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Mental Health Problems among Female Offenders and Its Relation to Social Engineering

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study is to understand the common mental health problems among female offenders and how they affect the society through application of rehabilitation program. Female offenders have always been a minor subject in research and study. So far, theory and research relating to crime had been focusing on male offenders. As a result, correctional program that has been used for female offenders is based on male criminality and often failed to provide the appropriate option for the needs of female offenders. In Malaysia, the study on female offenders has not draws so much interest contributing to a lack of information regarding this population. Factors that may cause a female to commit a crime have not been studied much. The number of female offenders however, seem to be increasing annually. One of the major concerns in female criminality is mental health problems. Various study revealed that female offenders had higher rates of having at least one mental health problems. The methodology of this study is designed based on cross-sectional study using a psychometric instrument, Carlson Psychological Survey (CPS). The findings showed that chemical abuse and antisocial tendency are very common among female offenders.

Keywords: *Mental health problems, Female offenders, Social engineering, Rehabilitation program, Crime.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Female offenders have always been a minor subject in research and study. For a very long time, theory and research relating to crime had been focusing on male offenders [1] [2]. As a result, correctional program that has been used for female offenders is based on male criminality and often failed to provide the appropriate option for the needs of female offenders [1] [3]. The lack of information and knowledge about them has caused difficulties in designing an appropriate rehabilitation program for this population. Although there is an existing program for the rehabilitation of prisoners, a better program may be created based on a better understanding of the prisoners themselves. A specific

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study on this population should be done to gather the information for the appropriate rehabilitation, consisting of empirical knowledge including antisocial behavior, chemical abuse, and thought disturbance. This empirical knowledge can give us an idea of why a woman commits a crime.

The purpose of rehabilitation is to restore people who offend to their previous or better condition. This rehabilitation program can be implemented in prison which is created to punish as well as to rehabilitate a person who has offended. How well this works depends on how effective the rehabilitation program is. In order to create an effective rehabilitation program, sufficient knowledge about the prisoners themselves is needed. The effectiveness of the rehabilitation program is crucial to the society itself since it helps how the prisoners enter and integrate with the society again after being discharged from the prison. The failure to provide this function may lead to recidivism or disturbance to the society.

1.1 The objectives of this study are:

1. To prepare empirical knowledge regarding antisocial behavior, chemical abuse, thought disturbance and self-depreciation.
2. To understand the common mental health problems among female offenders and how they affect the society through application of rehabilitation program.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Mental health problems are a major concern in female criminality. Bureau of Justice Statistics (2006) highlighted that female inmates had higher rates of mental health problems than male inmates in the United State [4]. Various study focusing on mental health problems revealed that female offenders had higher rates of having at least one mental health problems [5] [6] [7]. Many studies across the western countries, especially the United State of America [4] [8], England and Wales [5] [9] [10] had been conducted to explore the prevalence of mental health in prison setting. This gives an idea that mental health problems might be a factor that likely to cause criminal behavior.

Fazel and Danesh (2002) had reviewed 62 surveys of serious mental disorders among 23,000 prisoners across 12 western countries. The review included both male and female prisoners with the majority being male. The serious mental disorders stated in this review include psychosis, major depression and antisocial disorder. The result of the review showed that 4% of female prisoners had psychotic illnesses, 12% had major depression and 42%t had a personality disorder where 21% suffered from antisocial personality disorder. Fazel and Danesh (2002) suggested that for antisocial personality disorder

alone, about one in five female prisoners have at least one of these disorders. This indicates that the risks of having serious mental disorders are more likely higher in prisoners as compared to the general population [5].

For every five female prisoners, one has been reported to have antisocial personality disorder [11]. This suggests the increasing number of violent crimes among female. Due to the lack of studies, the relationship of this impulsive and aggressive behavior among female to the biological mechanism is unclear. According to Eronen *et al* (1996), aggression overlaps a number of psychiatric disorders as a symptom. However, it is commonly associated with personality disorder namely antisocial personality disorder [12]. The highest prevalence rates of antisocial personality disorder are found in prisons and forensic settings [13]. Increase in crimes committed by females showed that there is a need to study the relationship between female offenders and antisocial personality disorder. In Finland, it was found that approximately one tenth of homicides were committed by females and the risk for homicide has been reported to be exceptionally high in women with antisocial personality disorder [12].
Substance or chemical abuse had been reported among a significant number of female inmates where 70% of women in the United State prison were estimated to have used drug some time in their life [14]. A study conducted on female prisoners in Queensland reported 80% of this population used illicit drug at some time with the most common used drug was cannabis [15]. A systematic review on 13 studies regarding substance abuse in prison population showed estimated prevalence for alcohol abuse among female prisoners ranged from 10% to 24% and 30% to 60% for drug abuse [10]. While the estimated prevalence for alcohol abuse can be considered low, the estimated prevalence for drug abuse among female prisoners was higher than male counterpart (estimated range 10% to 48%). In another study, it was found that female used drug more frequently, used harder drug and had different reason to use drug compared to male [16]. A study on New South Wales prisoners showed the same pattern where substance abuse was more common in females than males. Drug abuse was found higher in females whereas alcohol abuse was higher in males [17].

3. METHOD

3.1 Participant

This study involves two groups of respondent. The first group is the study group (divided into 2 subgroups; Malaysian and non-Malaysian) consisting of female prisoners from one prison (named as prison A). For the Malaysian subgroup, the numbers of respondents are 46 inmates, while for the non-Malaysian subgroup, 88 respondents participate in the study. The second group

is the control group, the free living females in Kubang Kerian and Kota Bharu, Kelantan.

3.2 Measure

Carlson Psychological Survey (CPS) designed by Carlson (1982) [18], has been used in this study. The CPS is a psychometric instrument designed specifically for individuals who offend or are convicted of a crime. It enables information regarding antisocial behavior, chemical abuse and thought disturbance to be gathered in one survey at one time. It has four scales which are chemical abuse, thought disturbance, antisocial tendencies and self-depreciation. A validity scale was also included for the purpose of validating the respondent test-taking attitude. This measurement contains 50 items with a level four literacy level which is easily understood by respondents. Each item in CPS has five responses. The respondent needs to choose one that is most related to her and complete the 50 items. From each response given, a raw score is calculated for each scale.

3.3 Data Collection

The CPS was prepared according to the number of participants. The study group answered the survey in groups of ten in prison A. The survey was semi-structured and the researcher had a chance of interacting with the respondents but not directly interviewing the respondents. For the control group, participants who volunteered to participate were given the survey, and asked to return it as soon as they finished the survey.

3.4 Analysis

After data collection, all the data were transferred into SPSS. The analyses included a comparison between the study group and the control group, comparisons between subgroups within the study group, and comparison between convictions in study group. For statistical analysis, multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used.
Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) is the extension of univariate analysis of variance to the involvement of multiple dependent variables [19]. It was chosen for this data since this study involved multiple variables. The main objective in using MANOVA is to determine the affect of independent variables on the dependent variables. In this study, the independent variables were ethnicity, age, type of crime and length of incarceration for the study group. For the control group, the independent variables were ethnicity, age and working status. For dependent variables, scores of chemical abuse (CA), thought disturbance (TD), antisocial tendency (AT) and self-depreciation (SD) were selected for both groups.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

From Table 1 (Appendix), it showed that chemical abuse and antisocial tendency are very common among the offenders population. Both factors occurred across the ethnicity, the types of crimes and the length of incarceration. Chemical abuse occurred across the age range as well. This proved that chemical abuse and antisocial behavior are high among offenders [5] [6] [10] [20] [21]. The occurrence of chemical abuse and antisocial among this population also showed that there is a positive association between these two factors [22] [23] [24]. Through this study, thought disturbance and self-depreciation did not show a strong occurrence amongst the offender population. However, this does not indicate that there is no thought disturbance and self-depreciation in the entire population.
The control group did not show any strong prevalence of all these factors except across the ethnicity. Between ethnicities, there are occurrence of chemical abuse and self-depreciation. However, comparison of means for chemical abuse between the study group and the control group showed that the control group has much lower mean than the study group. This indicates that there are occurrences of chemical abuse in the control group. However, incidences might be low and not significant for this study.

Comparison between groups, including the subgroups showed a positive result. As expected for the outcome, there is a prevalence of all the dependent variables amongst the study group. The Malaysian subgroup showed a high prevalence of chemical abuse and antisocial tendency. On the other hand, non-Malaysian subgroup showed a high prevalence of thought disturbance and self-depreciation. This showed that the offender population has higher a risk of chemical abuse, antisocial tendency, thought disturbance and self-depreciation compared to the general population [5] [6] [10] [20] [21].

As mentioned earlier, there are positive association of chemical abuse and antisocial tendency amongst the Malaysian subgroup. Antisocial behavior had been defined as related to substance dependence and legal problems [25]. The result of this study proved that there is a relationship between antisocial behavior and chemical abuse. The high prevalence amongst offenders showed that antisocial behavior is likely to be related to unlawful behavior as well.

The non-Malaysian subgroup showed a high occurrence of thought disturbance and self-depreciation compared to the Malaysian subgroup. This may indicate that as a group non-Malaysian incarcerated offender have some forms of mental problems. Thought disturbance has been defined as disturbance in the form of thought and may involve confusion, hallucination, and delusion [26]. The high prevalence amongst the non-Malaysian subgroup may refer more to disturbance in thought due to pressure being away from home, which is

Indonesia. On the other hand, self-depreciation is defined as undervalue of oneself and it is more likely due to the feeling of inferiority and weakness.
High prevalence of thought disturbance and self-depreciation amongst the non-Malaysian subgroup does not mean the Malaysian subgroup does not suffer from these two factors. In fact, the means of both variables for the Malaysian subgroup are very close to the non-Malaysian. They are also very high compared to the control group. This showed that there are likelihoods that the Malaysian subgroup may have thought disturbance and self-depreciation as well.

5. CONCLUSION

The analysis carried out proved that chemical abuse and antisocial tendency are high amongst the female offenders. These showed that both variables are very likely to become the factors for a female to commit a crime. Both factors also showed a high probability to be associated with each other. A comparative analysis proved that chemical abuse and antisocial tendency are more likely to occur in the offender population compared to the general population. This provides the empirical knowledge needed and help to explain what is necessary for a better rehabilitation.
Thought disturbance and self-depreciation showed a high occurrence amongst the non-Malaysian subgroup. However, this does not mean that both do not occur amongst the Malaysian subgroup. The result of the analysis showed that the Malaysian subgroup has a high probability to suffer thought disturbance and self-depreciation as compared to the control group. Therefore, the offender population is more likely to have thought disturbance and self-depreciation. Both are also likely to become the factors for a female to offend.
Presence of certain type of mental health problems which is common among the offender's population should be considered in preparing a good rehabilitation program. Effective rehabilitation program helps the prisoners to integrate back into the society when they are discharged from the prison and consequently providing the society a better structure of safety and free from conflict.

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APPENDIX

Table 1: Summary of the MANOVA tests on all independent and dependent variables in this study for both groups.

Independent and dependent variables interaction		MANOVA Tests	Results
Study group	Ethnicity – all the dependent variables	1. Multivariate tests	- α = .000, significance differences in the dependent variables across ethnicity
		2. Tests of Between-Subjects Effects	- α for CA and AT < .05, CA and AT differ significantly across ethnicity. - Due to insufficient numbers of sample for each ethnic, comparison among ethnics cannot be done.
		3.Estimated Marginal Means	- CA and AT are likely to occur among ethnic in this group.
	Age range – all the dependent variables	1. Multivariate tests	- α >.05, no significance differences in the dependent variables across age range
		2. Tests of Between-Subjects Effects	- α for CA < .05, CA differs significantly across age range. - Due to insufficient numbers of sample, comparison among age range cannot be done.
		3.Estimated Marginal Means	- CA is likely to occur among age range.
	Types of crime – all the dependent variables	1. Multivariate tests	- α = .000, significance differences in the dependent variables across the types of crime
		2. Tests of Between-Subjects Effects	- α for CA and AT < .05, CA and AT differ significantly across the types of crime. - Due to insufficient numbers of sample for each types of crime, comparison among them cannot be done.
		3.Estimated Marginal Means	- CA and AT are likely to occur among types of crime.

	Length of incarceration – all the dependent variables	1. Multivariate tests	- α = .000, significance differences in the dependent variables across the length of incarceration.
		2. Tests of Between-Subjects Effects	- α for CA and AT < .05, CA and AT differ significantly across the length of incarceration. - Due to insufficient numbers of sample, comparison among length of incarceration cannot be done.
		3. Estimated Marginal Means	- CA and AT are likely to occur among different length of incarceration in this group.

Independent and dependent variables interaction		MANOVA Tests	Results
Control group	Ethnicity – all the dependent variables	1. Multivariate tests	- α = .00, significance differences in the dependent variables across the ethnicity
		2. Tests of Between-Subjects Effects	- α for CA and SD < .05, CA and SD differ significantly across ethnicity. - Due to insufficient numbers of sample for each ethnic, comparison among ethnics cannot be done.
		3. Estimated Marginal Means	- CA and SD are likely to occur among ethnic in this group.
	Age range – all the dependent variables	1. Multivariate tests	- all α values are more than .05, no significant multivariate effects in age range.
		2. Tests of Between-Subjects Effects	- all the α values are more than .05, no dependant variables contribute to the significant multivariate effects. Dependent variables are not affected by the age range

	Working status – all the dependent variables	1. Multivariate tests 2. Tests of Between-Subjects Effects	- all α values are more than .05, no significant multivariate effects in working status. - all the α values are more than .05, no dependant variables contribute to the significant multivariate effects. Dependent variables are not affected by the working status.
Between groups	Groups – all the dependent variables	1. Multivariate tests 2. Tests of Between-Subjects Effects 3. Estimated Marginal Means	- α = .000, significance differences in the dependent variables across groups. - α for all dependent variables < .05, all dependent variables differ significantly across groups. - Malaysian subgroup has the highest means for CA and AT (means= 23.96, 32.98). Malaysian subgroup has higher score in CA and AT than the others. - Non-Malaysian subgroup has highest means for TD and SD. The non-Malaysian subgroup score higher in both compare to the others.