ORIGINAL ARTICLE

The Influence Of Religious Guidance And Counseling on Malaysian Prisoners’ Self-confidence

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ABSTRACT

This paper is based on a research on the model and integrated rehabilitation approach of religious guidance and counseling that was provided to selected prisoners in Malaysian prisons. The aims of the study are to identify the prisoners’ acceptance of religious guidance module and counseling as well as to determine the influence of religious guidance and counseling method on the prisoner’s self-confidence. This study using both quantitative and qualitative approach. A survey method was used to obtain the prisoners’ acceptance of religious guidance module and counseling as the prison rehabilitation program and to determine the influence of religious guidance and counseling method on the prisoner’s self-confidence. The observation technique was used to observe the implementation religious guidance module and counseling session conducted by the staff. A group of 314 male and female prisoners who came from different religions and family background were selected as the respondents. The process of rehabilitation is carried out through special programs and one of them is the religious guidance and counseling program. The findings showed that majority of the prisoners expressed the need for religious guidance and counseling during their serving time. The respondents revealed that religious guidance and counseling program help them to build confidence to adapt with society. The observation of religious guidance and counseling session revealed that these group of people are really need someone who are willing to listen to their grievance besides letting out their anger and vengeance as well as lighten up their stress.

Key words: effective rehabilitation, integrated rehabilitation, religious guidance and counseling, prisoners, self-confidence

INTRODUCTION

The Prisons Department of Malaysia is the final institution in the implementation of the criminal justice system and its is responsible to serve the community by detaining those who are sentenced by the courts (http://www.prison.gov.my/portal/). The duties of the Department are to guard them with the utmost humanity and to help them live productive and law-abiding lives their time in prisons and after their release (http://www.prison.gov.my/portal/). Among the function of the prison in Malaysia are to execute detention order on inmates issued by the court or relevant authorities until their release and to carry out rehabilitation programs on inmates. Prisoners are people who were found guilty of committing crimes. The aim of putting them behind bars is not solely to punish them, but also to change their negative behavior into those accepted by the community.

Major ares of concern in justice system (eg. prison) is better assessment of needs and effective rehabilitation. Assessment of needs is the proper analysis of need of the prisoners concerning their personal history environment and in order to identify appropriate services (Segal, Gerdes & Steiners 2007). Rehabilitation is a treatment that helps criminal offenders change their antisocial styles of thinking, feeling and acting (Gendreau 1995). Rehabilitation requires employees who understand human behavior and have specific skills in order make the intervention success (Segal, Gerdes & Steiners 2007).

Generally, there are many types of rehabilitation program implemented in many areas of human services. For example, motor-rehabilitation-training program is designed to improve motor skills in children with cerebral palsy in hospitals (Ayed 2007). Prosthetic rehabilitation is used for elderly patients in denture treatment...
Rehabilitation program is also implemented in sport to maintain the health and fitness of the athletes (Tripolitsioti, Mountakis & Strigas 2009). The rehabilitation programs implementing in the prison. For example, in Iran, educational and preventive programs are implemented in order to control the spread of HIV and Hepatitis virus infection among the addicts (Hallaian 2008; Khodabakhshi, Abbassi, Fadaei & Rabiie 2007). Religious guidance and counseling is one of the methods of intervention in rehabilitation program. In fact, a few literature has been discussed about religion as a correctional intervention or highlighted about religious involvement in the correctional environment (Danner 2002; O’Connor 2005; O’Connor & Perreyclear 2002). Religious guidance and counseling is a necessary step that should be taken by the prison to help them change their behavior and to face challenges in life. The main philosophy in providing the guidance is to make them realize that its not the end of the world and that life has to go on. Providing education and guidance to those who had committed serious crime is even greater challenge. This challenge comes about due to the aim of rehabilitation which is to change and to prevent them from repeating the crime.

For example, New Zealand is implementing religion (Christian) approach in rehabilitation program to its prisoners. They are using prayer and spiritual transformation so that the prisoners who have been released will not have the tendency to be brought back in again. These prisoners who are into the faith-based rehabilitation program want the inmates to explore their faith more deeply, and encourage them to indulge in daily prayer and worship (http://www.rehabilitationtoday.com/news/16-prisoner-rehabilitation--giving-a-new-life-to-prisoners.html).

There are also prisons which practice the non-religious and non-medical approach in prison rehabilitation program. Some of their programs last for about six to eight months. One such example is the Second Chance Program, which is composed of four modules: drug rehabilitation module, education module, self-respect module and life skills module. This program does not use alternative drugs for its drug rehabilitation module, and the costs are extremely low compared to the other prisoner rehabilitation programs that use drugs and acquire the services of third party counsellors (http://www.rehabilitationtoday.com/news/16-prisoner-rehabilitation--giving-a-new-life-to-prisoners.html).

According to the current concept of imprisonment, prison are places where prisoners are detained, guarded and underwent various rehabilitation activities until their release. The forced factor gives a great challenge to rehabilitation program. The forced factor has also make it a difficult task to carry out behavior modification. However, positively all the inmates have the opportunity to undergo the religious guidance and counseling. Therefore, the program must be fulfill their needs and effective enough to change their negative styles of thinking, feeling and acting.

The aims of the study are to identify the prisoners’ acceptance of religious guidance module and counseling as the prison rehabilitation program and to determine the influence of religious guidance and counseling method on the prisoner’s self-confidence.

Materials And Methods

This study using both quantitative and qualitative approach. For quantitative approach, the study used a survey method. A total of 314 prisoners were randomly selected from three Malaysia prison namely Kajang Prison, Sungai Buloh Prison and Marang Prison. This approach was used to obtain the prisoners’ acceptance of religious guidance module and counseling as the prison rehabilitation program and to determine the influence of religious guidance and counseling method on the prisoner’s self-confidence. The questionnaire were constructed by the researchers based on the literature reviews. The survey was conducted in the classroom setting with the assistance of the wardens. There are 29 items with seven likert scale about the acceptance of religious guidance module and counseling session. The higher the score, the higher the acceptance. Observation technique as the qualitative approach was also used in this study. The observation used in this study is to strengthen the quantitative data. The researchers used observation technique to observe the implementation religious guidance module and counseling session conducted by the staffs. This approach gives the researchers more understanding about underlying acceptance of the particular method and the effect of the method on the prisoners. Descriptive analyses such as the frequency and percentage were used to present the data.

Results:

Background of the respondents:

There are 314 male (81%) and female (19%) prisoner involved in this study. 81 percent of the respondents’ age ranged between 21 to 40 years old. Most of them are Malay (79%) and almost half of them are stay single (47%). Most of the respondents only finished their secondary education (69%) whereas 20 percent of them just
stopped their education at primary school. Majority of them had had little knowledge in religion and came from the rural areas; but committing crimes in the city.

Implementation of religious guidance module and counseling session:

Here are the important points highlighted by the researchers based on the observation of the implementation of religious guidance and counseling:

Religious department of Malaysian Prison is responsible in drawing up religious classes and other programs, either using fixed timetable or flexible. Among the helpers are religious teachers, assistant teacher and volunteer religious guidance. Religious guidance covers a broad scope including exposure to religious knowledge, spiritual education, character building and positive thinking of which will develop them into better individual with strong will power and qualities during their stay as well as after release.

The other aspect that is related to religious guidance gives by the religious helper is counseling. The need for counseling is very significant. It is carried out hand in hand with the exposure to religious matters, as there are prisoners who wants to share their problem, and others who want advice on matters such as family problem, financial and preparation before being released. Religious guidance and counseling should be on-going programs throughout their serving time. This service is necessary especially when the number of prisoners is high because they will have to take turns.

Getting to know and understand the background and prisoners’ personalities:

This was the first step taken by the helper or counselor (religious counselor) before providing any form of help; guidance or counseling. Even though the main aim of the experiment was to test the model built based on a much exposure on religious matters as possible, especially on obligatory acts, background knowledge and understanding the prisoners personalities in the early stage did contribute to the helping process later. This information especially on the level of religious knowledge, the ability to read and write enabled the helping process to be carried out more easily and practically. The majority of the prisoners did not have basic religious knowledge. In fact, half of them could not recite the verses in the Quran.

Process of Guidance and Counseling:

Without a standard form of counseling process, both aspects were carried out at the same time by the helpers (researches). This had to be done because within the limited meeting sessions, the prisoners took the opportunity to express their feelings during the religious class in a crowded place and uncomfortable surrounding prompted them to express themselves and their hopes for the future. Secrecy was not practiced as the helping session carried was too open to those not concerned.

As observed throughout providing help, prisoners needed a place to let out their feelings. They felt secured telling their problems to personnel with religious background. They were happy to be reminded of Allah and this led them to repent. Most of them admitted that after prayers and reciting verses in the Quran, they felt peaceful. A convert admitted that he was frequently involved in fights. However after converting to Islam, and now able to recite al-Fatihah, verses from the Quran, he managed to control his temper.

Group Counseling:

At certain point, group counseling was carried out. At this moment, the researcher did a lot of self-rectification on the prisoners. During this period, prisoners were allowed to speak of their own good deeds, the understanding of the opportunities to do good deeds and hope to become good Muslim. This method allowed the prisoners to tell on their good deeds in the past and this made them realize that they potentials and strength within themselves to become good people.

Self Role concept:

Guidance and counseling activities emphasize on the fact that changes and repentance come within one self and not from others. This concept is understood by many of them as the result of the help provided to them. What is important is to strengthen this concept in practice. It is not an easy task. Nevertheless, it has to be an going activity. A handful of them still believe that their life is governed by others, not themselves. This might due to the fact that they were once controlled by family members or other form or external authority.
Giving Hope:

Among the advice given by the helper was to be patient, accept fate and be grateful. Patience in facing hardship in the prison. Accept the fate that had befallen them as the result of their own doings in the past. Be grateful to Allah for His mercy and to bestow onto them imprisonment as punishment. The prison has acted as a hindrance to all kinds of evil doings with the opportunity to repent.

Understanding the surrounding:

A prison is not a comfortable place to stay in. In fact, the capacity has tripled in number. Therefore, the helping method had to be adapted to the surrounding that was small, crowded and lacked facilities. The helper had to be aware of the surrounding when giving tips and advice for certain requests. Dangerous materials are discouraged as it is feared that they might be used to go against the rules and regulations as well as for other safety reasons. For instance, papers containing notes could be used to start a fire.

Effective Communication and Quality time:

Communication skill is the most important factor to get near to troubled prisoners. Communication can also calm those isolated and strictly guarded prisoners. It can help to build mental, emotional and spiritual strength. Quality time acquired at a particular time could be used to get guidance and counseling service and the prisoners need to use this time effectively. This short period of time could be used by the helper to give tips and advice to change the prisoners’ attitude for the better. This objective is achievable if we listen and understand their problems and needs, in addition to exchanging views.

Prisoners’ acceptance of religious guidance module and counseling session:

Religious guidance was carried out in prisons based on a special module prepared by Malaysian Prison Department. In general, respondents were very interested in religious programs offered. It is proved by the mean score showed a reading of 6.30 – 6.85. The respondents were interested in religious matters that contained stories like stories of the prophets and recital of Holy Quran. The respondents were also very interested in religious programs that involved groups of people such as prayer congregation. They informed that this kind of program gives the feelings of peace, the mode given was between 6.00 – 7.00. The findings also showed that most of prisoners (71.3%) preferred religious guidance with counseling as an intervention method in the rehabilitation program compared to religious guidance alone or counseling alone (Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Preferred method</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Religious Guidance</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>23.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counseling</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Guidance and Counseling</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>71.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not answer</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>314</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on the findings, the prisoners’ acceptance of religious guidance module and counseling session is high. Prisoners needed religious guidance during their serving time and they preferred group programs such as prayer congregation and group discussion. This kind of program gave them self-confidence as well as the opportunity to meet other prisoners. Counseling service has a similar effect on the prisoners. Group counseling gives them the chance to share their problems besides listening to others’ and sometimes sharing views on each other’s problem. It is a good indicator in implementing such approach in the prison setting. It shows that although most the prisoners are group people who had the history of breaking the law and involved in crime, they still can be changed.

The influence of religious guidance and counseling method on the prisoner’s self-confidence:

Several questions were asked to view the prisoners’ opinion on the effects of the religious guidance given to them. Compare to high frequency of program and boredom, self-confidence shows the highest response. The findings were recorded in Table 2. It showed that the prisoners were highly agreed that the program had helped them to restore self-confidence to face the public.
Table 2: Religious guidance effect

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Median</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Religious program help confidence adapting to society</td>
<td>6.32</td>
<td>6.50</td>
<td>6.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too much of religious program</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>5.50</td>
<td>4.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boredom on lecture</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussions:

The respondents revealed that religious program help them to build confidence to adapt with society. This findings is proved by O’Connor (2005) where religion in prison helps to humanize a dehumanizing situation by helping prisoners cope with being a social outcast in a prison situation that is fraught with loss, deprivation and survival challenges. The earlier findings showed the positive relationship between religious involvement with the adjustment of prison environment among the prisoners. For example, Clear and Sumter (2002) found a significant relationship exist between inmate religiousness and multiple measures of inmate adjustment to the prison environment. The increasing level of religiousness is associated with higher level of in-prison adjustment whereas higher level of inmate religiousness are associated with better psychological adjustment to the prison environment (Clear & Sumter 2002). O’Connor and Perreyclear (2002) added that the number of inmates with infractions decreases if the religious involvement increase, so they concluded that religion can be an important factor in the process of offender rehabilitation. However, this research findings indicate more good signal where religious program help the respondents to build confidence to adapt with society.

During the twentieth century, there has been much speculation by scholar in the United States about the relationship between religion and prisoners (Clear & Sumter 2002). In spite of the fact that both religion and prison have been subjected to considerable study, we know little about religion in prison particularly as it relates to the psychological of offenders to the prison environment and reduction in problematic behaviors such as disciplinary infractions (Clear & Sumter 2002). However, Dammer (2002) found out that inmates practice religion in prison provide valuable information for those who administer religious programs. So, it is proved that the religious guidance module which is implemented in the prisoner as one of the rehabilitation approach gives positive influence to the prisoner’s self-confidence.

Conclusion:

Giving the rehabilitation program to the prisoners is a big challenge. The program have to suit the needs of the prisoners who came from various background and had committed to various form of crimes. On the other hand, the society have the high expectation that the prison are able to change the prisoner before they release from the prison. Therefore, an effective program and strategic approach for the prisoners are needed.

Nowadays, integrated religious guidance and counseling is necessary for the prisoners as one of the rehabilitation approach and being accepted by the Malaysian prisoners. The approach helps the respondents to build confidence to adapt with society. The approach is also highly needed recently as the number of prisoners are increasing and the crowded prisons might bring about negative impact on the rehabilitation process. As a conclusion, chances and supports are important for the prisoners to change their life. Rehabilitation program which is enforced to them must suit their needs and give them positive influence.

Acknowledgement

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