

GROUP 2

**PROMOTING INTERVENTIONS, TREATMENT AND SUPPORT
TAILORED TO OFFENDERS’ INDIVIDUAL NEEDS**

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I. INTRODUCTION

Most of the inmates who are incarcerated in prisons have generally committed crimes several times, and some of them come back to prison after release. As effective interventions have some effects on reducing recidivism, organizations in the justice system need effective tools and interventions to deal with those inmates who are more likely to reoffend.

This paper focuses on effective risk assessment and intervention in prison and the community, leading to preventing inmates from continuing their criminal behaviour. It aims to discuss the challenges and good practices in selected countries (i.e. the Dominican Republic, Indonesia, Japan, Malawi, Malaysia and Thailand). In addition, recommendations to deal with the challenges will be stated.

II. CHALLENGES AND GOOD PRACTICES

It is generally agreed that the need to prevent crime and reoffending cannot be overemphasized. Various countries have put in place measures to assess offenders and then place them under programmes that will assist them to change into better persons in their society. It is acknowledged that every offender has to be treated according to the offender’s own circumstances. As will be noted from the discussion below, this paper has focused on the treatment plans available in prison and in the community through the probation service.

A. Justice System

1. Prison Environment

Treatment programmes in prisons are sometimes hampered by lack of appropriate structures and overcrowding. It is also difficult to carry out a treatment plan in the community in the absence of a functional probation system or with a probation system that has overstretched human resources.

The Dominican Republic is an example of how reforms can be implemented in prisons to achieve a reduction in recidivism. This nation is moving from its traditional

prison system to the New Penitentiary Management Model, in which all prisoners shall be guaranteed their constitutional and human rights, including enough clothing, food, housing and security in prison. This prison reform made it possible for the authorities to provide all inmates with evaluations to determine the type of treatment they will receive while serving their sentences and the rehabilitation programmes in prison.

2. Treatment in the Community

Currently, some countries have no community supervision system. During the discussions, the group found that other countries have good models of probation systems which can be displayed as good practices. In the particular case of Japan, in addition to having probation officers, they also have volunteer probation officers, who collaborate in the rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders into society.

B. Human Resources

Human resources are important factors needed in conducting assessments and interventions. The accuracy of the results of the assessment is determined by the quality of the officers carrying out the assessment. Likewise, the effectiveness of treatment is also determined by the competence of human resources carrying out the treatment.

Current conditions related to human resources in the participants' countries are:

- Insufficient numbers of human resources possessing the qualifications to carry out assessments and treatment;
- Considerable variations of competence in carrying out assessments and treatment.

Several countries (e.g. Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia and Thailand) conduct assessment trainings for officers who are responsible for assessment. Besides that, a simple intervention training programme is conducted for prison officers so that they can overcome the simple psychological and emotional problems of prisoners (Dominican Republic, Indonesia and Japan), whereas more complex interventions or treatments will be carried out by clinical psychologists and psychiatrists.

C. Assessment

Risk assessment attempts to predict individuals' likelihood of recidivism by exploring and evaluating their risk factors. Good risk assessment enables the tailoring of treatment plans and the administration of treatment programmes conforming to an individual's needs. This tailored treatment reduces the recidivism rate.

There are, however, some challenges in the tool and its practice. First, in some countries, it is only available for certain juvenile delinquents. Furthermore, the standard of the risk assessment tool might be questioned. Empirical evidence and updated knowledge about risk factors can be used to improve the tool by determining significant factors associated with different types of offences. In addition, some studies indicate that protective factors reducing the impact of risk behaviours and promoting an alternative pathway should be considered. These risk and protective factors need to be added in the tool for use with a particular group, and the tool has to be validated and standardized by statistical methods.

D. Specific Treatment Programmes

Many offenders face difficulties in their lives associated with their criminal behaviours such as conflicts in their family, chronic drug use, any type of abuse, and physical and mental impairment. Some of them need to be rehabilitated with certain types of treatment programmes in order to overcome such difficulties. Unfortunately, existing treatment programmes for dealing with these offenders may be ineffective and insufficient to respond to significant risk factors related to the likelihood of reoffending, particularly serious and violent offending. As several psychological and social factors mitigate behaviours associated with risk, treatment programmes should be designed to increase protective factors and decrease risk factors. A treatment programme needs to attend to various needs of the offender, have appropriate duration and be suitable to the offender's characteristics such as age and gender. Evaluation and statistical testing for the treatment programmes may need to be done. Furthermore, cooperating with partners (e.g. academic institutions) to develop and revise specific treatment programmes is a possible alternative to achieve effective outputs.

E. Awareness of the Community

The community should be aware that it has an important role to play in helping to provide effective offender rehabilitation. If the community does not help, the consequences of repeated offences by the offenders will have a negative effect on the society itself.

Governments need to be aware of the importance of community cooperation. They must have a precise and consistent policy on this issue by considering a form of programme that is intimate and can build good relationships between offenders and the community. The "Yellow Ribbon Project" in Singapore is an influential programme that builds strong and close friendships between the community and offenders. It is already a well-known brand and has been followed by other countries around the world. This has given aspiration to the offenders that they still have value to society. The same theme or essence needs to be created in all countries.

Awareness of the community is very important in playing a role in the rehabilitation of offenders. This understanding does not come easily. There must be a constant effort and a high level of commitment. When there is "trust" between the community, government and the offenders, the percentage of recidivism will decrease.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

From the foregoing discussion, several recommendations have been proposed to assist in the prevention of recidivism in the various countries. Some of the recommendations arise out of best practices obtaining in some participating countries in the seminar. The recommendations are as follows:

- Establishing or improving probation systems and, if necessary, a volunteer probation officer system in which citizens with integrity in the community help offenders rehabilitate themselves;
- Building facilities and introducing tailored programmes for offenders both in prison and in the community in order to enhance the chance of rehabilitation;

- Improving the quality of assessment, which enables the tailoring of treatment plans and the provision of treatment programmes conforming to an individual's needs;
- Educating and training practitioners who conduct assessment and treatment in order to enhance the chance of reintegration of offenders into society;
- Strengthening public cooperation, which plays an important role in helping offenders return to ordinary life.

IV. CONCLUSION

With a concerted effort, reforms that pay particular attention to the prevention of recidivism are very possible. Apart from introducing innovative ideas to prevent crime or, where a crime has been committed, to prevent reoffending, various countries should be open to learning about systems that are working in other countries and adapting them to their unique circumstances.