

REALITY THERAPY AS A TOOL IN ASSISTING PRISONERS ADJUST TO LIFE AFTER PRISON

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Abstract

Through a well-packaged rehabilitation programme, recidivism can be controlled, crime rate reduced and prisoners can become responsible, hopeful and better equipped to cope with societal reactions on release. This study was therefore aimed at investigating the effect of Reality Therapy (RT) in assisting prisoners adjust to life after prison. Twenty-four (24) male inmates of the Ilorin Prisons took part in the study. The pre-test and post-test instrument used was a questionnaire titled "Prison Adjustment on Release Questionnaire" (PARQ). The treatment phase spanned 8 weeks. The result of the study revealed that Reality Therapy was effective in assisting prison inmates adjust to society on release. It was therefore recommended that similar studies should be embarked upon by counselors who desire diversification as well as have career interest in rehabilitation of disadvantaged citizens.

Introduction

The dominant viewpoint of the criminal Justice system over the world has always been, and still is, rehabilitation. In 1870, the National Prison Congress (NPC) of America declared that:

Crime is a moral disease, of which punishment is the remedy. However, punishment should be directed not to crime but to the criminal and the supreme aim of prison discipline is the reformation of criminals, not the infliction of vindictive suffering. (Browne, 1996: 431).

Then, as it is today, the paramount aim of prison discipline, was and is still, the reformation of criminals (flowers, 1987; Grint, 1991; Norman, 1992). Bourdieu (1988), Norman (1992) and Watts (2001) are equally of the opinion that how well an ex-convict copes and behaves after release, depends on how the rehabilitation process in prison has changed him or her for the better. Similarly, Cockburn (1991) assert that the times ordered to be spent in custody should be seen as an opportunity for challenging prisoners, changing their attitudes and providing the skills with which they can lead useful and law-abiding lives on release.

The goal of rehabilitation seem unattainable able in practice and this can be attested to by the disturbing rate of relapses and recidivision. The major

problem seem not to be the first offender or the petty thief but the repeated, unrepentant offender who commits an increasingly serious crime, each time, more serious than the previous ones. In defence of the prison service, Grint (1991) and Norman (1992) argued that the fact that so many prisoners are repeatedly re-arrested does not necessarily mean that the prison system fails to deter people from crimes. On the other hand, Brooke, Taylor, Gunn and Maden (2000) opined that the prison certainly fails to deter some individuals that have refused to be rehabilitated. The implication of these diverse views is that the outcome of the rehabilitation process rests with each individual prisoner. Where a prisoner, however, becomes totally rehabilitated at release, societal perception of him or her becomes the next major problem. Society tends to make adjustment to life after prison almost impossible for prison inmates.

With positive perception of ex-convicts by society, it is expected that they would develop a positive attitude to life, forget the past and have a new perception of life and consequently, aim to be useful to themselves and to society. The ex-convict would need to cope with the realities of life outside the prison involving human contact, embarrassments, degradation and humiliation. Equally, the ex-convict would need to be equipped with skills to cope with his or her new role as a member of a socially stigmatized group seen as people of doubtful character. It becomes imperative therefore for prisoners to be equipped with counselling skills and techniques to enable them appraise their predicament realistically and on release become useful members of the society.

Reality Therapy appears to be the way out. It was propounded by William Glasser who first used the term in April 1964 in a paper he presented on young offenders. The theory objects to punishment and asserts that punishment in any form often proves itself ineffective in getting people to change behaviour (Glasser, 1984, 1989). Glasser (1964, 1969, 1989) opined that prisoners already have a failure identity which punishment only encourages and rather than dwell on punishment, Reality Therapy is geared towards the use of education in preventing delinquency and criminal behaviour.

The crux of the therapy is its ability to assist the individual become psychologically strong, rational, able to clarify goals and take responsibility while formulating a realistic focus on behaviour, both in the present and in the future (Glasser, 1984). To realize the therapeutic goal, the therapist acts as a teacher, a model, who is active and practical and who through a combination of techniques, like teaching, focusing, evaluation, role – playing, humour, confrontation, modeling promotes responsibility and freedom without blaming (Belkin, 1992). Reality Therapy has been found to be useful in assisting

prisoners and delinquents who try to talk their way out of taking responsibility for what they have done or what they are planning to do.

In line with Reality theory proponents such as Glasser (1964, 1969, 1984, 1989) and Glasser and Zuni (1978), the researchers believe that education is the key to sound human functioning and that educators, through a variety of educational programmes, can contribute significantly to the prevention of crime and delinquency and assist the individual to solve his/her problems through teaching and learning process. Thus, the study was aimed at investigating the effect of Reality Therapy skills in assisting prisoners adjust to life after prison.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study was to investigate whether Reality Therapy (RT) is effective in assisting prisoners adjust to life after prison.

Methodology

Research Design

The study adopted an experimental pre-test, post-test control group design. Hassan (1996) described experimental research design as the ultimate form of research which provides the most rigorous test of hypotheses. The design is shown thus:

Group I: $RO_1 X_1 O_2$

Group II: $RO_3 O_4$

Where R = random assignment of subjects to treatment group

O_1 & O_3 = Pre-test Measure

X_1 = Treatment (RT)

O_2 & O_4 = Post-test Measure

Sample and sampling Procedure

The target population for the study consisted of all prisoners in Kwara State. However, the sample for the study was limited to 24 male inmates of the Ilorin prisons who were randomly assigned to two groups after giving consent to their participation in the experiment. The sample did not include female prisoners. At the time of the study, only three female inmates were serving short and long – term sentences and at the selection stage, they were deliberately left out.

The single sex group has been noted to produce better results in group processes than mixed group (Alberti & Emmons, 1974; Asonibare, 1986). Thus, an all male group, as it was constituted here, helped to ensure effective group processes.

Instrumentation

A questionnaire titled "Prisoners Adjustment on Release Questionnaire" (PARQ) was used for the measurement of the Pre - and post-test performance. The questionnaire was developed by the researchers and items were generated from reviewed literature. The PARQ is divided into 2 sections. Section elicits personal information from subjects while section 2 contains 41 items on adjustment needs of inmates. The instrument utilized the four point scoring scale of strongly Agree (A) 4; Agree (A) 3; Disagree (D) 2 and Strongly Disagree (SD) 1.

The PARQ was validated by lecturers in the Department of guidance and Counselling and Sociology of the University of Ilorin. The reliability coefficient of the instrument was established using a test-retest procedure over a four week period. It yielded a coefficient of 0.84, which was adjudged to be good enough for this type of instrument.

Pre-Treatment Phase

The researchers sought the permission of the Comptroller - General of the Nigerian Prison Service, Abuja before the study was carried out. The permission letters were duly forwarded to the Kwara State Prison Service, through the Director of Prisons, Ilorin. Thereafter, at the Ilorin Prisons, participants were selected and randomly assigned to 2 groups (12 members each) using the pre-test measure.

Treatment Phase

The treatment phase was spread over eight weeks and the researchers relied on programme lecture notes and lecture planning records for effective imparting of Reality Therapy Skills. The lecture notes and manner of procedure were drawn from information gathered from reviewed literature.

The following session by session (on weekly basis) activities were carried out with the experimental group: (1)

Session One: General orientation about the programme and stating of group rules and expectation. Activities included, welcoming the group, introducing the researchers to members, stating the group rules, introducing Reality Therapy and the broad objectives of the experiment.

Session Two: Lecture on reality and identity as well as accepting responsibility for actions

Session Three: Communication of the first three principles of Reality Therapy by the researchers.

Session Four: Value judgment and evaluation of what participants do to contribute to their failure.

Session Five: Planning skills; assisting the inmates to make specific plans to change failure identity to success identity. Assisting inmates make multiple alternative plans.

Session Six: Teaching of the sixth principle of Reality Therapy – commitment. Inmates were assisted to commit plans into action on release.

Session Seven: Assisting inmates in not making excuses but in facing reality and moving forward while not being judgmental.

Session Eight: Summary of sessions 1 to 7

NOTE: The control group (II) received no treatment

Post-Treatment Phase

At the end of the experiment, the PARQ was administered to the two groups for post-treatment measurement.

Results

Research hypothesis

The main hypothesis stated that there is no significant difference between the group treated with Reality therapy and the control group in prisoner's adjustment to life after prison.

TABLE 1: Means, Standard Deviations and t-value of group 1 (RT) and group 2(the control group) on the post-test scores.

Variables	N	\bar{X}	SD	df	Cal. t-val.	Crit. t-val.
Reality Therapy Group 1	12	214.17	7.72	22	2.94*	2.07
Control Group 2	12	203.25	.10.27			

NB: = P < 0.05

The result in table 1 indicates that there is significant difference in the post-test scores between the treatment group and the control group. This means that the treatment (i.e. Reality Therapy) is efficacious in assisting prisoners adjust to life after prison.

Discussion

The results of the analysis of the pre – and post-test data has revealed that there was significant difference between the scores of the group exposed to Reality Therapy and the control group. The result supports the effectiveness of Reality Therapy treatment in assisting prisoners for adjustment outside

prison. The control group did not receive this treatment, hence the significant difference.

Reality Therapy principles have been noted to assist prisoners plan towards the future and implement the plans while accepting personal responsibility for every action. Reality Therapy has provided the inmates with skills to improve on their adjustment to life after prisons (Glasser, 1989). Borg and Gall (1980) also support the result of the hypothesis by stating that an increased post-test score, such as between Reality Therapy group, and the control group confirms the supremacy of the treatment used.

The direction of the finding might not be unconnected with fact that the prisoners are aware that they will be released one day and proper adjustment on their part depends on their being psychologically strong and rational, being able to clarify goals and take responsibility and being able to formulate realistic plans towards the future. The prisoners were able to acquire skills that enabled them appraise their predicament realistically and on release, become useful members of the society.

Implications Of The Study Finding

The result of the study revealed that inmates who were exposed to Reality Therapy reported a higher level of adjustment and are better equipped to face the future than inmates in the control group who did not receive any treatment. The efficacy of the treatment in the prison setting is an encouraging development in the helping profession as it further increases the chances of preparing prisoners for re-integration into society after release.

The implication of this finding is that proper adjustment of prisoners would depend on programmes they are exposed to while in prison. Consequently, if the prisoner is trained to face realities, and plan towards the future, the prisoner would fit back to society and be gainfully employed.

The result also implies that there is room for improvement in the counselling profession. The researchers, on the basis of the result of this study, joins others (Idowu 1988; Agali, 1993; Omotosho, 1994, Omoegun, 1999; Idowu, 2003) in calling for the diversification of counselling activities to other out-of-school settings such as the prisons.

Conclusion

It is evident from this study that the treatment (Reality Therapy) used was effective in assisting inmates adjust back to society on release. This provides an empirical bases for the application of Reality Therapy in assisting prison inmates plan for the future. It becomes imperative, therefore, for counsellors to beam their search light to places similar to the prisons and carry out experiments using same or different theories with the sole aim of assisting clients become better adjusted in life.

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