Impact of Recreation and Programming within Male Correctional Facilities

Michaela Langley and Edwin Gómez, Ph.D., CPRP
East Carolina University

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.

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 Alexanders’ (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.

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.