

Persistent Anger Management Problems in Prison Populations

Lecsy Hernandez, M.S., and Kristine M. Jacquin, Ph.D.
School of Psychology, Fielding Graduate University

Abstract

Anger is a feeling that ranges from frustration to tension in the person's body to intense rage (Duran, Ergün, Tekir, Çalışkan, & Karadaş, 2018). Anger is a natural emotional response when a person's aims and expectations are frustrated (Lomas, 2019). Anger has been found to trigger behaviors like aggression, which is a cause of harm and distress to other people. As a result, anger is identified as a problem in the prison environment, especially if a person persistently expresses anger. The current literature review examines persistent anger management issues in prison as a maladaptive habit leading to negative consequences.

Self-control as a Protective Factor

- Findings have demonstrated that relaxation, conflict resolution, and assertiveness training are strategies that help individuals express anger in healthier ways (Duran et al., 2018).
- Research also shows that identifying reasons for being angry helps an individual to be resilient.
- Ideally, inmates with anger management problems would be taught to control extreme emotions and eliminate the negative behavioral consequences associated with anger.

Adverse Effects of Anger on Conflict Resolution

- Anger becomes a problem when the individual cannot control thoughts and actions, but if well managed, it can be used in solving disputes.
- Anger triggers the body for fight or flight, which may cause fear, anxiety or excitement.
- Such reactions may lead to conflict and to being hurt or hurting someone else.
- Anger can be a catalyst to physical aggression, particularly in correctional settings (Duran et al., 2018).
- A reason aggression may occur is because the individual experiencing or expressing anger is not likely to be using the thinking part of the brain, the cortex (Herrero, Gadea, Rodríguez-Alarcón, Espert, & Salvador, 2010).

References

- Duran, S., Ergün, S., Tekir, Ö., Çalışkan, T., & Karadaş, A. (2018). Anger and tolerance levels of the inmates in prison. *Archives of Psychiatric Nursing*, 32(1), 66-70. doi:10.1016/j.apnu.2017.09.014
- Herrero, N., Gadea, M., Rodríguez-Alarcón, G., Espert, R., & Salvador, A. (2010). What happens when we get angry? Hormonal, cardiovascular and asymmetrical brain responses. *Hormones and Behavior*, 57(3), 276-283. doi:10.1016/j.yhbeh.2009.12.008
- Lomas, T. (2019). Anger as a moral emotion: A "bird's eye" systematic review. *Counseling Psychology Quarterly*, 1-55.
- Riley, B., & Oakes, J. (2015). Problem gambling among a group of male prisoners: Lifetime prevalence and association with incarceration. *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Criminology*, 48(1), 73-81.
- Wydo, M. R., & Martin, R. C. (2015). An assessment instrument for anger management in correctional settings: The angry cognitions scale-prison form. *Journal of Rational-Emotive & Cognitive-Behavior Therapy*, 33(4), 374-386. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10942-015-0219-6

Social and Emotional Outcomes

- According to Herrero et al. (2010), anger may result in violent behaviors between inmates hence result in loss of self-control of individuals when interacting with one another.
- Some individuals tend to be affected by violence when solving conflicts hence suffer from short or long-term mental health or somatic problems like headaches and high blood pressure (Riley & Oakes, 2015).
- Inmates with poor anger management may have poor social relations.
- Due to the distress and distancing of the individual from other inmates, many persistently angry individuals are isolated and may suffer from psychological disorders like depression (Herrero et al., 2010).

Conclusions

Previous studies have shown that prisoners experience anger in response to perceived provocation (Wydo & Martin, 2015). Findings suggest that inmates should be included in anger management classes to learn effective ways of expressing anger and to reduce the disposition to experiencing angry feelings. Utilization of effective techniques by those experiencing anger would minimize the chance of emotional and physical harm among inmates. The purpose of this presentation is to raise awareness about anger and its long-term negative consequences in prison inmates.