

Recidivism in Corrections

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Abstract

The intention of this research was to identify some factors that affect recidivism in the City of Opa-Locka and Carol City Florida. An overview of the changes in corrections in the last thirty years was conducted and an analysis was completed. Data was collected utilizing a survey and the information gleaned will possibly provide recommendations, which will diminish the problem of recidivism.

Introduction

For more than thirty (30) years corrections has confronted a vigorous fight against recidivism. The government created new laws to safeguard the community from criminal activities, to increase and facilitate dissemination of information to the public, and to identify the criminal elements in our streets.

Florida Department of Corrections has traveled different paths in order to respond to the need of society and the political arena. In 1956 Florida adapts a new correctional code, establishing the Division of Corrections. General Philosophy changes from “punishment” to “corrections”, (Timeline 1956-1961). During that time a great emphasis was placed in the rehabilitation of the offender and the prison increased educational training for offenders and the first transition officers are hired to assist inmates with placement upon release. In 1975 the Department is reorganized and changed to the Department of Offender Rehabilitation.

In 1978 the Florida Department of Offender Rehabilitation is renamed Florida Department of Corrections. In the eighties (80's) and nineties (90's) Corrections changed trajectory and focus in the punitive aspects of supervision and incarceration of offenders. The main goal of the Department is the safety of the community; rehabilitation is relegated to a second position. During this period of time several training and therapeutic Programs were eliminated from the prison systems. Restitution Centers were phased out and the supervision of homeless individuals increased in the State of Florida. The dynamic of the corrections Probation officer changed and became a law enforcement officer with zero tolerance toward any deviation from the offender.

This research will attempt to identify several factors that affects Recidivism and the ability of some offenders to overcome these difficulties and to remain in a productive and law obedience citizen.

As James Austin (2001) wrote “re-entry has become the new buzz word in Correctional Reform” (p.314).

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this research is to identify some of the factors that affect recidivism in the city of Opa-Locka and Carol City. It will also provide insight into the offenders point of view of the process they encounter to re-enter society.

Methods

The research was geographically limited to Carol City and Opa-Locka, Miami-Dade County, Florida.

The available literature for background information related to recidivism in corrections across the nation was abundant and encompassed a period of over thirty years. A thorough review of this literature was conducted and it revealed extensive information regarding this area of concern.

To determine the common factors for recidivism in this community a survey consisting of five (5) questions was designed. The survey was based on open-ended questions. The survey was conducted in personal interviews with offenders who were pre-selected with the following common records:

- a. Offender presently on supervision with Florida Department of Corrections.
- b. Between the ages of 25 – 50.
- c. Were in prison for a minimum of three (3) years and had a minimum of two (2) prior arrests.

Percentage was used as a primarily statistical method however, the analytical report of the data was based on comparisons of the “Productive member of Society” with the individual that were returned to the prison or pending a revocation hearing.

As Mr. Jim Collins stated in his book, *Good to Great* (2001), “The key question is what systematically distinguishes winners from those who never won” (p.8).

Results

This section provides the research with the responses from the thirty offenders interviewed for this research.

Table I –Environmental:

Home (Parents)	Wife or Girlfriend	Friend or other Family Member	Homeless
7	13	6	4
23%	43%	20%	13%

Table II – Employment history (present).

Working	Not Working	Supported by Family	Disabled
10	17	2	1
33%	57%	6%	3%

Table III – Unemployment history.

1-6 months	7 to 12 months	13-18 months	Never been employed
6	9	6	9
20%	30%	20%	30%

Table IV- Family assistance.

Yes	No
26	7
86%	23%

Type of Assistance (Cont.)*

Food Shelter	Monetary	Transportation	Other
26	10	2	0
87%	33%	6%	

*Interviewees may appear on more than one category.

V – Therapeutic Groups.

Yes	No
8	22
26%	73%

The comparison:

1. The research was conducted with 30 offenders from which 26 returned to some kind of family environments, from those 10 were arrested for new charges or technical violations of supervision.
2. Nineteen (19) offenders were not working or supported by family from which 13 were arrested for new charges on technical violations.

Discussion

Although recidivism in the Criminal Justice System have been studied for the past 30 years this research revealed some possible solutions for the improvement of the reintegration of the offender to society.

The purpose of this research was to identify some of the factors that affect recidivism in the city of Opa-Locka and Carol City. Five questions were generated with the purpose to examine the Dynamic of recidivism. Thirty offenders that meet the established criteria were interviewed and the responses entered in table form for further analysis.

The review of the responses solely delineated some reverent factors that affect recidivism. The importance of ties in the community and the support of family and friends, the liability to secure and maintain employment, transportation and support groups are some of the things that affect offender's reintegration to society. However, the research clearly demonstrates that it is not only one factor that affect recidivism, this condition overlaps to create an unsafe environment conducive to criminal behavior. Placing level of importance on one factor will create an inaccurate picture of the dynamic of recidivism. One of the most basic elements and the energy that mobilize the overlapping factor is the human behavior of the offenders.

In reference to the effectiveness of parole and probation in the integration process of offenders in society, the offenders agree that they received no assistance from their probation/parole officers. Twenty-two of the offenders stated that they were provided with the address of the "employment office" the four (4) individuals that were "homeless" were provided the address of local shelters, and some arrangements were made to secure a bed for the night. Regarding the offenders that returned to reside with family or friends, twelve (12) of them expressed dissatisfaction of returning to the same environment "the same fights and bullshit". Four (4) mentioned feeling depressed and dissociated from the family.

Conclusion

The need for improvement in the action plan developed for the offender at the time of release from prison should delineate a road to fight against returning to criminal activities.

There is a need for a comprehensive, integrated plan that encompass, housing, employment education/training theoretical treatment and close supervision.

There is a need for the community in general to get involved in the integration of offenders in society; other governmental agencies need to be integrated in this process. The housing authority, the Department of Transportation, Department of Labor, the school system and the local governments must establish a partnership for the integration of releasee to a productive society.

The conclusion reached regarding recidivism is that will always be a part of the criminal justice system. The goal should be to reduce recidivism. To reduce the amount of time an offender is re-arrested and to reduce the type of crimes for which they are re-arrested (reduce of violent crimes). The reduction of recidivism should be a responsibility embraced by all members of the community with the partnership of all governmental agencies.

The following is a list of recommendations for improving offender release to the community.

Phase I

A – Increase of Vocational/Educational training in the prisons (one year prior to release).

B – Therapeutic treatments

C – Addiction Treatment

Phase II

A – A division will be created to re-integrate inmates back into society.

1 – Housing

2 – Job Development

3 – Therapeutic treatments

4 - Addiction treatment

B – Interagency partnerships will be developed in order to assist the offenders.

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