

Title:
The Application of Positive Psychology Intervention to Female Inmates' Rehabilitation Program

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Abstract

Negative emotions, stress, and the lack of positive stress-coping skills have been found to be related to illicit drug use and relapse. Empirical studies reveal that the elements in positive psychology interventions—e.g., recalling three good things per day, and developing self-strength and self-efficacy—can enhance one's mental health and resiliency. In recent years, clinicians and researchers have started to incorporate positive psychology principles into treatment programs to help rehabilitate ex-offenders and ex-drug users.

The application of positive psychology and related concepts (e.g., mindfulness, Yoga, and good-life model) to substance abuse treatment and offender rehabilitation is still in its initial stages. Systematic studies with longitudinal data are not sufficient. Most of the existing studies have been conducted in Western countries, and empirical studies in Asian countries are rare. In this presentation, I will share with you an empirical study that examined the outcomes of a strength-based positive psychology intervention for female inmates with drug offenses in Taiwan. A quasi-experimental intervention design was adopted in this empirical study. Participants in the experimental (intervention) group consisted of a sample of 61 female inmates in a women prison in Taiwan. The comparison group consisted of a sample of 60 female inmates with matched characteristics (age, length of imprisonment, history of prior criminal records) in the same prison. Female inmates assigned to the experimental group participated in a 6-session intervention. The six-sessions included optimism (three good things a day) and being hopeful; visualizing best self (identifying and applying signature strengths); being kind to others and showing gratitude; building goals; relaxation (Seligman et al., 2005; Lewis, 2007; Papazoglou & Andersen, 2014; Huynh et al., 2015), emotion regulation, resilience, and empowerment. Pre-and post-intervention surveys were conducted to examine the effects of the intervention. It was found that inmates who completed the six sessions intervention had significantly higher scores in the dimensions of personal growth, empowerment, and mindful attention awareness, compared to the female inmates in the control group.

This study, of benefit to criminal justice agencies and practitioners, offers empirical evidence about the effects of positive psychology interventions on promoting the wellbeing of incarcerated women. Findings of the research can suggest courses and strategies that might be included in treatment programs for women during incarceration.

Keywords: positive psychology; intervention; resilience; substance abuse treatment; hope; empowerment