

Positive Psychology Approaches to Recidivism Prevention in Youth Offenders



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Introduction

- The United States currently has nearly 60,000 incarcerated youths under the age of 18. Most rehabilitation programs offer little help with recidivism prevention in offending behavior.
- According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, nearly 68% of released prisoners were arrested within three years, 79% within six years, and 83% within nine years (Alper et al., 2018).
- Previously incarcerated youth suffer peer isolation and rejection leading to behavioral issues (Reid, 2016).
- The purpose of this presentation is to examine whether positive psychology constructs can be used to build the confidence and self-assurance of youth offenders.
- Moreover, this presentation examines whether positive psychology approaches, coupled with traditional rehabilitation, can help prevent recidivism.

Predictors of Recidivism

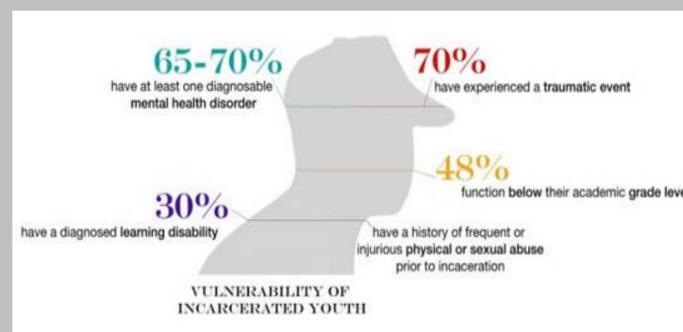
- Research suggests the main predictors of youth recidivism includes drug and alcohol use, lack of positive peer interaction, gang relations, and ethnicity (Archwamety et al., 2015; Haerle, 2014).
- The majority of U.S. correctional systems focus on the justice model of corrections instead of rehabilitation (Stahlkopf et al., 2010).
- The prevalence of recidivism predictors plus the justice model for corrections offers little hope for the offending youth to reintegrate with their community and maintain lawful behavior.

Hypothesis

Positive psychology approaches can be used to build the confidence and self-assurance of these youth. Moreover, positive psychology coupled with traditional rehabilitation can help reduce risk factors for recidivism.

Counseling-Based Interventions

- Currently, the Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) uses the Violent Offender Treatment Program (VOTP) that has shown little positive results for preventing recidivism (Haerle, 2014; Reid, 2016).
- VOTP is arguably setting offending youth on the trajectory for failure.
- If the youth fails to complete the program, the juvenile will face further sentencing and potential incarceration in an adult prison.
- Counseling-based interventions and therapeutic rehabilitation are not enough to reverse the high youth recidivism statistics.
- Offending youth may have cognitive and emotional disabilities and may be a risk to themselves and others (Brookes et al., 2014).



Source: The Illinois Juvenile Justice Commission. (2015). Chicago Youth Justice Data Project. <https://chiyouthjustice.wordpress.com/category/youth-incarceration>

Positive Psychology Constructs

- Implementing positive psychology constructs such as identifying the youth's social and character strengths and virtues and exploring self-efficacy and self-awareness may help to rebuild the offending youth's psychological foundation and promote positive affect (Hanson & Kin, 2007; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Tweed et al., 2011).
- Research suggests that increasing character strengths can potentially decrease youth violence (Hanson & Kin, 2007).
- Positive psychology offers a strength-based approach to working with the juvenile's positive virtues (Baglivio & Wolff, 2018).
- Identifying and working on core character strengths such as forgiveness, gratitude, and altruism need little defense or justification (Schutte et al., 2019).
- Focusing on forgiveness and demonstrating thankfulness may assist the offender in positively rebuilding their identity (Witvliet et al., 2019).
- Research suggests using applications like Values in Action (VIA) and the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) can assist with finding solutions to offending behavior.

Positive Psychology Constructs

- Specifically, VIA and PANAS can help by identifying the negative emotions youth experience and creating useful emotion-focused coping strategies to increase well-being (Crawford & Henry, 2004).
- Offending youth immersed in their community, working for others, are less likely to engage in violent or aggressive behavior (Connolly & Jackson, 2019).
- Promoting a juvenile's positive affect coupled with working on the youth's reasons not to commit a crime can decrease recidivism (Walters, 2020).
- The Self-Regulation Model of Relapse Process (SMR-RP) can assist with therapy if the offending youth was previously convicted of sexual perpetration (Ward & Hudson, 2000).
- Motivating the offending juvenile to stay away from harmful behavior can help facilitate community integration and lower recidivism (Delfin, 2019).



Source: Ackerman, C.E. (2020). What is positive psychology and why is it important. Positive Psychology. <https://positivepsychology.com>