

Positive Psychology and Offender Rehabilitation: A Narrative Review

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ABSTRACT

This paper includes a narrative review on strengths-based approaches, rooted in positive psychology, in rehabilitating different offender populations such as perpetrators of Intimate Partner Violence and Abuse (IPVA), street gang members and drug offenders. Based on Positive Psychology and Good Lives Model (GLM), we highlight the importance of emphasising on strengths, promoting desistance and internal transformation of identity. GLM provides the aetiology of criminality and the importance of developing appropriate prosocial ways to access primary goods. By accentuating the strengths and positive aspects of offenders, these approaches bolster engagement, motivation, and participation, leading to successful intervention outcomes. The paper concludes by suggesting future studies to incorporate positive psychological theories to develop offender rehabilitation programs. Future studies should also assess the efficacy of GLM-based intervention models in different offender populations. Integrative positive psychology and strengths-based approaches into offender rehabilitation provides a promising avenue to promote desistance, reduce recidivism and facilitate successful reintegration into the community.

Keywords: *Positive Psychology, Good Lives Model (GLM), Intervention, Desistance, Offender*

There has been reluctance in analysing the concepts of rehabilitation theories and understanding the core features of it. This is a source of problems because without an analysis, it is difficult to draw a comparison and evaluate various theories of rehabilitation. Briefly, it can be said that a rehabilitation theory is the one that depicts the higher-level aims, principles, values and causal assumptions which direct forensic and rehabilitative interventions and enable the practitioners in employing these principles in daily practice. Theories of rehabilitation are a mixture of different elements that include ethics, theories, scientific evidence and practical aspects. These are different from treatment and etiological theories, commonly used in psychology such as psychodynamic, behavioural, etc which are more specific and include applying principles and practical ways to modify an element in the behaviour of an individual (Davis & Beech, 2018).

According to Seligman (2011), Positive Psychology is the science which deals with the study of human flourishing. This focus on positive emotions and human flourishing can

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provide answers to rehabilitation of offenders by developing positivity and character strengths. Saleebey (2006) suggested that there should be an emphasis on strengths and resilience instead of a deficit-centric approach in the context of offender rehabilitation. As cited in Keltner (2009), Darwin mentioned that humans are innately kind and being compassionate is one of the strongest abilities of humans. This inborn tendency to be kind can be influenced by extreme events like trauma, toxins or even professional practices of rehabilitation. Therefore, it is suggested that the therapeutic relationship is important and growth and healing occurs when the professional makes a relationship with the client and instils the power of the client to restore himself/herself (Brayford et al., 2010; Pelletier, 2000; Mapham & Hefferon, 2012).

Good Lives Model (GLM)

On these lines of Positive Psychology, a new model for rehabilitation has surfaced which is an alternative to the traditional Risk Need Responsivity (RNR) Model of rehabilitation. This model is called the Good Lives Model (GLM), which is a strengths-based model, rooted in Positive Psychology and it has been developed on three principles of self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

GLM is based on the following assumptions:

- Offenders are engaged in satisfying the “primary human goods” such as relationships, belongingness, autonomy etc., which are sought in antisocial ways because they don't possess the required skills and appropriate external conditions. There are also “secondary goods” which are tangible ways of providing primary goods. For example, joining a sports team or church or Khulisa support group might satisfy the “primary good” of belonging to a community.
- Rehabilitation and interventions that promote well-being will increase prosocial behaviour and reduce the criminal tendencies and activities.
- The criminal characteristics can be changed by placing emphasis on the primary goods that offenders wish to achieve through antisocial means and providing them more appropriate means to achieve these primary goods.

There are eleven classes of primary goods: 1). Life, 2). Knowledge, 3). Excellence in Play, 4). Excellence in Work, 5). Excellence in Agency, 6). Inner Peace, 7). Friendship, 8). Community, 9). Spirituality, 10). Happiness and, 11). Creativity. Primary goods assume a central position of an individual's self and they are what he/she feels is worth having in life. When these goods become inaccessible without availability of alternative means of achieving them, frustration, lack of meaning or purpose are likely to occur and risk of offending is further increased. Secondary goods or instruments are actions, practices or roles that let an individual achieve their primary goods (Willis & Ward, 2013).

GLM has also emphasised on desistance research and therefore, it is also known as the Good Lives-Desistance Model (GLM-D). This model works on concepts that align with desistance such as enhancing the well-being of offenders and search for fulfilment and meaning (Mapham & Hefferon, 2012).

Sexual Offending

Based on the GLM Model, interventions for sexual offenders are seen as an activity which involves addition to the repertoire of personal functioning instead of an activity which only removes a problem or manages it, like a restriction of an activity for a lifetime as the only

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method of avoiding offending. Interventions for sexual offenders must have the aim to restore the individuals to normal functioning and restrictions should be there only on activities which are highly linked to the problem behaviour. A man who was convicted for raping an adult woman should not be made to feel hopeless about developing an intimate consensual relationship in future by being told to escape situations where single women might be present. Instead, there should be restrictions only on certain activities and situations and corrective measures must be taught along with this (Ward & Mann, 2004).

Initial sessions in groups involve establishment of group norms, introductions of individual members and building an orientation to treatment. Based on GLM, introductions of members involve each participant sharing a strength and something they want to improve through intervention and anything else they want to tell about themselves. They are told that sexual offending is because of the inappropriate ways of satisfying important needs in the lives of the clients or result from a problematic life plan. Through the modules of intervention, the aim is to provide to the clients an understanding of how issues in their Good Life Plan (GLP) led to their offending and how related thoughts, emotions and behaviours resulted in an offence. Therefore, the aim is approach-oriented (gaining understanding) and is linked to fulfilment of goods (knowledge). When it comes to managing deviant sexual fantasies, it is significant to develop approach goals regarding fantasies and arousals. Moreover, it is important that clients have an accurate understanding of how this arousal reconditioning intervention will allow them to gratify their important needs and implement a future GLP. The final phase includes helping clients develop a futuristic GLP which includes a set of plans to enable clients to satisfy their important needs which are inconsistent with future offending. This means promoting a prosocial manner of attainment of needs of the clients and containing realistic secondary goods to satisfy the primary ones (Willis et al., 2013).

The Rockwood Strength-Based Sex Offender Treatment Program (Marshall et al., 2008) incorporates positive psychology and RNR model. It includes engagement of participants, addressing criminogenic aspects and enhancing self-management for efficient reintegration into the community. Phase 1 of it includes introduction of the program, identifying strengths and addressing background factors that led to offending. Phase 2 involves targeting criminogenic factors such as relationship issues, attitudes and self-management which have been found to be predicting recidivism. Lastly, the self-management phase involves learning into release plans and life goals which also involves developing a plan for self-management and recognizing warning signs and approach strategies in order to avoid recidivism (Marshall et al., 2008; Marshall, 2019). There are some studies that have assessed the efficacy of Rockwood's program. It was found that it increased these self-esteem of clients, improved skills related to relationships, enhanced victim empathy and normalised sexual interests. Moreover, long-term effects of this program have been effective in reducing recidivism. Probability of reoffending over 8-year follow up for high-risk offenders was 10.3% for Rockwood's program in comparison to 45% for untreated offenders (Marshall, 2019; Olver et al., 2019).

Intimate Partner Violence and Abuse (IPVA)

In the context of Intimate Partner Violence and Abuse (IPVA), there has been the utilisation of deficit-based approaches which have been criticised for its focus on negative aspects. There has been an emerging need to develop interventions that strengthen aspects that are important for developing the commitment of an individual to desist from the act. McNeil (2012) suggests that there should be an emphasis on desistance and evidence and theories

should be developed that are concerned with desistance. Such a work is rooted in a framework that strives to develop strengths and social resources so that obstacles to change can be overcome; the emphasis here is on “What helps?” instead of “what works?” (McNeill, 2016).

As posited by criminological theories, transforming the identity from criminal to non-criminal identity is required in order to desist. That transformation requires that others believe in the individual and there is a development of hope for their future. Self-control and agency also play a significant role in this process (Bowen et al., 2018).

There is a lack of theories and models that can explain desistance from IPV. A conceptual model of desistance from physical IPV has been developed by Walker, Bowen, Brown, and Sleath (2014). It was found that desistance requires a complex interaction between various contextual, individual and situational factors. Those who desist manage triggers by modifying the appraisals of situations and dealing with stressors effectively. They give themselves ‘permission to be non-violent’ by taking cognizance of the issue and setting in place positive actions in place of violent behaviour which produces a cognitive shift and reconstructs their identity. Successful desistance involves taking accountability for their behaviours and redefining the self with positive identity, thus becoming the agent for change (Walker et al., 2014; Bowen et al., 2018).

There have been certain recommendations from the GLM framework while designing interventions for domestic violence offenders. A comprehensive approach to evaluate and treat such offenders and emphasising on personal, psychological and social factors is recommended. Risk factors, self-regulation and situational features should be considered while assessing. Good lives, integration of primary and secondary goods, dynamic risk factors and offence pathways must be addressed while devising a treatment plan. There should be consistency between the overarching values of the offender and the treatment plan. There should be relevance and achievability in the treatment plan. Offenders should be engaged in these good life plans as it enhances engagement in intervention and reduces the likelihood of dropping out, thus improving the intervention outcomes for the offenders of domestic violence (Langland, Ward & Gilchrist, 2009).

Drug Offenders

Strengths-based narrative has also started to emerge in the reentry context wherein judicial oversight is provided to restore the released prisoners back to the community. In this context, in addition to needs-based and support-based narratives, strengths-based is being utilised. This narrative assumes that there is a lot of stigma attached to ex-convicts and this stigma is responsible for recidivism. One of the most successful programs based on strengths-based frameworks is the Delancey Street program in San Francisco, which was founded by Mimi Silbert and ex-convict John Maher in 1971. The residents here are taught a basic lesson that they can offer something (Maruna & LeBel, 2003).

Moreno et al. (2022) conducted a study to develop an intervention based on positive psychology for offending adolescents to treat their drug use. The intervention program was of a cognitive behavioural orientation, however the therapists based it on a positive psychology paradigm. The purpose was to produce positive emotions related to the plan for personal change in order to break learned helplessness observed in participants due to failures of prior interventions. This program involves seeing every participant as a unique and worthy individual and human being, thus developing change options from protective

factors and resources of each participant. Factors like risk factors, criminal acts and drug usage are seen as dynamic variables that do not predict future behaviour nor burden them with indissoluble antisocial identity. The authors found that there was a reduction in the problems associated with drug consumption in the experimental group and the differences with the control group were statistically significant. The effect size was also large. This indicates that programs rooted in positive psychology carry tremendous potential for reducing alcohol and cannabis consumption.

Individuals recovering from addiction, especially those with a history of incarceration, have a quality of life even higher than those not in prison, which means incarceration is not completely negative. Instead, such experiences lead to a “rebound” effect producing a more positive prognosis for recovery. This is consistent with “Better Than Well”, which posits that individuals who overcome significant hurdles experience an increased sense of well-being beyond normal. This highlights the importance of resilience and transformative potential present in the process of recovery. Individuals who are able to sail through adversities not only get back to normalised level of functioning, but even might surpass it, thus attaining a high quality of life and enhanced psychological well-being. This suggests the potential for growth and flourishing even during significant challenges (Best & Aston, 2015).

Street Gang Offenders

Sonterblum (2018) synthesised research on factors that put individuals at risk for gang involvement using Maslow’s Need Hierarchy Theory (1943). For instance, the drug-dealing aspect of gangs can satisfy the physiological needs by providing money from selling drugs. Safety needs are met by protection from rival gangs and harmful neighbourhoods. Being associated with the gang provides reputation and prestige thus, satisfying the esteem needs. Gangs also satisfy the love needs by providing a sense of belongingness to someone who is experiencing conflicts with family or has been cast out. When needs are not met, the individual finds it difficult to self-actualise and is unable to reach her/his full potential. This individual will also experience an intense urgency to satisfy the basic needs in whichever way he/she can. This urgency combined with the inability to self-actualise increases the risk of involvement in gangs.

Current models of interventions for street gang members include Cognitive-Behaviour Therapy (CBT), Functional Family Therapy-Gangs (FFT-G) and Multisystemic Therapy (MST). However, it has been found that GLM framework can enhance the value of existing empirical interventions by including a holistic approach through incorporation of real-world goals, values, identities and environments as formulated in the individualised Good Lives Plan. The emphasis in GLM is on enhancing the skills instead of removing or managing the problems. This can be incorporated in the current interventions that facilitate the well-being of street gang members, by achieving personally meaningful primary goods in appropriate prosocial manner. This is efficient as it does not place blame over the individuals and their families for their antisocial behaviour and increases their participation in interventions (Mallion & Wood, 2020).

Strengths-based reentry programs have been introduced for youth involved in the criminal justice system. This includes regular interaction with legal professionals and officials, opportunities to improve, and engaging in community works such as volunteering. In comparison with the conventional approaches, these interventions focus on rewards and achievements instead of punishments. Some of these models prioritise empowerment of

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clients so that they can utilise their strengths and resources for addressing the challenges they face. Similarly, existing Restorative Justice Programs for youth, like the one operated by Touchstone Family Association in Richmond, also emphasise building strengths (Bhatt, Tweed & Dooley, 2010).

Interventions based on GLM are strengths-based and have an emphasis on goals, which is significant in increasing engagement and motivation. These interventions are positively framed and therapists are respectful towards the clients and empathise with them. This is important for developing a trustful and strong therapeutic relationship. GLM overcomes issues commonly seen in interventions of street gang members such as high drop-out rates, weak therapeutic relationship and poor participation by clients. There has been no application of the GLM framework to street gang members till date, however it has been efficiently applied to offenders who are young and violent (Whitehead et al. 2007; Chu et al. 2015). As members of street gangs are usually younger in age and participate in violent acts, this supports the application of interventions based on GLM framework for this special type of population (Mallion & Wood, 2020).

CONCLUSION

The studies reviewed indicate the importance of strengths-based approach in the rehabilitation of offenders including drug offenders, intimate partner violence and abuse (IPVA) perpetrators, and street gang members. Positive Psychology and the Good Lives Model (GLM) provide alternative approaches to deal with successful offender rehabilitation and reducing recidivism as opposed to the conventional deficit-centric approaches, focusing on well-being, enhancing strengths and promoting desistance. GLM provided insights into the reasons for criminal behaviours and the significance of developing appropriate ways of accessing primary goods. Interventions based on this framework have proven to be effective for drug offenders and those convicted for IPVA.

By emphasising the strengths and the positive in the offenders, these approaches enhance engagement, motivation and participation producing successful outcomes of these interventions. Another advantage is that his approach has the power to internally transform the identities of these offenders in a positive manner thus leading to desistance. Applying GLM for street gang members has led to the development of their personal and social strengths (Bhatt, Tweed & Dooley, 2010).

This paper highlights the need to incorporate positive psychological theories and concepts for the rehabilitation of offenders and future work can be undertaken in the direction of examining the efficacy of intervention models based on GLM and positive psychology in different kinds of offender populations. The integration of positive psychology principles and strengths-based approaches into rehabilitation and intervention programs offers a promising pathway for promoting desistance, reducing recidivism, and ultimately facilitating the reintegration of offenders into society. By emphasising individual strengths, promoting well-being, and fostering positive relationships, these approaches provide a more comprehensive and effective framework for promoting positive change and reducing criminal behaviour.

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