

Therapeutic Interventions for Female Inmates' Rehabilitation: A Review

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Abstract


Crime is a behavior that adversely affects social peace and harmony. Many disciplines, especially psychology, try to understand and prevent criminal behavior. Although men commit more crimes than women, the number of female prisoners is increasing. Female inmates are known to have more pronounced gender-specific needs (sexual abuse victimization, childcare and parenting, etc.) than male inmates. Female inmates use psychiatric services more frequently than male inmates. Because the symptoms and course of mental disorders differ between men and women, treatment and interventions are expected to differ. In this article, we review recent research on the treatment needs of female inmates and discuss how existing treatment modalities can be adapted for them. There is an urgent need for therapeutic interventions that are sensitive to gender-specific needs to rehabilitate female inmates and prevent them from committing crime upon release. This review is intended to provide a framework for further studies to reduce recidivism, increase well-being, and improve the overall quality of life among female inmates.

Keywords: Crime, Female Inmates, Rehabilitation

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The literature shows that female inmates are a minority of the total prison population. The percentage of female prisoners in prisons around the world ranges from 2% to 9% (Walmsley, 2017). This likely indicates that female inmates are less likely to commit crimes and more likely to comply with legal norms. Criminological research suggests that there may be sociological, biological, religious, and psychological reasons why women commit fewer crimes than men (Carlen & Worall, 2004; Newburn, 2007). The existence of a relationship between crime and gender suggests that it is an important factor in understanding and intervening in the causes of criminal behavior.

There are gender differences in the quality and quantity of criminal behavior. Compared to men, women commit the same types of less serious crimes (Davies, 2011; Walklate, 2004). The crimes committed by women are mostly property-related (Van Kempen & Krabbe, 2017) and rarely violent (Van Kempen & Krabbe, 2017). Women convicted of violence have been observed to be victimized before committing crimes, and these are isolated acts that do not reflect their overall behavior (Kubiak, Kim, Bybee, & Eshelman, 2014). Therefore, the criminal behavior of female prisoners appears to have a unique character.

Treatment Needs of Female Inmates

Women in prison are known to have different needs than men in terms of substance abuse and mental health problems, family relationships, responsibilities, and many other aspects (Langan & Pelissier 2001; Messina et al. 2006). Understanding the gender-specific needs of female inmates is critical to the effectiveness of treatment programs. Priority treatment needs are identified under the following headings:

Physical/Sexual Abuse

Research shows that female inmates have higher rates of childhood abuse and neglect than males (Armytage et al., 2000; Shaw, 2000; Thomas & Pollard, 2001). One study found that female inmates were 85% more likely to be sexually abused than the general female population (Byrne & Howells, 2000). Exposure to abuse and traumatic experiences in childhood has been linked to mental health problems and criminal behavior in adulthood (Grella, Stein, & Greenwell, 2005). Female inmates often have a history of childhood abuse, and female inmates with a history of abuse have low self-esteem and negative identity perceptions and are at increased risk for self-harm and substance abuse (Thomas & Pollard, 2001). Experiences of childhood maltreatment have been linked to poor physical and mental health in later life (Messina & Grella, 2006). Rehabilitation efforts that are sensitive to female inmates with traumatic experiences are critical to preventing recidivism among female inmates.

Psychological and Psychiatric Problems

Research on female psychopathology, although sparse, suggests that female offenders have higher rates of psychological dysfunction than male offenders (Byrne and Howells, 2000). Borderline personality disorder, depression, anger management, and low self-esteem are common among female inmates (Armytage et al., 2000; Thomas & Pollard, 2001). Major depressive disorder is a common psychiatric disorder among female inmates (James & Glaze, 2006). Major depressive disorder is known to perpetuate substance abuse and complicate

treatment, especially among female inmates (Brady, Krebs, & Laird, 2004; Johnson et al., 2011).

Depression is an important risk factor for female inmates. There is a relationship between major depressive disorder and suicide attempts (Charles et al., 2003). Failure to receive adequate treatment support for women inmates diagnosed with depressive disorder may reduce the likelihood of transitioning to a healthy life after release (Baillargeon et al., 2009; Benda, 2005). Major depressive disorder increases the risk of suicide in female inmates (Thomas & Pollard, 2001). The oppressive and freedom-restricting nature of prison environments can make it difficult for female inmates to cope with depression.

Family Relations and Parenting

Most female inmates are mothers and have family relationship problems (Powell & Nolan 2003). Although most live with their children before going to prison, they lose parental rights when they are incarcerated (Mullings et al., 2004). The limited contact that children in state custody have with their incarcerated mothers damages the mother-child relationship (Armytage et al. 2000). For these reasons, female inmates are known to often experience feelings of disappointment, guilt, and hopelessness regarding their role as mothers (Arrigo, 2000). Among female inmates, those who are pregnant and those who give birth while incarcerated experience significant difficulties in caring for the baby (Pollock, 1998).

Substance Abuse

The number of female offenders with substance abuse disorders is increasing (Alemagno, 2001). Female inmates have been found to have higher rates of mental health problems than male inmates, and these problems can co-occur with substance abuse (James & Glaze, 2006). Emotional and anxiety disorders are common among substance abusing female inmates (Pelissier & Jones, 2005). This increases the likelihood of recidivism among other offenders (Blitz et al., 2005; Sacks, 2004). In addition, because their post-release employment is limited, they are more likely than other inmates to lose custody of their children and to experience economic hardship (Grella & Greenwell, 2006).

Psychotherapeutic Approaches Used in Rehabilitation of Inmates

Psychotherapies are of great importance in the rehabilitation of criminal behavior. Criminal behavior is one of the most negative consequences of unhealthy coping. It is known that many biological, psychological, and social factors play an interactive role in the development of criminal behavior. Changing the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that form the basis of crime is of great importance in preventing criminal behavior and preventing its recurrence. Psychotherapeutic practices used in the rehabilitation of prisoners are of great importance in terms of intervening in these unhealthy patterns of behavior and the possible underlying causes of these patterns. Psychotherapies aim at positive change and development of the individual. In this context, some of the psychotherapeutic methods that can be used in the rehabilitation of prisoners are presented below.

Short-Term Dynamic Therapy

Dynamic therapies aim to uncover thoughts, impulses, and defense mechanisms that the individual is not aware of. Short-term dynamic therapies are much shorter than classical

dynamic therapies and usually target specific disorders (Messer, 2001). The goal of brief dynamic therapy is to provide insight into the unconscious motivation underlying an individual's behavior. Through this method, individuals who commit crimes can gain insight during the therapy process and gain an understanding of how to recognize and cope with repetitive patterns of criminal behavior.

Insight can help the individual resolve their internal conflicts, giving them a more realistic perception of what they are going through. Short-term psychodynamic therapy can help offenders understand the underlying causes of their behavior and develop healthier ways of coping with compulsive impulses. Short-term dynamic therapy offers a functional method in prison settings in terms of limited cost and less time (Mcleary, 2009). Although there is weak and limited evidence for the effectiveness of the short-term dynamic approach with inmates, it can be used as a therapeutic method to develop insight and positive coping skills in female inmates with traumatic experiences.

Cognitive-Behavioral Approach

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is considered an effective model for understanding and treating criminal behavior. The interaction between the thought, emotion, and behavioral components of CBT can reveal the unique structure of any criminal behavior. Beck (2005) CBT aims to create awareness of the individual's automatic thoughts, core beliefs, and intermediate beliefs. First, it aims to create awareness of the automatic thoughts that run through the individual's mind. Automatic thoughts are thoughts that suddenly appear during experiences. When we look at the theoretical underpinnings of CBT, we see that there are core beliefs that underlie automatic thoughts. Core beliefs are shaped by childhood experiences. Core beliefs are defined as fixed and overgeneralized beliefs. Between automatic thoughts and our core beliefs are intermediate beliefs. Intermediate beliefs consist of attitudes and rules that serve the core beliefs.

CBT is one of the most effective methods for the prevention and non-repetition of criminal behavior (Lipsey et al., 2001; Pearson et al., 2002; Wilson et al., 2005). CBT aims to reorganize the link between dysfunctional thought processes and harmful behaviors through a variety of therapy techniques. CBT-based intervention programs aim to improve decision-making and problem-solving skills and to teach individuals how to manage their difficult emotions. CBT aims to reduce recidivism by targeting a few mental health disorders common among female inmates, including substance abuse, aggression, and depression. Although the effectiveness of CBT in reducing recidivism has been documented, there is a need for specialized programs to address the treatment needs of female inmates.

Positive Psychology

Positive Psychology is a therapy method that aims to maximize the potential of the individual and focuses on the individual's core strengths and resources. Therefore, it is a "health"-based approach, not a "disease"-based approach. The focus of positive psychology is defined as character strengths, a fulfilling life, and happiness (Park et al., 2006).

Seligman (2011), one of the founders of positive psychology, developed the PERMA model, which includes five basic components of individual happiness and well-being, and

presented this model as an approach to development and change. PERMA consists of five components: positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and achievement. Positive emotions mean seeing phenomena as they are. An individual's positive emotions create motivation for positive actions in other areas of their life. Engagement refers to all the activities an individual does throughout his or her life, including hobbies. Relationships, including peer relationships, enable the formation of successful life experiences and a sense of belonging, reinforcing this sense and supporting the sense of security created by the individual's need to be together. Meaning indicates a commitment to goals in life. A sense of meaning offers the individual the opportunity to rewrite and reorganize his or her perspective on life. At the same time, meaning enables the individual to belong to and serve something bigger. Having meaning and purpose in life makes it easier for the individual to tackle important challenges. Achievement refers to actions in which the individual feels empowered. A sense of achievement helps to activate hope in the face of difficulties. It is known that both exercises related to the strengths of personality and group sessions in line with the PERMA model have a significant impact on individuals' behavioral change (Güney, 2015; Seligman, 2002; Park et al., 2006).

In recent years, rehabilitation of individuals who have committed crimes has become one of the application areas of positive psychology. Positive psychology-based interventions have been found to be beneficial in increasing the well-being of female inmates and improving their character strengths (Mak & Chan, 2018). Positive psychology-based mindfulness practices implemented in prisons were found to be effective in reducing stress levels among female inmates (Ferszt et al., 2015). These findings complement an earlier systematic review that found that mindfulness practice in correctional settings led to improvements in substance use, hostility, relaxation ability, self-esteem, and optimism (Shonin et al., 2013).

Conclusion and Discussion

The literature on female inmates clearly indicates gender-specific treatment needs. Women appear to have more pronounced gender-specific needs (sexual abuse victimization, childcare and parenting, etc.) than male inmates (Pelissier and Jones, 2005). Within the penal system, men make up the majority of the prison population. As a result, many regulations and intervention programs, from the way penal institutions operate to the treatment of inmates, are tailored to the needs of male prisoners. Sensitivity to gender differences is a matter of responsibility. Although some rehabilitation programs are gender neutral, most target male-specific risk factors. Existing therapeutic approaches could be gender-specific to reduce female reoffending and prevent recidivism.

Looking at the specific treatment needs of female inmates, it is evident that female offenders have substance abuse and co-occurring mental health problems while incarcerated (Blitz et al., 2006). Rehabilitation programs for substance-abusing women inmates rarely include goals for healing their traumatic histories (Morrisey et al., 2005). An integrated, needs-based design of treatment programs for female inmates may increase the effectiveness of treatment participation. Most CBT-based substance abuse treatment programs are designed for male inmates. Few studies have addressed the gender-specific needs of female inmates (Connors et al., 2001). This suggests that more gender-specific studies are needed.

Female inmates need to change their negative perceptions of the motherhood role and need skills training on how to become competent parents. Parenting programs designed to strengthen mother-child interaction in prisons can provide opportunities for female inmates to explore and manage their experiences as mothers (Boudin, 1998; Pollock, 1998). It may be effective to encourage young children to stay in an enriched prison environment, allowing them to strengthen mother-child contact through some special visitation programs (Arrigo, 2000; Loy, 2000; Pollock, 1998; Stanley & Byrne, 2000). CBT-based group and individual counseling services can be provided to change female inmates' negative self-perceptions regarding their motherhood roles. Positive psychology-based compassion and gratitude studies are effective in strengthening the bond of female inmates in prisons with their children. It is critical that prisons have facilities that allow female inmates, especially those who have just had babies, to stay with their babies. Considering that female inmates do not receive adequate parental care during their childhood, this measure may also prevent the transmission of crime from generation to generation.

Positive family ties are important for women's reintegration into society and are a protective factor against recidivism (Stanley & Byrne, 2000; Young & Jefferson Smith, 2000). Strong family support can support the mental health of a female inmate during her stay in prison and contribute positively to her relationships with her family after release (Klein & Bahr, 1996). Content aimed at improving family relationships and communication in family therapy programs may be beneficial for female inmates (Pollock, 1998). Improving the well-being of female inmates, together with family therapy, parenting and birth programs, is considered to be of great importance in ensuring their reintegration into society.

There is limited research examining programs targeting depression in female inmates. In combating depression, therapeutic interventions are needed to uncover evidence of success in the lives of female inmates and strengthen their self-efficacy. Therefore, the PERMA model, a positive psychology approach, may help increase feelings of self-efficacy in female inmates. Such programs may also help female inmates increase their motivation by strengthening their sense of purpose and meaning. In programs aimed at combating depression, sessions can be added to help female inmates express their repressed anger in healthy ways.

Suggestions

Since female inmates have a higher number of mental problems than male inmates, more detailed research can be conducted to expand the database on female criminality and their treatment needs. Since the symptoms and course of mental disorders differ in men and women, rehabilitation efforts for female prisoners must be planned specifically for gender. There is a serious need for mental health assessments and interventions specifically designed for women. Inclusion of revealing strengths, developing self-compassion, and enabling connections with a sense of purpose and meaning in life are highly recommended for the rehabilitation sessions of female inmates.

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Ethical Standards

The study is a compilation study and ethics committee permission were not obtained.