

Criminon Research Briefing

A Study of

The Criminon Program in Israel Prisons

The following is a summary of the paper, "Evaluation of the Contribution of Prisoners' Participation in a Study Framework in Prisons..." by Dr. Ofra Stein. This summary has been prepared by ABLE International. A copy of Dr. Stein's paper can be obtained from Criminon International or ABLE International.

Evaluation of the Contribution of Prisoners' Participation in a Study Framework in Prisons

On Learning Abilities and Social Trends

Criminon Studies and Elementary Education Studies

by Dr. Ofra Stein

This paper analyzes the impact of two study programs on the behavior of inmates in five Israeli prisons. The purpose of the study was to determine the degree to which the program reduced violent behavior and enhanced social behavior.

The study dealt with 322 prisoners from four male and one female prison in Israel, Tzalmon, Givon, Naveh Tirza, Rimonim and Eshmoret. The prisoners were divided into three groups: a group which spent their mornings participating in the "Elementary Education" program - which is an education program running from basic reading skills through high school; a group which studied the Criminon program in the morning; and a group which did not participate in any type of training program.

Both programs were directed extensively towards rehabilitation of prisoners and bettering their future. The Elementary Education program offered knowledge and education, constituting an entry card into society and a tool for social advancement, while the Criminon program focused on developing social and learning capabilities and establishing a world of values. The concept of Criminon is based upon transmitting tools for self-supervision and connection with others based upon common ground, with the objective of decreasing the chances for social alienation.

The underlying premise of the study is that

crime and violence occur when individuals are poorly integrated into the social fabric of the society. Simply imprisoning individuals, then, fails to improve, and indeed, may worsen, their level of social integration leading to the unsurprising result of recidivism rates approaching 70%. Accordingly the research hypothesis was that participation in any study program would result in an improvement of learning capabilities and improved social integration. It was recognized that programs differ in their approaches, in the degree to which integrating were interwoven in the principles of its study program. Consequently, the degree and intensity of change was anticipated to be dependent upon the unique qualities of each program. And, naturally, better results were expected among the groups of prisoners studying in the two programs than for those who were not involved in any study program.

The study examined the social skills of participants from two complementary aspects - interaction with peers and interaction with figures of authority. Social skills consist of capabilities for interaction, cognitive abilities, and abilities for self-control.

Interaction capabilities refer to all visible modes of behavior: cooperation, accepting criticism, negotiation, expressing agreement or disagreement, ability to give compliments, standing up to social pressure, and others.

The Prisoners Learning and Education Department in the Education, Treatment and Rehabilitation Division

of the Israeli Prison System (IPS) is responsible for operating an educational system for prisoners in all criminal prisons in Israel. The objective of this department is to design processes for changing behavior and to strengthen life capabilities of prisoners in order to help them become integrated into society. The topics of formal and informal education serve as a tool for alleviating pressure, strengthening self image and belief in personal abilities, increasing feelings of belonging, enriching and strengthening attitudes of belonging to society, and learning habits and professional training.

The educational system in the IPS operates in a uniform basis in all prisons, and includes formal education: "Elementary Education" for completing elementary school (reading and writing to the 12th grade level and matriculation). The objective of this track is to develop cognitive skills, learning and creativity, organization of information, self-confidence, function on the work and family level, and developing citizens who possess national, human, and social values.

The participants in the Elementary Education program are prisoners who lack elementary education and young prisoners who are mainly sent to complete their education and then go out to find work. Students receive a system of benefits and rewards that encourage them and help them avoid dropping out: learning materials and certificates of excellence, vacations, visits, recommendations for the release committee, improved living conditions, integration into rehabilitation work, outside work and other rewards.

Criminon studies deal with learning skills and life capabilities, and emphasize use of a dictionary as part of the learning skills in all the areas of study, as well as strengthening the student by transmitting patterns of independence and personal responsibility for learning, by using methods of increasing feelings of pride and self-respect. This educational program is designed not only for educational purposes, but also to create changes in thinking and patterns of behavior

This study looked at the influence of learning abilities and social factors upon prisoners participating in formal study frameworks in five Israeli prisons. Social skills, interaction with peers and staff, self-control, values of self-image, motivation to study, vocabulary, and learning skills were examined.

Research Procedure:

Following a personal interview with the director of the education, treatment, and rehabilitation department,

educational coordinators, and officers in each prison, the research subjects were selected according to the study groups. The subjects were asked to respond to a questionnaire anonymously. Adherence to secrecy was used to avoid deviation and attempt to sway the researchers. The questionnaires were distributed in the prisons in the spring of 2006 and again at the conclusion of the study period.

The questionnaires included a series of questions addressing the key variables in the study:

- * Self control -- the ability to relinquish immediate satisfaction in favor of more desirable behavior. This is accomplished by means of controlling anger, controlling violent behavior, self-persuasion, awareness of feelings and awareness of behavior.

- * Self image -- reflecting the value that an individual relates to himself, against a background of personal experiences that include social and academic successes and failure.

- * Motivation - as this influences all learning activities and academic success and the creation of motivation for both internal and external learning. The study sought to assess the influence of the study programs in upon academic achievements, motivation to learn, and learning skills..

The specific issues addressed are summarized in the following tables:

Dependent Variables	
	Life capabilities (Social Skills)
	Interaction with peers
	Interaction with staff
	Self-control/Violence
	Self Image
	Learning Products were measured by
:	two variables:
	(a) motivation to learn
	(b) vocabulary
	Learning Skills

Independent Variables	
Types of Program	
	1. Criminon Class
	2. Elementary Education Class
	3. Non-learning Group

The Criminon program and Elementary Education program constituted the independent variables as well as serving as a means of rehabilitation of criminals. The research did not deal with other forms of rehabilitation such as therapy. The control group consisted of prisoners who were not studying at all.

In light of the fact that prisoners in the control group did not participate in any study program, the variables of learning skills, motivation to learn interaction with staff, and interaction with peers could not be examined in relation to them. Accordingly, the analysis relates to the differences between the groups in the following manner: Prisoners studying in the Criminon program and those studying in the Elementary Education program were assessed in relation to all the variables of learning skills, motivation to learn, vocabulary, interaction with staff, interaction with peers, self-control/violence, and self-image.

The initial questionnaire (before) results were tabulated and processed to establish a baseline for comparison of the three groups so that differences between the groups could be taken into account when viewing the final results. The after-program questionnaires were then tabulated and an analysis done to establish what changes in the independent variables were statistically significant and which program produced the largest effect.

Results:

The study examined three factors connected to crime or which might decrease the incidence of crime: social behavior, which was measured by questions about interaction with peers (helping others and receiving help from others), interaction with the teaching staff (the staff helps prisoners, takes an interest in their problems, students make progress in their study material even if they do not understand), self control (violent behavior expressed in reactions to verbal or physical skirmishes, participation in physical fights or threats), self-image (satisfaction with myself, capability of performing tasks, self-belief in success in attaining goals) and learning products that were defined as motivation to learn (interest in studies, investment in studies) and vocabulary (matching words with definitions).

The results were as follows:

Self-Image: The scores were higher (most improved) among the Criminon group, followed by the Elementary Education group, and finally, non-learners.

Self-image was significantly higher among prisoners in advanced stages of learning, both in the Criminon program as well as the Elementary Education program. These dif-

ferences stemmed from interaction between the learning groups and the stage of learning. The lowest self-image appeared among prisoners beginning to study in the Criminon group. These findings support the claim that participation in an educational program influences prisoner rehabilitation, and strengthens social behavior.

Interaction with Staff: The best results were among the Criminon group as compared to those studying in the Elementary Education group.

Vocabulary: the highest scores were those of the Criminon group, followed by those studying in the Elementary Education framework, and the lowest score was that of those not studying at all.

Violence: The lowest score (most improved) occurred among prisoners studying in the Criminon program, followed by similarity in violence scores among those in the Elementary Education group and those not studying at all.

Interaction with the Teaching Staff: The highest level of interaction occurred among the Criminon group as compared to prisoners in the Elementary Education group.

Use of Sources of Information: Prisoners who were in advanced studies in the Criminon program and in the Elementary Education program made more use of sources of information than beginning learners.

Differences in Levels of Interaction with the Teaching Staff: Prisoners who were in the advanced stage in the Criminon program had the best interaction with teachers as compared to the lowest, which was among the Elementary Education program students in both beginning and advanced stages.

The research results point to the Criminon program as the most efficient in the three basic dimensions which were examined. In general students in the Criminon program had an advantage in the dimension of interaction with peers as compared to the other education groups. However, assessment of the differences between the prisons points to different levels of gaps between the prisons in this aspect. Assessment of interaction with peers with differentiation between the length of study time in the two programs revealed that advanced students in the second Criminon course and onward had better results than those in the beginning Criminon course (those in the first course). Students in the Elementary Education study group - scores in interaction with peers among the

beginning students (illiterate) were higher than those of the advanced ones. Consequently, advanced Criminon students had better interaction with peers in comparison to all the other research groups. It should also be noted that all advanced Criminon students completed a course in communications, a fact that helps to explain the higher scores among these prisoners.

Thus the findings that the Criminon group in general and those in the advanced Criminon group in particular were relatively higher than the other groups supports the proposition that Criminon students receive social skills and behavioral norms.

Another explanation for the higher scores among the Criminon group in the dimension of interaction with peers is connected to the strategy of studying in pairs that strengthens social traits and feelings of support. The reason for this is that every pair of students achieves their tasks only when both members complete their task successfully. This trend is expressed in all the prisons.

Assessment of the differences between interaction with the staff among beginning and advanced groups in the two programs reveals that in all cases advanced students in both Criminon and Elementary Education program had better and significant interaction with the staff than beginning students. The duration of studies in each of the programs therefore constitutes an influential factor upon better interaction with the staff.

The level of violence (self-control) was examined in all research groups. Findings point to a lower level of violence among the Criminon students. The scores for violence among the Elementary Education program group and those not studying are similar and higher than those of the Criminon group.

In other words, these prisoners displayed better self-control. It should be noted that the lowest scores on the violence scale (or the highest for self-control) point to a decline in behavioral disturbances similar to taking part in physical fights, verbal fights and threats.

This conclusion verifies IPS reports of a decrease in tens of percent of the rate of return to prison among Criminon graduates, and on improved behavior of Criminon students in the wards.

The research results support the fact that self-control is most outstanding among Criminon students - particularly among the advanced students - in both their interaction with the staff as well as their high scores on other parameters. A connection is evident between the

duration of studies, and of achievements and learning upon the improvement of students handling of their external environment, notably evidenced by improved control of their behavior. Studying the learning material for the Criminon course shows emphasis upon self-efficacy in association of an environment of equals (based on the non-hierarchical relationship which the Criminon students engaged in with their course supervisors).

The hypothesis that study products (motivation to learn and vocabulary) would improve behavior was refuted. There were no significant differences between participants in the various programs. As already noted, however, the related variable of duration of time on study did have an impact on behavior.

In general, better results were observed among prisoners studying in the two groups than in the non-learning group. This finding supports the general assumption that studies contribute to improved behavior, since participation in studies can influence the formation of positive patterns of behavior (and improve learning capabilities).

Summary

The study showed that learning programs are able to contribute to decreasing the rate of violence. This suggests that it is of great importance to invest in educational and learning programs both in the educational system outside prisons as well as in the education program in prisons. A learning program is able to decrease the rate of criminal behavior and violence.

The subjects being studied were found to be less important in increasing feelings of self-efficacy and self-confidence than participation in a program, generally. However the best results in most cases appeared among the Criminon students. The Criminon program is unique in that it strengthens life capabilities and skills for its students. A formal, more academically-oriented study program, on the other hand, achieved less positive results. This shows the importance of transmitting tools and treating the dynamic, social factors underlying criminal behavior in order to prevent violence.

The causes of crime are connected to social processes, deviation from rules of normative behavior, and with social tension. Prison learning frameworks in general and the Criminon program in particular deal with the social value factors that were found to be connected to social processes similar to adhering to learning and enforcement (supervision), to coping with rules of behavior that were established in educational institutions in the prisons and strengthening interaction with peers and staff that contrib-

ute to alleviating social tension. In addition, the Criminon program deals with values and norms of behavior by developing a prisoners' center of awareness through forming personal values and understanding the reasons that led them to crime, including relating to factors of negative influence and assimilating negative norms of behavior. Not surprisingly, the study findings showed that learning in the Criminon program enhances the individual's ability to recognize negative processes that influence him, and offer him/her tools to cope with them and to avoid these influences.

In Conclusion

The two programs that were studied - the Elementary Education program and Criminon - had a common objective in that both were directed at rehabilitating criminals and bettering their future. The difference between these two programs lies in the manner and methods of attaining that objective. The Elementary Education program offers

knowledge and education, that constitute an entry card into society and a tool for social movement, while the Criminon program focuses upon developing learning and social skills and a basis for a world of values. The approach of Criminon is based upon transmitting tools for self-supervision and establishing ties with others based upon common ground, with the objective of decreasing the chances for social alienation.

The research results point to the need for transmitting life capabilities and learning skills that contribute to the development of normative behavior, and in doing so help attain the greatest influence through education and learning in prisons and in the educational system in the schools. It is therefore recommended that the advantages of the two programs be combined to first teach reading and writing, and then to transmit life capabilities and learning skills, according to Criminon and then add knowledge and Elementary Education.

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