

APPROACHES TO THE PSYCHOLOGICAL TREATMENT OF JUVENILES IN DETENTION

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IN BEN OKRI'S PRESTIGIOUS BOOKER PRIZE WINNING NOVEL, *THE Famished Road*, one finds the story of Azaro, a spirit child who is born only to live for a short while before returning to the idyllic world of his spirit companions, but who chooses to stay in the world of the living.

Azaro says "There was not one amongst us who looked forward to being born. We disliked the rigours of existence, the unfulfilled longings, the enshrined injustices of the world, the labyrinths of love, the ignorance of parents, the fact of dying, the amazing indifference of the living in the midst of the simple beauties of the universe . . . But this time I wanted to stay . . . I wanted to make happy the bruised face of the woman who could become my mother" (Okri 1991, p. 9.)

An Underpinning Philosophy

Life is a struggle, relatively speaking, for all of us. Adolescence particularly is a time when this sense of struggle can become focussed because it contains the inherent challenge to gain maturity. Winnicott (1988) has suggested that adolescence contains in unconscious fantasy the actual death of someone in order for the personal triumph of becoming adult to take place. He notes that this theme may become manifest as the experience of suicidal impulse or as actual suicide for some adolescents.

It seems that as we grow, if our experiences are "good enough" we develop emotional capacities and related skills that enable us to meet the challenges of life, including adolescence, adaptively. Part of this process, involves the development of a belief in constructive, reparative, and loving capacities which have had the opportunity to develop in relationships with significant others. This reparative urge is what Azaro hints at when he says, "I wanted to make happy the bruised face of the woman who could become my mother". These capacities, thus, have the potential to mitigate the destructive side of our natures (Klein 1937). Essential in turn, to a psychological understanding of the disturbances of adolescence (which sometimes involve committing crime) is the notion that adaptive or mal-

adaptive responses to life are developed in the context of relationships (Stern 1985). This need for relationship, and the feeling that one has something good, generative and restorative in oneself to bring to a relationship, are crucial to our understanding of what will ultimately influence change. This is especially true of those with narcissistic and psychopathic personalities, where it is strongly denied because it threatens. The exact techniques through which this change occurs are still largely elusive, though if the research literature concerning the application of psychological approaches to the remediation of crime is any indication, there are many paths. This may in part explain why a seemingly innocuous psychological intervention such as teaching social skills may reduce repeat offending.

Prior to reviewing the research findings concerning the effectiveness of psychological approaches to the remediation of delinquency and associated crime, it is important to state that it is not claimed that all criminal behaviour is seen to emanate from psychological disturbance—though some might hold this view in its broadest sense.

The Problem of Juvenile Offending

Overall, if one examines the data in the period 1981-1991 across the six Australian States there is no evidence that juvenile crime is "out of control" (Gale, Naffine, & Wundersitz 1993). Nonetheless there has been a slight increase in juvenile involvement in serious crimes in recent years, and juveniles continue to be over-represented in certain crime categories, such as violent crime. In NSW the total number of proven appearances for juveniles involved in violent offences (as a proportion of all proven appearances for violent crimes) during 1986-87 represented only 9.9 per cent of all appearances for juvenile offenders. By 1991-92 the percentage of appearances for violent crimes had almost doubled to 14.2 per cent (Gale et. al 1993). Interestingly, this increase was largely due to a rise in serious assaults and robberies rather than any substantial increase in sexual assaults or homicides. So despite a continued emphasis on diversion and community based treatments, it is likely that a small group of more serious offenders will continue to be incarcerated.

The fact that such a problem exists means that it is incumbent on professionals, if the view is held that psychological factors can be an important part of the remediation of crime, to be as clear as possible about what psychological approaches are or might be useful in rehabilitation. That some professionals might hold that psychological approaches are useful in remediating crime is historically relatively new, and it is of interest to review how this enlightened thinking has developed.

The History of Forensic Psychiatry and Psychology

Forensic psychology and psychiatry are still in their infancy. Relevant to this is the fact that since their conception in the 1840s, two very divergent models have struggled to dominate the development of juvenile justice programs. These have been the rehabilitation/treatment model and the

justice/punishment model (Mann 1976). Gradually psychological and psychiatric theory informed such programs.

Society has come some way down an enlightened path which is now lined with achievements, such as the McNaughton Rules (UK), which acknowledged that psychiatric and psychological factors need to be considered in sentencing. Behind these changes in thinking has been the influence of those in the fields of psychology, sociology, psychiatry and psycho-analysis who have challenged archaic ways of thinking about crime and have suggested alternate perspectives.

Freud in his paper *Some Character Types Met With in Psycho-Analytic Work* (1916) sketched some early psychological thoughts on crime in his piece entitled *Criminals From a Sense of Guilt*, in which he outlined his suspicion that the majority of crime could be conceptualised as relating to the paradox that there was often a sense of guilt present before the crime, that it did not arise from it, but conversely the crime arose from the sense of guilt. He stated: "These people might justly be described as criminals from a sense of guilt"—the notion that committing the crime resulted in a sense of relief.

These highly controversial first attempts at a psychological conceptualisation of crime, (though Freud did acknowledge Nietzsche's contribution to the subject), and in turn implications for intervention, were later eloquently expanded and adumbrated by Edward Glover (1922) in his classic paper, "The roots of crime". Powerfully written, though humble in its plea to the minds (and hearts) of the magistracy, the paper set out to demonstrate that there were varying typologies of psychopathology which could account for the phenomenon of crime in some individuals. A variation of this notion of typologies has been one of the promising areas of psychological research concerning delinquency in recent years (Quay 1987). Specifically, it has been shown that conduct-disordered youth can be classified along behavioural dimensions which can be used to predict treatment outcome with different psychological interventions.

In Glover's paper an attempt was made to demonstrate that certain psychological mechanisms (for example, symbol-formation, displacement, sublimation and projection) are excessively relied upon by criminals with certain types of psychopathology. Glover attempted to illustrate how these concepts could be used to understand criminal behaviour. He urged these considerations especially against the body of evidence that loss of freedom and punishment did little to reduce criminal behaviour in those who were under the pressure of psycho-logic rather than logic when they committed crimes. One of Glover's most compelling illustrations was that of relating emotional deprivation to stealing, a notion which he was to elaborate. As a result, Glover's advice to the magistracy was at times bold, advising for example, "that he would do well to consider all juvenile offences as behavioural problems rather than criminal acts". This sort of conclusion was of course highly controversial at the time.

Glover acknowledged the complexity of attempting to foster psychological approaches to the remediation of crime when he stated, "we must realise of course that penal codes, being in the last resort an expression of current social and moral values sharpened by the need for societal safety,

must of necessity express the age old prejudices, fears and penchant for punishment which have bedevilled social progress". Society, it has been said, "gets the crime it deserves and its stability owes something to the scapegoat system whereby the criminal is made to pay for the unconscious criminal tendencies that lie dormant in the community" (p. 9).

Developments in Forensic Psychology

Since these frontier days of forensic psychology, there has been much psychological theorising and experimental intervention. Much of this has taken place within the overall change of theoretical fashion in recent decades. Indeed, the early psycho-dynamic approaches were somewhat abandoned as psychologists developed an idolisation with things measurable and quantifiable. Out of this era (particularly the 1960s) came behaviourism, with its emphasis on changing behaviour by altering its consequences, and later by emphasising the development of new behaviour and skills.

After the realisation that such approaches were limited in their effectiveness, cognitive therapy was added with some improvement in effect. It is interesting and little acknowledged to note that cognitive therapy was initially derived by the psycho-analyst Beck who wanted to translate psycho-analytic notions into a more user friendly format. Added to this list, have been social system treatment approaches, especially family therapy, certain forms of which have shown promising results, as well as developments in psychometric assessment. One of the main advantages of this latter development has been to highlight the fact that offenders have different individual needs related to different underpinning psychological variables which may be associated with their offending. Sociological and psychological research studies have also highlighted the need for individually tailored psychological approaches and, relatedly, a multi-factorial model of causation of offending. Let us therefore examine in more detail what we have come to know about adolescent offending and psychological approaches to intervention.

Research and Psychological Interventions

At the outset it may be said that there is no single psychological approach to juveniles who offend which is seen to be useful for all types of offenders, but it is also *not* true that nothing works. It is probably generally true, however, that methods for evaluating interventions are thwarted by numerous issues, such as varying definitions of delinquency, non uniform applications of approaches and varying levels of training and expertise in applying treatments. Another factor is the extent to which the setting promotes the effect of the intervention, which includes the stance of those involved in the day-to-day care of the juveniles. A review of the research indicates that the developmental and social context of the offender is crucial to understanding and responding to delinquency also.

The need for this developmental and systemic understanding has clear implications for psychologists involved in the assessment and treatment of delinquents, especially in terms of how assessment information is formulated

and related to treatment recommendations. Clearly, there needs to be more of a focus on treatment effort, since the research indicates that the length of time spent incarcerated does not in itself necessarily equate with recidivism rates.

Offender Characteristics

The research literature concerning offender characteristics reveals certain key characteristics of the offender. In terms of age, for example, arrest rates in large birth cohort studies show the prevalence of arrests in NSW peaks at 16 years of age (Department of Juvenile Justice, unpublished data). Farrington (1987) has attempted to account for the curvilinear association between age and offending rates with several biological, behavioural and economic explanations. With respect to gender, boys, as is well known, have a higher prevalence and incidence rate than girls, for most delinquent behaviours. This is clearly evident in the NSW population. What is not so clear is why. There are of course a number of interesting theories which attempt to account for the sex difference including the notion that boys are socialised differently and need to obtain power and dominance in some way or another. There is also some evidence which suggests a slight association between social classes and delinquency. In both the USA and Australia, black youth have much higher rates of arrest and incarceration. Again, one needs to think about why this is so. These findings inevitably lead back to the notion of a multi-factorial explanation of delinquency and offending.

In terms of other features which characterise the individual adolescent offender, delinquency is associated with low verbal aptitude, immature stages of moral reasoning and low self-esteem. One of course needs to apply caution in interpreting these findings because of a related finding that children who have been abused tend to have low self-esteem and this can have a powerfully determining effect on learning ability and related psychometric test performance (Smith 1975). Another characteristic is that of the presence of deficits in social skills, attention, and problem-solving. There are, however, only equivocal conclusions about the actual role these play in the development and maintenance of delinquent behaviour.

With respect to the issue of gender sub-grouping it is interesting to note from the literature that, even though criminal behaviour is less frequent and severe with girls, univariate and multivariate studies show that similar individual and systemic characteristics are associated with delinquent behaviour in boys and girls. Yet in many respects female offenders can be treated more harshly than male offenders. A group of feminist lawyers writing about the systemic issues in the publication *Scarlet Woman* (Feminist Lawyers Group 1992), detail data from the USA and Australia which also revealed that women in custody often receive health care which falls well below the accepted guidelines.

Another interesting though not surprising finding is that the women's movement, and in particular feminist attitudes have not been associated with an increase in delinquent behaviour in girls. One implication of these findings is that psychological treatment for girls might be guided by similar principles as for boys, though perhaps with modifications such as the gender

of the therapist and a special focus on training all personnel involved in working with young women in custody about the special needs of this group.

These findings underline the importance of the overall context in which psychological interventions are attempted which includes the training and attitudes of staff involved in the day-to-day care of incarcerated juveniles. In a paper addressing these types of problems and the possibilities of treating incarcerated offenders, Russell Eisenmann (1992) discussed the negative effect on the treatment program of attitudes and behaviour of certain custodial staff. These sorts of issues must be addressed, particularly in relation to girls in custody, if treatment is to have a chance of success.

Behavioural Characteristics

As was mentioned above, delinquents have been found to cluster into behaviour dimension sub-groups. In a series of multivariate research projects Quay (1987) has shown that there is a similarity to these dimensions of behaviour in juveniles to categories defined by researchers of child psychopathology. These dimensions referred to above include under-socialised aggressive, which is seen to involve destructive and aggressive behaviour similar to conduct disorder, and which produces elevated externalising scores on the Achenbach Youth Self-Report. A second grouping is the socialised-aggressive dimension which describes juveniles who associate with delinquent peers. A third dimension is that of immaturity-attention deficit which is akin to hyperactivity, and the last dimension is anxiety withdrawal, which is internalising in character and associated with such scales on the Achenbach Youth Self Report. These subgroups were shown to account for differences amongst young offenders in a review of over 20 studies addressing recidivism, stimulation seeking and, most importantly, treatment outcome.

What these findings highlight once again is that there must be attention to individual needs and the needs of particular groups in custody which, as the historical writings first implied, suggest that there be careful consideration of psychological factors associated with offending and their related implications for treatment.

In regard to the abovementioned findings, it has now emerged that, whereas externalising problems (high levels of acting out behaviour) were seen to be predominant in incarcerated juveniles, researchers are finding high levels of incarcerated juveniles assessed as having high internalising (such as anxiety and withdrawal) scores. Armistead et al. (1992) compared a group of incarcerated male and female offenders with a non-offending group. In their conclusion they stressed the importance of assessing and treating offenders for difficulties other than externalising problems. They found high internalising scores amongst the incarcerated group.

The existence of self-report inventories such as the Achenbach Youth Self Report provide a means of assessing these behavioural dimension subgroups. A recent study by Motiuk, Motiuk and Bonta (1992), a group of Canadian researchers, indicated that offender self-reports in combination with more traditional risk/needs assessment is likely to be more useful than the

interview method alone in identifying needs of particular offender subgroups. This, of course, may be particularly appropriate when the psychologist is less experienced. Nonetheless, their use does allow for more comparative research.

Behaviour dimension subgrouping which is likely to be linked to personality appears to be more useful than personality as a predictor of treatment outcome. This is probably due to the conceptual and methodological difficulties in research linking personality with offending behaviour.

Having noted these characteristics and made some preliminary observations regarding the need to acknowledge the heterogeneity of this population in terms of psychological factors, let us now focus our attention on what is known from the research literature about the efficacy of psychological interventions.

Program Approach Research

Firstly, looking at *program approaches* to treatment in *institutional settings*, with any such approach one has to be aware of confounding variables which may impinge on the success of such a program. This goes beyond the issue of attitudes mentioned above and includes factors such as the nature of the offence, the perceived amenability of the youth to treatment, the perceived effectiveness of the treatments available and the availability of resources (Mulvey & Reppucci 1988). In summary nonetheless, reviews of programs have suggested there is some evidence (Hazel et al. 1982) for the effectiveness of behavioural, cognitive problem solving and skill development approaches, even though the generalisability and long-term effect of these are in doubt. These programs include such mechanisms and techniques as point systems, token economies and behavioural contracting which appear to be more efficacious than other approaches (Andrews 1989).

The presence of cognitive deficits in juveniles tends to make psycho-dynamic approaches more limited in their success. However, conceptualising in a psycho-dynamic way may nonetheless have value. A promising area in terms of actual technique with institutional programs, however, appears to be family therapy. Barton et al. (1985), for example, found that after treatment and 15 months following their release, recidivism in a treated group who received family therapy was down to 60 per cent compared to 93 per cent in a group who received no treatment.

With respect to community based treatments, when these are compared to institutional treatment programs, it has been found that intensive community based treatments which aim at improving family functions and incorporate some cognitive-behavioural strategies and address delinquents' social networks, show the most promise when it comes to program approaches. It is worth noting that research on wilderness schemes indicates these do not appear to produce lasting effects (Winterdyk & Roesch 1981). More significant, however, are studies which have raised the importance of community infrastructure to maintain the gains of any intervention (Armstrong 1982).

Success with detention centre programs seems to depend on the use of multifaceted approaches which relate to the research findings concerning offender characteristics and the systems within which juveniles operate. Hagan and King (1992), for example, analysed the recidivism rate of 55 youths placed in an institutionally based psychological treatment program in which all the staff were trained in the treatment approach. The program contained (cognitive behaviour modification) strategies to facilitate appropriate behaviours as well as individual treatment contracts, family therapy and community aftercare placements. At follow up, 49 per cent of the group had not reoffended. Redondo et al. (1991) also report a similar type of treatment program in which they stressed the importance of multidisciplinary teams which periodically review the juveniles in the program.

The research on institutional treatment programs, thus seems to bear out the need for tailored approaches addressing the relevant dimensions of delinquent behaviour and the developmental factors associated with the offending.

Individual Approaches

With respect to findings concerning individual treatments, a number of conclusions can also be drawn. The first is that the more recent cognitive behavioural approaches to treatment overall have not proved to be more effective than the prior psycho-dynamic ones. In fact in a major review of these individual treatment approaches, Blakely and Davidson (1984) found that they were either ineffective or, when they were effective, the effects did not generalise. Michaelson (1987) has hypothesised that a combination of problem-solving skills combined with social skills training and other cognitive behavioural approaches might be more promising. Kazdin (1987) has also noted that treatments which intervened with family and peer systems as part of the treatment process were the most promising, possibly suggesting reasons for the failure of some of the other earlier behavioural approaches. These findings of course are entirely consistent with the notion of multidimensional causation models.

In terms of social system treatment, interventions findings indicate that family therapy is useful with predelinquents, but the findings are more equivocal when it comes to delinquent offenders. Yet family therapy does seem to add to the effectiveness of other treatments and is generally more effective than other treatments (Hazelrigg et al. 1987). Peer group interventions alone seem relatively ineffective yet, when combined with approaches that promote the offenders' association with pro social peers, they appear more effective (Feldman et al. 1983).

Multisystemic therapy (Henggeler & Borduin 1989) has also shown some promise. This approach is brief, problem focussed and addresses family and developmental issues incorporating treatment components from a wide range on a needs basis. It puts emphasis on the therapist having a wide range of skills. Borduin et al. (1989) reviewed the outcome of this approach with 210 juvenile offenders and their families and found that it was more effective in

terms of lower long-term rates of self-reported delinquent behaviour and arrests, when compared to individual counselling.

As one can see from this relatively brief review, the corpus of research literature concerning psychological approaches to the treatment of juveniles in detention is enormous, and yet no final conclusions can yet be made about what constitutes the best approach. Initially, promising approaches have met with problems, especially the generalisability of their effects. What is clear is that some approaches do have efficacy; so there is evidence that some things do work, yet it is not always clear why.

Some Conclusions Regarding the Research Findings

It seems that there are two main issues that can be cited in relation to why some approaches seem to have only limited success. One issue is that these approaches seem not to relate to the developmental and social (ecological) factors which research indicates are associated with the establishment and maintenance of delinquent behaviour. Therefore, no matter how good a treatment component might be intrinsically, if it is not supported by interventions with other systems in which a juvenile operates, such as the family, then it appears to have a compromised effectiveness.

The second issue is that treatments which do not address individual needs are also limited. Above-mentioned evidence can be seen to support the need for individual treatments, tailored to particular needs. One means to achieve this end may be to invoke assessment along the lines of Quay's subgroups using multi-disciplinary team assessments which incorporate standardised instruments such as the Youth Self Report to identify juveniles according to behavioural dimensions from which psychopathology and personality can be inferred. These can be used to indicate the type of intervention needed and how this might be integrated within a multi-systemic approach. This would invoke systems theory and a bio-psychosocial model. In turn, it would address the needs of subgroups and allow for the incorporation of the research findings concerning delinquent behaviour. It should also logically lead to a model of psychological services which incorporates standards of assessment and intervention.

This may be illustrated by considering sexual offenders. Sexual offenders, as a group, appear to have higher rates of internalising symptoms and interpersonal difficulties, especially in relation to establishing relationships with their peers. Deficits have also been reported in family relations. Further, a significant percentage of these offenders have been victims of the abuse (sexual, physical or verbal) themselves. Intervention after careful assessment might therefore, hypothetically, involve individual therapy and/or group therapy (which research suggests should involve a focus on accepting responsibility) and family therapy. Depending on the level of cognitive functioning, this intervention may involve a cognitive/behavioural or psycho-dynamic approach. In an institutional setting this could be supported by a variety of incentive systems and self-esteem enhancing programs conducted by staff briefed about the best methods of supporting the therapy.

Similarly, with violent offenders, who as a group have been found to have higher levels of personal impairment than other delinquent samples and where there is clear evidence of disturbed family relations, an individually tailored treatment approach could focus on specific behavioural techniques such as anger management and family therapy work, as appropriate. The efficacy of psycho-dynamic approaches within this sort of multisystemic approach is largely untested. There is great value in psycho-dynamic concepts such as projective identification (where the therapist can be made to experience by the client unwanted aspects of his emotional life which sheds light on his conflicts), identification and dependency. The concept of identification with the aggressor/victim is also often useful in understanding violent offenders. The concept of dependency with associated failure to internalise sustaining capacities is particularly useful in understanding those immature personalities where there is a reliance on external substances to cope with internal feeling states which are often unknown, unlabelled and felt to be outside one's control. If these types of concepts are incorporated into a multisystemic approach, it is possible to achieve a greater depth of understanding which can guide the intervention.

Conclusions Regarding Psychological Interventions

A useful way of dealing with offenders then appears to be to utilise the research findings by taking a multisystemic approach, using an empirically derived means of classifying offenders and then matching offenders with best fit treatments. In turn, a conceptual framework (and associated philosophy) is also needed which incorporates a bio-psychosocial model blended with psycho-dynamic concepts (especially those concerning destructiveness, guilt, and reparation). As stated at the outset, the success of techniques used, and the research they are based upon are perhaps related to the extent to which they promote an individual's belief in the power of his reparative, restorative and loving capacities, and in turn his ability to engage in sustaining and loving human relationships. In cases where juveniles have become hardened and destructive this may need to be fostered in its most disguised and desperately weak form.

In her most insightful and deeply human book *Live Company*, Alvarez (1992) gives a clear account of the value of such a philosophical underpinning in dealing with psychopathic children and adolescents. She notes the psychopathic child has an addiction to cruelty and cruel power but says that "before they can get in touch with more caring concerned parts of themselves, they have to begin to take other people more seriously . . . there needs to be a sobering down from the omnipotent destructive state where anything goes". She notes that when a youth "plucks up the courage to reveal his disturbed (baby) self . . ." then as with the real baby comes a new opportunity to encounter another person in a way that enables the youth to experience not only his own capacity to receive goodness and pleasure, but also his/her capacity to give it.

Ultimately then, we need to adopt a multisystemic means to help clients achieve a reparative, responsible, constructive and loving outcome.

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