

Rehabilitating Sex Offenders: Lessons from the Correctional Service of Canada

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Introduction

This project focuses on the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC), and their efforts to rehabilitate sex offenders within their system. The rehabilitation of sex offenders is a controversial and problematic issue, however, with the correct programs and treatment, sex offenders may be rehabilitated so they can one day be released back into the public.

Background

Although only ten percent of federally incarcerated inmates in Canada are sex offenders (CSC, 2015), there is a tremendous amount of public fear and scrutiny regarding these offenders. As almost all federally incarcerated inmates in Canada will one day be released back into the public, it is imperative that we, as a nation, offer the most comprehensive rehabilitation programs we can (Wilson, Picheca, & Prinzo, 2007). With this in mind, the CSC offers a variety of different rehabilitation programs for the offenders under its care, including sex offender specific programs (CSC, 2014). This project critically appraises the literature that exists surrounding the issue of rehabilitating sex offenders, and compares it to the programs that the CSC currently offers within its institutions.

Methods

The method used to complete this project was a critical appraisal. A thorough literature review of the current research was conducted, and the most topical information was chosen for review. In order to find the most relevant and valid information, the Justice Institute of British Columbia’s online database was searched using keywords relevant to the topic. This search returned almost three thousand results. In order to narrow the results, the search criteria was narrowed to sub-databases such as PsycINFO, and SocINDEX, and to only include full text, peer reviewed articles from the year 1990 onwards, which narrowed the results to fifteen hundred articles. From here, more specific key-words were used, such as ‘Canada’, ‘Correctional Service of Canada’, and ‘rehabilitation’. This search returned around thirty results, which were then analyzed for their relevance and validity concerning this research.

Results/Findings

- Three main themes emerged from this research, and were compared to current CSC practices. These themes were:
- The need for additional and supplementary programs on top of the current sex offender rehabilitation programs the CSC offers
 - Issues surrounding the release of sex offenders back into the community at the end of their incarceration
 - Issues surrounding how rehabilitation programs can be considered effective on both an international, and domestic scale

These themes were compared to the current practices of the CSC, and further discussion was undertaken.

Discussion

From this research, it was concluded that the CSC is operating effective programs to rehabilitate sex offenders in its institutions. Comparison to other similar nations showed that the recidivism rates of sex offenders in Canada are comparable (Harris & Hanson, 2004). The research also showed that the CSC offers some additional and supplementary programs to rehabilitate sex offenders with underlying issues, which may be contributing to their sex offences (CSC, 2009). Finally, there are some programs that are available for offenders once they have been released from prisons, which offenders can access in the community (Wilson et al, 2007). As the main limitation of this research was inclusion of information only on Canadian offenders, it was concluded that the CSC’s practices reflect the research that exists regarding best practices for rehabilitating sex offenders, however some recommendations were made, regarding areas in which the CSC may be able to improve.



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Conclusions or Recommendations

Several conclusions and recommendations were made from this research. These recommendations include, but are not limited to:

1. Design sex offender rehabilitation programs which incorporate substance abuse treatment as a complete package
2. Incorporate more mental health treatment into National Sex Offender Programs
3. Mandate sex offender programs be taken by high risk offenders
4. Design more community based programs to be taken by offenders after their release into the community
5. Continue the practice of updating and managing sex offender programs to reflect continuing research in the field of sex offender rehabilitation

The research shows that the CSC’s rehabilitation programs are effective, and comparable to countries with similar criminal justice systems. By continuing these practices, as well as including the recommendations made here, the CSC can continue to rehabilitate sex offenders to the satisfaction of all stakeholders involved in the process.

References

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