

Implementation of rehabilitation programs on offenders in prison: what works?



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Abstract

Rehabilitation programs have become a more recognizable method of controlling recidivism rates world-wide. Many different specialized programs have been implemented into daily practices in prisons, but are they all effective methods? The general goal of this paper is to review research literature to determine whether there is a relationship between the effects of different types of rehabilitation programs, and recidivism rates of offenders. Specifically, the paper will investigate education, employment, and counselling rehabilitation for inmates, and will look at how these programs impact the lives of offenders once they have been released from prison. It will be argued that offender rehabilitation is a program that requires a high level of precision and accuracy in determining which offender requires which program. With the help of RNR (Risk-Need-Responsivity) model, I will argue that in order to properly implement rehabilitation practices, prison employees are required to assess the risk and need factors of each individual offender. By doing so, employees and practitioners will be able to create a specialized rehabilitation plan that will be designed based on individual needs. Targeting these needs is a crucial part in the design plan, and I will argue how by doing so, recidivism rates can not only be improved, but also how such program designs can increase the perceived value of life for offenders in prison.

Introduction to Prison Rehabilitation Programs

Each year, a large number of individuals return home after serving time in the penitentiary system. Many studies have shown that recidivism rates of

these ex-detainees are high, both in the North America and Europe. Past North American research has shown that well over 60% of prisoners are re-arrested within 3 years (Hughes & Wilson, 2002) after release, whereas reincarceration rates for male ex-detainees are around 53% (Visher & Travis, 2003). With a large amount of offenders being released from prison daily, and their high probability of re-offending, it is essential to implement effective rehabilitation programs in prison in an attempt to try and control the recidivism rates of ex-detainees. This essay will examine the effectiveness of different rehabilitation programs that are present in modern prisons. The three different rehabilitation programs that will be investigated throughout the essay are: education, employment, and counselling. In addition, three different offender types: high-risk, medium-risk, and low-risk, will also be investigated throughout the essay. The reason for including an array of both rehabilitation programs and offender types, is due to the fact that different offender types will react differently when introduced to a rehabilitation program in prison. While a rehabilitation program may yield a positive effect on an offender, the same process may yield a negative effect when presented to another offender. The main goal of the research is to investigate this relationship between rehabilitation program and offender type.

Prior research attests to the fact that *some* rehabilitation programs are successful with *some* offenders, in *some* settings, when applied by *some* staff (Antonowicz, 1994). The goal of this essay is to look at different offender types, and investigate the link between which rehabilitation program works most effectively for each individual. In order to effectively

investigate the link between the two, the first part of the essay will focus on presenting information surrounding offender types and prison rehabilitation separately. Once this information has been presented, the next section will be focused on combining the two subjects, in an attempt to draw a link between them. Based on my review of the literature, it is apparent that offender rehabilitation is a program that requires a high level of precision and accuracy in determining the proper rehabilitation program to administer to an offender type.

With the help of the Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) model (Andrews & Bonta, 2006), as a tool to determine the risk level of offenders, I will argue that in order to properly implement rehabilitation practices, prison employees are required to access the risk and need factors of each individual offender. By doing so, employees and practitioners will be able to create a specialized rehabilitation plan that will be designed based on individual needs (Polaschek, 2012). Targeting these needs is a crucial part in the design plan. It will be argued that by doing so, proper rehabilitation programs can be created and implemented into prison, in order to effectively decrease recidivism rates for offenders being released from prison.

Offender Types

To begin, as a starting point, it would be useful to first explore and define crime and criminal behavior, before investigating those who commit crimes. It is thought that crime is a type of action or omission which constitutes an offence punishable by the law (Michalowski, 2016). Therefore, if it classified

as an action that is punishable by the law, why do so many individuals commit crime?

There are high levels of both difficulty and complexity when attempting to answer this question. Although one may not be able to answer this question on their own, there are countless amounts of theorists that have attempted to explain the question. It is evident that psychological theories are among some of the most prominent explanations for criminal behavior (Kendler, Lonn, Lichtenstein, & Sundquist, 2006). While these psychological theories will not be explained in detail, it is important to understand the core assumptions of the psychodynamic theory. The theory has its core foundation around the assumption that human behavior is controlled by unconscious mental processes, and that such processes are developed in early childhood (Andersson, 2017). Given that human behavior can be controlled by these unconscious mental processes, it is pivotal for society to understand the danger associated with offenders, and the high probability of them re-offending.

Knowing a little more information surrounding criminal behaviour, it is now time to introduce the different offender types. While this essay is going to focus on broad groups of offender types, it is important to note that an offender can range from any gender, socio-economic status, and most importantly, age. For the purpose of this paper, there will be a focus on three generic offender types: low-risk, medium-risk, and high-risk. Before one can assess an offender and determine which risk type they fall under, an understanding of the difference between the three is required.

Over the last 20 years, correctional practice in the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) has adopted an approach that adheres to the Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) (Andrews, & Bonta, 2006) model of offender rehabilitation (Nolan, & Stewart, 2017). According to the Risk principle, the amount and intensity of service should be proportionate to an offender's risk to reoffend. More specifically, lower risk offenders should be provided with low intensity or minimal services, while the focus of the correctional effort should be placed on providing supervision and services for higher risk offenders. Many question the idea of a low-risk offender, pondering the question of how an offender can be classified as being low-risk to society given that they are in jail for committing a crime.

The idea behind a low-risk offender is that they simply show lesser tendencies to re-offend and are of minimal risk to the community. In most cases, first time offenders are classified as low-risk. Given that low-risk offenders are typically exposed to community-based supervision, another determinant of low recidivism rates could be that they have been in a community setting for a long period of time without reoffending. Community-based surveillance will be discussed in detail later on in the essay. In contrast, as mentioned earlier, a high-risk offender is ultimately in need of more supervision, treatment, and at a higher risk of reoffending. High-risk offenders are a hazard to society, and if they were to be released from prison, the chance of them reoffending is very likely. Studies have shown that 90% of high-risk offenders are sex offenders and that the prevalence of anti-social personality disorders among this group is high (Bonta, 1996).

Given the dangers they pose of society, high-risk offenders are usually placed in prison with lengthy sentences.

The final offender type that will be included in this paper is a medium-risk offender. To better understand medium-risk offenders, it is important to note that low-risk offenders have on average a recidivism rate of 10%, and high-risk offenders, a rate of 50%. With that being said, with a recidivism rate of 30%, one could perceive where the medium-risk offender would fall into the spectrum. Although a medium-risk offender shows much lower rates of recidivism, they are treated very similar to high-risk offenders. It was noted that low-risk offenders rarely spend much time in prison, and are usually sentenced to community-based supervision. With high-risk and medium-risk sentencing, offenders are rarely ever sent to community-based supervision, but instead, their supervision and rehabilitation is primarily done in prison. However, it was highlighted that when compared to offenders of high-risk, medium-risk offenders are required to complete half the hours of treatment. When looking at the 30% potential for recidivism in medium-risk offenders, although there are identifiable indicators of serious harm, these harms are unlikely to happen unless provoked. While the offender has the potential to cause such harm, a change in circumstances is typically the cause of the re-offense. Leading causes that were found within medium-risk offences were: failure to take medication, loss of accommodation, relationship breakdown, and drug or alcohol misuse. By being able to implement unlimited supervision on such offenders, prison employees are able to have control of, and avoid possible causes of re-offending.

To continue, given the complexity and importance of placing offenders under their proper risk type, the Criminal Justice System relies heavily on instruments to capture important information surrounding an offender. Offender classification and assessment are two instruments that are used, and that play an essential role in the correctional system. Classification refers to the procedure of placing prisoners in one of several custody levels (maximum, medium, and minimum) to match offender needs, while assessment covers the risks and needs of the offender. The assessment of risk refers to the danger to self, others, and the community that is presented by the offender, whereas the assessment of needs may include measurements related to education, employment, financial situation, interpersonal relationships, and mental health issues and attitudes toward crime (Andrews & Bonta, 2006)

Prison classification and assessment systems are intended to differentiate among prisoners who pose different security risks and/or have a higher degree of need (Austin, 2003). In order to successfully classify offenders at the time of their detainment, prison administrators rely on assessment instruments that identify and help select supervision strategies, on the basis of assessing the risks and needs of the offender (Lowenkamp, Holsinger, & Latessa, 2001). The best known instrument is the Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) model, as it does a good job at highlighting the importance of the following: (a) programs should be delivered only to higher risk cases, (b) programs should target risk-related factors, and (c) programs should be designed and delivered in a manner that enhances offenders' abilities to respond to them (Andrews & Bonta, 2006). The RNR plays an

essential role in every offender's road towards rehabilitation, and while it delivers a significantly effective way to assess and classify offenders into an array of custody levels, the majority of rehabilitation is done primarily after the offender has been assessed and placed under their respective supervision.

Rehabilitation Programs

Given the large number of offenders re-entering society with a high rate of recidivism, rehabilitation programs are put in place as an attempt to decrease the chance of re-offending. It was up until the 1970s, where there was a widely accepted notion that nothing works in correctional treatment (e. g., Lipton, Martinson, & Wilks, 1975; Martinson, 1974). At this time, there was a strong belief that there was no rehabilitation program that could decrease recidivism in offenders. During the 1980's and 1990's, however, several factors were identified that had a positive influence on recidivism reduction in offenders. Since that time, there has been a shift in criminal justice thinking from nothing works to what works (Andrews & Bonta, 1994). Consequently, in an attempt to prevent or reduce recidivism, several prison-based offender rehabilitation programs have been implemented in North America (Lipsey & Cullen, 2007). These rehabilitation programs are designed specifically to help reduce recidivism rates in offenders, and decrease the risk they pose on society once they have been released. While there are many different types of rehabilitation programs that are currently being implemented in prisons around North America, this essay is going to strictly examine the practices of the three most recognized techniques.

Firstly, according to the National Reentry Resource Center, correctional education refers to a wide variety of educational programs available to both men and women under correctional supervision. The types of programs range from basic skills training to college and vocational training that provide the skills necessary for people to obtain employment upon release (2018). While many factors are responsible for why some offenders re-offend and others do not, research states that a lack of education and skills is one main cause (Davis, Bozick, Steele, Saunders, & Miles, 2013). With that being said, educational rehabilitation is put in place to not only decrease recidivism, but also ensure that offenders are given the education needed to promote the possibility of them becoming a positive and impactful member of society.

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