



REVIEWING THE NEED FOR TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICES IN THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM.

Psychology

Afra Firdouse

Bachelor's in Psychology (Honors), CMR University, Bengaluru

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the increasing need for trauma informed approach to juvenile rehabilitation and Juvenile justice system. Drawing upon research findings, empirical evidence and theoretical framework, it aims to study the indomitable relationship between trauma and delinquency recognizing the profound effect of trauma on youth offenders. It highlights the result of lack of trauma based approaches to rehabilitation among juvenile offenders. By exploring collaborative intervention, trauma based practices, ripple effect of trauma and the prevalence of trauma among young offenders, this paper underscores the importance of adopting a trauma based lens while supporting impacted youth, facilitating their rehabilitation and integration into society. In summary, it calls for a shift away from punitive punishment towards making amends for victims' rights while at the same time advocating for healing, safety as well as accountability. Lastly, it argues for a multidisciplinary approach.

KEYWORDS

Trauma, Juvenile Justice , Psychological Perspective, Juvenile Rehabilitation, Young Offenders, Trauma-Informed Practices

INTRODUCTION

The Juvenile Justice System is highly complex, facing constant challenges while addressing the complex needs of young offenders. It strives to offer rehabilitation while also preventing recidivism. At the heart of this challenge is the lack of understanding and insight into the impact of trauma on youth involved in the justice system. Statistically, young offenders belong to communities which have higher level of violence, socioeconomic disadvantages and dangerous mob activity which exposes them to a high risk of trauma within their environment since childhood. Within their families and close circles, many offenders have reported endurance of abuse, neglect, dysfunction, exposure to violence etc. which further exacerbates their trauma (Abram et al., 2004). The Juvenile Justice System must undertake trauma based approach to interventions, promoting restoration and well being which will in turn reduce future crimes and promote positive outcomes for youth, their families and communities alike.

Understanding Trauma and Juvenile System Nexus

Unveiling the trauma landscape among juvenile offenders reveal a complex system of adversity they experiences are multifaceted and stems from various sources and contexts. Adverse childhood experiences or ACEs such as physical and sexual abuse, neglect , family dysfunction and exposure to community violence are very common among young offenders (Ford et al., 2013; Abram et al., 2004). These ACEs and trauma bound experiences result in the development of adverse psychological effects such as behavioral issues increasing their risk of engagement in delinquent behavior (Baglivio et al., 2014).

The trauma is then compounded by the experiences they encounter within the justice system which further deteriorate their mental health. The process of arrest, detention, and court processes cause heightened levels of psychological distress exacerbating their existing trauma (Baglivio et al., 2016). Juvenile detention homes also expose these young offenders to adverse conditions such as isolation and violence neglecting their pre existing mental distress which impede rehabilitation efforts (Harris et al., 2001). Understanding this cumulative impact of trauma before and after juvenile offence is crucial for informing trauma-informed practices within the juvenile justice system.

Prevalence of Trauma among Juvenile Offenders

One study found that 92% of juveniles involved in the court system had been traumatized at least once and many experienced multiple traumas (Abram et al., 2004). In particular, males reported witnessing more violence compared to females who claimed to have undergone more interpersonal victimization with sexual assault being a significant part (Cauffman, Feldman, Waterman, & Steiner, 1998; Ford et al., 2007; Foy et al., 2012). For example, Wood et al. (2002) claim that among female inmates as a whole population about 29% and male inmates about 3% admit they have experienced sexual abuse or molestation while male prisoners are also likely to be victims for instance their case shows that by comparison women prisoners were almost twice less likely than men prisoners to experience various forms of violence like watching violent acts (Cauffman et al., 1998).

Many prevalence studies have explicitly focused on the development of PTSD among children involved in the criminal justice system due to the high rates of trauma exposure in this population. Among juvenile offenders, rates range from three percent to fifty percent (Ford et al., 2007), with an average prevalence rate of thirty percent.

Trauma as a Driver of Delinquency

Research highlights the complex pathways through which a child is influenced to commit offence due to trauma. For many children, delinquent behavior serves as a coping mechanism which is maladaptive. They cope with the overwhelming stress and mental health concerns such as marked distress by indulging in such offensive acts. The trauma of violence, abuse and neglect hinders their normative development process and reduces their ability to regulate emotions, make healthy decisions and problem-solving skills (Ford et al., 2013).

The experience of childhood trauma and adverse childhood experiences negatively impact their trust and relationship with authority figures and institutions. This leads to defiance, oppositional behavior and aggression towards Juvenile justice professionals and law enforcement.

Impact Of Inadequate Trauma-informed Practices In The Juvenile Justice System

Trauma can have a long lasting effect which exceeds its initial impact, shaping young lives significantly. One negative experience in an individual's life can deeply interfere with their livelihood in latter times, it reduces the individuals tolerance to future inconvenience and increase the risk of using negative coping mechanisms to deal with the same.

Research reveals the Ripple Effect of Trauma which links adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) to the host of various undesirable outcomes, including mental health issues and involvement in delinquent activity (Anda et al., 2006). These issues may intrude child development and persist in adulthood. The Ripple effect is also shown to increase the risk of substance abuse as a coping mechanism to numb mental pain. It highlights that one traumatic event can set off a chain reaction of negative consequences which effect various aspect of an individual's life from their well being to their interaction with the law.

Neglecting to identify and treat trauma in juvenile offenders can have detrimental effects on the people involved as well as society at large. Trauma can impair young people's capacity for emotional regulation, problem solving and healthy decision making, which can lower their chances of a good recovery and successful reintegration into society.

Additionally it can lead to the emergence of underlying mental illness such as anxiety, depression, and post -traumatic stress disorder(PTSD), which may be left unaddressed and unidentified in the conventional juvenile justice settings (Abraham et al., 2004). These mental health conditions might worsen their engagement in delinquent behaviour and increase the risk of recidivist. It can further have personal repercussions in addition to community-wide cycles of victimization, violence and reoffending.

Moving Beyond Punitive Responses

The best interest of society is focused more rather than the child's best interest under the current punitive model. It revolves around the belief that the more serious the crime, the more the child or culprit needs to be kept away from the society for protection. This is more aligned with adult criminal justice system. This approach aims to reduce future offenses through punishments, isolation from society and holding the young offenders accountable (Finley et al., 1999). Traditional punitive approaches fail to address the root cause of the offending behavior. Practices such as incarceration and punitive discipline can exacerbate their sense of alienation, hopelessness and victimization. Instead, we must adapt a holistic approach which takes into consideration their experiences and needs, emphasizing safety, belong and accountability.

Central to trauma informed juvenile justice is the commitment to Build Bridges, not Barriers. Innovative initiatives such as restorative justice initiatives, recovery centres will enable them to address their trauma, repair harm and reconnect with their communities (Harris & Fallot, 2001; Bloom et al., 2003).

Effective implementation requires a multidisciplinary approach which includes the collaboration between educators, community organization, mental health providers and juvenile justice professionals.

Implementing Trauma-informed Interventions

Research by Branson et al. (2017) reveals the efficiency of collaborative training initiatives among juvenile justice professionals in promoting trauma informed practices. These initiatives connect professional from multiples disciplines to improve their understanding of trauma, it's impact on youth and evidence-based strategies for trauma informed care. Using cross disciplinary collaboration and exchange of knowledge, they create a framework for addressing trauma in a shared language.

Capacity- building programs are vital in the facilitation of adopting trauma informed practices in addition to training initiatives. Research conducted by Myers, D. L. (2013) emphasize the value of capacity building initiatives to improve organizational preparedness to adapt trauma- informed practices and improve staff competencies. A few examples of capacity- building initiatives include creating trauma-informed policies and procedures, offering continuing supervision and support, and fostering an encouraging workplace culture that prioritized trauma informed treatment.

Juvenile justice systems can establish settings that support healing, resilience, and favorable outcomes for young offenders by a prioritizing their safety, encouraging teamwork, and giving youth voice and choice.

Working together with neighborhood groups and resources is crucial to giving traumatized adolescents complete support. To guarantee that young people receive the comprehensive support they require to recover and thrive, research by Baglivio et al. (2016) emphasizes the significance of forming partnerships with mental health agencies, drug abuse treatment providers, educational institutions, and other community-based organizations. Juvenile justice systems can improve their ability to meet the varied needs of traumatized adolescents and families by utilizing community resources and knowledge.

According to Van Wormer, K. (2013) Restorative justice is a political movement aimed at restoring human dignity of all parties involved (the victims, the perpetrators, and the community). Rather than imprisonment, a possibility of the community service coupled with substance abuse treatment according to the circumstances may become more appropriate.

The application of restorative techniques, like victim-offender mediation and restorative circles, to mend harm and encourage accountability is essential to healing justice. Restorative justice strategies can lower recidivism rates, improve victim satisfaction, and foster greater empathy and understanding between offenders and victims (Bazemore and Umbreit, 2001).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the paper highlights the critical need to adapt a trauma informed approach while addressing the needs of young offenders. It thus requires professionals dealing with Juvenile justice to psychologically facilitate the process of healing among these youth

through establishing a protective environment that deals with juvenile crime in terms of its cause and effect by recognizing underlying psychological trauma. By identifying trauma as a key factor in youth's involvement in delinquency, we must adapt a compassionate approach. We need a comprehensive approach that will enable us to stop this vicious cycle. There has to be provision of psychotherapy interventions, teaching programs and employment opportunities so as to assist juveniles recover and rebuild their lives again. More research should focus on the long term impacts of trauma trained interventions aimed at developing best practices within the Juvenile Justice System.

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