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Rehabilitation of Public Offender

Introduction:

Rehabilitation of public offenders has been a big issue in the criminal justice system as there has been this confrontation of old school and new school of thought. The old school is this idea of locking offenders up and keeping them locked up. Then we have a new population of people going in to work in the criminal justice system where we focus more on rehabilitation and having the offender to be ready to be reintroduced into society. Rehab programs have shown, if done right that it can be really effective and looking at past evidence-based programs, we should start looking at this school of thought to have less recidivism in the criminal justice world.

There are already programs implemented or trying to be implemented but there is still some resistance to the idea of rehabilitating criminals. Some crimes are easy to write/create programs and have the government approve of them, but murder is probably the highest capital crime a person can commit. Many people have conflicting thoughts on if we should rehab offenders who have committed murder, even I have conflicting thoughts on if we should rehab murderers. Then there is also the lack of evidence-based programs specifically for murders.

Murder Federal Crime:

Murder is the unlawful killing of another human being with malice aforethought. Murder law and punishment changes from state to state having different degrees of murder to different sub groups of murder. The federal law only recognizes murder to the first and second degree.

While Wisconsin's does not follow the same murder laws as the federal government on murder, instead they have a First-degree intentional homicide, first-degree reckless homicide, and felony murder. The first-degree murder in the federal law means a murder that has been premeditated or planned, while the second-degree murder is a murder that wasn't planned/premeditated. By the federal law the first degree can be punished to the death penalty or life in federal prison, while the second-degree is punishable to any term of imprisonment and up to life but can't be punished by the death penalty.

Watts Family Murder:

The case example I am using for murder is the Watts family murder. The murder was taken place in Colorado where they also follow the federal rules on murder as they only have first- and second-degree murder in their law. In Colorado, if the offender is found guilty in the first degree, life in prison is the sentence. If found guilty in the second degree, 16-48 years must be carried out in prison.

A quick summary of the crimes that happened is that Chris Watts was having an affair for months, and his wife found out and confronted him about which led him to kill his pregnant wife and two daughters by strangulation and smothering. He then threw the two daughters in oil tanks and buried his wife yards out from the oil tank where he put his daughters in. Then Shannon (Wife) friends reported her missing since she was going to drive her to her doctor's appointment, and she was a no show. Then the police searched the house and saw nothing to show that someone kidnapped them or that Shannon took the kids and ran away. They then started to suspect Chris Watts and they brought him in for questioning where he confessed to him killing his wife because he got caught from the affair he was having. Watts pleaded guilty on multiple accounts of first-degree murder as a part of a plea deal to avoid the death penalty. He was

sentenced to five life sentences with no possibility of parole and three to be served consecutively. He received an additional 48 years for the unlawful termination of Shannon's pregnancy. Also 36 years for three charges of tampering with a deceased body.

Rehab Services:

I tried looking all around if there were any specific rehab services for offenders who committed murder, but I only found rehab services already in service. These services included, adult education services, job skill workshops, mental and physical health service, and employment preparation. Then I found a research study which looked at different serial killers and looked at what treatment or rehabilitation they were given but almost always the offenders would turn down the treatment or not really engage in the treatment. Psychiatrist who worked with killers said this comes from this idea of hopelessness, most times the offenders are in prison for life, so they see no need to attend rehab services or are not motivated to go through the program and change. Then with already the debate on rehabilitation or lock them up going on, I feel offenders locked up for murders would be one of the last groups to get specified rehabilitation programs out there for them. Due to the idea if we should let murders back into society, and if serial killers or people who killed someone premediated or planned can be changed and rehabilitated.

My Own Services:

Since I couldn't really find any current specified programs for murders, I based my own program off another service that is an evidence-based program. I first would create a threat level, probably based off the one Wisconsin already uses from COMPASS from a scale of 0-10. Then I would have 2 different groups for that threat level, one for first degree murders, then one for

second degree murders or any other sub group of murder. I would do this as I stated above, most murders who were in for life, with no possibility of parole, have the feeling of hopelessness and would be less willing to cooperate or go through the program. With the different groups, I know people who are charged with murder on the first degree are more likely to be in for life compared to people who were charged in the second degree. From there I would then have three different sub groups which would base on how long they are sentenced in prison for. Those groups would be, G1 0-25 years, G2 26-50, G3 51-100+.

I would do all this grouping to cross section the everything, threat level, degree of murder, and life sentence to find the best candidates for rehabilitation. As lower threat level, second degree murder, and a G1/G2 groups would be more willing to participate in the rehab program and not have this sense of hopelessness. That many counselors and psychiatrist noticed when working with this population of offenders.

Then my next step would to be introduce restorative justice as I see this type of rehabilitation program to be really well suited for this population in prison. Restorative Justice is a different approach than other services as this one focuses on having the offender and victim/wider community meet to heal the harm that was done and rebuilding that relationship. Some of the programs typically identified with Restorative Justice include: Victim/Offender Mediation or Dialogue, Conferencing, Peacemaking circles, Victim assistance and involvement, Former prisoner assistance and involvement, Reduction of DMI (Disparate Minority Incarceration), Real restitution and, Community service. Restorative Justice is a great way to help rehabilitate murderers as it focuses on heal what has been broken, and it helps the offender accept full and direct accountability. This type of treatment needs the offender to have its full participation and agreement on how the service works. That's why I would focus on

people who have a threat level of 0-5, second degree murder charge and in the G1/2 group as this cross section would be more likely to be willing to accept this service and be successfully rehabilitated back into society.

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