 1, 3 and 6 months post-training, with less pronounced signs of change beginning from around 6 months after training, indicating optimal timing for refresher training. Younger staff and OSP staff showed the greatest change in SJT performance. Five of the 10 FMI skills were captured across SJT questions that showed the most change from pre- to post training, including 'building trust, confidence and rapport', 'giving and receiving feedback', 'creating space', 'active listening', and 'rolling with resistance'.

We concluded that FMI training was effective for the acquisition of FMI-related skills among custodial staff. Refresher training is recommended from around 6 months after initial training to prevent skill decay, and should target skill maintenance, a concentrated focus on skills that were not associated with significant improvement and addressing concerns and barriers to using FMI. The study provides promising evidence that training is associated with improved SJT performance and that refresher training will support the continued use of FMI-related skills among custodial staff.

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INTRODUCTION

Reducing reoffending is a significant challenge for criminal justice agencies, with effective rehabilitation centred around a complex set of interactions involving individual, social and community factors, criminal justice system processes, and custodial and post-release environments (Farrall et al., 2010; LeBel et al., 2008). Staff play a crucial role in building rehabilitative correctional environments through their interactions with people in custody (Liebling et al., 2011). When staff treat people with respect and fairness, support and encourage people's participation in rehabilitation, and engage with people in ways that model and promote non-criminal values and identity, they have a greater chance of fostering hope and motivation, promoting readiness for treatment, and helping people desist from crime (Blagden et al., 2016; Mann et al., 2018).

Under the Premier's Priority to Reduce Reoffending, established in 2019, Corrective Services NSW (CSNSW) introduced a range of initiatives aimed at building a prison environment that supports rehabilitation. Five Minute Interventions (FMI) is a key initiative aimed at building a rehabilitative environment through turning everyday conversations between custodial staff and people in custody into meaningful interactions that inspire hope and motivate change (Tate et al., 2017). FMI is a relational approach developed in the U.K. and adapted to the CSNSW context that equips staff with a set of skills and techniques for addressing various 'targets' that affect behaviour and present barriers to rehabilitation (Kenny & Webster, 2015; Tate et al., 2017; Vickers-Pinchbeck, 2019). Skills such as 'building trust, confidence and rapport', 'active listening', 'Socratic questioning', and 'building commitment to change' are used to address targets such as criminal attitudes, impulsivity, and ineffective problem solving to encourage people in prison to resolve issues for themselves, commit to change and engage with rehabilitation (Daniels, 2021; Mann et al., 2018; Vickers-Pinchbeck, 2019).

Early evaluations of FMI in the U.K. examined perceptions of staff who had been trained in FMI and of people in custody who had experienced interactions with FMI-trained staff (Kenny & Webster, 2015; Tate et al., 2017; Vickers-Pinchbeck, 2019). After training staff indicated a shift towards a more rehabilitative orientation, that their rapport and relationships with people in prison had improved, they were able to better manage challenging conversations with people in prison, and that they generally felt all individuals were capable of change while also recognising their role in supporting and promoting change (Kenny & Webster, 2015; Vickers-Pinchbeck, 2019). People in prison who had experienced an FMI interaction with a trained officer felt treated with respect, that they were being listened to, that they had an increased sense of self-efficacy, autonomy, and self-confidence, and that officers generally helped facilitate change and promote personal growth (Tate et al., 2017).

Corrections Research Evaluation and Statistics (CRES) has also completed several studies to evaluate implementation of FMI training across NSW correctional centres. Two studies identified a significant positive change in staff attitudes towards people in prison, and their motivation and ability to support rehabilitation at both 6 weeks and 12 months after FMI training (Barkworth et al., 2021; Lobo et al., 2022). In comparing specific staff groups, it was found that correctional officers (COs) showed significant increases in positive attitudes towards people in prison, and both motivation and ability to support rehabilitation following FMI training, whereas Offender Services and Programs (OSP) staff consistently reported positive attitudes and high motivation and ability to support rehabilitation at both pre- and post-training (Howard et al., 2021). Interviews with FMI-trained staff completed 12 months after training found staff had positive perceptions of the training and that specific skills, such as 'building trust, confidence and rapport', 'active listening', 'giving hope', 'giving and receiving feedback' and 'rolling with resistance' were widely used by staff and were identified as important for de-escalating tense situations, communicating and connecting with people in custody, and supporting change (Barkworth et al., 2023). Taken together, these findings provide evidence that staff have benefited from FMI training and appear to be utilising that training in practice.

AIMS

The ability of correctional centre staff to correctly and consistently embed FMI-related skills in their everyday interactions with people in custody is a central component of FMI and an important mechanism of change. Following the successful implementation of FMI training, it is crucial to understand the impact of training on acquisition, maintenance and decay of skills. Understanding these factors may also have important implications for development of strategies for continuous support of staff in using and maintaining FMI skills.[1]

The current study utilises situational judgement tests (SJTs) to examine how staff employ FMI-related skills in specific situations. SJTs present job-related situations and associated response options that require a respondent to select what they are most likely to do in each situation (i.e., a behavioural tendency response) (Lievens et al., 2008). SJTs provide an opportunity to determine both knowledge and application of FMI-related skills among staff who have completed FMI training. To this end, the current study aimed to determine whether staff acquired new skills or approaches to interacting with people in custody following FMI training; whether there are points in time following training where skills were more or less utilised, indicating potential signs of decay; and whether there were particular FMI-related skills that staff were more or less likely to acquire and utilise following training.

The study addresses three key research questions:

1. Do staff who are trained in FMI respond differently to SJTs depicting staff-inmate interactions post-training compared to pre-training?
2. Is there a relationship between timing of post-training assessment and responses to SJTs? How long after training are skills maintained and when do they start showing signs of decay?
3. Based on patterns of responses to different SJTs, is there evidence of particular skills that are more or less correctly identified by staff on average?

METHODS

The sample for the current study consisted of 122 custodial staff who completed FMI training at one of six correctional centres across NSW. The average age of participants was 49.5 years (SD = 12.14), and 41% were women. Among staff, 68.0% held frontline roles as correctional officers (COs), 14.8% had roles in delivery of programs and services and related case management (OSP staff), and 5.7% were Corrective Services Industries (CSI) staff, with the remainder (11.5%) performing administrative roles within correctional centres.

At the commencement of training staff were asked to complete a series of SJTs and were followed up by email with a second series of SJTs at a specified time after training. SJTs consisted of brief vignettes involving interactions between staff and people in custody, and staff were asked to select one or a series of responses to the situation. SJTs were scored based on how responses aligned with FMI-related skills and practices. Both SJT vignettes and response options were developed and agreed upon through consultation with CSNSW trainers and other subject matter experts.

Staff were randomly assigned to complete a set of 6 SJTs from a series of 21 before training, and a different set of 6 SJTs after training. Staff were also randomly assigned to complete post-training SJTs at 1, 3, 6, 9, or 12 months after training. Random assignment of different SJT questions at pre- and post-training occurred independently to the randomisation of post-training timing and prevented potential practice effects by ensuring respondents did not receive the same SJT items at both pre- and post-training. Utilising different time periods post-training allowed us to establish an optimal timeframe for retention or use of skills and the

[1] At the time of the study, FMI training was offered as a once-off stand-alone training package completed over 2 days. Refresher training regimes were under consideration but had not been implemented.

point at which skills may begin to decay. Responses on the SJTs were quantified to give a single continuous score between 0 (fully incorrect responses) to 1 (fully correct responses), giving a total SJT performance score with a range of 0 to 6. Survey data were merged with staff establishment records to obtain additional variables about staff position and demographics for the purposes of analyses.

Paired samples t-tests and regression modelling were used to compare the magnitude of change in SJT scores from pre- to post-training, and to explore patterns of association between time of testing post-training and skill acquisition. Analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) were also utilised to determine the change in average scores on each individual SJT question, while controlling for timing of post-training testing, to explore whether specific FMI-related skills were more readily acquired or utilised over other skills.

FINDINGS

Overall change in SJT scores from pre- to post-training

Figure 1 shows the distribution of SJT scores before and after FMI training. At pre-training, scores tended to cluster around the mid-range, with a mean SJT score of 3.45 (SD = 1.34), indicating just over 50% correct responding on average. Post-training scores were more likely to cluster towards the upper end of the range, with a mean score of 4.05 (SD = 1.25), indicating close to 70% correct responding on average. Scores improved by an average of 0.60 points between pre-training and post-training (range = -3.35 to 3.69). A paired samples t-test revealed a significant difference between pre-training and post-training scores on average, t = -4.93, p <.001. A Cohen's d effect size of .45 indicated a close to moderate effect.[2]

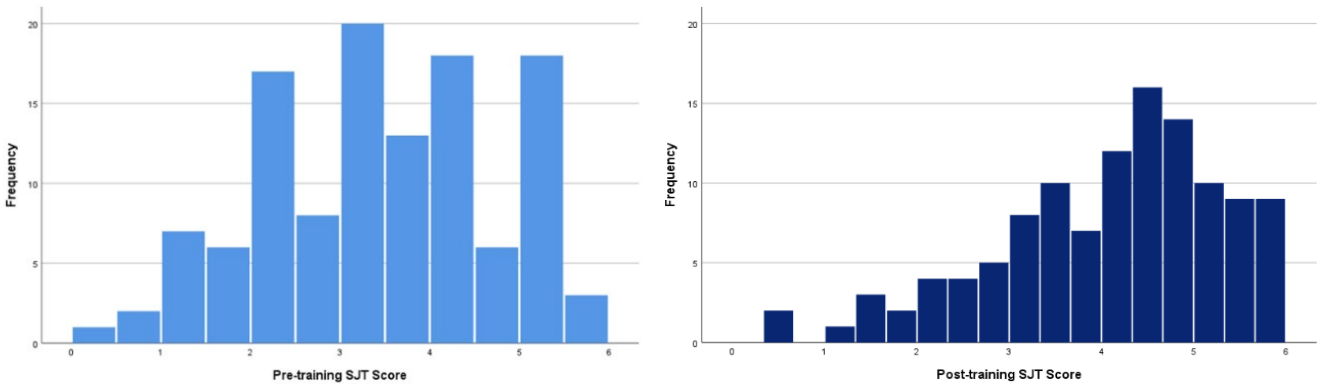

Figure 1. Distribution of SJT scores at pre-training and post-training

Figure 2 presents average SJT scores based on whether scores improved, declined or showed no change from pre- to post-training. Almost two thirds of respondents achieved improved scores from pre- to post-training, around 30% had a lower score at post-training compared to pre-training, and around 10% showed no change in their score. Among those who did better, scores improved on average by 1.47 points (SD = 0.86) from pre- to post-training, while scores decreased on average by -0.91 points (SD = 0.72) among those who did worse at post-training. It was noted that pre-training scores were on average higher among those who had either a decline (M = 4.28, SD = 1.09) or no change (M = 4.28, SD = 1.34) in SJT performance, compared to the pre-training scores of those who had improved SJT performance (M = 2.90, SD = 1.17). The average post-training score for those with improved SJT performance (M = 4.37, SD = 1.08) was only slightly higher than that of staff who had no change in scores.

[2] Cohen's d effect size is used to report the magnitude of the average difference in scores on each measure. Interpretations of effect sizes were guided by Cohen (1988), where effect sizes of .2 are considered small, .5 are considered moderate, and .8 are considered large.

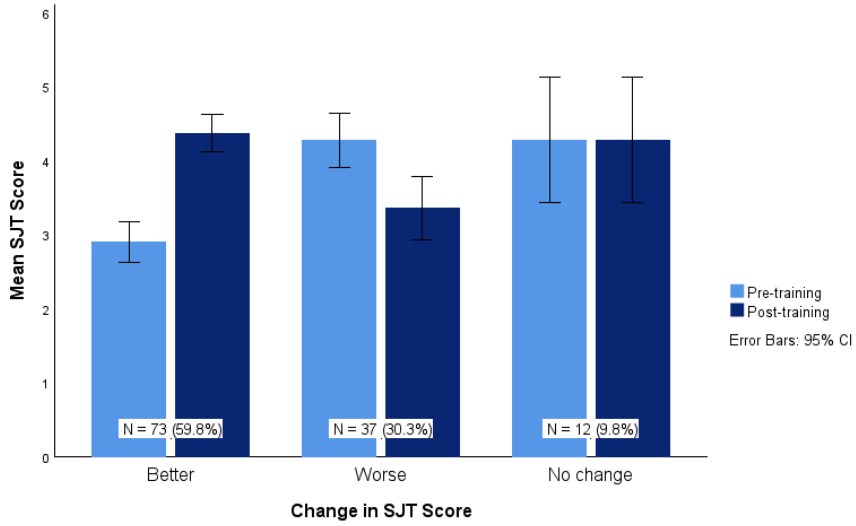

Figure 2. Change in SJT score performance from pre- to post-training

Change in SJT scores pre- to post-training by time since training

Post-training SJT surveys were administered to those who had completed FMI training either 1, 3, 6, 9 or 12 months after training to examine the potential timing associated with the acquisition or decay of skills. Figure 3 shows average scores at pre- and post-training across each time period that surveys were administered following training. Average SJT scores at post-training were higher than pre-training scores across all time points, though more notably so when post-training surveys were completed between 1 and 6 months after training.

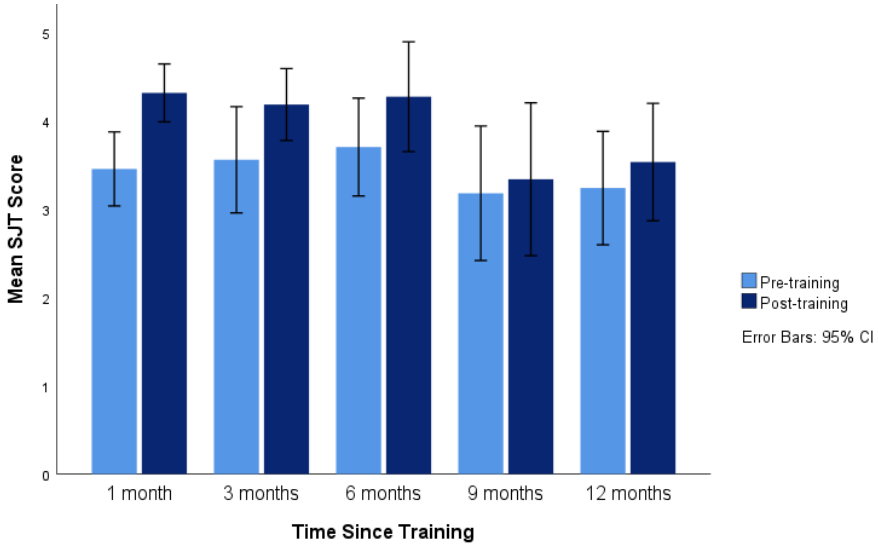

Figure 3. Change in mean SJT scores pre- to post-training by time since training

A series of paired samples t-tests were conducted to compare average scores pre- to post-training for each of the five time periods (see Table 1). Significant differences between pre-and post-training SJT scores were identified at 1 month, 3 months, and 6 months, with moderate to large effect sizes. No significant differences between pre- and post-training scores were identified at 9 and 12 months. Average RCS values across the groups support these results and suggest that post-training SJT performance was relatively better than expected among those who completed assessments at either 1, 3 or 6 months after training, and relatively worse than expected among those who completed assessments 9 or 12 months after training. The results suggest FMI-related skills were acquired following training and readily recalled at least 6 months later but were then subject to decay from at least 9 months post-training. Figure 4 presents the mean difference in SJT scores from pre- to post-training for each of the five post-training time points (error bars that extend below 0 for the 9-and 12-month groups further highlight no significant improvement in SJT performance).

Table 1. Paired samples t-tests for pre-and post-training SJT scores

		Pre-training	Post-training			
	N	*M* (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)	*MD*	*RCS*	*t*, *p*-value, *d*
1 month	45	3.45 (1.40)	4.32 (1.09)	0.87	0.241	**-4.420, <.001, .66**
3 months	24	3.56 (1.42)	4.18 (0.96)	0.62	0.075	**-2.113, .023, .43**
6 months	21	3.70 (1.22)	4.27 (1.37)	0.57	0.099	**-2.419, .013, .52**
9 months	15	3.18 (1.38)	3.34 (1.56)	0.16	-0.541	-0.476, .321, .12
12 months	17	3.24 (1.25)	3.53 (1.29)	0.29	-0.388	-0.764, .228, .18

Note: Bold = significant results

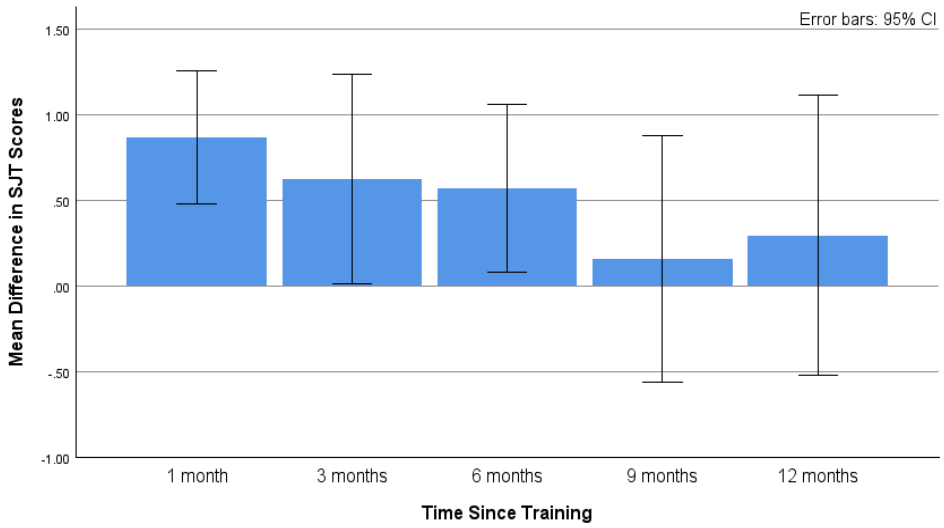

Figure 4. Mean difference in SJT scores pre-to post-training by time since training

A multiple linear regression further explored staff characteristics (age, gender, staff role) and post-training survey timing on the magnitude of change in SJT performance using residualised change scores.[3] The results of this model are presented in Table 2.

The results confirmed that post-training survey timing accounted for significant change in SJT performance. The regression coefficient indicated that each incremental increase in duration between pre-training and post-training assessments was associated with a decrease in the magnitude of change in scores, on average. Age and role were also significantly related to change in SJT performance. Younger staff and OSP staff experienced greater change in SJT performance. Gender was not significantly related to a change in SJT performance. Table 3 presents mean scores at pre-and post-training and residualised change scores based on gender and staff role.[4]

Table 2. Regression model examining staff characteristics and survey timing on SJT residual change scores

	β	R^2	ΔR^2	F
Age	-.269*	.210	.210	4.379**
Gender (0 = Male; 1 = Female)	.000			
Staff role (0 = OSP; 1 = CO)	-.265*			
Survey timing	-.271*			

β = Standardised beta coefficients; $^{**}p < .01$, $^{*}p < .05$

[3] Only COs and OSP staff were examined in the regression analysis. CSI staff only accounted for a small proportion of the sample and were therefore excluded. Administrative staff were also excluded on the basis they are less likely to regularly engage with people in custody.

[4] Age has not been included in Table 3 as it was entered in the regression model as a continuous variable.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for SJT scores by staff characteristics

		Pre-training	Post-training		
	N	*M* (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)	*MD*	*RCS*
Gender					
Male	72	3.13 (1.21)	3.81 (1.23)	0.68	-0.090
Female	50	3.92 (1.39)	4.40 (1.20)	0.48	0.129
Staff role					
OSP	18	3.69 (1.30)	4.76 (1.11)	1.07	0.548
CO	83	3.25 (1.27)	3.79 (1.17)	0.54	-0.162

Acquisition of specific skills

Collectively, all FMI-related skills and targets were covered across the series of 21 SJT questions that staff could receive in pre- and post-training surveys (see Appendix for FMI skills and targets mapped to SJT questions). A series of ANCOVAs, controlling for post-training survey time, were conducted to assess pre- to post-training differences in scores for each individual SJT question (see Table 4).[5] Eight of the 21 questions showed significant differences in scores between pre- and post-training (p's < .05). Mean differences (MD) are presented to indicate where the largest difference in scores occurred; however, these do not necessarily translate to significant differences between pre- and post-training scores as other factors, such as sample size and variability, can affect whether a significant difference in scores occur. Effect size (partial eta squared) is instead utilised to represent where the most reliable difference in scores occurred. All significant results had effect sizes within the medium range.[6]

Further exploration into individual questions sought to identify specific skills that were subject to significant change from pre- to post-training. The eight questions that showed significant change collectively incorporated all six targets covered during training, as well as five skills. The skills represented by items that showed significant change included 'building trust, confidence and rapport', 'giving and receiving feedback', 'creating space', 'active listening', and 'rolling with resistance'. Many of these questions also incorporated response options that included 'Socratic questioning' as a way to either address a specific target or utilise one of the other skills.

Among questions that showed no statistically significant change from pre- to post-training, nine were still representative of small to moderate changes (based on effect size) and covered a number of the skills and targets that showed significant change, in addition to 'building commitment to change'. The remaining four non-significant questions demonstrated either no change or a decrease in average scores from pre- to post-training. Three of these questions covered the remaining FMI skills of 'giving hope', 'turning a negative into a positive', and 'teaching people to seek reliable information', as well as some specific applications of 'Socratic questioning'. Question 14 also covered the skill of 'giving and receiving feedback' (previously noted as showing a significant improvement in other questions); however, the pre-training average on this item was the highest of all questions at 0.85 with the post-training average dropping by only 0.01. This may suggest that some staff were already quite adept at utilising this skill, while others benefited from the training provided in this area.

[5] A key component of the study design meant the same individuals did not receive the same questions at pre- and post-training to prevent practice effects. Analyses therefore assess between-subjects effects to compare average mean scores for different groups of respondents who responded to each item at pre- and post-training.

[6] Partial eta squared (n2p) are interpreted as: .01 (1% of the variance) = small, .06 (6% of the variance) = medium, ≥ .14 (14% or more of the variance) = large (Richardson, 2011).

Table 4. ANCOVA results for individual SJT questions (ordered by strength of effect size n^2p)

		Pre-training		Post-training		Change	ANCOVA
Item	Skills & Targets	N	M (SD)	N	M (SD)	MD	*F*, *p*, n^2p
9	Build trust, confidence & rapport	19	0.58 (0.51)	49	0.90 (0.31)	0.32	**8.134, .006, .111**
13	Giving & receiving feedback	15	0.46 (0.52)	49	0.78 (0.42)	0.32	**5.668, .020, .085**
19	Perspective taking Rolling with resistance Creating space	29	0.58 (0.28)	51	0.73 (0.21)	0.15	**6.604, .012, .079**
4	Impulsivity Active listening	43	0.68 (0.32)	30	0.84 (0.19)	0.16	**5.864, .018, .077**
17	Impulsivity Problem solving Building commitment to change	36	0.46 (0.26)	25	0.62 (0.30)	0.16	**4.644, .035, .074**
20	Criminal attitudes Perspective taking Socratic questioning	20	0.31 (0.47)	45	0.59 (0.50)	0.28	**4.587, .036, .069**
2	Setting & achieving goals Taking responsibility Socratic questioning	28	0.60 (0.29)	39	0.72 (0.20)	0.12	**4.302, .042, .063**
11	Taking responsibility Perspective taking Rolling with resistance Building commitment to change	44	0.71 (0.29)	20	0.87 (0.17)	0.16	**4.026, .049, .062**
15	Setting & achieving goals Giving hope	41	0.41 (0.50)	15	0.68 (0.49)	0.27	3.298, .075, .059
10	Building trust, confidence & rapport	52	0.71 (0.46)	17	0.94 (0.24)	0.23	3.810, .055, .055
5	Taking responsibility Building commitment to change	15	0.30 (0.49)	69	0.56 (0.50)	0.26	3.276, .074, .039
18	Criminal attitudes Socratic questioning	27	0.52 (0.51)	41	0.66 (0.48)	0.14	1.389, .243, .021
21	Turning negative into positive	36	0.25 (0.44)	54	0.37 (0.49)	0.12	1.375, .244, .016
16	Criminal attitudes Impulsivity Socratic questioning Active listening	47	0.60 (0.28)	22	0.67 (0.23)	0.07	0.962, .330, .014
6	Creating space Building commitment to change Giving hope	55	0.81 (0.20)	23	0.84 (0.20)	0.03	0.650, .423, .009
3	Setting & achieving goals Taking responsibility Socratic questioning	36	0.62 (0.23)	24	0.64 (0.20)	0.02	0.104, .748, .002
12	Problem solving Rolling with resistance Building commitment to change	32	0.71 (0.23)	47	0.72 (0.19)	0.01	0.091, .763, .001
7	Seeking reliable information	40	0.13 (0.34)	24	0.13 (0.34)	0.00	0.000, 1.000, .000
14	Giving & receiving feedback	41	0.85 (0.36)	38	0.84 (0.37)	-0.01	0.011, .917, .000
8	Seeking reliable information Giving hope Active listening	40	0.66 (0.22)	22	0.65 (0.13)	-0.01	0.036, .851, .001
1	Setting & achieving goals Giving hope Turning negative into positive	36	0.60 (0.26)	20	0.58 (0.29)	-0.02	0.102, .751, .002

Note: Green = positive change; Red = negative change; White = no change. Significant results in bold.

CONCLUSIONS

The aim of the current study was to understand whether FMI training was effective in promoting the acquisition and retention of related skills among custodial staff. The study also sought to examine whether there was a point in time post-training where skill decay occurred, as well as whether there were specific FMI skills that were more or less likely to be acquired and utilised. In doing so, the study utilised behavioural tendency questions in the form of SJTs depicting typical interactions that may occur between staff and people in custody.

SJT scores achieved by staff were, on average, higher after FMI training compared to before training, indicating that training was effective for the acquisition of FMI-related skills. The majority of staff showed improved SJT performance from pre- to post-training, indicating the training provided staff with new skills and ways to approach situations they may not have previously used. Participants from an earlier qualitative study on staff perspectives of FMI training identified the training as important for learning from staff working in different roles and developing new perspectives and ways of communicating with people in custody, which increased their confidence and willingness to use FMI-related skills (Barkworth et al., 2023).

Among staff who either scored lower at post-training compared to pre-training or showed no change in SJT performance, pre-training scores tended to be higher, which imposes statistical limits on their capacities for improvement. The results may also reflect findings from the staff perspectives study where many felt they were already using a lot of FMI-related skills prior to completing the training but that the training was valuable for reinforcing what they were already doing (Barkworth et al., 2023). It stands to reason that FMI training may have limited effects on skills and attitudes for those staff who already have advanced competencies in those areas (see also Howard et al., 2021). Higher SJT scores at pre-training have also been associated with higher perceptions of manager 'buy-in' or endorsement of FMI-related skills (Howard et al., 2023). Staff previously reported they were more likely to utilise FMI-related skills in their interactions after training if they felt senior officers and other managers encouraged and guided staff in the use of FMI (Barkworth et al., 2023). On the other hand, staff were less inclined to engage in FMI training and utilise the skills if they felt discouraged or undermined in their efforts, if they felt the situation was unsafe, or the individual they were interacting with was not receptive to FMI-related skills (Barkworth et al., 2023).

The amount of time that had lapsed since training was also linked with SJT performance. Significant changes in SJT scores from pre- to post-training were identified at 1, 3 and 6 months after training, while no significant change in scores occurred at 9 and 12 months after training. Regression modelling also indicated that the magnitude of change in scores significantly declined with greater intervals between pre-training and post-training assessments. This supports earlier preliminary findings that found staff performance on SJT measures significantly improved among staff who completed post-training measures up to 6 months after training (Howard et al., 2023).[7] The findings suggest skills were maintained until at least 6 months post-training, with evidence of skill decay occurring from around 9 months. Research supports that skill decay increases with the length of time that has passed since initial training (see Arthur et al., 1998 for a review). Overlearning, through additional training beyond what is initially provided for proficiency, has been linked with less skill decay (Arthur et al., 1998). Implementation of initiatives such as FMI refresher training around 6 months following initial FMI training may therefore assist with maintaining the use of FMI-related skills and prevent skill decay.

Additional analyses found age and staff role were related to significant changes in SJT scores. Younger staff and OSP staff showed the greatest improvement in SJT performance from pre- to post-training. These findings align with facilitators and barriers to using FMI previously identified by staff. Age was generally related to length of service where staff felt that the newer, younger generation of officers were more open to taking on board FMI training and initiating the use of FMI-related skills compared to officers who had been in the job for 25+ years (Barkworth et al., 2023). OSP staff were also more likely to see their role as

[7] At the time of the Howard et al. (2023) study, data was not available for staff who completed post-training measures at 9 or 12 months after training.

being conducive to using FMI-related skills where the nature of their role meant they were often interacting with people one-on-one and engaging in challenging conversations about their thoughts and behaviours. COs, on the other hand, while still open to using FMI-related skills, felt their role acted more as a barrier. They expressed concern about separating that rehabilitative role from their security role and reported that people in custody often viewed and interacted with them differently compared to non-uniformed staff (Barkworth et al., 2023).

Further exploration of individual SJT questions revealed specific skills staff that were more likely to be associated with significant change from pre-to post-training. The skills linked with significant change from pre- to post-training ('building trust, confidence and rapport', 'giving and receiving feedback', 'creating space', 'active listening', and 'rolling with resistance') were also previously identified by staff as those they were most likely to use in interactions with people in custody (see Barkworth et al., 2023). The results suggest these are the skills that staff are most likely to acquire through training and are in turn able to recognise situations where they can be applied. Interestingly, the degree of agreement in these results across studies also suggest that skill acquisition through training often corresponded with real-world application of those skills and could be indicative of the benefits of rehearsal in skill maintenance over time.

Skills associated with an average decrease in scores from pre- to post-training ('teaching people to seek reliable information', 'turning a negative into a positive') were also previously identified by staff as being among those skills they were least likely to use (Barkworth et al., 2023). 'Giving hope' and 'Socratic questioning' were also subject to a decrease in scores in some instances, despite previously being identified as skills staff were most likely to use (Barkworth et al., 2023). It should also be noted, however, that the average decrease in SJT performance for questions covering this group of skills was minimal (0.01 - 0.02 points) and not statistically significant. In addition, a number of these items showed high scores before training, which were often comparable to the post-training scores of items that saw significant improvement. This suggests some of the less improved areas could alternately reflects skills that staff are already and continue to be adept at using, as well as skills that could benefit from additional training.

Several limitations of the current study should be noted. The use of self-report behavioural tendency questions may be subject to social desirability bias where respondents may be more likely to respond in a way viewed more favourably by others (Boon-Falleur et al., 2022), rather than in a way that was best aligned with FMI-related skills. While randomisation of SJT questions across different sets was designed to mitigate potential differences in item difficulty, we cannot rule out that some sets may have been comprised of items that were less difficult and in turn elicited higher scores among some staff at either pre- or post-training. Smaller sample sizes, particularly at 9 and 12 months post-training may have also limited opportunities to identify significant effects. Finally, as the study was completed at a time when the rollout of FMI training was in its final stages, we were unable to utilise an experimental design to compare acquisition of FMI-related skills over time between staff who had completed training and those who had not undergone training.

Findings from this study support the effectiveness of FMI training for the acquisition of FMI-related skills among custodial staff. Following identification of patterns consistent with skill decay at 9 and 12 months post-training, it is recommended refresher training is implemented prior to this time to support maintenance of skills. Further training focusing on skills that staff may be less adept in could also be beneficial. The findings should further be considered alongside previous research where staff have identified both facilitators and barriers to using FMI-related skills (see Barkworth et al., 2023). Refresher training that is targeted at skill maintenance and addresses concerns around barriers to using FMI would best support the continued use of FMI-related skills among custodial staff. Overall, the study contributes to the body of work in NSW examining the implementation of FMI and supports the ongoing rollout of FMI training and refresher training to all custodial staff.

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