

Impact of Recreation and Programming within Male Correctional Facilities



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Introduction/Purpose

Physiological and psychological problems for offenders can be managed with recreation and programming targeted at their individual or group needs (Fenton et al., 2017; Link & Williams, 2019). These programs can be designed specifically to benefit the needs of each offender (Alexander, 2017). The purpose of this paper is to explore how recreational activities in offenders' daily routines can have a positive impact on their overall health, prison environment, coping skills, and recidivism rates.



Methods

Twelve questionnaires were sent to current offenders and past offenders on November 6th, 2019 via a contact at a correctional facility. Three surveys were returned. Data collection took longer than expected due to correctional staff having to inspect/read each envelope sent to the facilities.



Survey Questions

What was enjoyed the least?

- A: "The super oppressive officers and corrupt administration"
- B: "Being around people who are absolute scum who have absolutely no moral fiber"
- C: "The staff was very uneducated and unwilling to listen to reason- punished for things not having anything to do with"

Results

Participants A, B, and C were white males ages 25, 42, and 62, respectively. Recreational activities were offered, but differed at each facility. Participants A and B were in medium and maximum prisons that offered single activities including weights, track, and movies. Participant C was in a federal prison and had access to more social activities, including group sports, where he interacted with other offenders. Participants A and C mentioned stress reduction due to recreation activities, corroborating Ambrose and Roskys (2013). Participant B believed recreation did not have any benefits other than passing time, reflecting Alexander's (2017) findings. Participants A and B had lower socialization with other races, as compared to Participant C. Fenton et al. (2017) found that correctional group recreation builds social connections. Ostensibly, Participant C built better social connections over Participants A and B because of access to, and participation in, group sports.

Quotes from Inmates

Participant A:

"After working out the endorphins released made me feel good"
"The people who stuck with me through the sentence gave me hope and made me feel loved"

Participant B:

"Goals were to make prisons money, rehab in prison is a JOKE"
"Society shunned me and I only had one financial option"

Participant C:

"Technology had advanced over the 7 years in everything"
"Visitation with family and friends- help keep in touch with things going on in family and world outside"



Conclusion

Incorporating recreation and rehabilitative programming into offenders' daily routines can have a positive impact on their overall health. Social connections within the correctional facility create a healthier environment for offenders to grow positively. Offering more recreation programs related specifically to each offenders' needs will develop proper coping mechanisms to ease societal reintegration.