The utility of social interventions in youth offending

There are a number of relevant factors for re-incarceration rates and criminality among youth offenders. For example, having a substantial history of adverse childhood experiences has been shown to increase the likelihood that a young offender will be re-incarcerated (Hawthorne et al., 2012). Maltreatment by caregivers and neglect, specifically, have been shown to increase recidivism rates for youth (Spinhoven et al., 2010). Moreover, a criminogenic environment after the original detention of the young offender and a lack of aftercare each have been shown to increase the chance of re-incarceration among young offenders (Farrall, Bottoms & Shapland, 2011). Thus, there are a number of considerable social factors that contribute to the re-incarceration of youth offenders. Given such social factors, it is important for researchers to reveal the utility in social interventions, specifically in relation to incarceration rates and criminality.

Concerning psychology specifically, there are a number of benefits to social interventions for youth offenders. This project will explore the different ways in which social interventions that aim at reducing criminality in young offenders provide utility. Social interventions for the reduction of crime can be described as taking the position that reducing crime can be at least partially understood by " the interaction between individuals and their socio-cultural and natural environments which are viewed as important in shaping options and choices for that person. Accordingly, crime and desistance from crime are reciprocally influenced by the conditions and contexts in which they occur" (White & Graham, 2015: p. 12). Unlike clinical and formal interventions, social interventions are focused on improving social aspects of the lives of youths, effectively discouraging young offenders from

committing crimes and participating in delinquent or antisocial behaviour. The current project features an examination of the utility of social interventions that aim at the prevention of the re-incarceration of young offenders by decreasing the criminality of such offenders.

Social Intervention and Legal Processes

The processes, including social interventions, that young offenders experience after an arrest differ dramatically from area to area. Such processes are typically complicated and include various individuals who become responsible for ensuring that the proper interventions occur to help prevent future incarcerations. After an arrest, a number of juvenile justice stakeholders must decide how the youth is to be processed through the court system, if at all. Such stakeholders include officers of the court, attorneys, judges, magistrates, and other officials. The option to release a youth offender with no referral for intervention services is available, though often intervention of some sort is crucial in preventing future incarceration (Hawthorne et al., 2012). Meanwhile, there are various community-based services that offer an alternative to the traditional justice system route. A study by Petrosino, Turpin-Petrosino, and Guckenburg (2010) revealed that traditional juvenile court processing was likely to increase criminal behaviour compared to social and community-based interventions. There is, therefore, a prominent place in juvenile courts for social interventions.

Rationale behind Social Intervention

In general, there can be utility in any social intervention when it is executed correctly. The rationale behind social interventions is that by increasing social support, social inclusion, or the influence and availability of role

models, young offenders have fewer opportunities to commit crimes or engage in deviant or antisocial behaviour and are discouraged from participating in such behaviour (Kelly, 2012). Simons and Burt (2011) revealed that persistent exposure to various adverse environmental and social conditions negatively contributed to increased incarceration rates among some youths. Such adverse environmental and social conditions include community crime, racial and socioeconomic discrimination, harsh and abusive parenting, deviant peer activities and poor neighborhood efficacy (Simons & Burt, 2011). Thus, social interventions provide relief from the conditions that can encourage criminal activity, while encouraging positive behaviours.

School-based Social Intervention

School-based social interventions have been shown to be effective at reducing incarceration rates among at-risk youths and youth offenders. (Allen-Meares, Montgomery, & Kim, 2013). School-based social interventions include after-school, extracurricular programmes that are sponsored by or held at local schools and colleges. Because such programmes are voluntary for most youths, it is typically a goal of school-based social programmes to launch campaigns to attract at-risk youths and keep retention rates high (Allen-Meares, Montgomery, & Kim, 2013). Yet, for young offenders, school-based social interventions may be perceived as being extensions of mandatory school programmes. This can be off-putting to young offenders, especially those who have unsupportive or lack positive social circles. In large cities, young offenders can be required to participate in school-based programmes that are not their principal schools. This offers an opportunity

for young offenders to connect socially with members of another school. After all, many students connect better with students from schools other than their own (Cooper, Allen, & Bettez, 2009). In some cases, young offenders may even seek a transfer to the school in which they were assigned. The utility in school-based social interventions, therefore, is that they offer opportunities for young offenders to expand their social circles, replace their more deviant or less-supportive social circles, and even switch to a more compatible school. Each of these opportunities can set such young offenders on the right path and away from deviant and criminal behaviour.

Community-based Social Intervention

Community-based social interventions include a number of programmes and conditions. Many community-based social interventions involve public officials being responsible for young offenders, such that young offenders are required to periodically report to such officials. Barnes et al. (2010) investigated the effects of decreasing the intensity of community supervision for low-risk youth offenders. In Philadelphia, many youth offenders are required to participate in community supervision programmes in which the youths are monitored and supervised by community officials. One social programme in Philadelphia sought to identify low-risk youth offenders and decrease the intensity of such community supervision in the hope that by treating low-risk youths less like criminals will help reduce re-incarceration rates (Barnes et al., 2010).

Barnes et al. (2010) relied on a random forecasting model to determine the severity of crimes committed by youths in Philadelphia. In all, 1, 559 youth offenders were identified as being low-risk given the severity of their crimes

committed. These offenders were randomly assigned to either the typical community supervision mandatory office visits or much fewer visits. Participants in the typical community supervision group were required an average of 4. 5 probation visits per year compared to 2. 4 for the participants in the low community supervision group (Barnes et al. 2010). The results of a one-year follow-up in which re-incarceration rates were measured, the researchers found that lower-intensity had no significant effect on re-incarceration rates. Thus, the researchers concluded that lower intensities of community supervision are required for low-risk youth offenders. The utility in community-based social interventions is the increased accountability that they require of the young offenders. However, as was shown in the Barnes et al. (2010) study, community-based social interventions can be very flexible and still remain effective.

Sports-based Social Intervention

Sports programmes as social interventions for youth offenders have emerged as promising solutions to youth incarceration. Kelly (2011) argues that recent international enthusiasm for sports programmes as social interventions has increased substantially. Kelly (2011) holds that sports programmes can be viewed as encouraging social inclusion strategies, which increase the positive social involvement of youth and discourage youth participation in illegal activities and antisocial behaviour. Sports programmes have become increasingly included as part of various youth-targeted initiatives, especially for at-risk youth or past youth offenders. For example, Positive Futures is a social intervention programme that was developed in England and Wales to discourage antisocial and deviant activities by

encouraging the youth to participate in various positive social activities, especially sports activities.

In a study by Kelly (2011), the ways in which sports-based interventions promote social inclusion were examined. The results revealed that all programmes achieved at least some degree of success, in terms of helping to prevent incarceration. However, many of the sport-based programmes had poor retention rates. Even so, some were able to obtain high retention rates for the programmes, ultimately keeping at-risk youth out of trouble. It was revealed in this study that " sports-based interventions risk legitimating a reductive analysis of these complex processes, highlighting individual deficits and de-emphasizing structural inequalities" (Kelly, 2011: p. 139). Like most other social interventions, sport-based interventions must specifically seek to prevent antisocial and illicit behaviours, rather than simply providing a social refuge for youth (Kelly, 2011). Otherwise, there is a severe risk for low retention rates and ineffective intervention.

In another study by Kelly (2012), sports-based social interventions in England were examined to determine their efficacy at reducing youth crime and antisocial behaviour. The sports-based programmes in Kelly (2012) intended to help transform, particularly at-risk youths, by fostering supportive and mentoring relationships between the youths and their mentors. Effectively, the programmes providing youths with various sport-related alternative activities in controlled environments, while helping the youth handle adverse situations and deal with problems in an effective manner. Some of the participants in these programmes were assigned to the programmes by court officials, as parts of justice programmes. Kelly (2012)

revealed that most of the programmes successfully transformed how participating youths deal with adverse situations and reduced antisocial behaviour. However, because this study was qualitative, the results were consequently, not quantitatively verifiable. Nevertheless, Kelly (2011; 2012) revealed that social intervention programmes, and sports-based social intervention programmes in particular, can be effective at reducing incarceration in youths by not only providing such youths with alternative social activities, but perhaps more importantly providing social inclusion into peer groups and educating the at-risk youths on appropriate responses to problems.

Multimodal Social Intervention

Boisjoli, Vitaro, Lacourse, Barker, and Tremblay (2007) examined the effects of a two-year intervention programme for adolescent boys who have exhibited high levels of disruptive behaviour on the future criminal behaviour and academic performance of the boys. The two-year programme in this study involved multimodal intervention strategies to help prevent maladjustment for the adolescents. The researchers met with the students, as well as their parents and teachers to foster a positive social and educational environment for such students. The results of Boisioli et al. (2007) revealed that, compared to a control group, adolescents who participated in the two-year programme were significantly less likely to have a criminal record and significantly more likely to complete high school. The multimodal approach to social intervention may be the most effective, as it is highly inclusive of various types of social intervention, including school-based, community-based, and sport-based intervention. The utility of

multimodal social interventions is not only the sum of the utility of any included social intervention types. Rather, multimodal social interventions provide a much more holistic approach to criminality in young offenders. Such an approach may be ideal for at-risk youths who lack positive social circles and who have troubled family lives (Boisioli et al., 2007).

Conclusion and Discussion

The current project focuses on ways in which social interventions help prevent the re-incarceration of young offenders by decreasing the criminality in such offenders. Unlike clinical and formal interventions, social interventions tend to aim at improving the social aspects in the lives of young offenders, discouraging them from committing crimes and participating in delinquent or antisocial behaviour. In addition, social interventions provide relief from the conditions that can encourage criminal activity, while encouraging positive behaviours. In fact, traditional juvenile court processes were likely to increase criminal behaviour compared to social and community-based interventions (Petrosino, Turpin-Petrosino, & Guckenburg, 2010). School-based social interventions offer opportunities for young offenders to expand or replace their social circles and even switch to schools that are more suitable for them (Allen-Meares, Montgomery, & Kim, 2013). In contrast, community-based social interventions increase accountability in young offenders (Barnes et al, 2010). Two studies by Kelly (2011; 2012) showed that sports-based social intervention programmes can be effective at reducing incarceration in youth by providing young offenders with alternative social activities and increasing their feelings of social inclusion.

This project has featured an explanation of the many different types of social interventions and the utility of each. There are several common threads that seem to run through all or most of the types of social interventions. First, social interventions tend to provide many opportunities for young offenders to engage in positive and social activities, during which they cannot easily participate in deviant or criminal behaviour. Second, social interventions discourage deviance and criminal behaviour by encouraging involvement in positive social circles. Finally, social interventions tend to increase feelings of social inclusion among young offenders. Such feelings of social inclusion may discourage criminality by giving young offenders the belief that if they commit criminal acts, people that they care about will consequently be disappointed (Kelly, 2011). Social intervention can provide unique utility and complement other interventions, such as legal, formal, and clinical interventions.

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