

USING EVIDENCE-BASED KNOWLEDGE TO CREATE AN OFFENDER THROUGH-CARE SYSTEM

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. Background of Evidence-Based Practice in Singapore

By 2010, the Singapore Prison Service (SPS) had developed an evidence-informed Rehabilitation System. Despite these advances, a number of significant limitations remain. These include:

- Evidence-based knowledge had been largely confined within the Prison Service whereas community partners did not possess the knowledge of evidence-based rehabilitation.
- The aftercare support of offenders was limited to a relatively small group of offenders, provided mainly by community and religious groups. Moreover, the support given was not guided by evidence-based practices.
- A large segment of high-risk offenders, many with drug antecedents, did not receive criminogenic programmes to reduce their offending risk due to limitations in rehabilitative resources.

In short, Singapore lacked a Throughcare System of offender rehabilitation that facilitates the reduction of risk from prison into the community.

II. BATTLE TO REDUCE RECIDIVISM

A. Continuing Efforts to Reduce Crime and Reoffending

Despite achieving a 2-year recidivism rate of 26.7% in 2010, there was still much that could be done to further reduce recidivism rates. In the ongoing efforts to reduce crime, the Singapore government explored a number of measures. These included upstream crime prevention measures, further law enforcement strategies, enhanced community engagement strategies and the use of offender rehabilitation. The recommendations from several recent government initiated Inter-Ministry Committees, set up to address matters relating to reducing crime and offending, involve SPS as a key player in the overall strategies to reduce offending. The success of the Prison Service in maintaining security while establishing evidence-informed rehabilitation system brought confidence in the ability to reap further recidivism benefits for the future.

B. A Throughcare System

There is now a wider recognition of the need for a robust Throughcare System that will address and reduce reoffending. Evidence from offender research has been useful in influencing higher-level policy by providing a strong rationale that high-risk offenders will need to receive more intense rehabilitation and continued support to help them reintegrate into society after they leave prison.

There is also recognition that offenders need the support of the community in their reintegration back into society. The success of the Yellow Ribbon Project, the growth of the CARE Network,¹ and the increased

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¹ The CARE (Community Action for the Rehabilitation of Ex-offenders) Network was set up in the year 2000 to serve as platform for a network of partnership involving the Singapore Prison Service, the Singapore Corporation of Rehabilitative Enterprises, the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Ministry of Community Development, Sports and Youths and several social agencies to explore possible collaborations and enhance community services for rehabilitating ex-offenders.

numbers of prison volunteers exemplify the potential of the community as being a key partner to achieving the mission of reducing reoffending and helping ex-offenders to live responsible lives.

To this end, the SPS will spearhead the development of a Conditional Remission system and a Mandated Aftercare Support system for offenders. The new remission system will provide a structure to support rehabilitative services for offenders after they leave prison. High-risk offenders, guided by the Risk Principle, will receive a higher level of post-release support and supervision. An integrated system of supervision and evidence-based casework will be developed and will involve the families of offenders and the local community.

The experience and knowledge gained in the previous ten years will enable the Prison Service to develop community-based rehabilitation for high-risk offenders. The system will also enable the provision of appropriate types of reintegrative services to lower-risk offenders with specific needs.

To eventually effect a throughcare-offender-management and rehabilitation system, a review of existing systems and the development of new structures and processes are required. This task will be led by the Director of Prisons and the Chief Executive Officer of the Singapore Corporation for Rehabilitative Enterprises.² The task will be supported by three working groups headed by Senior Staff and look at different areas covering legislation, the management of offenders in prison and in the community, administrative policies and support, and evidence-based interventions.

Each working group will examine the research and practice literature in their area, and learn from our overseas counterparts in corrections through study trips and published information. The Prison Service's own experience will also be used to contextualize the system and interventions for the local landscape. Lastly, the information and knowledge will be brought together, discussed and adapted to form the foundation for developing a throughcare system.

C. Evidence-Based Principles for a Throughcare Rehabilitation System

Developing community-based interventions that dovetail the existing system of interventions within prison requires a consideration of the principles of effective correctional programming. Correctional research supports a common set of principles that are correlated with good recidivism outcomes. The Principles of Effective Correctional Programs from the Canadian Correctional Service (Andrews, 2000), the Eight Principles of Effective Correctional Interventions (Latessa, Cullen & Gendreau, 2002), and the Effective Principles of Intervention for Community Corrections (Bogue et al., 2004) emphasise the need to:

- Use empirically validated tools and methods in assessment and intervention
- Apply the "Risk, Need, Responsivity" model to programmes and services, with attention to the "Dosage" of programmes for high risk offenders
- Integrate treatment and intervention into the full sentence of offenders and their sanctions requirement
- Ensure adequate positive reinforcement contingencies
- Equip staff with a range of evidence-based practical skills to address criminogenic needs
- Engage the community in assisting offenders
- Measure, evaluate, and improve interventions and processes

Latessa, Cullen, and Gendreau (2002) also drew attention to the need to "Create a Positive Environment" and "Build High Quality Staff."

These principles serve as guiding posts for the development of a correctional system committed to using evidence-based practices as a basis for effective rehabilitative interventions.

² SCORE was set up in 1976 with the objectives of rehabilitating offenders through work programmes and vocational training, and preparing them for reintegration into society by being the bridge between prison and the community. SCORE is the lead aftercare agency that collaborates with prison to create a seamless throughcare environment to facilitate reintegration of offenders into society.

III. FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR THE SINGAPORE PRISON SERVICE

A. Evidence-Informed Initiatives

As the Prison Service moves towards a throughcare system in the next two years, a number of major developmental initiatives attempting to incorporate the research evidence will be developed.

1. Redesigning and Piloting of an Integrated Criminogenic Programme

A review of the extant literature provided a means for the Prison Service professionals to review the adequacy of our cognitive-behavioural programmes. Guided by the literature on effective cognitive-behavioural programmes (e.g. Lipsey, Landenberger, & Wilson, 2007), a new criminogenic programme was developed to address high-risk offenders. The new programme will address all the seven dynamic criminogenic needs (Bonta & Andrews, 2007) using a cognitive-behavioural approach. The programme will give added emphasis on skills modelling and practice as well as incorporating the elements that are found by research to be effective. Proper attention will be given to train Rehabilitation Specialists to deliver the new programme, to the maintenance of programme integrity and to minimise offenders dropping out from criminogenic programmes.

The new programme will also address the motivation of offenders more systematically. Motivational Interviewing concepts and processes will be included (Miller & Rollnick, 2002; McMurrin, 2009). Instead of just prescribing the goal of reducing risk, the programme will engage offenders in discussing fundamental aspects of their lives and what they believe to be worthwhile pursuing as their own future oriented goals. This aspect draws inspiration from the work of Tony Ward (Ward & Brown, 2004) in engaging offenders to consider the type of “primary goods” that they would pursue in their lives. The importance of including future-oriented goals has also been articulated by Andrews, Bonta and Wormith (2011) in the “Expanded Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) Model.”

The programme will also engage offenders to explore their narrative identities. This aspect of the programme tries to incorporate research from the literature of desistance (Maruna, 2001; Maruna & Roy, 2007). The use of “narrative identity” draws also from the experience with another programme addressing interpersonal violence called, “Man Alive.” The programme was introduced by Hamish Sinclair in 2008. In “Man Alive,” the violent offenders are guided to explore and construct a prosocial narrative identity that would guide their future non-violent actions. Through our experiences with “Man Alive,” it was found to be a worthwhile enterprise to engage offenders to relook at their identities and the ways they viewed themselves (Gilligan & Bandy, 2005). The concept of narrative identity will be further described later in the paper. It is an experimental component of the programme that will be subjected to evaluation.

2. Re-Entry Regime

High-risk offenders will undergo a 3-phase gradual re-entry into the community. The overall philosophy is to provide structured support and supervision as offenders are released gradually into the community. The phases are:

- Living in a structured community residence
- Living at home with curfew hours and electronic monitoring
- Living at home without electronic monitoring

The structured community residence will provide a graduated process for newly released ex-offenders to have access to the community. The residence will allow rehabilitative activities to continue, such as continued relapse prevention programmes, individualised counselling, etc.

Returning home to live will also involve a gradual transition from restricted freedom of movement (curfew hours at night) to free access according to the assessment of their dynamic risks and needs carried out by the supervision officers and caseworkers.

3. Development of a Pre-Release Centre for Offenders

The fundamental aim of a Pre-Release Centre is to prepare offenders for re-entry into the community under the conditional remission system. The Centre will provide intensive Criminogenic Programmes to high-risk offenders and a range of reintegrative programmes aimed at enhancing adjustments to community living and employability.

The Centre will deliberately focus on developing a positive environment optimised for learning and reflection. The Centre will also foster a culture of hope, personal responsibility, respect, honesty and perseverance. The system of privileges and rewards will be skewed towards positive reinforcement according to behavioural principles (Gendreau, Little & Goggin, 1996; Andrews & Bonta, 2006). All staff members will play an active part towards developing and maintaining the desired culture irrespective of their roles within the Centre.

A pilot Pre-Release Centre commenced operations in April 2012 to house high-risk pre-release inmates. The duration of stay will be ten months before offenders are released for supervision and casework. The pilot Pre-Release Centre will undergo process and outcome evaluations. The learning and evaluation results from the pilot will be utilised to refine and design the eventual Pre-Release Centre that will house inmates of various risk categories.

4. Development of an Integrated Supervision and Offender Casework Model

Inmates in the Pre-Release Centre will be reassessed using the Level of Service Case Management Inventory – LS/CMI (Andrews, Bonta, & Wormith, 2004). Their case management needs will then be identified by specialist caseworkers, who will continue to work with them in the community. Both the supervision officers and caseworkers will work in teams to share the management of these offenders. Hence decisions affecting the case and the application of sanctions for breaches of conditions should be agreed upon between the supervision officer and caseworker, after taking into consideration the dynamic risk and need profile of the individual offender.

Supervision officers and specialist caseworkers will be given training in the “Risk, Need and Responsivity” model. They will also be equipped to address the criminogenic needs of ex-offenders. The conditions of remission will be tailored according to the identified “Risk, Need and Responsivity” issues of each inmate. A common set of evidence-based skills will be used, such as those identified and taught in the Strategic Training Initiative for Community Supervision – STICS (Bonta, Bourgon, Rugge, Scott, Yessine, & Gutierrez, 2010; Bonta, Gutierrez, & Ashton, 2012) and Effective Practices in Community Supervision – EPICS. EPICS was created by criminal justice researchers from the University of Cincinnati. As of May 2012, professional specialists and supervision officers had received training in STICS and EPICS.

B. Training and Development of Staff

The expansion into a throughcare system will require recruitment of staff to increase coverage of criminogenic programmes in prison and in the community. Supervision officers and caseworkers will be recruited and the latter will provide throughcare support for the offenders from pre-release into the community. There will also be a need for existing and new staff to be trained in evidence-based rehabilitative skills.

For officers working in prison, there will be a gradual rollout of skill sets that are effective in addressing criminogenic needs (Gendreau & Goggin, 1996; Dowden & Andrews, 2004; Bourgon & Armstrong, 2005). This will complement their operational skills as Prison Officers. Over the past ten years, the Service has been able to recruit staff aligned to the Vision and also helped existing officers transit into a rehabilitative environment. While there is a general support for rehabilitation, evidence-based behavioural skills relevant to reducing recidivism have yet to be fully incorporated into the training doctrine for Prison Officers. The Prison Service has begun to systematically address this gap in 2011.

The past ten years have also seen new thinking in rehabilitation (Maruna, 2001, Ward & Steward, 2004, Ward, 2010; McNeill & Weaver, 2010, McNeill, 2012). This has occurred as rehabilitation researchers and practitioners from different disciplines reflect on the complex issues surrounding offender rehabilitation and reintegration. This has also led to Andrews, Bonta and Wormith (2011) rearticulating in a fresh way the Risk, Need and Responsivity model to address a broader range of rehabilitation issues.

There will be a need for prison administrators and senior officers in leadership roles to keep abreast of the evidence base and rehabilitation discussion. This will enable the leadership to form sound rehabilitation policies based on a good understanding of the evidence base in rehabilitation.

C. Greater Role for Community Partners and Volunteers

Community partnerships will be one of the fast growing areas in the correctional landscape. Community groups, volunteer organisations and religious groups together with the families of offenders will play a greater role in helping ex-offenders reintegrate. Examples include family related programmes and services, general counselling, befriending and mentoring services, employer engagement to increase the job pool for ex-offenders, and provision of religious services. There will be scope for local communities to be mobilised to assist families whose members are incarcerated. An initiative named the “Community Outreach Programme,” has already gained momentum in the local community. This scheme operates with the consent of the offenders to help to buttress their families against the threats and vulnerabilities to the family ecosystem resulting from incarceration.

D. Transferring Knowledge to the Community

For rehabilitation efforts to achieve their maximum outcome, the knowledge needed to reduce recidivism has to go beyond the Prison Service and be used by community partners. When both the Prison Service and community partners share a similar vision of changing lives and possess the “know how” to do so effectively, the benefits reaped are likely to be superior.

Increasingly, there will be opportunities for specialised community agencies to provide criminogenic programmes based on the Risk, Needs and Responsivity principles. Beginning in 2010, the CARE Network members have been introduced to the “Risk, Needs and Responsivity” model of offender rehabilitation. This was welcomed by community partners. The transfer of such knowledge has continued as more community agencies and their members are equipped with the knowledge of evidence-based practices.

The hope in sharing evidence-based knowledge is that the increasing community organisations involved in offender work will be able to direct their energies and resources towards services that have a more direct impact on reducing recidivism. The use and understanding of common terminology (e.g. Risk, Needs and Responsivity, cognitive-behavioural approaches etc.) will allow for better collaboration between the Prison Service and community partners in furthering effective interventions and services.

E. Research, Evaluation and Knowledge Innovation

The expanding field of offender rehabilitation in Singapore will also allow for greater developments in offender research and evaluation. Research will include the development and refinement of assessment technologies, and the generation of “practice knowledge” that will help improve direct interventions through programmes and the setting up of specialised transformational regimes.

Research and evaluation should support the generation of new knowledge that will further the Vision and Mission of the Prison Service. SPS’s experience in utilising and attempting to integrate organisational development knowledge, innovation, security and operational management of a prison system, and the introduction of evidence-based rehabilitation reflects a shift towards a knowledge-based system that is open to integrating diverse strands of knowledge through innovation and experimentation.

Changes within the prison system in the past ten years appear to parallel the strategic shift in Singapore towards a knowledge-based economy. In a knowledge-based system, the generation of new knowledge and the integration of knowledge to better meet the needs or demands of a system become key drivers of progress.

In a similar way, correctional systems are challenged to bring together the various knowledge domains that are relevant to its mission. While the established empirical evidence informing rehabilitation must form the basis for rehabilitation of offenders, there should also be room to explore and benefit from knowledge from other areas. Within the field of rehabilitation, one area that has attracted the attention of the Service is the emerging knowledge from desistance research.

IV. THE RELEVANCE OF DESISTANCE IN REHABILITATION

A. Incorporating New Knowledge into Rehabilitation

A meeting with Dr. Shadd Maruna in 2007 saw the beginning of an interest in desistance research.

Maruna's Liverpool Desistance Study (Maruna, 2001) described significant differences in how desisters saw and described themselves in contrast to those who offended and returned to prison (the persisters). He pointed to a key concept that desisters appeared to take on a new narrative identity as opposed to persisters who remain largely unchanged in their own narrative identities.

Unfortunately, desistance research does not offer a unified theory of offender change as does the Psychology of Criminal Conduct established by Andrews and Bonta (2006). The nature of desistance research thus makes it difficult to operationalise some of these concepts for practice (Andrews & Bonta, 2011). Frank Porporino (quoted by McNeill & Weaver, 2010) draws attention to this:

“Desistance theory and research, rich in descriptive analysis of the forces and influences that can underpin offender change, unfortunately lacks any sort of organised practice framework.”

Despite these challenges in operationalising the findings in practice, the richness of the information obtained from the research is too compelling to be ignored.

This is where the work of Fergus McNeill (McNeill & Weaver, 2010) has contributed to looking at rehabilitation from a different lens. McNeill was able to pull together separate strands in criminological and desistance research, and present them in a coherent way that can add value to rehabilitation.

Desistance can be understood as an “act of stopping from crime” or as a “process of stopping from crime.” The second understanding accepts that desisting from crime for many is not a one-off event but a continual process. Another way to look at desistance is to see it as a “messy zigzag” process (Glaser, 1964) with the offender drifting in and (eventually) out of crime (Matza, 1964). This journey is not a straightforward one but one that often involves starts and stops, reversals and moving forward again.

The implication of this is that for those who are working with offenders (e.g. prison officers, rehabilitation specialists, caseworkers, volunteers), an appreciation and understanding of such a process will enable them to work through these shifts. An understanding that a reversal or decline does not mean an ex-offender has “failed” and the “good work” done thus far (by the prison officers, probation officers, therapists, and the inmates themselves) has been wasted but allows the rehabilitation practitioner to continue to be able to provide the appropriate type and level of support needed when the offender experiences a standstill or reversal in her/his journey of desistance.

McNeill and Weaver (2010) identified several crucial and important findings from the literature that is important for those who are trying to help and bring about offender change. These are:

- A need for hope and agency
- Having people who believe in them
- Having opportunities to change
- Reconstructing a new prosocial identity
- Practical and emotional support (Human and Social Capital)

This paper will highlight three aspects of desistance research: hope, agency and narrative identity, as examples of their potential contribution to rehabilitation. The reader is encouraged to refer to McNeill and Weaver (2010) for a more in-depth discussion on the relevance of desistance research to offender rehabilitation and reintegration.

B. Hope

Hope can be seen as not just having a desire for a future outcome but also having the means to achieve this outcome, i.e. “having the wills and the ways.” In fact, medical and other psychological arenas have since recognised the construct of hope as an important buffer to life stressors and setbacks. In the field of correctional practice, Burnett and Maruna (2004) found that a sense of hope predicted post-release success, even after ten years. Martin and Stermac (2010) also found encouraging results that having hope has a positive correlation with reduced recidivism. Regardless of whether it is a causal or a correlational relationship that mediates other factors, it is clear that an offender's subjective experience of hope acts as

an important protective factor that can result in lowered risk and augment their ability to make positive changes.

These findings have important implications for rehabilitation and for rehabilitation practitioners. In terms of rehabilitation, hope can be utilised to encourage and motivate individuals to enact positive changes and to prepare them for other treatment programmes. Maintaining a sense of hope is also a powerful protective factor to prevent prisoner suicide (Beck, Steer, Kovacs, & Garrison, 1985).

An understanding of the dynamics of desistance, of the journey being a “zigzag” with offenders moving forward and backward, helps sustain the element of “hope” in the staff and those involved in rehabilitation as well. Even with the best criminogenic programmes, working with high-risk offenders can be very challenging, especially if the risk involves interpersonal or verbal violence. Offenders undergoing rehabilitation may assault fellow inmates or officers. Inmates dropping out of programmes or being removed due to disciplinary problems, offenders reoffending and returning to prison, can cumulatively lead to staff burnout and discouragement. This can dent staff morale and also cause staff to question the value of rehabilitation. Therefore, a good understanding of the desistance process can buffer against disappointment and continue to give staff a sense of hope. Desistance research strengthens the perspective that staff can be the “harbingers of hope” to offenders struggling with issues and help inculcate and augment this sense of hope amongst them.

The Yellow Ribbon Project can be seen as one which brings hope to the ex-offender and his/her family. Hope can also be fostered by correctional leaders in the manner in which policies and practices are developed. Some questions a prison administrator interested in providing rehabilitation might want to ask are:

- Do we present prison policies and practices in ways that engender hope or “suffocate” it?
- What practices in the system augment this sense of hope in offenders?
- How do the people (usually correctional staff) who spend the most time with offenders contribute to developing and maintaining the sense of hope in the offenders?

C. Agency

One of the effects of imprisonment is the loss or reduction in personal agency. The ability to make choices and decisions are limited within prison. As offenders spend more time in prison, their ability to make decisions and choices often deteriorate, through lack of use and the reduction of options to the most basic level. Paradoxically, good decision-making skills become increasingly important as the offender prepares to re-enter society and is faced with multiple, complex choices. The challenge then for every rehabilitation system is to increase the level of decision-making in areas that are possible. Cognitive reasoning and problem-solving programmes provide avenues for offenders to learn such skills. However, learning “outside the class room” needs to continue for the skills to be generalised to new situations. Step-down (security) prisons in which offenders are given increasing levels of decision-making and autonomy, appear to be one such possible means to encourage this. The State of Victoria in Australia uses such an approach in an innovative way in one of their specially designed rehabilitation prisons, Marngorneet Correctional Centre, where inmates progressively learn to hone their decision-making skills and choices.

D. Narrative Identity

Maruna’s (2001) research revealed stark differences in how offenders described their lives. Persisters who returned to prison had narrative scripts that depicted themselves as victims of circumstances with little sense of control over their lives. They saw little hope for themselves, and they tended to externalise blame for their situation.

Desisters on the other hand, described having a new sense of empowerment and agency; a sense that they can act to change their lives. They tended to see themselves as having different identities. Desisters are also generally involved in prosocial generative activities. They commonly expressed a desire “to give back to society” as a display of gratitude (Maruna, 2001).

Part of this process of change for the desister is the discovery of agency to overcome the challenges

brought about by their criminal lifestyle and patterns. The discovery of agency, of one's ability to change, appears to have been made possible by the presence of significant others who believed in them and saw in them the possibility of being a different person, i.e. to have an alternative identity.

For desisters, the psychological change to seeing themselves as different people is an important process in ensuring long-term success in the journey of desistance. Thus, a key task in rehabilitation could be to engage offenders to examine their own narrative identities and scripts, and to explore the possibility of re-scripting their identities towards a prosocial one that would sustain them in their positive change. For instance, Andrews, Bonta and Wormith (2011) suggest practical approaches to helping offenders with their "narrative identities" by using self-regulatory and self-monitoring skills.

V. CONCLUSION

Evidence-based knowledge exists today that enables correctional systems to be confident in developing rehabilitative systems that will be effective in lowering the recidivism rate of offenders. The use of these evidence-based principles can and should form the basis for rehabilitation. In addition to that, it is also important that correctional systems are open to other strands of research and knowledge that could enhance the system of providing rehabilitation. The use of organisational development knowledge and practices to build a rehabilitation system has already been covered in a previous paper. The study of offender desistance can potentially complement and enrich the current evidence-based principles in offender rehabilitation.

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