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Measurement, Assessment, and Reduction of Violence in Juvenile Offenders

Abstract

Objective

To determine if there are any changes in self-concept, locus of control and frequency of aggressive behaviors in juvenile offenders. As a function of receiving Direct Decision Therapy (DDT), a cognitive-based group therapy. Objectives are whether DDT will effect positive change in self-concept, higher interval control and significantly few aggressive behaviors.

Method

Sample was 52 male juvenile offenders who were First commitments at California Youth Authority. Data was extracted from the author's Doctoral dissertation at U.S. International University (1978). Mean age = 18.5 years. Subjects were randomly assigned to two groups, Group A and Group B. Subjects were administered the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale (TSCS) and the Rotter Internal-External Control Scale (RIECS). Aggression was measured by the Disciplinary Decision Making System (DDMS). The DDMS is categorized infractions of institutional rules. Infractions are categorized for most aggressive behaviors (Level B), Consequences are possible add on time to confinement, to least aggressive (EP) loss of evening program.

All subjects attended (2) one hour group therapy sessions utilizing the treatment modality of DDT, a Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy.

A cross-over design was utilized wherein subjects in Group A were treated with DDT while Group B was placed on a waiting list for four weeks.

To measure aggressive behaviors, baselines of Level A, B and EP behaviors for all subjects were obtained for 50 days prior to treatment for Group A and 75 days prior to treatment for Group B. Subjects were given a pretest questionnaire prior to treatment.

Prior to treatment, subjects in Group A were assigned to 3 groups and subjects in Group B to 3 groups. This was to assure random distribution of subjects from different living units.

Upon termination of treatment, subjects in Group A were administered the TSCS, RIECS and a questionnaire developed by the investigator. (Appendix B).

Subjects in Group B after a waiting period of four weeks attended two one hour group therapy sessions utilizing DDT for four weeks. The TSCS and RIECS were administered again 50 and 100 days post-treatment.

Results and Data Analysis

The data change scores on the TSCS, RIECS and behavioral measures (pretest and post-test) were analyzed via 2 way ANOVA. Discriminant Analysis was conducted with 3 dependent variables, viz, EP behaviors, and total positive score on TSCS and RIECS scores. Subjects mean scores on RIECS and TSCS were compared to norm group mean scores pre- and post-treatment. Pre- and post-test attitudinal measures were analyzed via 2-way ANOVA.

Subjects scores on TSCS were significantly higher from baseline to second follow-up for both groups ($z = 2.2, p > .01$). For Group A and $z = 2.1, p > .05$ for Group B. Scores in the behavior subscale of the TSCS were significantly higher from baseline to second follow-up for Group A ($z = 1.8, p < .08$) and for Group B ($z = 8.19, p < .05$). There were significant changes in TSCS scores on self- satisfaction, personal – self, total –self and total positive score.

In terms of measurement of aggression, for level A behaviors there was a significant reduction during treatment ($p = .04, p < .05$) and for baseline and between baseline and first follow-up ($p = .02, p < .05$) for Group A. For Group B there was a significant drop in Level A behaviors ($p = .02, p < .05$) during treatment, there was a significant reduction in Level A behaviors from baseline to first follow-up ($p = .03, p < .05$). For EP behaviors, There was a marked reduction for Group A from baseline to second follow-up which first missed significance ($.10 > p > .05$). However, for Group B there were significant reductions in EP behaviors during

treatment ($p = .01$, $p < .05$), between baseline and first follow-up, between baseline and second follow-up ($p = .02$, $p < .05$) and between baseline and third follow-up ($p = .02$, $p < .05$).

In conclusion, the data supports the experimental hypothesis. There were significantly fewer aggressive behaviors in male juvenile offenders as measured by the DDMS system as a function of treatment with DDT.

Prediction of Success

Discriminant and multiple regression analysis conducted to determine whether significant preparation of variance in outcome measures could be predicted from pre-treatment characteristics. Goal was to determine whether or not subjects whose RIECS scores and TSCS total positive scores improved (i.e. became more internal and had better self-concepts at the end of treatment compared to the beginning) could be discriminated from those who did not improve on the basis of pretreatment characteristics. For RIECS, discriminant analysis indicated that only 3 of the 15 predictor variables, viz, commitment offense, baseline number of EP behaviors and baseline RIECS scores, showed a significant difference between success to no-success groups. The discriminant function was significant ($x = 24.095$, $p < .001$) and indicates that subjects (success group) whose RIECS scores became more internal across the four test administrations had more serious commitment offenses, more baseline and more external baseline RIECS scores. This suggests a no-success group, since exactly half of subjects were changed into (2) groups, viz, success and no-success contingent on scores on RIECS and TSCS in last administration as compared to baseline, we would expect we could predict correctly by chance 50% of the time. Thus, discriminant analysis gives one approximately 27% improvement in predictive power, i.e. we could correctly classify 27 percent (nine subjects) correctly ahead of time using the discriminant function.

Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis

Dependent variables for the stepwise regression analysis were RIECS Scores, the total positive scores for TSCS and EP behaviors during the last follow-up period.

Discussion of Findings

Three major findings of the study are:

1. There were no significant differences between groups on pretreatment (demographic) characteristics, on pretreatment behavioral measures, or on GATB and JPI scores. After randomization, Group A and Group B were essentially the same.
2. The analysis of the crossover design indicates no special effects of time of treatment or time of testing on the outcome measures.
3. RIECS scores and the TSCS subscale scores (adjusted for faking) of Self-Satisfaction, Behavior, Personal-Self, Total Conflict, Personality Disorder, True-False ratio and Total Positive showed significant changes (improvement) across the four test administrations.
4. There were significant reductions in Level A behaviors during treatment and between baseline and first follow-up. There was a marked reduction in EP behaviors for Group A from baseline to second follow-up which just missed significance. For Group B, there were significant reductions in EP behaviors during treatment, between baseline and first follow-up, between baseline and second follow up and between baseline and third follow-up.
5. Attitudes towards parole and release improved significantly after treatment compared to before treatment.

6. The discriminant analysis indicated that subjects whose RIECS scores became more internal across the four test administrations had more serious commitment offenses, more baseline EP behaviors and more external RIECS scores than subjects whose RIECS scores did not change or become more external across the four test administrations.
7. No consistent pattern of predictive variables was found for the three most important dependent variables, viz, RIECS scores, Total Positive subscale scores on the TSCS, and EP behaviors.
8. The Youth Training School sample was found to be less well-adjusted than the TSCS norm group when the TSCS means were compared. The Youth Training School sample mean on the most important indicator of self-concept on the TSCS, viz, the Total Positive subscale score of the TSCS, was higher than the norm group mean after treatment as contrasted to pretreatment comparisons.
9. The Youth Training School sample scored significantly more internally than Rotter's normative sample on the RIECS after treatment. Before treatment, the Youth Training School sample scored significantly more externally than Rotter's normative sample on the RIECS.

Results of data analysis indicated significant changes in RIECS scores from baseline to second follow-up towards more internal control and a more internal control and a more internal mentation. These results are significant in that they confirm the relationship between internal locus of control and reduction in violence. Alternately, individuals who are externally controlled are more aggressive.

The researcher told subjects that their decisions were up to them. However, they were told to always ask the question “Will this benefit or hurt me in the long run?” before they acted. Subjects were told that the central problem was that their aggressive behaviors were self-destructive. Exploration of and provision for alternatives to aggressive behaviors was supported in the literature by Greenwald (1973) and Bandura (1969:384) who stated that

Lasting changes in aggressive behavior can be most successfully achieved by reducing the utilitarian value of aggression through the development of more effective alternate modes response.

Subjects were told that they could relieve tension by acting out, but that the long-term consequences of aggressive behaviors, e.g., more time in jail and increased probability of aggressive behaviors subsequent to release from the institution, would outweigh the reward of tension-reduction. Illustrative of increased self-control and inhibition of aggressive acting out is the following statement made by subject 10:

I used to get frustrated and act out against others to get it out of me. Now, you and the groups helped me a lot with self-control. Before the groups, if I was in a bad mood, I'd mouth off to somebody, but all I'd get was write-ups from staff every time I did that and they'd win and I'd lose. Now, if somebody says something smart, I'll ignore them and won't say anything. I stop and think and see what the payoff is before I act and so the groups helped me to control my temper as well as my communication with the staff and people in authority and other inmates.

The researcher served as a model of constructive responses to aggression by maintaining self-control when subjects launched into tirades at him. When subjects, in initial group sessions, complained that they were hard pressed to maintain self-control, the researcher emphasized to them that the problem was not that they could not exert self-control, but that they did not believe that they could do so. The researcher would point out to subjects how they provoke anger in others and the ineffectiveness of their manipulation in trying to control others. At the same time, the researcher demonstrated how he successfully utilized manipulation to obtain desired ends

rather than aggressive acting out. This technique is consonant with Bandura's (1969) findings that positive modeling of constructive responses to frustration is an effective means to extinguish aggressive behaviors.

One explanation as to why reduction in aggressive behaviors did not persist throughout may be related to the subculture within the institution. It may be that the potency of the psychotherapeutic intervention may be diluted in the long run by the highly negative environment in the institution. Specifically, there is a great deal of peer pressure in the institution. Residents are frequently ridiculed by their peers by positive attitude change. A contingency analysis by Buehler et. al. (1966) revealed that delinquents generously rewarded anti-social conduct, but disapproved of actions that either deviated from their own norms or conformed to institutional standards. Illustrative of this is the following statement of subject 3:

When a guy straightens out his behavior and acts straight he is put down by the other inmates and accused of being a "smack" and "squaring up" - - you know, like inmates tell you that you kiss staff's ass. Like me, I left the gang I was in and tried and get other people to stop low riding in gangs and then guys set me up to try to get me in fights in front of staff so I'd get booked. My own ethnic group froze me out and wouldn't talk to me.

CYA wards who simply try to do their time and abide by the rules and wards who reject peer influence are perceived by the other inmates as being weak. It is not usual for these subjects, especially if they have just arrived at the institution, to be pressured out of money, cigarettes, etc. If a subject acquiesces to this pressure and/or is easily intimidated, he is highly likely to become the target of a sexual assault. He is not left alone by the other peers unless he fights them. However, he receives more prison time for this or may be transferred to the Department of Corrections. Thus, he is damned if he does acquiesce to pressure and damned if he does not. If the ward who is the victim of pressure from other peers complains to staff, he is apt to be placed

in “protective custody.” He is stigmatized and labeled a “P.C. case” by some staff and wards and labeled as a “punk.” He is looked down upon by some staff who perceive him as a “weak” person. If he files charges against his aggressors, a contract may, in all probability, be placed on his life. Even if he is transferred to another institution, the contract may follow him. Upon release to the community, the contract may be carried out on him. If, in any situation, a youth witnesses any type of illegal act or rule infraction, he is placed in a difficult position. If he testifies he is labeled as a “snitch” and either beaten or knifed. If wards refuse to go along with requests of gangs to engage in illegal activities, they become pariahs. The extent of the problem is illustrated by the fact that there are sixty gangs within the institution. Indeed, a primary goal of many aggressors is to retain or gain membership in gangs of their peers. Job success, raising a family and achieving the respect of other men have been largely beyond reach for them. Only sexual and physical prowess stand between them and feeling of emasculation. Buehler et. al. (1966), Wolfgang and Ferracutti (1967) and Yablonski (1962) noted that in deviant subcultures where physical aggression is rewarded as emulative behavior, aggressive behavior is often rewarded and collectively sanctioned, which in this study would apply to gangs , cliques, and peer pressure. Bandura and Walters (1962) present a substantial body of evidence that novel modes of aggressive behavior are acquired via observation of aggressive models. McCord and McCord (1958) demonstrated the crucial role of modeling in the genesis of antisocial behaviors. It appears to the researcher that negative sanctions by staff members are not strong enough to outweigh contravening peer influences. Consonant with this is Bandura’s (1969:303) finding that

When peer influences conflict with the behaviors promoted by staff, as in correctional institutions, negative sanctions achieve, at best, only temporary control over aggressive behavior.

Furthermore Bandura (1973:303) stated that:

Given a powerful delinquent system, punishment may downgrade one domineering leader only to elevate another one without restructuring the peer reinforcement system to any significant degree.

In light of all this, the fact that there were only five Level B behaviors for all subjects over the entire length of the study is encouraging, as is the significant decrease in EP behaviors throughout the entire study for Group B, which may indicate that response generalization occurred. Illustrative of this is the following statement by subject 20:

I flashed on the groups after they were over. I thought about the things you taught us. It stopped me from acting out because I thought about the payoffs and alternatives before I acted. Like I asked a staff for soap and he didn't answer me. I asked again and there was no answer. I knew he heard me. I was going to bang on my door but I caught myself. I sat down on the bed in my room and cooled off until my anger settled down because I thought that, man this isn't worth a write-up. I waited and then asked again and I got the soap.

Another possible explanation for post-treatment resumption of aggressive behaviors is the fact that some subjects were close to being considered for parole and may be agitated by their peers. Many inmates are jealous of their peers who may be going home in that they have an attitude of "I have two or three years to do time; why should he go home?" Furthermore, many inmates who are close to being paroled tend to drop their guard and to not be as cautious about committing Level A and especially EP behavioral infractions. The resident reasons that since he is going home, there is not much that can be done to him for behavioral infractions unless he commits a Level B behavioral infraction. In addition, some of the subjects in this study report agitation by some staff members who want to see how hard the resident can be pushed or who verbalize the attitude of "you'll be back."

Another possible explanation for the post-treatment resumption of aggressive behaviors is that some staff members play a great deal of attention to negative behaviors, but hardly any attention to positive behaviors. For example, one day while the researcher was in a control center

on a living unit a ward had just finished doing an excellent job of mopping and cleaning the control center. In lieu of staff stating to him that he did a good job, staff stated, "Okay, you can go now."

Another possible explanation for the post-treatment resumption of aggressive behaviors is related to extinction and is analogous to a situation wherein an individual has been in a token economy system and sent home. Consequently, extinction takes place. In this study, there did appear to be reinforcement present during treatment, e.g., the acceptance of wards by the researcher and the fact that wards were rewarded by the researcher for constructive decisions and were encouraged to liberally reward themselves for constructive decisions resulting in positive payoffs. Subsequent to subjects being taken out of the groups, extinction probably often occurred. For example, subject 8 stated:

A lot of us wanted more help with our problems. Like, we learned a lot in the groups, but different situations and problems came up where we needed to talk about how to handle them, but the groups were over.

Another possible explanation for the post-treatment resumption of aggressive behaviors is that calling a "ceiling effect" was present in data. Specifically, a very large range of exists for increase in aggressive behaviors. Since most subjects did not have a high baseline frequency of aggressive behaviors, the possibility for decrease in aggressive behaviors was quite restricted. They would not have much room to improve, so it would be easy to obtain changes in aggressive behaviors in a negative or upward direction.

The researcher is unable to account for the fact that there was significant reductions in EP behaviors for Group B throughout the study, but not for Group A.

Insofar as the relationship between personality and behavioral measures are concerned, the changes in personality measures apparently persisted until the end of the study; while predicted changes in the behavioral measures, with the exception of EP behaviors for group B, did not persist. A possible explanation for this is that, as suggested earlier, wards ridicule and ostracize their peers for evidencing positive, constructive behavioral change. In contrast, wards are not able to discern what is going on inside other inmates in terms of personality changes. Thus, subjects could continue to evidence cognitive changes throughout the study. Consonant with this explanation are the results of the multiple regression analysis which showed that personality measures are best predicted by other personality measures. Furthermore, it is not unusual for personality and behavioral measures to be only weakly related. At Youth Training School, inmates have little or no control over events. Things happen to them at least as often as they make things happen. An EP behavior is not considered serious, and EP's are often given arbitrary by some staff members contingent upon their like or dislike of an inmate or because some staff members may displace their anger about something bothering them onto wards. One could probably suggest that part of the variance in behavior reports could be accounted for by the ward's behavior, while part of the variance in behavior reports may be a matter of being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Many subjects in the study used information in the treatment group, to change dysfunctional behavior such as acting out towards staff and peers and violation of institutional regulations. Subjects implemented goals for their future. The discriminant analysis on RIECS showed subjects who had significantly more EP behaviors during baseline also had significantly more external baseline RIECS scores than other subjects.

Conclusion

This study demonstrated a positive relationship between a cognitive model of group therapy and locus of control and selected measures of self-esteem. A quantifiable system to measure aggressive behaviors was discussed. This study demonstrates a cost-effective treatment system resulted in a significant decline in violence. This study demonstrates that brief psychotherapeutic intervention may be effective in reduction of aggressive juvenile delinquents. However, this research demonstrates that unlike aversive control reinforcement contingencies should be set up to create contingencies for future use. This study demonstrates the effectiveness of cognitive based psychological intervention.

Recommendations

Practical Applications

A major recommendation gleaned from the results of this study relates to the contingent-punishment, non-contingent rewards system, viz, a system wherein delinquents obtain rewards and privileges as long as they comply with institutional regulations, but where the privileges are promptly withdrawn for disruptive or uncooperative behavior. Thus, the wards comply with institutional demands simply to avoid punishment. Skinner (1953) objected to aversive control because of its by-products. He believed that emotions are generated which have negative side effects. He found that punishment did not suppress aggressive behaviors. Punishment may only reduce a current tendency to respond. As soon as the punishment is withdrawn, the behavior bounces back. He related that if one makes common punishing events contingent on behavior, the behavior will recover after the punishment ceases. This appears to be the situation at Youth Training School. Aversive control is utilized, e.g., "If you attend trade and school, you won't be locked up." Thus, the staff attempt to regulate ward's behavior by constantly holding the threat of punishment over them. Thus, wards half-heartedly follow the rules simply to avoid

punishment rather than to obtain rewards. The nine days maximum time off their sentence per month for following all policies and attending trade school is not guaranteed and can easily be taken away. Bandura (1973:303) stated:

Aversive control can be an effective method for managing aggressive behavior in residential settings, but it is unlikely to have much rehabilitative value in correctional institutions as they are constituted at present.

The system of aversive control should be eliminated and replaced with a system such as one recommended by Bandura (1973:314) wherein

Reinforcement contingencies should be set up to create competencies for further use, rather than to extract minimal compliance with situational demands. All residents receive humane treatment on a non-contingent basis, but they can earn valued rewards and privileges for progress in acquiring educational, vocational and social skills to create alternatives to antisocial conduct.

At Youth Training School, wards are told, “If you don’t involve yourself in gangs, you won’t be locked up.” Many wards whom the researcher has interviewed have been involved in gangs since ages eight or nine; and by the time they are committed to Youth Training School, they are seventeen or eighteen. Therefore, they may not know any other way to act. The point is that these individuals should be taught alternative behaviors to their antisocial lifestyles rather than continually being threatened with punishment. Skinner (1953) stated that aversive control simply does not work in curtailment of aggressive behaviors. In lieu of aversive control, it is recommended that a hierarchical contingency system be instituted wherein inmates are taught competencies for future use of increasing complexity through sequential steps with commensurate rewards for achievement at each higher level. It seems to the researcher that a remedial program such as this can be managed without resorting to punitive measures commonly employed in correctional institutions. This remedial program should place more responsibility on

wards rather than staff. How else will the inmates learn responsibility if everything is structured for them by the staff? Bandura (1973:311) stated:

One limitation of an exclusive adult-implemented program is that it places the burden for managing conduct on staff, which tends to create antagonistic positions. Greater progress can be achieved if peers are enlisted to further the values and goals of the treatment program.

Phillips et. Al. (1972) found that the contingency systems which was not preferred was one in which incarcerated delinquents periodically selected a peer leader who assigned tasks to them individually and rewarded or penalized them according to their performance. To provide for use of power constructively by the peer leader, he would earn or lose points depending upon how well his peers whom he supervised fulfilled their obligations. Bandura (1973:312) suggested that

It would appear that self-governing reinforcement systems would have greater educational potential because it would provide experience in cooperative and responsible social living.

One could even have a double-contingency system in which a given member's outcomes are determined by both his own contribution and the group's overall attainments. Bandura (1973:312) suggested that

A completely individualized system is well suited for creating autonomous, self-determined people. If, on the other hand, one wished to promote shared responsibility and contribution to common goals, then this objective can be best accomplished by instituting reinforcement contingencies on a group basis.

Further recommendations would be for staff to positively reward constructive behaviors by wards in lieu of the emphasis on attention to negative, disruptive behaviors. Staff members should convey to wards that they are persons of value and worth despite their previous behavior. Furthermore, staff members should cease use of the "district attorney" approach of which Greenwald (1973:15) spoke:

Some therapists are always playing Mr. District Attorney. “Why are you doing a thing like that?” trying to “get” the patient. Such therapists ought to display a sign warning, “Everything you say will be used against you.” That’s not a productive attitude. The attitude has to be very much one of trying to understand the payoffs for past decisions.

The researcher found that telling the subjects that what they do is their own business, mutually exploring alternatives to their past decisions with them and leaving the decision up to them while encouraging them to think about the consequences of their actions was indeed a way of reaching them. Greenwald (1974) stated that psychopaths have a need to control others. In light of this, forcing decisions upon them or lecturing them with an attitude of “How could you have done that?” simply will not work.

It is also recommended that the judicial system eliminate the system of “counsel and release” which is simply a slap on the wrist when individuals are, for example, eight or nine years of age. The alternative to this is that with individuals this young (eight or nine years old), this is an optimal time for psychotherapeutic intervention with the youngster and his family. If emotionally disturbed individuals are committed to the California Youth Authority, youth counselors should only provide counseling and not be placed in a therapist-jailer role. One could have a psychological center separate from the living units wherein youth counselors would do nothing but counseling. In addition, treatment facilities should not be in correctional facilities. What is recommended, are two medical-psychiatric units which would serve Northern and Southern California. Youth counselors should be screened by psychologists before working in such units. There is also a great need for an adequate parole program and outpatient clinics such as in adult corrections. The skills which youth need to achieve satisfactory re-entry into the community should be taught to youth from the time they arrive at the institution, not in the last

thirty days as is attempted at Youth Training School. Finally it is recommended that youth who are first commitments be segregated from recidivists.

Recommendation for Further Research

In future research it is suggested that DDT be compared with a highly structured, nondirective approach such as active listening with a separate no-treatment group. One would still have therapist bias, but taping the therapy sessions and having two observers see if they could discriminate between the two modalities might provide a check on therapist bias. One possible way to avoid order effects in a multimodality study would be to utilize a counterbalanced design wherein subjects would be exposed to different modalities in a counterbalanced order.

References

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