

The Status of Counseling in Brunei Prisons: Qualitative Exploratory Case Study

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Abstract

Prisons have many functions but the two major and basic ones are (1) to enhance safety and security in the society by keeping away people with dangerous criminal and predatory behaviors; and (2) reform the convicts prior to returning them back to the community as productive and useful members. Recidivism problems (relapse, or re-offending, or repeat acts) are often common partly due to the way inmates are handled while in prison and what happens to them in society upon release. Counseling and psychotherapy are procedures intended to help the prisoners to change their behaviors in desirable manners. Based on interviews, the present study found that both individual and group counseling are conducted in Brunei prisons. However, evidence suggested that the quality of counseling needed to be improved. This could be done in many ways including increasing budgetary support and providing further training to counselors. It appears that family counseling and the role of various re-integration programs need to be emphasized. This is where more attention, efforts, and priority should be directed. We recommended further mixed methods research to gain additional insights into the problem and its possible solutions.

Keywords

Prison; inmates; convicts; counseling; psychotherapy; recidivism; re-integration

1. Introduction, background and setting

The Brunei Prison Department is a government agency under the Ministry of Home Affairs. It is responsible for the management of correctional institutions comprising of Jerudong Male Prison, Jerudong Female Prison, and the Maraburong Prison, all of which are administered in accordance with the provisions of the Prison Act and Prison Rules (Chapter 51 of the State

Laws of Brunei Darussalam). The Prison Department's vision is *"to be an excellent rehabilitation institution"* while its mission is *"to protect society with safe humane custody and ideal rehabilitation of the inmates to foster useful and responsible members of society"*. The Brunei prison and detention center conditions generally meet international standards. As of 2013, Maraburong prison held 236 prisoners while the Jerudong prison had 282 offenders of whom 40 were women (held in a separate facility within the prison compound). According to Brunei laws, juveniles are not subject to imprisonment. However, the courts send juvenile offenders to local rehabilitation centers such as Al-Hidayah. In 2013, approximately 10 percent of the prison population consisted of individuals awaiting trial. Nearly 25 percent of the inmate population consisted of foreigners of various races, religions, and nationality.

Brunei prisons run five main categories of rehabilitative programs such as: physical rehabilitation; psychological rehabilitation; social rehabilitation; moral rehabilitation; and civic rehabilitation. All these efforts are intended to persuade inmates to repent, become law-abiding, and productive citizens. The implementation of rehabilitative activities is not only limited to the correctional institutions but also extends to additional external outreach programmes to assist families of inmates and encourage whole recovery as well as social reintegration of the inmates. The government of Brunei has trained prison personnel in all correctional facilities in basic counseling skills to assist inmates in identifying their presenting antisocial issues and facilitate their reintegration into society. In-prison counseling is thus a means for reducing the negative effects of imprisonment. Research shows that many prisoners suffer from relatively low-level psychological disturbances such as depression, anxiety, stress, and sleeping disorders. Early identification and intervention could help prevent these prisoners from developing more deep-seated mental health problems.

1.1 Counseling research in Brunei society and prisons

In Brunei, counseling is relatively still new and hence studies on counseling activities in this country are scarce. There are many reasons why this situation is persisting. First, although there is a counseling degree program at the University of Brunei Darussalam, the number of counselors in the country is still small. In addition, there are only few registered counselors in the country with legal practising certificates or licenses as reported by Mundia (2009). Second, it is difficult to do psychological and counseling research in Brunei using western instruments that are written in standard English because the main and official language used in Brunei is Bahasa Melayu. The difficulties encountered with instrumentation are discussed in some of the few published previous studies. For example, Mundia and Bakar (2010) found that many major instruments were not yet translated into the local language and doing translations (forward and backward) and validating all the editions was a tedious task. Technical problems also often arise when using western instruments for psychological and counseling research in Brunei. For instance, Mundia (2011a) found that the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory – Revised Edition, MMPI-2, had poor reliability and validity. This however, depends on two other factors, namely the educational level of the sample who are administered the instrument and the length of the instrument. The higher the

educational level of the research participants the better the reliability and validity. For research participants to have enough time to read the items, reflect and make meaningful responses, a long instrument such as the MMPI-2 with 560 items needs (in practice) to be divided into parts or sections which are then administered in phases. Despite these technical issues, the felt need to use standard western instruments (adopted or modified format) in Brunei psychological and counseling research is apparent because developing and validating new instruments requires psychometric skills that may be beyond the reach of some counselors in the country. To this end, western instruments have already been successfully used in a few Brunei studies regarding: depression, anxiety and stress in student teachers (Mundia, 2010a); students' coping strategies to stressful situations (Mundia, 2010b); mental health in trainee teachers (Mundia, 2010c); secondary school mathematics education (2010d); mathematics anxiety (Hamid et al., 2013); the impact of a child with autism on the Bruneian family system (Tait & Mundia, 2012) and the relationship between mental health and teaching (Mundia, 2013). The instruments have also been used in research about: effects of psychological distress on academic achievement (Mundia, 2011b); non-adherence to medication (Mundia, 2012); assessment of psychological distress in Brunei female and mature age parttime students (Haq & Mundia, 2013); and more recently with Brunei prisoners (Matzin et al., 2014). Some of the instruments have been used to identify school-going children with antisocial behaviors or delinquents (see Mundia, 2006).

1.2 Types and effectiveness of prisoner counseling programs

Guidance and counseling services in the prisons are meant to assist the inmates to reform themselves by making relevant decisions that will repair the deficiencies in them so that they can return to society and become productive members. While safety and security are paramount in prisons, the Prison Administration also has a responsibility to provide inmates with opportunities to participate in programmes that can provide them with the skills they need to lead crime-free life after release. These programmes should provide many self-improvement avenues, such as work in prison industries and other institutions, vocational training, education, drug abuse treatment, religious observance, parenting, anger management, guidance and counseling, and other programs that teach essential life skills.

Two types of counseling occur in Brunei prisons – individual and group. Individual or Personal counseling is to assist the clients in resolving personal issues that may be preventing them from achieving their potential and everything discussed with a counselor is strictly confidential. On the other hand, group counseling involves a small number of people (usually 6-10) who meet together, along with one or two counselors to talk about their struggles and problems. These groups can take a variety of forms. Some focus on a specific topic or problem, while others address a number of different concerns.

Of the two modes of counseling, group counseling is thought to be more effective than individual counseling. When people come into a group and interact freely with other group members, they tend to recreate those difficulties that brought them to counseling in the first

place. Under the skilled direction of the group facilitators, the group is able to give support, offer alternatives, or gently confront the individual. In this way, the difficulty is resolved, alternative behaviours are learned, and the individual develops new social skills.

Group counseling has been found to be a very effective means of treatment and, in some cases, the best form of treatment for a particular individual or a particular type of concern. Group counseling helps to develop positive peer pressure that will influence its members to change. This is so because, clients learn more about how they are perceived by others and experience a sense of acceptance and belonging. They will also discover that they are not alone in the difficulties they are experiencing as they hear ideas from others which enhance their ability to make decisions and solve problem. The association will enable them to experience the benefit of being helpful to others and learn to constructively express their feelings and ideas to others. More so, they get encouragement by observing the successes of others. The responsibility is shared among the group leaders and all group members.

1.3 Objectives of the study

The main objective of the present study was to find out the status of counseling in the three prisons in Brunei. Specifically and broadly, we wanted to determine the types of counseling provided to inmates.

2. Methods

We briefly explain below the research design, sample, data collection, data analysis, and procedures used in conducting the present study.

2.1 Design

The study was a qualitative case study of five counselors working in three Brunei prisons. The rationale and justification for using this approach was to get in-depth information from the participants. Of course case studies have their own disadvantages which are discussed below under the limitations section.

2.2 Sample

As stated above, the nonprobability sample consisted of 5 counselors working in Brunei prisons. Since the sample was too small ($N = 5$), the demographic characteristics of the participants are withheld and kept confidential for ethical reasons (to prevent identifying the individual participants).

2.3 Instruments

Data were collected via in-depth informal interviews which were conducted in Bahasa

Melayu language. All the 16 items on the interview schedule were open-ended to permit inmates to respond freely. Such interviews allowed little room for misinterpretation as the interviewees were, through probes, asked to explain their answers more clearly. Appropriate prompts were thus used whenever necessary to solicit further responses from the interviewee if prolonged answers were needed or to clarify the responses. The reliability of the obtained data was determined through intra-coder agreement reliability which was 83%. Having been derived from a prison environment and to be used to solve problems in prison contexts, the data was assumed to have had both good ecological validity and adequate social validity, respectively.

2.4 Data analyses

The interviews were tape-recorded, transcribed, and then analysed qualitatively using content analysis and constant comparison techniques (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990) to generate categories, themes, and quotations.

2.5 Procedures

Prior to collecting the data, prison authorities and the participants were told about the purpose and objectives of the study. No deception was involved in the study. In addition, the participants were told both verbally and in writing about the ethical conditions or requirements for being involved in the study. The discussion on this topic centered on issues of voluntary participation, privacy, anonymity, confidentiality, physical and psychological harm, debriefing, and informed consent. Participants were given ample time to reflect on and withdraw from the study if they felt uncomfortable with the research's purpose and objective. The participants voluntarily agreed to participate in the study. With regard to language problems, all the interviews were conducted in Bahasa Melayu (Brunei's mother tongue and official language). The study met the ethical requirements for using human participants in research stipulated by the participants' university, the Government of Brunei, and the Helsinki Declaration.

3. Results of the study

The participants' responses to the 16 interview questions are presented in Table 1 below. The categorical answers are direct translations from Bahasa Melayu language.

Table 1

Responses to interview items

Item Question #	Counselor Response
1 Why do you give A counseling services to criminals?	Inmates suffer from stress and emotional disturbance while in prison and counseling is key to rehabilitation
B	It is my duty as an Assistant Counselor to do it
C	To help inmates to understand their problem, solve it and produce behaviour change
D	To help inmates how to handle problems
E	The task is entrusted to me
2 When do you give them A counseling?	After self-referral for counseling or referred for counseling
B	Discharged inmates' program 09.00-11.15am and 14.00-15.15pm
C	By appointment date
D	When an inmate requests, or inmate is to be released or when they are referred to undergo counseling
E	During working hours from 07.45am to 15.45pm
3 What type of counseling A services do you offer the criminals?	Individual Counseling, Career Counseling, Family Counseling and Group Guidance sessions.
B	Individual Counseling, Group Guidance, Peer Support Group and Orientation.
C	Individual Counseling, Group Counseling, Career Counseling, Family Counseling and Guidance.
D	Individual Counseling, Group Counseling, Individual and Group Guidance.
E	Individual Counseling, Group Counseling, Individual and Group Guidance.
4 Which categories of A criminals need counseling?	Normally for short sentence inmates and pre released inmates.
B	Orientation session for all incoming inmates. Individual counseling (locals), involuntary inmates who are identified.

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| | C | Inmates being referred, inmates who seek counseling and inmates who are willing to have counseling. |
| | D | All categories of inmates. |
| | E | All categories of inmates. |
| 5 | How often do you counsel A your clients (criminals)? | Subject to issues being shared by the inmates, some may lead to 3 to 4 sessions. |
| | B | Minimum of 3 inmates per month. |
| | C | Group Counseling - 3 times a week.
Individual Counseling - Depending on the source of the problem |
| | D | Twice a day. |
| | E | Subjects to the problems faced. |
| 6 | Where do you offer the A counseling services? | In the counseling room. |
| | B | In the Women's Prison. |
| | C | Special room for individual counseling. |
| | D | In the rehabilitation block and during orientation session. |
| | E | In the prison. |
| 7 | When do you give A counseling to the inmates? | When the inmates requested and subject to availability of escort (prison guard). |
| | B | Being referred and inmates voluntarily seeking counseling. |
| | C | Office hours. |
| | D | Conducted everyday according to the timetable being set. |
| | E | Reffered inmates and when the counseling service is requested by the inmates. |
| 8 | List 3 problems A encountered during counseling sessions. | Conditions of the room is not conducive.
Limitations of counseling due to the shortage of escort. |
| | B | Adaptation problem among the inmates in prison. Personal problems related to family and marriage. Recidivism problem among the inmates |
| | C | Marriage, career and financial. |
| | D | Complexity of understanding the counseling techniques. Limited space or place. |

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| | | E | Inmates being referred are not ready to have counseling. Cross-cultural and religious. Inmates who alleged incest case. |
| 9 | State 3 problems A encountered as a counselor after giving the services to your clients (criminals) | B | Inmates have not been able to practice the changes as they are still in prison. |
| | | C | Counselors cannot do follow up sessions due to other job commitments. Feedbacks for cases being referred to other relevant agencies usually too long to wait. Inmates have less privacy and often considered complaining to the counselor. |
| | | D | No problem. |
| | | E | Inmates' behavior remains the same. Inmates had difficulty in understanding the techniques being introduced by the counselor. |
| | | E | No problem. |
| 10 | State 3 benefits that your A clients derived from counseling | B | They feel relieved and relaxed. Glad that they are being heard. They are being motivated and encouraged to change. |
| | | C | Able insights into the problems. Inmates can build their own action and Counselor only give guidance. Inmates show behaviour of negative reaction to a positive reaction |
| | | D | Inmates gain intellectual and emotional stability. Inmates can solve the problems and concerns. Inmates able to plan and obtain self satisfaction. |
| | | E | Inmates able to insight after counseling. Inmates have a passion to live. Inmates able to think well in stages. |
| | | E | Inmates can think rationally. Inamets can make a decision. Inmates able to determine the best option. |
| 11 | Have your counseling A services reduced the tendency of crime commitment of your clients? Yes/No. If Yes | | From individual counseling, cause of crime can be detected. Through counseling, inmates have the opportunity to correct the ways of thinking. |

give 2 examples

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| | B | Pre released program. Pre released counseling. |
| | C | High risk inmates able to create harmony in their block. Inmates began to realize the importance of discipline. |
| | D | Inmates can think rationally and not emotionally. Emphasize goals in life. |
| | E | No. |
| 12 | A | Have you been able to reintegrate your clients (criminals) into normal society through the counseling services? Yes/No. If Yes, give 02 examples |
| | B | Through coaching and motivation sessions from the officials, headmen and various government agencies and private sector. Through family counseling sessions. |
| | C | The involvement of various agencies during the pre released program. An example recidivism case where they are being given shelter, job and financial assistance. |
| | D | Inmates are taught how to deal with the community. Educates inmates to be independent. |
| | E | No |
| | F | No |
| 13 | A | Have your clients (ex-convicts) been accepted by their societies? Yes/No. If Yes, give 2 examples |
| | B | Yes, some of the inmates had returned to their work in the private sector. They are being welcomed by their family especially parents and siblings. |
| | C | Inmates able to find work once released. The family being supportive of the inmate's involvement in business by giving financial assistance. |
| | D | The inmates get a job due to good behavior and working skills. Returned to their family to live happily. |
| | E | Through the career of endeavor. Live their lives daily. |
| | F | No comment. |

- 14 Do you have a counseling A room? Yes/ No. If Yes, how appropriate and confidential is it?
- No.
- B Yes, the door has a window and the walls are soundproof.
- C Yes, a special room, conducive and safe.
- D Small, cozy space and not open.
- E Used together and not conform to the actual resolution of counseling services.
- 15 Why is it the most effective A for you?
- Individual Counseling is very necessary to understand and explore issues facing the inmates. Family counseling aims to strengthen and enhance inmates' relationships with their families.
- B Individual Counseling only focuses on the individual problems comprehensively.
- C Group Counseling because naturally men are more willing and trying to solve problems in groups. Through group, individual can achieve their own goals by sharing ideas.
- D Individual Counseling session conducted privately in which all problems are just being heard by the Counselor.
- E Individual Counseling is appropriate for the size of the generator in terms of safety.
- 16 Any suggestion on how to A improve upon counseling services in your department?
- The requirement of Counseling Centre in the Prison Department. Assistant Counselors should be exposed to more training in counseling. Counseling services should be implemented on a regular basis, so it requires a skilled and qualified counselors.
- B The requirement of supervision services for monitoring the effectiveness of in care program. Build a Counseling Centre in the Prison Department so that counseling program can be adjusted and counselors can be focused on their job.
- C Prison Counselors should be exposed to more training especially training for trainers,

- handling high risk inmates and facilitator courses. These courses are important and help counselors in monitoring the inmates.
- D Providing a specific block for activities related to counseling. The availability of escort to smoothen the counseling sessions.
- E Employing more qualified counselors.

4. Discussion

As stated earlier, there are only few counselors in Brunei. Only a small number of them are attached or assigned to prison institutions. Below is a summary of the above counselor responses to the 16 interview items.

4.1 Overview of counselor responses to interview items

Nearly all the 5 counselors were aware that imprisonment, as a form of punishment, does not lead to long-term change and that inmates have to be helped through counseling to change their lifestyles (Item 1). Most of the in-prison counseling occurs as a result of an inmate being referred although on few occasions offenders volunteer to undergo counseling but such self-referral is rare or unusual (Item 2 and Item 7). According to the five interviewed counselors, all categories of prisoners need counseling (Item 4). Offenders with highly personal and private problems receive treatment in form of individual counseling while those with common problems such employment skills training and career seeking skills receive therapy under group counseling (Item3). On average counseling sessions seem to last at least three hours (Item 5) and the counseling occurs in specially designated rooms (Item 6).

Convicts in Brunei prisons have a wide range of problems that bring them to jail (Item 8). Due to ineffectiveness however, counseling has little positive effect and does not make inmates to change substantially (Item 9). As a result there is not much reduction in crime rate and this contributes to high recidivism (Item 11). The main benefit to convicts is that counseling enables those to be heard (Item 10) but does not lead to real or effective re-integration (Item 12) and inmates are not really accepted by the society as they carry a stigma (Item 13). Counselors need better counseling facilities (Item 14) as well as a counseling center and more training in counseling skills (Item 16). Above all, in-prison counseling needs to include some aspects of family counseling. In general, convicts preferred to receive therapy from hospital counselors rather than from prison counselors.

4.2 Need to improve counseling interventions

Convicts in Brunei jails where our research participants worked committed many different offenses, the major ones being theft, drug crimes, violence / aggression, and sex offenses. Based on these few selected types of crime, the literature suggests that people with such

problems may respond well to cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) which works on thoughts, feelings, and beliefs (TFBs) that trigger action or behavior. TFBs are based mainly on emotions and emotional literacy (see Gardner, 1993; Goleman, 1995; 1998; Steiner & Perry, 1997). CBT is itself made of many different but related techniques, some of which are listed below together with the presenting problems they may address. Since our findings suggest that much still needs to be done to improve the quality of counseling in Brunei prisons we have, after a long careful deliberation, thought, and reflection, proposed the following therapies that prison counselors and psychologists in Brunei may wish to consider using when conducting individual or group counseling (please note that this list of personal problems and intervention procedures is not exhaustive but rather illustrative):

- Drugs, alcohol, and tobacco abuse/trafficking (rational emotive behavior therapy , REBT e.g. Ellis, 1973; 1994; self-instructional therapy, SIT e.g. Meichenbaum, 1977).
- Stealing/theft/housebreaking (cognitive restructuring therapy, CRT e.g. Beck, 1963; 1976 or REBT e.g. Ellis, 1973; 1994).
- Violence/aggression/fighting (anger management e.g. Harrower, 2001; the firework anger treatment model e.g. Barwick, 2000; roleplay; operant conditioning).
- Conning/manipulativeness/forgery (rational emotive behavior therapy, REBT e.g. Ellis, 1973; 1994).
- Sex offenses such as rape, incest, and adultery (self-instructional therapy, SIT e.g. Meichenbaum, 1977).

4.3 Recommendations for counseling

1. The government should increase the annual budget allocated to the Prison Department to enable them expand the prison facilities and build the Counseling Centre with fully equipped infrastructure. This in turn will help the counseling section to function well and more effectively. The Counseling Centre will make the prison work attractive to qualified counselors and this will reduce the shortage of professional counselors in the prisons.
2. Counselors and psychologists need to have deep understanding of the psychology of the criminal and be able to use a relevant and appropriate approaches for individual, group, and family counseling. They need updating workshops and further short or long courses to support them.
3. The counseling centre in the prisons needs to be equipped with conducive therapeutic counseling rooms to enable the counselors to have privacy with inmates. This will help inmates to open up and reveal their problems as they knew that confidentiality between them and their counselors is assured. Likewise the availability of many counseling rooms enabled counseling to be done more often and at any time.
4. Further treatment such as the after-care program is necessary to provide support and assistance to prisoners newly released from prison by an appropriate period of time. This may

help to reduce the recidivism rate which is high right now.

Follow up guidance and advice sessions will be needed for the vulnerable reintegrated prisoners at risk of relapsing. Ex-prisoners need these services as they are weak and not strong enough to face reality. Such advice and guidance assistance could help ex-convicts in their self-regulation and self-redirection efforts during reintegration.

4.4 Vocational skills training and employment prospects

One of the reasons given by many inmates for stealing is that they lack money to buy goods they need. And a major possible reason to explain lack of money is unemployment which, in turn, is caused by either lack of jobs or lack of appropriate training and skills. Literature from previous related studies constantly mentions poverty as a correlate of crime particularly stealing. Part of the solution to this problem is to provide suitable in-prison vocational skills training that can empower inmates to either obtain gainful employment after release or go into self-employment. Failure to do this might encourage criminals to relapse and re-offend either the same or other crimes thereby increasing the rate for recidivism (repeat offenses).

4.5 Recommendations for future research

An important piece of research that needs to be conducted is to carefully evaluate the existing and ongoing re-integration schemes in Brunei. The results of such a study would be very insightful and helpful in designing and implementing reintegration programs that are effective in reducing the recidivism rate in Brunei. Of the two types of counselors that provide therapy to inmates in Brunei prisons, the hospital counselor was most preferred by the prisoners than the prison counselor. The term hospital counselor refers to a psychiatrist or clinical psychologist working in a hospital while “prison counselor” implies an ordinary counselor or social worker or criminologist or sociologist attached to a prison. There is an expressed need to review these two types of counselors and determine which one would be more suitable and effective in providing appropriate therapeutic services to prisoners prior to release.

5. Conclusion

Both individual and group counseling are currently being offered to inmates in Brunei prisons. However, the findings of the present study have established that the setbacks of counseling in Brunei prisons investigated for the present study were partly due to the inability of the Prisons Department to support the counseling section effectively. This might be attributed to budgetary constraints and needs to be addressed.

Attention and priority should now be accorded to the family relationship. Awareness among the families of prisoners to accept back the ex-convicts is something that the prisoners hoped for, although this is hard and difficult for the family. Crime and imprisonment are labels that ex-convicts carry and render them to be discriminated by both the family and society at large. This discrimination negatively affects the ex-prisoners' quick and successful re-integration.

Hence family and community counseling are needed to change the mind-sets and stereotypes. Ex-prisoners are ordinary people who want to return and contribute to the family, community, and nation. They need moral support in order to re-integrate themselves in the family and community.

Peer guidance groups are also being implemented in Brunei prisons and these permit inmates to be proactive in resolving their criminal behaviors whilst in prison. Peer guidance groups involve activities such as: ice breaking; a talk on decision making; problem solving; skills acquisition; social issues learning; leadership and assertiveness skills; and speaking skills. These peer and guidance groups are done once a year for selected inmates. Likewise, motivational talks from the Community Development Department and career talks from the various government and private agencies are also organized by the rehabilitation section. All these activities should be continued and if possible increased or expanded.

6. Limitations of the study

This study was informed by many limitations but we will discuss only three major ones here. As a case study, the results of the present study cannot show cause-and-effect relationships among the variables investigated. This is because the research was not experimental and we had no control group. In addition, the findings can also not be generalized to counselors working in other Brunei prisons other than those who participated in the present study. This is due to the fact that the sample was small and non-random. Furthermore, the present study lacks a quantitative component. This was needed to supplement or complement the results of the qualitative inquiry. A mixed-methods research approach was desirable to cross-validate the findings. Despite these limitations, the present study has practical significance and may be of value to both the local Brunei and international communities.

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