



Criminal Justice Rehabilitation in Prisons

Lardén M*

Head of Treatment, Work and Education Unit, Swedish Prison & Probation Service, Sweden

***Corresponding author:** Martin Lardén, Head of Treatment, Work and Education Unit, Swedish Prison & Probation Service, Sweden, Tel: +46 (0)70 218 75 75; Email: martin.Larden@kriminalvarlden.se

Editorial

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Editorial

There's been a long debate on the effectiveness of prisons; are they effective in reducing crime or just a necessary evil. The content of a prison stay plays an important role in being able to manage the negative effects of imprisonment. Education and vocational training prepare the clients' opportunity to earn a living on the outside. Treatment programs help inmates to distance themselves from a criminal lifestyle, and prepare them for a life beyond crime. But to achieve long-term desistance, we must be prepared to accept the reformed offender into our community.

Criminal behavior is a complex problem that requires both persistence and patience to change. It is rarely an isolated problem, rather a pattern where different psychosocial problems interact. Of course, it would be much easier to accept a simple explanation of the single given cause. Thinking in terms of patterns, complexity, parallel problems, and interacting factors is, of course, much more difficult. As this pattern is usually the result of a long-term antisocial development that has been going on since early childhood. A lot of conflict in the family leads to insecurity for the small child, difficulties in interacting with other children lead to rejection and isolation or seeking antisocial association. The combination of lack of parental supervision and antisocial youth often leads somewhere in the transition between elementary and middle school to staying out at night and experimenting with drugs. Thus, a young man sentenced to prison is likely to have a long history of antisocial behavior. A consequence of this reasoning is that it is not possible to reduce our treatment task to curing an isolated disease or disorder; our task is to change the person's way of life. There is a substantial body of evidence for the effectiveness of criminal justice rehabilitation [1], and contemporary research suggest that the content of a prison is crucial for a prisons ability to reduce recidivism [2].

Whether it is ethically right to force individuals to change through a treatment program is of course another question. The more philosophical discussion about whether it is right to force a person to change himself must always be alive and address both humane and legal considerations [3]. That a treatment imposed on an individual should be effective in remedying the problem at hand is an important aspect of good ethics, but we must also always ensure that we administer them in a way that does not violate the individual's rights and privacy, and that it is administered under circumstances that do not violate those individual rights. We have to assume that any intervention that can be effective also has the potential to be destructive if administered in the wrong way. This applies regardless of whether we engage in medication, psychotherapy or other psychosocial interventions. For me, that a certain treatment method has shown positive results in controlled studies is an obvious starting point when choosing methods, but it is equally obvious that careful consideration is required as to whether it is ethically acceptable to administer it to a certain target group, by a certain type of administrator under certain specific conditions. An inmate that have been provided education, vocational training and programs that target their criminogenic needs while incarcerated are adequately prepared for release, but the task of establishing and maintaining a pro-social life remains.

Most important of all is that the individual's new prosocial life is meaningful and satisfying regarding housing, work, leisure time and social interaction. This means that no matter how effective prisons become in preparing inmates for release, we are ultimately dependent on there being a society that is ready to receive these reformed inmates. A society that offers more pro-social opportunities such as education, work, housing and community, instead of shortcuts in the form of alcohol, drugs, gambling and purely criminal activities. To reduce the rates of re-offending we

need to inform citizens and policy makers on the importance of strategies and interventions on how to facilitate the social reintegration of prisoners.

References

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