

Examining the impact
of mentoring
desistance among
prisoners criminology
essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

This chapter seeks to situate the importance of the impact of mentoring in promoting desistance among ex-prisoners, and why effective interventions such as mentoring which aim to reduce reoffending are crucial for the wellbeing of society and should therefore be explored in order to discover which elements of such interventions do or do not promote desistance. A critical review of current relevant literature in the field of mentoring and how it impacts on desistance will be reported on and hopefully a gap within that literature will be identified which this research will attempt to address.

The Problem of Reoffending

The Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) has provided some of the most overwhelming statistics regarding reoffending ex-prisoners and has declared that 'Prison sentences are not succeeding in turning the majority of offenders away from crime' (2002: 5). Fifty eight per cent of prisoners released in 1997 were reconvicted of another offence within 2 years of being released from custody, and of those, thirty six per cent also went on to receive an additional prison sentence (SEU, 2002: 5). Even though the Ministry of Justice (2010: 2) declare that the proportion of ex-prisoners reoffending is actually falling (noting a decrease in re-offences from forty three per cent in the year 2000 cohort, to forty one per cent in the 2008 equivalent), and The Home Office recent 'Five Year strategy for protecting the Public and reducing reoffending' (2006: 9) claims 'Crime is going down. The risk of being a victim of crime is at the lowest level in 24 years', reoffending rates still remain persistently high.

In conjunction with punishment, the reform of offenders is crucial to reducing reoffending and delivering justice to the public. But when these figures quoted from the above sources are combined they make for shocking reading and depending on how they are interpreted can imply that current rehabilitative interventions which aim to reform offenders and reduce reoffending, are thus 'failing'. This raises questions about how current rehabilitative interventions can be improved to achieve their aims, or if new interventions, such as mentoring for example, should be researched further, and used more widely (and possibly in place of current strategies) if they show positive effects.

Rehabilitation

Criminal Justice theories of rehabilitation broadly take the stance that crime is best prevented by working directly with offenders to address the personal, social and economic factors most closely associated with their offending behaviour, which Canton and Edie term as their criminogenic needs (2008: 93). Millie and Erol (2006: 2) identify some examples of criminogenic needs as, 'substance misuse, poor educational and vocational skills, poor cognitive and interpersonal skills, and antisocial attitudes'. By focussing on these risk factors it is more likely that an offender will successfully rehabilitate (Millie and Erol, 2006: 2) and desist from committing further crime.

At the beginning of the 20th century, penal policy was strongly influenced by a theory of rehabilitation. Unfortunately rehabilitative strategies failed to live up to the claim that they would reduce recidivism according to Martinson, resulting in his gloomy conclusion that 'nothing works' (1974) and provoking

a loss of confidence in the rehabilitative ideal during the 1970s and 80s in Britain (Hollin, 2005: 7). However, through a series of meta-analytic reviews which developed the 'What Works' agenda, and provided a compelling case against Martinson's (1974) declaration, Britain witnessed a remarkable resurgence of the rehabilitative ideal in the 1990s (Hollin, 2005: 8).

The general message of the meta-analyses that took place during the 'What Works' movement was that when rehabilitative treatment was used with offenders it could have small but noteworthy effects in terms of reducing reoffending. McGuire and Priestly (1995) outline their interpretation of these key areas through a set of guiding principles, concluding that if followed they could lead to greater effectiveness in program content and delivery. These guiding principles are;

Risk Classification- effective risk assessment is said to be required for the accurate matching of the clients with the level of delivery of certain rehabilitative programmes

Focus on criminogenic needs

Responsivity- matching styles of learning between worker and service user

Community based interventions

Treatment modality- a combination of skills-orientated, cognitive behavioural and other methods

Programme integrity- that ensures programme aims are reflected in the methods used (McGuire and Priestly, 1995).

<https://assignbuster.com/examining-the-impact-of-mentoring-desistance-among-prisoners-criminology-essay/>

However, it would be wrong to assume that the case for treatment was established as 'it is difficult to derive the exact magnitude of this overall treatment effect' (Hollin, 1999: 3) from the meta-analyses, and perhaps more significantly because not all interventions that were researched had the same effect on recidivism, making the findings unreliable to a certain degree. Like all research methods, the meta-analysis process also has limitations, with Sharpe (1997) noting that; mixing dissimilar studies into the analysis and only using published research (of which some might have involved poorly designed and conducted original studies), results in 'meaningless findings' (cited in Hollin, 1999: 7).

This research will attempt to overcome some of the ambiguities that arose from the findings of the 'What Works' era that although provided evidence of what does work with offenders in tackling reoffending generally, provided little in-depth and substantial evidence regarding what aspects of certain programmes (such as mentoring) promoted desistance among offenders and will seek evidence of this from service users themselves who have not traditionally been asked to comment on the service they receive (Ford et al, 1997).

Resettlement

Another process which aims to reduce the likelihood of prisoners reoffending upon release into the community is known as 'resettlement' which although does hold out hope for the rehabilitation of offenders, focuses most of its attention on the pressing practical problems faced by many ex-prisoners,

which if solved or at least significantly improved can go some way to reducing the likelihood of reoffending.

The charity 'User Voice' which draws on insights from offenders in order to develop strategies to reduce reoffending (User Voice, n. d) highlighted in its report 'The User Voice of the criminal justice system' that gaining treatment, accommodation and work are key factors in the journey toward successful resettlement (2008: 13). Likewise a report from the Home Office (Lewis et al, 2003: 8-9) which evaluated the findings from 7 pathfinder programmes placed an emphasis on providing a co-ordinated approach to practical resettlement problems and recommended that the gaps it identified in provision of services needed to facilitate reintegration of offenders prompt a need for; Improved partnership working with Employment Services, Benefits Agencies, local authorities and relevant voluntary/private sector agencies; and access to a wider range of suitable housing, among others.

Recent legislation and policy has attempted to combine ideas from theories of Rehabilitation and Resettlement and recommendations from reports such as those detailed in order to combat the problem of reoffending through various new strategies and most importantly through the creation of the National Offender Management Service. This has generally meant increased levels of alternative interventions being used in criminal justice in order to reduce reoffending, such as mentoring.

Current Policy

The Government's Reducing Reoffending National Action Plan (Home Office, 2004) translated the Social Exclusion Unit's recommendations most
<https://assignbuster.com/examining-the-impact-of-mentoring-desistance-among-prisoners-criminology-essay/>

specifically (2002) into policy, with its core focus on the resettlement of prisoner's after release. This National Action Plan required the production of 'Reducing Re-offending Strategies' and linking 'Action Plans' for the delivery of key services which were divided into seven separate pathways including; 'accommodation, education, training and employment (ETE), mental and physical health; drugs and alcohol; finance, benefit and debt; children and families of offenders; and attitudes thinking and behaviour' (Maguire and Raynor, 2006: 4).

The delivery of these services enacted by the Home Office (2004) now takes place in a dramatically different organisational framework after the creation of NOMS which brought Probation and Prison under one management system and most importantly for purposes of rehabilitation and resettlement introduced 'end to end offender management', meaning an offender would now be under the supervision of one 'manager' throughout the whole of their sentence. This new concept of 'end to end' offender management implies 'the close involvement of partner agencies in service planning and provision' (Maguire and Raynor, 2006: 5), and is an important move for third sector organisations such as mentoring projects, who are now increasingly seen to play an influential role in the resettlement of ex-prisoners and reducing reoffending. This optimism for third sector organisations is supported by the Ministry of Justice in reports such as 'Working with the third sector to reduce reoffending: securing effective partnerships 2008-2011' (2007) and by NOMs in its consultation paper 'Volunteers Can: Towards a volunteering strategy to reduce re-offending' (2007).

This newly found optimism for third sector organisations to be able to improve the chances of successful rehabilitation and resettlement thus reducing the likelihood of reoffending, has naturally lead to an increase in the prevalence and use of such organisations including mentoring projects, as part of criminal justice interventions.

The Rise of Mentoring

Joliffe and Farrington (2007: 2) note that mentoring is used in the criminal justice context to increase ' the life successes of individuals who are at risk of reoffending' by providing direct practical assistance (for e. g. filling out housing applications, assisting in searching for employment) and indirect support (for e. g. by acting as a positive role model). By providing individuals with both of these forms of support, mentoring aims to assist in reducing reoffending and increase positive life outcomes (Joliffe and Farrington, 2007: 10). For the purpose of their systematic review Tolan et al identify the following 4 central characteristics of mentoring;

Interaction of two individuals over an extended period of time.

Inequality of experience or power between the mentor and the mentee (recipient) with the mentee possessing a greater share.

The mentee is in a position to imitate and benefit from the knowledge, skill, ability, or experience of the mentor.

The absence of the role inequality that typifies other helping relationships and is marked by professional training, certification, or predetermined status

differences such as parent-child or teacher-student relationships (Tolan et al, 2008: 6).

Mentoring is a relatively new concept to the UK, especially in the field of criminal justice. It is identified by Newburn and Shiner that mentoring originated as a ' formal response to social exclusion and social welfare problems in the US' (2006: 1), with one of the earliest mentoring programmes being identified as the Big Brothers Big Sisters of America (BBBSA) which was established in 1904. The Big Brothers/Big Sisters programme has since expanded rapidly in the US and is used as a template by other mentoring organisations with similar visions elsewhere in the World including the UK (Big Brothers Big Sisters, n. d) through ventures such as The Dalston Youth Project (DYP) and Big Brothers Big Sisters UK (Newburn and Shiner, 2006: 2). Although, despite its increasing popularity mentoring continues to be associated with a number of difficulties.

Defining ' mentoring' becomes difficult due to the vast set of practises it can cover including one or all of the following; coaching, facilitating, counselling, befriending, tutoring, teaching, role-modelling, buddying or life-styling (Phillip, 1999; Clutterbuck, 2002). It is these definitional problems combined with the contemporary nature of the intervention that creates further difficulty in assessing the value of mentoring, which is why there is little empirical research evaluating its impact, particularly concerning how or why it is or is not of benefit in promoting desistance (i. e. what aspects of mentoring impact on desistance) and not simply does it reduce recidivism.

The ' Effectiveness' of Mentoring

<https://assignbuster.com/examining-the-impact-of-mentoring-desistance-among-prisoners-criminology-essay/>

Most evaluations of mentoring schemes have originated from the US and report generally favourable findings in relation to reducing reoffending. For example, Becker (1994) studied delinquent youths who were involved in the Partners Inc. Mentoring programme and reported a 65-75% reduction in recidivism. In Joliffe and Farrington's rapid evidence assessment (2007) 18 studies were analysed in order to assess how successful mentoring is in reducing reoffending, with 7 of these showing a 'statistically significant' positive impact on reoffending, demonstrating a 4 to 11 per cent reduction of subsequent offending for those involved in these mentoring schemes. It was noted though that this result was driven primarily by those studies with lower methodological value. The best studies that were designed to provide the most accurate assessment of the impact of mentoring actually suggested that mentoring did not cause a statistically significant reduction in reoffending. It was also noted that due to the restricted time-period that their study had to be completed in, it was unrealistic to be able to include unpublished studies, difficult to obtain materials and foreign language studies. This can reduce confidence in the findings and also results in 'publication biases' due to there being a greater tendency for statistically significant findings to be published over studies that show non-statistically significant findings.

However, there are other advantages to mentoring, which may impact on reducing reoffending but which cannot be directly measured (For e. g. improving chances of gaining employment). Most research into mentoring appears to focus significantly on quantitative measures of success rather than qualitative approaches, which might provide a better measure of its

benefits. For example when Newburn and Shiner (2006) conducted a study of the 'Mentoring Plus' scheme they did not find it impacted successfully on reducing re-offending per se, but they did find the impact of mentoring was strongest in relation to engagement with education, training and employment (a key pathway to aid reducing reoffending). But similarly to some other studies, they took a cautious approach in their conclusion of their evaluation by stating that 'mentoring faces an uncertain future' (2006: 17) but it has 'real potential' (2006: 16).

Clancy and colleagues (2006) have associated 'through the gate' work with lower reconviction rates due to the mentor having already established a positive relationship with the mentee in custody and this being continued after release (See also; Hudson et al, 2007). This is supported by Hudson et al (2007) who highlight mentoring schemes as a promising strategy to assist ex-prisoners in settling in at their initial accommodation and assisting their progress afterwards.

The structure of mentoring can also affect the success of mentoring schemes. Joliffe and Farrington (2007) found that the mentoring programmes that were most successful in reducing reoffending were those where the mentee and mentor met at least once a week and spent longer periods of time together when they met. St James-Roberts et al (2005) also identified that programmes lasting over ten months, including 15 meetings on average, and had a steering group, were recognised as most 'successful'. They found that the characteristics of the mentee also had effects on outcomes too, reporting that mentees who were younger, had a lack of offending history and were female were most successful.

<https://assignbuster.com/examining-the-impact-of-mentoring-desistance-among-prisoners-criminology-essay/>

Joliffe and Farrington (2007) noted that when mentoring occurred as part of a multi-modal programme, with a larger number of interventions involved, these programmes tended to be more successful in reducing reoffending. Pathfinder studies (Lewis et al, 2007) also provide support for the growth of interventions based around a combination of cognitive-motivational work and facilitating offenders' access to service agencies.

Other benefits of mentoring on reducing reoffending have come from Clancy et al who completed a review of the Transitional Support Scheme (TSS) which provided mentoring for offenders in Wales. The study concluded that the scheme produced statistically significant changes in offenders' attitudes to crime and that offenders found assistance completing forms and managing finances the most useful aspect of mentoring (2004, as cited in Ministry of Justice, 2008: 10-12). Furthermore another vital factor in the effectiveness of the scheme was that the mentors were understood by offenders to be detached from the criminal justice system, therefore mentees were more likely to participate in a relationship with them.

The most recent systematic review of mentoring schemes has come from the Campbell Collaboration in the US (Tolan et al, 2008). The study evaluated the effects of the mentoring interventions included in their study ' on delinquency outcomes for youth...and key associated outcomes' (2008: 5). The Review concluded that when the 39 included studies were analysed for outcomes measuring delinquency or closely related outcomes it suggests ' mentoring for high-risk youth has a modest positive effect for delinquency, aggression, drug use, and achievement' (2008: 8). They noted that effects were strongest when 'emotional support was a key process in mentoring
<https://assignbuster.com/examining-the-impact-of-mentoring-desistance-among-prisoners-criminology-essay/>

interventions' (2008: 8). However, Tolan et al are wary not to make any sweeping conclusions about what elements of mentoring make it an effective intervention by stating that 'the valuable features and most promising approaches cannot be stated with any certainty', putting this down to the 'remarkable lack of description of key features or basic program organization' in the studies included in their review (2008: 8). They finally call for 'more careful design and testing of mentoring effects to provide the needed specificity to guide effective practice of this popular approach' (2008: 5).

On the whole mentoring seems to be a promising intervention and the elements which have been identified as making it effective, have been highlighted, but there is still a lack of research into mentoring effectiveness from the UK, especially concerning its impact on adult rather than young offenders or 'at risk' individuals. This implies that most mentoring projects in the UK have begun due to a 'leap of faith'. Most studies that have been published into the effectiveness of mentoring so far have also been overly concerned with quantitative analyses of mentoring with the majority only being interested in reconviction rates, resulting in them only being able to provide some general and tentative statements about what specific elements of mentoring might impact on its ability to reduce reoffending. This ignores the possibility that qualitative approaches may provide a better measure of the benefits of mentoring, as they are able to assess the numerous indirect impacts mentoring may have on desistance in the long run. There is also a lack of studies focussing on the thoughts of the service user and as it is ultimately only the offenders themselves who can stop reoffending it is vital that their views on how this should be done are taken

into account, this is reinforced by Matza's method of 'appreciation' in which 'aim is to comprehend and illuminate the subject's view and to interpret the world as it appears to him' (1969: 25).

The Process of Desistance

Farrall and Calverley describe desistance as 'the process of ending a period of involvement in offending behaviour' (2006: 1). This definition recognises that the study of desistance is not primarily concerned with whether an individual has committed further crime or not but rather the journey towards becoming a non-offender. Maruna (1998) supports this by claiming desistance is not an 'event' but a 'process' (as cited in Farrall, 2002: 65) and Laub et al define desistance as 'a gradual movement away from criminal offending' (1998: 3).

It has been widely agreed that one of the most important influences on future offending patterns is a change in offender's thinking as well as their circumstances. For example Zamble and Quinsey who concluded from their study of released male prisoners in Ontario that habitual offending is best predicted 'by looking at an individual's acquired ways of reacting to common situations' (1997: 147) and that pessimistic or negative reactions to common problems for many prisoners can lead them to give up on attempts to lead a crime free life. Similarly Maruna's (2000) interview-based study lead to him conclude that what he terms different kinds of 'narrative' (or the personal understandings or accounts of behaviours and situations) can either support desistance or continued offending. Maruna found that a key factor in narratives that promote desistance was the belief that the offender had

begun to take control of their life, where as in comparison those still offending ' seemed to have little vision of what the future might hold, [but] desisting interviewees had a plan and were optimistic they could make it work' (2000: 147).

DiClemente and Prochaska (1982) identify a broad ' cycle of change' with specific stages; Pre-contemplation Contemplation Action Maintenance, which people might pass through when attempting to change any previously habitual behaviours. A person's readiness can be affected by a range of factors which might include among others; major life events, age, physical and social circumstances and social bonds (Maguire and Raynor, 2006: 24). Burnett instead refers to a ' zig-zag' path of desistance which involves ' reversals of decision, indecision, compromise and lapses', and suggests that ' if interventions are to facilitate the desistance process this ubiquitous state of ambivalence should be fully acknowledged and addressed' (2004: 169).

Another element which many writers agree is a central component in the process of desistance is the generation and maintenance of motivation (See Maruna, 2000; Maruna and Immerigeon, 2004). But however strong a person's ' narrative' or motivation to change is, this can be seriously frustrated by a range of social problems, such as persistent accommodation problems or barriers to employment (Burnett and Maruna, 2004: 8).

As people undergo a process of change and begin to desist they will also need ' new skills and capacities appropriate to their new lifestyle, and access to opportunities to use them' (Maguire and Raynor, 2006: 8). They will need to acquire new ' social' and ' human' capital, with human capital referring to

the skills and knowledge that an individual possesses and social capital being conceptualised as 'socially structured relationships between individuals, in families and in aggregations of individuals in neighbourhoods, churches, schools and so on' (Hagan and McCarthy, 2007 as cited in Farrall, 2004: 60). It is suggested that if ex-offenders do not have access to these new appropriate social capital and human capital then the process of desistance could be slowed down (Farrall, 2004) which the use of a volunteer mentor would hopefully overcome.

Maguire and Raynor (2006) suggest that many of the observations described above from desistance theorists have implications for interventions aiming to reduce recidivism and the following points should be taken into account by those involved in the resettlement of offenders, such as mentors or probation officers, in order to foster change and reduce reoffending;

There is a need to respond to offender's individual needs rather than applying a 'one size fits all' series of interventions.

It is important that the offender takes the lead in the process of change or that it is understood as a shared effort between the offender and one attempting to foster change in them.

Emphatic support required in order to maintain the motivation of the offender.

It is imperative that assistance is given in taking advantage of opportunities to improve the lifestyle of the offender and in attaining relevant skills for them.

Motivation of the offender can be maintained by overcoming social and practical problems.

It should be expected that 'relapses' will occur, whereby the offender falls back into previous patterns of behaviour, but this should not act as an indication that desistance has 'failed' (Maguire and Raynor, 2006: 8).

Like many of the studies of mentoring that have already been discussed Maguire and Raynor (1997) also highlight the importance of 'throughcare', suggesting this may increase the chances of interventions being effective, and the offenders involved desisting. They define 'throughcare' as encompassing the following characteristics;

Early preparation for release and planning.

Creation of a close relationship with the offender before they are released from prison.

A focus on continuity between work started with individuals whilst they are in custody with work taking place upon release.

The provision of any required services (for example a drug treatment worker) as soon as is possible after their release (Maguire and Raynor, 1997).

As has been proven through the evaluation of previous studies into the impact of mentoring on reoffending, as a rehabilitative intervention and one which aims to aid the resettlement process, it has huge potential to be able to curb offending behaviour. However little research has yet to be done into what impact mentoring can have as part of the whole process of desistance

and what it is about mentoring that specifically encourages or discourages the mentees to desist in the long run. Maguire and Raynor (1997; 2006) have gone at least some way to link how interventions should be structured in order to promote desistance, and this dissertation will be exploring this process in relation to the specific intervention of mentoring.