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The Effects of Rehabilitation on the Ability to Reintegrate into Society

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Abstract

With crime and recidivism rates so high in the United States, a focus on reintegration and rehabilitation are key in order to allow these individuals to be productive, successful members of society upon release. The following research will investigate the struggles of post-incarceration life for several individuals in a particular rehabilitation program and try to understand how the program they are a part of is aiding them with these struggles. Factors detrimental to reintegration, protective factors against recidivism, environmental factors that aid reintegration, and employment post-incarceration will be examined to gain a better understanding of the life ex-offenders face and what it takes for them to re-enter society successfully.

The Effects of Rehabilitation on the Ability to Reintegrate into Society

In 2013, 2.8% of the of the US adult population was under correctional supervision (around 6.9 million adults). Of those nearly 7 million adults, 2.2 million were incarcerated in prison or jail (Glaze & Kaeble, 2014). These high numbers, coupled with ineffective measures for helping ex-offenders reintegrate into society has led to exponentially high recidivism rates. A 2005 study showed that within 3 years of release around 68% of offenders were rearrested and after 5 years of release, 76.6% of offenders were rearrested (Durose et al. 2014). These statistics together indicate that the United States has an overwhelming issue with crime and recidivism, as well as an issue getting these individuals back into society successfully, allowing them to become productive citizens again. More help needs to be offered to individuals while they are in the correctional system as well as when they are released.

Detriments to Reintegration

Reintegration back into society is an exceedingly difficult task for many ex-offenders to accomplish. There are many needs that these individuals have immediately upon exiting a correctional facility such as housing, food, transportation, and the money to obtain it all. However, people being released from correctional facilities generally have very few resources to satisfy these needs. There are many factors that can make it even more difficult to reenter society. Probably the most influential factor in one's ability to successfully integrate into society is post-release employment. This difficulty seems to stem from a combination of things such as ex-prisoners having lower levels of education, lacking specific job skills and interpersonal skills, having a criminal record, and being young (Lockwood et al., 2015; Kimonis et al. 2016). A study conducted by Lockwood and colleagues demonstrated that unemployment rates for ex-prisoners during the first year after they were released from prison was between 92-97% in 2005. Not

having a source of income for that period does lead many individuals back to crime.

Additionally, sub-factors for post-release employment are also influential factors. Two of the largest detriments to an ex-offender finding a job and getting hired are youth, and low levels of education (Lockwood et al., 2015; Međedović, 2016). Clearly these two factors are going to make getting a job more difficult which in turn will increase one's chance of recidivism, decreasing one's ability to reintegrate into society. Again, of the 6,394 ex-prisoners studied by Lockwood and colleagues, education was a significant predictor for determining recidivism with 56% of those individuals having below a high school education returning to prison in comparison to only around 31% who had a college degree. Age was also seen to be positively correlated with education level as well as negatively correlated with recidivism (Lockwood et al., 2015).

Personality variables have also been seen to be able to predict recidivism. Socially aversive, callous traits have been seen to be positively correlated with recidivism and difficulty reentering society. In a study of 227 male juvenile delinquents, scores on a measure of callous-unemotional traits positively predicted the number of total prior charges. Those who scored higher on this measure also had a shorter time before they returned to a correctional facility compared to those who scored lower (Kimonis et al. 2016).

Factors Advantageous to Reintegration

Despite the detriments to reentry, there are a few protective factors against recidivism as well. As it was discussed in the earlier section, lower levels of education and lower age were detriments to reentry, while older age and more education are advantageous. One study investigating this link showed there were significant negative correlations between age and antisocial behavior (Međedović, 2016). As stated previously, those with college degrees return to a correctional facility 25% less frequently than those who do not have a college degree

(Lakewood et al., 2015). Certain levels of specific personality traits also act as a protective factor against recidivism. Personality traits such as honesty-humility, emotionality, agreeableness and conscientiousness are all significantly negatively correlated with measures of antisocial behavior in ex-offenders (Međedović, 2016). One final protective factor, and the focus of this study, is participation in correctional education programs. These programs can include GED participation, vocational or job skills training, cognitive or life skills programs, and even college level education programs. A study conducted by Steurer and Smith indicates that individuals who participate in correctional education have significantly lower likelihood of recidivating compared to those who did not participate in any sort of correctional education (43.3 % and 56.7% respectively). These sorts of programs address a lot of the concerns brought up in the previous sections with different programs (education, job skills, cognitive skills, etc.).

Environmental Factors that Aid Reintegration

Successful reintegration is dependent on the environment the individual places themselves in post-release. If someone goes back to the way they were living pre-incarceration, odds are they will reoffend and return to prison with additional criminal charges. Unfortunately, one study found that 60.5% of ex-prisoners studied returned to the troubled neighborhoods in which they resided previously which does not give them an advantage when it comes to changing their lives and not returning to prison (Lockwood et al., 2015). One way to mitigate this is through some sort of correctional education or rehabilitation program. These programs will put ex-offenders in an environment that focuses on healthy behaviors and how to successfully reintegrate into society. Research has demonstrated that programs such as drug courts, therapeutic communities, correctional education, cognitive-behavioral therapy, and pharmacological intervention have all proven effective at helping people reintegrate and desist

from criminal activity (Bahr et al., 2012; Steurer & Smith, 2003). Not all programs successfully reduce recidivism rates; there are many characteristics that these programs must have to increase success rates. Effective programs typically focus on high and medium risk offenders, have multimodal approaches to treatment, and are conducted in a community setting with some sort of care after completion (Bahr et al., 2012; Hollin, 1999). Other research suggests that focusing on cognitions improves success, as well as being interactive and engaging (Hollin 1999). If done correctly, the therapeutic environment of a rehabilitation center can greatly improve the success of reintegration.

Employment for Ex-Offenders

Despite the best efforts of any individual coming out of a correctional facility, employment may remain difficult to obtain. Without employment, it is only a matter of time before a recently released offender returns to a jail or prison. Though obtaining a job does not sound terribly difficult, having a criminal record does decrease your chances for a job offer or even for a callback. In the United States, 92% of employers inquire about criminal histories of prospective employees (Von Bergen & Bressler, 2016). These questions typically come as early as the application process for some individuals. These inquiries lead to those having criminal records receiving 50-60% fewer callbacks than their co-applicants who do not have criminal records (Agan & Starr, 2017; Devah et al., 2009). These findings confirm that even minor felonies and misdemeanors can hamper one's ability to get a job post-incarceration. These issues have sparked a movement to level the playing field in the working world for ex-offender. The "Ban the Box" movement looks to remove the box that asks about one's criminal record from the preliminary job applications and have those questions moved to later in the selection process. This gives individuals an opportunity to explain their situation and their story and hopefully

convince an employer to hire them in an interview setting and not simply based off a box checked on an application (Von Bergen & Bressler, 2016; Devah et al., 2009). Typically, any criminal record is a red flag for employers; Ban the Box attempts to have employers look at qualifications first, and criminal record second. Particularly if this criminal record is not dealing with the tasks at hand on the job the individual is applying to.

Purpose

One of the main purposes of the following investigation was to understand the struggles of post-incarceration life such as employment, living arrangements, as well as some of the mental/emotional struggles and how being in a rehabilitation program assists individuals with some of these struggles. Additionally, understanding the positive and detrimental factors of reintegration and recidivism is a focus of this research. Lastly, I also wanted to investigate the effectiveness of offender rehabilitation programs. More specifically, what makes these programs effective, what services are offered to ex-offenders upon release, and how effective are they.

Methodology

For the following research, focus groups were conducted at a rehabilitation center for ex-offenders. Small groups of 2-3 ex-offenders were questioned orally; they also completed a short personality measure (Dirty Dozen) measuring the sub-clinical, socially aversive Dark Triad traits of psychopathy, narcissism, and Machiavellianism (Jonason & Webster, 2010). Since the data being collected is mainly of a qualitative nature and prone to long descriptions from the participants, using focus groups seemed to be the most effective mode for data collection. Another benefit to using a focus group design in this context was the amount of time that was saved. Being able to ask the questions one time and gathering 2-3 responses at a time was effective for data collection. Being in a group setting allowed individuals to build off what the

others had to say which sparked more ideas and more detailed responses. In this specific investigation, focus groups were conducted on site at the rehab facility for easy access to the target population as well as decreasing the burden for participants to participate. Upon arrival, participants were greeted and given an informed consent form as well as a descriptive flyer for the research project which was approved by the University of Akron Institutional Review Board (#20180209). After agreeing to participation, they were asked the oral questions and then given the Dirty Dozen measure. Despite the many advantages of focus groups, there are a few disadvantages. Some participants may feel intimidated to participate and others in the group might change how they would respond to certain questions compared to if they were asked in a one-on-one setting. Analysis of the qualitative data is also difficult for two main reasons: first being that there may be large amounts of irrelevant information. Second, the vast amount of information makes the data cumbersome to work with at times.

Rehabilitation Center Studied

The current research was conducted at a rehabilitation center that houses and rehabilitates ex-offenders upon their release from a correction facility or from other treatment centers. This rehabilitation center offers a 12-month program that gives these offenders a place to live, a chance to earn money towards a permanent place to live, a support system which includes the local church, as well as job training and other sorts of education on cognition and behavior. The job training offered is a 5-month, 750-hour apprenticeship where the men will receive on-the-job training on rehabbing homes, commercial cleaning, lawn care, landscaping, and more. This gives these men a chance to learn technical skills that will give them a greater chance of being employed, as well as giving them other intangibles such as leadership and communication skills that are valued by employers. The work they do is community work where the proceeds go right

back into the program so that they can continue to help ex-offenders. Their focus on God and religion gives an immediate support system of the church and the religion itself helping individuals cope with their situation. Classes are also offered to help individuals learn about the faulty thinking mechanisms they may have and how to alter those cognitions to change their behavior (tenets of cognitive behavioral therapy). Lastly, the program is family sensitive. Many individuals expressed that the program has not only helped them but their family as well. Some mentioned indirect help such as keeping the individual off the streets, but some mentioned acts of direct help such as providing Christmas gifts for their children, or having a Thanksgiving meal gifted to them. From the previous research, many of the tenets of a successful rehabilitation program are present here.

Results

Focus groups were conducted with 6 current or former participants in the rehabilitation programs as well as input from 2 staff members. The small sample size here was the main limitation for the generalizability of the study. All individuals answered all questions that were asked of them and all 6 participants in the rehabilitation program filled out the Dirty Dozen measure at the end. I then took the typed notes and audio recordings and coded the data to find themes/trends in the responding. I also took the responses on the Dirty Dozen questionnaires and scored the results as well as compared them to a sample of undergraduate students to see how scores compare.

Results: Detriments to Reintegration

When asking staff members about what they believed to be detrimental qualities for those in the program, they described factors such as excessive pride, being closed minded, and having unhealthy relationships. They described many people coming into the program as angry,

shameful, and fearful. Other issues they saw for those being released from prison were having negative attitudes/emotions, acquiring shelter and other basic needs, negative relationships, and living with their newfound criminal charges. Staff members mainly focused on the emotional and cognitive difficulties that ex-offenders face. This was expected due to their training focusing on those constructs (even though they themselves were also ex-offenders). A slightly different picture was painted by the participants currently in the program. Their answers aligned with contemporary research (Kimonis et al. 2016; Lockwood et al., 2015; Međedović, 2016). Results here indicate that the hardest parts of life post incarceration were reintegration in general (66.7%), getting a job (33.3%), coming back to their family (33.3%), and finding housing (33.3%). While the focus of the staff was on changing one's emotions and attitudes, the focus for a lot of individuals released from prison is finding a place to live, and a job and these trends are seen in the individuals interviewed. These difficulties are well managed by the rehabilitation facility which gives them housing, job training, and a path back to their families.

Results: Factors Advantageous to Reintegration

When asked about what kinds of qualities are beneficial to individuals entering the rehabilitation program, staff members pointed to mainly personality characteristics such as humility, being openminded (willing to learn), perseverance, and interdependence. Responses such as humility, being openminded, and interdependence are seen in the literature as protective factors against recidivism. Research has shown honesty-humility is negatively correlated with recidivism (Međedović, 2016). Outside of personality factors, all staff members also indicated that they believe the program that they are a part of is successful, and that similar programs are necessary for ex-offender success. Similarly, all participants indicated that the program that they are a part of has helped them. Some of the ways in which they believe it is helpful includes social

support/support systems (66.7%), life structure (50%), job training (50%), religion (33.3%), emotional/mental support (33.3%), and safety/living arrangements (33.3%). Other motivators for ex-offenders in the programs were hope, family, and not wanting to return to prison.

Results: Environmental Factors That Aid Reintegration

As seen in prior research, returning to the place that they were living post-incarceration gives ex-offenders a decreased chance of reintegrating back into society. This rehabilitation program addresses that issue by having on-site housing for the individuals in the program. In general, similar rehabilitation programs are a positive environmental factor to reduce recidivism. Staff agree stating that these programs are necessary for society. The reasons they gave support the current research saying that community and support are important, as well as structure. Religion is also very important in this program; religion has been seen to be an effective way to help individuals recover such as in Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). When asking participants about the effectiveness of the program, all men stated it was effective for them as well as for their families. Program such as these are significantly positive environments for ex-offenders and as noted earlier, effective treatment programs typically focus on higher risk offenders, have multiple approaches to treatment, and are done in a community setting with support after completion. Many of these men would be considered high risk since 50% of the men have served over 10 years in prison and most have been released from prison within the last year. Components focusing on cognition, work skills, religion, and behaviors are used in the curriculum at this facility. Additionally, support is a significant component of this program. One participant stated that the program treats you as if you are family and this response can be seen by all those interviewed as all participants stated that the program was an area of support for them. As an environmental support, rehabilitation programs seem to be effective in this scenario.

Results: Employment for Ex-Offenders

Research has shown that post-incarceration employment is a significant indicator when it comes to recidivism. Those who do not have gainful employment after release typically go back to prison. One issue for those not being able to get a job is that they do not have the educational background or specific skills to be appealing to employers. The program studied offers job training in a variety of areas (house demolition, roofing, painting, siding, lawn care, etc.). However, the staff at this program do not list getting a job as a primary goal they have for recently released offenders. They believe that the individuals need to focus on themselves and their attitude/health before trying to obtain work. Staff believes that obtaining money does not fix the problem, it just allows them to live the life that they came from (a life of crime). However, all staff agreed that not having work experience, a GED or other forms of education, or job skills increases the likelihood of someone reoffending. When asking the participants in the program about their experience with obtaining a job, most individuals in this program (83.3%) indicated that they have never been denied employment due to their criminal charges. This could be for many reasons: many of the individuals interviewed (83.3%) stated that the work they did before incarceration is the same work they are doing after. This means they have the job skills and experience to obtain more work. The one individual who indicated difficulty finding work did not work in the same areas as the job training offered in the program. Age is also a possible protective factor for these individuals finding employment. The average age for these men was 45 and the research suggests that younger individuals typically have a harder time reintegrating compared to those older (Lockwood et al., 2015).

Results: Dirty Dozen

The results from the Dirty Dozen questionnaire were interesting when compared to a sample of responses from college undergraduates (Webster & Jonason, 2013). From the individuals interviewed, the average score on the measure was 34.8 out of an 84 possible points. In a study conducted by Webster and Jonason, 544 college undergraduates completed the measure and scored an average of 43.04 which is over 8 points higher than the average seen in the ex-offenders in the rehabilitation program studied here. Breaking down the scores further, the ex-offenders scored 9.67 on the psychopathy items, 12.00 on the narcissism items, and a 13.17 on the Machiavellianism items all out of a possible 28 points. College undergraduates scored 14.06 on psychopathy, 18.07 on narcissism, and a 14.72 on Machiavellianism. Comparison shows that college undergraduates scored higher overall than ex-offenders. This means that college undergraduates exhibit more antisocial, callous and manipulative behaviors than ex-offenders in this program. It is known that individuals who have higher levels of these traits are typically more aggressive and research cited earlier showed that high scores on callous-unemotional items positively predicted total prior charges in juveniles. Ex-offenders having lower scores could mean that the program is helping them decrease the levels of these traits which would then decrease their likelihood of reoffending. Of course, not having a pre-measure of the Dark Triad traits prevents a strong conclusion regarding causality.

Discussion

The research of one particular program for re-offender reentry yielded some interesting introductory qualitative data. Detriments to reintegration from a participant standpoint focused on basic needs such as shelter and a job, while detriments to reintegration from a staff point of view fell on cognitions. Both views are seen in the contemporary research on barriers to reentry. Protective factors to recidivism for participants seemed to focus on the program itself, as well as

having a newfound support system which again has been seen to be impactful when trying to reduce recidivism. This ties directly into the environmental factors that can aid reentry. The program itself is a large portion of the environment these men experienced since there was housing on site. The program also has the tenets of a successful rehabilitation program such as a focus on high-risk offenders, a multimodal approach, and care/support after completion. One area that did not line up as much with the current literature was employment for ex-offenders where a majority of the men surveyed indicated not being denied work due to their criminal charges. This could be for a variety of reasons such as age, experience, and skill which are all protective factors against recidivism. Lastly the ex-offenders interviewed scored lower overall on the Dirty Dozen measure than a sample of undergraduate college students indicating they have lower levels of socially aversive, callous and manipulative behaviors. This could indicate program success.

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