

Effective Interventions for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Female and Male Offenders from the Perspectives of Urban Indigenous Youth at Saskatoon Community Youth Arts Programming (SCYAP).

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Abstract

This research was funded by the Centre for Forensic Behavioural Sciences & Justice Studies. It considers the perceptions of effective interventions for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit offenders through the perspectives of urban Indigenous youth at the Saskatoon Community Youth Arts Programming (SCYAP); a valuable organization that delivers art and culture based programming to address the social, economic, and educational needs of youth-at-risk. In the context of interventions for Indigenous youth (SCYAP) uses art as an intervention to assist youth at risk to foster a positive identity and provide creative ways of expressing themselves through art. The study is qualitative in nature and utilized the tools of ethnography critical the development of effective interventions for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit offenders. The study provide insights that can assist in the development of insights that can effect policy developments in respect to interventions for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit offenders who are disproportionately incarcerated in the Prairie Provinces.

Rationale

There is a need to recognize Indigenous perspectives in order to enhance our knowledge of how to enhance effective interventions for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit female and male offenders. Second, perceptions of the justice system by urban Indigenous youth can provide significant insights into how we can enhance effective interventions for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit female and male offenders. The literature shows that Indigenous people experience disproportionate rates of incarceration, and this development is reflected in Statistics Canada (2012: 7) youth correctional statistics:

In 2010/2011 a disproportionate number of youth entering the correctional system were Aboriginal. Of the admissions recorded in 2010/2011 in the eight jurisdictions that provided data, just over one quarter (26%) was Aboriginal... The disproportionate number of Aboriginal youth admitted to the correctional system was particularly true among females. In 2010/2011, Aboriginal female youth comprised 34% of all female youth in the correctional system, while Aboriginal male youth made up 24% of all male

youth in the correctional system...For both male and female youth in the general population, about 6% were Aboriginal”

This passage demonstrates that Indigenous youth and especially females experience much higher incarceration rates in comparison to non-Indigenous youth. Furthermore, the “overrepresentation of Aboriginal women in Canadian prisons is even greater than that of Aboriginal men ...Aboriginal women are incarcerated for more violent crimes than non-Aboriginal women. And alcohol has played a role in the offences of twice as many Aboriginal women in prison than Aboriginal men” (Linden, 2012: 191). It is anticipated that Indigenous youth perceptions of effective interventions for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit offenders through the perspectives is a positive step towards improving justice practices in Canada. Indigenous custody concerns have continued to increase even after the Gladue Report of 1999, which requires courts in Canada, to consider all sensible options to incarcerations when dealing with Aboriginal offenders. The Canadian Bar Association (2012: 1) notes that, “Canada’s Criminal Code applies to all aboriginal people, including offences by Indians whether on or off reserve. However, if convicted, the sentencing provisions of the Criminal Code direct judges to consider all reasonable alternatives to imprisonment, with particular attention to Aboriginal offenders. ” This report led to the development of Indigenous justice interventions with the courts working with Indigenous communities on matters of justice throughout Canada. (Green & Healey, 2003; Ross, 1996). Contemporary Indigenous justice interventions are grounded in cultural teachings, traditions, and practices that are taught largely by elders. Such teachings and practices respond to crime by focusing on repairing harm, healing victims and offenders and restoring balance in the community. Yazzie and Zion, note that Indigenous justice “is not to a process to punish or penalize people, but to teach them how to live a better life. It is a healing process that either restores good relationships among people or, if they do not have good relations to begin with, fosters and nourishes a healthy environment.” (1996: 160). These Indigenous justice interventions are about community building and healing and have rich cultural significance that reveal a great deal about what Indigenous communities find important about justice. Indigenous peoples are the fastest growing population in the Prairie Provinces, and it is important to invest in assisting Indigenous peoples to build a better future and a more viable Canadian society. Academic literature demonstrates that collaborative work between Indigenous people and the criminal justice system is a positive step towards improving justice practices for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit in Canada and society at large (Aboriginal Justice Inquiry, 1999; Commack 2012; Commission of First Nations and Metis Peoples, 2004; Hansen, 2014; Linden, 2012; Ross, 1996).

Research Methodology

Effective interventions for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Female and Male Offenders from the Perspectives of Urban Indigenous Youth at Saskatoon Community Youth Arts Programming (SCYAP), utilizes culturally appropriate ways for conducting research in Indigenous communities and it brings forward Indigenous worldviews that shape the research methodology. We had in-depth conversations with Indigenous youth and thus the methodological approach utilized in this research focus on the conversion of Indigenous perceptions. The tools of qualitative research methods such as ethnographic interviewing and observations are used in data collection. Such rich detail will be used to develop knowledge of the topic. Gall, Gall, & Borg, (2007: 491) note that research involves professional “practioners self-reflective efforts to

improve the rationality and justice of their work.” Participants were asked the following open-ended interview questions:

Research Questions

In your view, what are the most effective interventions for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit offenders in terms of:

1. Helping female and male offenders to heal, rehabilitate or correct behavior? Please comment on gender differences if any?
2. What kinds of interventions do you see are effective for female and male offenders in terms of addictions recovery?
3. Would it be helpful for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit offenders to have their families and community involved in an intervention such as a sentencing circle?
4. Do you believe cultural interventions such as healing lodges or sweat lodges are effective interventions for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit female and male offenders?
5. Are there any particular interventions that you have experienced or witnessed that you find very helpful?
6. Are there gender differences that need to be acknowledged in terms of effective interventions for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit offenders? Could you give me an example of this?
7. Do you see art as an effective intervention for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit offenders? Please explain?
8. Do you believe cultural interventions such as healing lodges or sweat lodges are effective interventions for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit female and male offenders?
9. What do you see as the most effective interventions offered by the Correctional Service of Canada for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit offenders?
10. What kinds of interventions would you like to see the Correctional Service of Canada provide to reduce incarceration rates for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit offenders?

The procedures of case study, personal experience, and interviews are practiced in this research. The participants will be recruited through postings at (SCYAP). The postings seek Indigenous males and females between the ages of 18 and 30 in Saskatoon who would like to participate in a study that examines effective interventions for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit female and male offenders. Since this research is related to Indigenous youth experiences, each participant is an Indigenous youth who utilizes the services of SCYAP. The graduate student researcher will conduct in-depth interviews with the seven participants who identified themselves as Indigenous youth. It is important to note that this study uses the term Indigenous to refer to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people in Canada.

Limitations of the Study

There are certain limitations in this ethnographic research that need to be acknowledged in this study. First, this research is conducted in Saskatoon and Inuit peoples are the least urbanized of Indigenous peoples in Canada and therefore will have limited discussion of the Inuit. Second, the research is qualitative in nature, and does not claim to represent or speak for all First Nations, Metis and Inuit male and female offenders.

Discussion of Findings

Those attending SCYAP are pleased with being in the program and are enjoying their experience. One participant stated that while one is at SCYAP "...you get to meet all kinds of people from all kinds of different background" (First Nation male, 20 years of age). "A lot of Aboriginals tend to be artistic in some way. We have stories to tell. Using art can shepherd Aboriginal youth to express themselves in ways that are not criminal" (First Nation female, 24 years of age). Another participant described how much needed and valued intervention programs are losing their funding: We used to do a program, Urban Canvas, but we've not done it for a few years because they didn't get funding. They'd take 12 at risk youth, under 30 years of age, and they'd teach Art for 9 months. I know that helps lots do different stuff after... like not illegally painting trains, like getting into school, finding jobs. Not getting into trouble. (Métis female, 30 years of age) This passage clearly illustrates the benefits of being involved in art interventions, which includes staying out of trouble. This is what an intervention program such as SCYAP is intended to produce. It is intended to keep the clients out of trouble and help them establish positive ways to live and heal.

Sense of Belonging

We found that having a sense of belonging, the ability to access positive role models, the ability to take pride in oneself and express that pride – in terms of both artistic expression and in the ability to give back all play a significant role in allowing participants to take ownership in something that is greater than themselves. The sense of individual displacement, for those on the margins, can be difficult as exclusion, social or otherwise, is an affront to one's individual humanity. The sense of "not" belonging can be devastating (Downey and Feldman 1996; Eisenberger et al. 2003; Mendoza-Denton et al. 2002). One reason for the success of SCYAP as an effective intervention is its inclusivity. As one respondent stated, "I think this place [SCYAP] is kind of for everybody. It's a community thing... I guess that helps... anybody can come here. Feeling safe is important (Métis female, 30 years of age). Another respondent stated, "From my experience, I've been in-and-out of institutions for a long time, mostly in, you need to find a purpose with/for your life. You need to find something that you like" (First Nation male, 24 years of age). A third respondent stated, "Community involvement is key. First Nation recognition is good, but a sense of community and of helping ourselves and others is very important. If you don't have family, then you can create one within the community" (First Nation male, 24 years of age). In speaking to the need to find belonging as a key component of effective interventions, it is useful to look toward those on the outside, or the othered, for guidance. To this end, Turiel (2002) observed that justice entails "equal respect for persons along with freedom from oppression as the standards by which individuals and society should be guided" (5). Cone (1975), a well-known Black theologian, echoed the fact that justice entails freedom from oppression. King (1963) famously stated that, "there is a tension in society that will help men to rise from the dark depths of prejudice and racism to the majestic heights of understanding and brotherhood" (3). The tension King was referring to was the demand by the oppressed for justice; that is, freedom from oppression. Understanding and brotherhood result when middle-class society realizes that when Tutu (1999) drew upon the Bantu notion of Visualizing Indigenous Perspectives 412 ubuntu, he was trying to impart a long-standing African cultural notion that what hurts one person hurts us all. Following this vein, Braithwaite (2003) offers a convincing argument that "providing social support to develop human capabilities to the

full is one particularly indispensable principle because it marks the need for a consideration of transforming as well as restoring or healing values” (12). To bring this discussion back around to the inclusivity of SCYAP, effective interventions must be examined not so much as a response to a crime committed, but as a healing endeavor. Bazemore and Schiff’s (2001) observation that community must occupy a focal position within this process is helpful. Not only does such thinking place the locus of responsibility for healing and inclusion with the local community, it does so without alleviating any individual of their personal responsibility, whatever their role is. Punishing for the sake of punishment is simply revenge. Revenge is not a mathematical formula in which two negatives equal a positive; unfortunately, the outcome of revenge is quite the reverse.

Positive Role Models

The available level of social support one is able to draw upon is a crucial factor when considering effective interventions. Low levels of social support have been associated with depression and posttraumatic stress disorder; whereas high levels of social support have been positively associated with active problem-focused coping, a sense of control, and self-esteem (Davidson and McEwen 2012; Hansen and Antsanen 2016). Earlier research by Barber and Crisp (1995) found that the degree of social support available from the most supportive individual in an addict’s social network was the primary predictor for using, or not using, over a three-month interval. The respondents within this study concur that role models are important. One respondent stated, “SCYAP has enhanced my skills, showed me how to work and collaborate with others. It [SCYAP] has allowed me to give back and help others through the gift given to me...” (First Nation male, 27 years of age). Another respondent stated, “We learn from older people; talking with them is so helpful” The Annual Review of Interdisciplinary Justice Research 413 (First Nation female, 24 years of age). Finally, speaking directly to the need to be able to seek guidance, a First Nation female (age 30) observes, “need a place where they can talk to someone and feel safe

Sense of Community

Research findings grounded within social disorganization theory postulate that criminal markets are the outcome of ineffective systems of pro-social control mechanisms (Anderson 1999; Curtis 1998; Wilson 1996). Fagan (1992) asserts that criminal activity flourishes “in a context of rapidly changing neighborhoods where the... informal social controls that limited crime... have been weakened” (102). As a result, in many deprived urban contexts criminal activity not only emerges but evolves into an “obvious statistical normality” (Hannerz 1969: 103). In communities where the collective capacity to obstruct illicit conduct is weakened, the transmission of this criminal behavior is more than likely to occur (Sampson and Wilson 1995). This literature provides an explanation of the manner by which informal social control shapes the distribution illicit markets while further suggesting that community organization partially accounts for the positive link between social structural disadvantage and drug market activity. Empirically grounded evidence from neighborhood-level studies suggests that a large amount of variation in crime is determined by systems of informal social control (Antsanen and Hansen 2012; Bellair 2000; Sampson et al. 1997; Taylor 2002). Additionally, research indicates that community organization has an inhibitory effect on neighborhood-level crime (Wilson 1996). Taken together, this line of inquiry supports the supposition that communities capable of practicing informal social control are able to reduce violence by monitoring and managing behaviors of

individuals (Antsanen and Hansen 2012; Bursik 1988; Bellair 2000). SCYAP is an example of informal social control at the community level. SCYAP offers clients the ability to both express themselves Visualizing Indigenous Perspectives 414 and take pride in that expression. As one respondent states, “Like it [SCYAP] helps me through my bad days. I can just come in here and paint and feel good about myself” (First Nation male, 24 years of age). Another respondent states, “There are a lot of therapeutic aspects to art. It helps you relax and focus. People enjoy it. It builds community”(First Nation male, 29 year of age). Finally, another respondent, when talking about SCYAP states, “People need to learn to dream big and aim high. We need to learn not to settle, but to work hard at getting more” (First Nation male, 27 years of age). SCYAP, by offering at risk clients an accepting place where they can “buy” into the program, allows clients to align their moral code to the group in order to maintain contact. Not only is a sense of belonging important (Downey and Feldman 1996), it has been noted that the mere threat of punishment does little to change active criminal behavior. While some researchers (Manski and Pepper 2012) question how data alone can identify the deterrent effects of capital punishment, the fact that it occurs so frequently is problematic. Furthermore, Giordano et al. (2002) note that the need for a “general openness to change” (1001) is necessary for someone to move away from criminal activity. Papachristos et al. (2012) note that offenders reformed more readily when links to criminal social networks are weakest. As SCYAP provides an accepting community that fosters individual development within the bounds of social cohesion, both at risk Indigenous clients and the community at large benefit.

Conclusions

This study demonstrates that for seven Indigenous clients, finding a community in which they can both express themselves and take pride in that expression, and ultimately in their own self-worth, is one principle objective any future intervention with at risk Indigenous young offenders needs to incorporate. SCYAP offers the youth a sense of community while providing positive role models allows at risk clients to willfully incorporate behavioral change as they wish to “buy in” to belonging to such a community. SCYAP is a strong example of how a community based intervention that does not undergird its presence with the threat of retribution, can work by simply offering a person something of value; the sense of belonging and acceptance. SCYAP is, in other words, an organization that provides youth with a sense of social inclusion which promotes the development of effective interventions for the urban Indigenous youth in this study.

Knowledge Mobilization Activities

The data for this study serves as the impetus for development and basis for the publication in the peer reviewed journal listed below.

Charlton, J. & Hansen, J.G. (2016) Visualizing Indigenous Perspectives of how the Saskatoon Community Arts Program (SCYAP) Addresses Social Exclusion. The Annual Review of Interdisciplinary Justice Research. Volume 5. University of Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. http://media.wix.com/ugd/bab59a_76b042fed3174b31803d21cdf7248eb0.pdf

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