Social Psychology in Offender Reentry Journal Article

**Evidence-based practices utilized in correctional program support services to reduce the effects of stress, foster happiness, and reduce recidivism in offenders working towards**

# reentry

In criminal justice system, evidence-based practices are effectively applied in the field in a quest to implement desired objectives. Different practices are used to reduce recidivism and foster happiness among offenders seeking reentry. They involve application of risk assessment, the importance of enhancing motivation, harmonizing offender’s characteristics with interventions, developing intrinsic motivation, and applying cognitive behavioral therapy (NCSC, 2018). The practices have proved efficient over the years, but not without challenges as discussed below.

# Application of risk assessment

Andrews and Dowden (2007) conducted a research which shows that actuarial risk assessment, when applied, provide well refined results compared to clinical judgment. When individual bias plus opinions are removed, consistent results which are ideal and predictable in future are achieved. Different tools are used in risk assessment since they show major risks and need factors which predict offending in future. They involve antisocial attitudes, associates, personality patterns as well as history of antisocial behaviors (Andrew $ Dowden, 2007). Brenna et al. (2009) shows how these tools are effective in COMPAS’ predictive abilities in their study group. Their assessment reached a predictive ability, even to those offenders who were willing to change. Such an assessment is conducted on arrival of inmates in prisons and completed during release for parole supervision. Cooperation with risk assessors allows the offenders to program their behavior and attitudes to enhance their rehabilitation chances during their term. However, it is not easy since the inmates encounter antisocial associates who discourage or threaten them from taking part in the assessment. In addition, vocational programs equip them with skills, keeps them busy and away from trouble and when achieved well, they boost their conditional

release.

# Enhancing motivation

After identification of treatment needs in risk reduction plan, motivation to take parte and embrace change is imperative. According to Vest et al. (2016), motivational interviewing entails engagement, focus, evoking plus establishing a plan to enhance intrinsic motivation in an offender and embrace a commitment to change their behavior. MI interviewers question the offenders and guide them towards the process of change. The counselor is able to comprehend the offender’s readiness to change and their commitment to make those changes. As such, the offenders willing to change frees their mind off their past mistakes to enjoy and utilize the sessions in embracing change. Using the COMPAS software, offenders establish goals which rhyme with the risks and needs assessed. Their level of achievement is reviewed quarterly through counseling meetings. Those ready to change become motivated and actively participate in achieving the set goals. Those who care less about them say and do what the parole board expects of them and do nothing to change. MI is constrained by time factor, making the counselors to spend less time with the offenders willing to change. However, when applied, it is an effective tool for fostering intrinsic motivation.

# Harmonizing offender’s characteristics with interventions

Offenders have different character traits, a reality which is considered when choosing the intervention to be used to facilitate behavioral change. Some go through the prison program and follow the rules as many times as possible. However, Andrew and Wormith (2006) explain that focusing more on the needs of each offender, considering the risk assessment, which was carried out, may develop more interest plus motivation to actively participate in different programs and affect change. Offenders’ listing their occupations such as football, singing and recording is not a cliché; it is a clear indicator that there are character traits which needs developing and satisfied, other than addressing criminogenic needs. As such, when such traits match with, let’s say, music classes, offenders end up making better decisions, having less impulse towards crime, develop long-term plans and gain education on their skills. As such, some offenders finish their parole and become great people in the society.

# Applying cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)

Taxman (2018) explains that CBT is a methodology used to help offenders understand their perception towards situations, how they react towards them and how they can create new plus positive reactions towards such situations. Thinking for a change is CBT program based on groups and guides on social skills and abilities, cognitive self-change plus techniques in finding solutions to problems (Lowenkamp et al. 2009). The program trains offenders on how to live and relate with people while avoiding confrontations. Effectiveness of CBT in reducing recidivism by 25% to participants of CBT program in as study conducted by Landerberger & Lipsey (2005) was encouraging. Another study show that CBT in probation departments works more effectively in reducing recidivism compared to prisons (Lowenkamp et al., 2009). However, effectiveness of CBT highly relies on employees’ motivation plus interest levels to impact real change among the offenders.

**Elements of social psychology to be considered when structuring and administering**

# services to aid offenders in reentering into the society

Services design to help offenders prepare to reentry in the society assist them in acquiring different skills which help them succeed in the society. The programs help them address personal challenges as well as triggers of criminal behavior through establishing healthy relationships in the society. Design of such services is guided by elements of social psychology which are useful in the process of assisting offenders to reenter the society. They include attitudes, social cognition and self-concept. Attitudes involve approval or disapproval of an action or an entity based on believes and convictions (Kassin, Steven & Hazel, 2008). Offenders have attitude towards rehabilitation program as they strive to achieve behavioral change. Some have positive attitudes towards different programs, thereby participating actively and successfully while others have a don’t-care attitude, making them participate in the programs to pass their jail time. Since attitudes are mostly genetic, those with negative attitudes towards different programs might not refrain from criminal activities even after parole is granted. However, they can learn and develop positive attitudes willing or through persuasion. The programs should therefore consider attitude change and development towards embracing a crime-free life thorough mentoring and counseling.

Social cognition is what we perceive, think and remember information about others (Kassin, Steven & Hazel, 2008). Offenders may have social challenges which may affect their reentry in the society. These challenges may affect the way the view the society, finding it difficult to embrace transition, thereby affecting the way they embrace change. Offenders may compare themselves with other people only to see them as skilled and deserving more than themselves, thereby developing poor cognitive and emotional functioning. It becomes hard for them to be ready to face the society, even when they are reformed and ready to start a new life. As such, they lack self-esteem and conviction of living a crime-free life. Such individuals may have an extended parole to resolve their negative social cognition.

Self-concept is what people believe about themselves. It can be emotional, behavioral or cognitive. Emotional is how individuals view their self-worth to establish a safe personality; behavioral is how individuals control their acts in different situations and cognitive is how individuals construct their identity and maintain its stability (Kassin, Steven & Hazel, 2008). If the three elements are not in harmony with each other, an offender may easily relapse to criminal activities. As such, rehabilitation programs enable a counselor to understand the extent at which an offender has achieved them, thereby informing them on the intervention to use on them.

# How methods of stress management can help to reduce recidivism

Stress among offenders can be contributed by difficulties in living a meaningful life such as finding employment, acceptance by the family and the community and lack of basic needs for survival. As such, stress management is an important element in seeking to reduce recidivism. Hartwell & Orr (2004) conducted a research which showed that continuity care is an important aspect of managing stress among offenders in criminal justice system. Such involves helping them access social services, disability benefits, vocational training and social group support system. Family support is also imperative in managing individual support. It provides emotional support, basic needs and helps one to start their life all over and avoid criminal life. As such, programs to prevent recidivism should incorporate family members to ensure that their families offer support in the reentry program.

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