

**The Impact of TOPUCU upon Criminal Thinking among
Incarcerated Men in a Medium Security Facility¹**

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Abstract

This study sought to determine whether criminal thinking possessed by offenders in prison would be significantly reduced through psychoeducation using the TOPUCU curriculum. TOPUCU is the acronym for the phrase “The Only Person U Cheat is U,” which has been developed and published through the TOPUCU Foundation. This study utilized the Criminal Thinking Scale (CTS) as a pre-test and post-test measure of criminal thinking among offenders who participated in the TOPUCU program. Results between both measures of the CTS showed significant reductions in criminal thinking. Further analysis related to reductions in subscale measures are also discussed in this study.

Literature Review

When attempting to find prior research related to the effectiveness of psychoeducation curricula in prison environments, the research is somewhat lacking, with only a handful of studies focused on evaluating the psychoeducational program, itself. One study by Brazão, da Motta, & Rijo (2013), determined that meta-analytic research has, time and again, supported the effectiveness of cognitive-behavioral psychoeducational programs in reducing recidivism among offenders. After considering outcomes of meta-analytic research on the merit of psychoeducational programming, Brazão et al. (2013) provided discussion on a newly touted program that their facility had adopted. Thus, they examined prior research on similar approaches as a prelude to showcasing a less-known curriculum. We found their study particularly insightful because it consisted of a broad-reaching meta-analysis of prior similar research and because, similar to our own study, Brazão et al. (2013) had explored the application of a less-studied psychoeducational curriculum with prison inmates.

In a similar manner, Simourd, Olver, and Brandenburg (2016) examined the positive effects of a standardized psychoeducational curriculum on the criminal attitudes of participants. In particular, the relation between these attitudes and recidivism after offenders completed their program was discussed. They determined that their psychoeducation program had produced positive effects on offender thinking and resulted in significant decreases in criminal attitudes. These changes in attitudes were also found to produced significant reductions in future recidivism; completers of this program had roughly 7% less recidivism when compared with other offenders who did not receive similar programming (Simourd et al., 2016, p. 1437). Thus, it would appear that psychoeducational curricula can successfully impact criminal thinking and/or attitudes and, it would also seem that this translates to lower future criminal activity.

Perhaps the best study of psychoeducational programs was conducted by Auty, Cope, & Liebling (2017). This research examined the effect of a psychoeducation program on violent behavior in a prison environment. Auty et al. (2017) conducted a comprehensive search of the literature to locate both randomized and non-randomized studies carried out during a 20 year period lasting from 1996–2016 that compared the performance of psychoeducational programs.

Auty et al. (2017) found 21 studies that were considered appropriate for further scrutiny but they all had considerable variations in the evaluation methodology that was used. Auty et al. (2017) found very limited evidence for the efficacy of any of these programs, although they did find that highly-structured programs showed the most potential. Programs that integrated treatment into the institutional regimen and targeted specific criminogenic risks produced the most evidence of effectiveness (Auty, Cope, & Liebling, 2017). After completing their review of prior studies, they concluded that research does not provide a clear answer to what works in treatment programming. While some approaches were more successful than others, they hoped that their research would guide future program evaluation to better answer the question as to *why* some programs had better results than others. Indeed, it is their work that provided much of the impetus to how and why we conducted our current study.

Criminal Thinking

It seems intuitively obvious that offenders likely have specific criminal thoughts that facilitate their criminal behavior. This criminal thinking serves as the antecedent to most criminal behavior observed among offenders. There are few validated instruments that measure criminal thinking. One such instrument was examined by Taxman, Rhodes, and Dumenci (2011), who considered the validity of the Criminal Thinking Scale, developed by the Institute of Behavioral Research. After their review of this instrument, Taxman et al. (2011) noted that the scale was

effective with prison-based populations but did express reservations if used with offenders who are on community supervision.

More specifically to our current study, Simpson, Joe, Knight, Rowan-Szal, and Gray (2012) used the Criminal Thinking Scale (CTS) to assess functioning of offenders in substance abuse treatment programs within correctional facilities. Simpson et al. (2012) believed that simultaneously measuring the reduction in both substance abuse and criminal thinking, before-and-after treatment, could lead to findings that would improve the ability to lower an offender's likelihood of overall recidivism, whether drug-related or not. Similar to Simpson et al. (2012), the process of measuring both substance abuse and criminal thinking variables at intake and discharge had already been adopted within the therapeutic community where our current study was conducted. However, we took this notion one step further by examining the effectiveness of an additional curriculum (TOPUCU) that was woven into the existing program regimen. The desire was to examine whether significant impact could be made upon the criminal thinking of those offenders who were already engaged in an established therapeutic community.

The "TOPUCU" Curriculum

The acronym "TOPUCU" is used to convey the overarching idea that *The Only Person U Cheat is U*; a term that asserts that individuals who choose to not make healthy changes in their life are the individuals who suffer the most. This program is designed to transform thinking and actions. This curriculum provides a 7-step program with lectures and techniques to desist from bad habits, effectively set goals, stay motivated when following a regimen, and engage in effective time management. At later stages, the curriculum helps participants take an inventory of multiple dimensions of their life, leading to the participant creating a "personal mission statement" for their life (TOPUCU, 2018). The program teaches participants how to use Specific,

Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound (SMART) goals to aid the participant in achieving successful positive transformation in their life (TOPUCU, 2018).

Substance Abuse, Recidivism and Criminal Thinking

Throughout the literature on offender treatment, there is a common contention that substance abuse and recidivism are interlinked (Andrews, Feit, & Everett, 2011; Simpson, Joe, Knight, Rowan-Szal, & Gray, 2012; Taxman, Rhodes, & Dumenci, 2011). These and other researchers have also contended that ideal treatment approaches will be multidimensional, including a variety and array of programs that are provided simultaneously. Further, there is substantial support for the idea that providing separate housing from the general population will tend to have more success due to encouraging cohesion and support among participants (Andrews et al., 2011). The over-arching belief is that completion of prison programs will be linked to lowering the risk of future recidivism once offenders leave prison.

Similar to the work of Andrews et al. (2011), Taxman et al. (2011), Simpson et al. (2012), Brazão et al. (2013), and Simourd et al. (2106), our current study was conducted in a therapeutic environment where substance abuse was the primary treatment concern but where additional forms of programming were provided and/or welcomed. This was important because this meant that the location of the current study was an appropriate (if not ideal) for the addition of the experimental curriculum – TOPUCU - and was also an excellent environment for evaluating that curriculum's potential effectiveness.

The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 5th edition (DSM-V), provides criteria for a variety of diagnoses related to substance abuse disorders. There is quite a bit of variability in these diagnoses. This means that in any therapeutic community designed to treat substance abuse disorders, the specific diagnosis held from person-to-person will vary. This

is the case with our current study; while all of the participants who were involved have been identified by the state department of corrections to have substance abuse issues, the specific drug-of-choice and circumstances are far from identical. It should be noted that in much of the treatment literature and even the literature including evaluation research, this is often the case. Few programs are tailored specifically around a single type of drug activity, aside from medically-assisted opiate harm reduction programs.

Method

To measure criminal thinking, participants completed a self-report questionnaire that measured the degree to which the inmate displayed the specific characteristics that comprise the concept of criminal thinking; this instrument was given before treatment and then again after the completion of treatment. While information regarding offenses, age, and other demographics were available, these variables were not given focus in this study because the sample size did not allow for sufficient categorization of the multitude of offenses in a manner that would have sufficient representation to conduct analyses.

Participants

The research participants in this study were 203 male inmates at a medium security prison in Northeast Louisiana, ranging in age from 18 to 64 years of age. Among these participants, 97 were Caucasian, 103 were African American, 2 were Latino, and 1 was of Asian descent. The participants were recruited through a 90-day substance abuse treatment program within the prison facility. Participants were informed that they would receive no benefit for participation and could cease participation at any time without penalty.

Materials

TOPUCU Curriculum. This psycho-education curriculum consists of seven (7) lesson topics that are presented in a classroom format. Each lesson topic includes lecture-based lessons with homework assignments that are completed by participants. The curriculum consists of the following lesson topics: Habits, Motivation, Pain, The Seven E's of Thinking, Visualization, The Value of Time (time management), and Burning the Bridge.

Criminal Thinking Scale (CTS). This is a self-report inventory that measures the concept of criminal thinking, which is comprised of the following subscales: Entitlement (EN), Justification (JU), Power Orientation (PO), Cold Heartedness (CH), Criminal Rationalization (CN), and Personal Irresponsibility (PI). It consists of 36 items, and participants were asked to rate each item on a 5-point Likert scale. For scoring, the items are first regrouped by subscale; some items reflect a reversal for scoring purposes. The responses for each subscale are then summed and divided by the number of items within that subscale; the average for each subscale is multiplied by 10 in order to obtain a score that ranges from 10 to 50 for each subscale. For each subscale, a score of "10" is considered very little criminal thinking in that area of measure while a score of "50" reflects an individual with excessive criminal thinking who is, presumably, more likely to recidivate due to their cognitions that essentially condone or support criminal activity. The CTS was administered as both a pre-test and post-test measure. Higher scores on the CTS indicates a higher degree of criminal thinking.

Procedure

This study was conducted using a modified version of the classic experimental design that had randomized participant selection. However, rather than one experimental group, this study utilized three different experimental groups and a control group, as follows:

- *Experimental Group #1*: This group initially consisted of 69 participants but 3 were eliminated due to there being no post-test score collected from them. The remaining 66 participants were housed in the same dormitory and were enrolled in a substance abuse treatment program. These participants were taught TOPUCU by two fellow inmate mentors.
- *Experimental Group #2*: This group initially included of 54 participants but, as with Group 1, a total of 3 participants were eliminated due to there being no post-test score collected from them. The remaining 51 participants were housed in the same dormitory along with participants in group 1 and 3 of the study. All of these participants were enrolled in the same substance abuse treatment program. These participants were taught TOPUCU by both an inmate mentor and a staff member of the facility.
- *Experimental Group #3*: This group initially consisted of 51 participants but due to a failure to obtain a post-test score, one was eliminated from the study. The other 50 participants were housed with other participants and were enrolled in the very same substance abuse treatment program. These participants were taught TOPUCU by two staff members of the facility.
- *Control Group*: This group originally had 37 participants but was reduced to 36 participants due to the inability to obtain a post-test measure from 1 of the participants. All were housed in a separate dorm from any of the experimental groups but were enrolled in the same substance abuse treatment program.

Each of the participants in the groups above were active in the same substance abuse program at the same prison during the period of June 2018 to December 2018. All experimental group participants were from the same therapeutic community (C-Dorm). All control group

participants were active in the same exact treatment program, the only difference being that they were on a different dorm (D-Dorm) which as identical in structure and programming.

At the beginning of the study, voluntary participants signed consent forms and completed a demographics questionnaire. Participants who took the TOPUCU course were asked to complete the CTS Questionnaire prior to beginning the course as a pre-test measure. Upon completing the treatment program, participants were asked to complete the CTS again as a post-test measure of treatment gain. All participants were voluntary and gained no incentives other than being awarded a certificate of completion at the end.

Analysis

Demographic data from offender records and from CTS pre-test and post-test administrations were entered into SPSS for analysis. ANOVA and *t*-Tests for significance tested Mean outcomes on pre-test and post-test measures for the combined score on the CTS as well as the various subscales of the CTS to examine potential impact of the TOPUCU course on criminal thinking. In order for research questions to be endorsed, a statistical difference should be evident, and the threshold should be at least $p < 0.05$.

Results

Upon analysis, the data for this study produced numerous significant findings. In particular, significant reductions in criminal thinking were found, from pre-test to post-test, for all three groups of study participants. Indeed, equally significant results were found among all three groups and, just as consistent, standard deviations for all four groups (the experimental and control groups) were within a tight range from 4.81 to 5.29 at the pre-test measure and a range of 4.61 to 4.94 at the post-test measure. Consistency in responses was common among this sample given that this deviation decreased over the span of the study.

Table I
Paired Samples t Test Comparing Pre and Post Test Scores

Group	Test	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Group 1	Pre	66	25.75	4.91	8.79	0.00
	Post	66	22.39	4.94		
Group 2	Pre	51	24.13	4.74	5.79	0.00
	Post	51	20.54	4.88		
Group 3	Pre	50	24.00	5.29	4.15	0.00
	Post	50	21.36	4.76		
Control Group	Pre	36	22.61	4.81	1.03	0.30
	Post	36	21.88	4.61		

From Table I, it can be seen that, from pretest to posttest, highly significant reductions in criminal thinking occurred as reflected by group means. Group 1, taught by inmate mentors, saw a reduction of 3.36 points, on the average, on CTS responses that was significant ($t = 8.79$, $p = .001$). Group 2, taught by inmate mentors and by treatment staff from the substance abuse treatment program, resulted in a reduction of 3.59 points in responses to CTS items, that was significant ($t = 5.79$, $p = .001$). Finally, Group 3, taught solely by treatment staff saw a reduction of 2.64 points, on average, in responses to CTS items which, though less of a reduction, was nevertheless significant ($t = 4.15$, $p = .001$). Lastly, the control group did have an overall reduction of .73 points in endorsements of CTS items, but this was not significant ($t = 1.03$, $p = .30$). Thus, Group 2 produced overall reductions that were slightly better than Group 1, and both Groups 1 and 2 saw more reductions in criminal thinking than did Group 1, while the control group had reductions that were not significant.

Further analyses examined potential reductions in criminal thinking on specific subscales as well. In regard to Group 1 (n = 66), it was found that significant reductions in the use of

Table II
*Paired Samples t Test Comparing of **Group 1** Subscale Pre and Post Test Scores*

Subscale	Test	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
EN	Pre	66	19.86	7.363	1.72	0.089
	Post	66	18.41	6.169		
JU	Pre	66	22.70	7.874	3.70	0.000
	Post	66	19.44	6.776		
PO	Pre	66	26.76	7.203	4.31	0.000
	Post	66	22.86	6.688		
CH	Pre	66	24.91	7.692	1.82	0.073
	Post	66	23.15	7.250		
CN	Pre	66	33.70	7.290	8.37	0.000
	Post	66	23.15	7.250		
PI	Pre	66	25.26	7.943	4.61	0.000
	Post	66	21.23	7.040		

justifications (JU) occurred ($t = 3.70, p = .001$). Further, concerns with power orientation (PO) and the use of criminal rationalizations (CN) also resulted in reductions ($t = 4.31, p = .001$ for PO; $t = 8.37, p = .001$ for CN). Lastly, participants exhibited less personal irresponsibility (PI) for their actions ($t = 4.61, p = .001$).

Table III
Paired Samples t Test Comparing of Group 2 Subscale Pre and Post Test Scores

Subscale	Test	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
EN	Pre	51	19.24	6.23	4.57	0.000
	Post	51	15.10	5.46		
JU	Pre	51	20.25	5.91	4.74	0.000
	Post	51	16.22	5.75		
PO	Pre	51	25.73	6.76	2.99	0.004
	Post	51	22.51	8.12		
CH	Pre	51	23.12	7.06	2.41	0.020
	Post	51	21.18	7.02		
CN	Pre	51	32.61	7.37	4.31	0.000
	Post	51	28.61	7.98		
PI	Pre	51	23.20	6.66	4.88	0.000
	Post	51	19.10	7.55		

For Group 2 ($n = 51$), significant reductions in all six subscales, EN, JU, PO, CH, CN, and PI can be observed in Table III ($t = 4.57$, $p = .001$ for EN; $t = 4.74$, $p = .001$ for JU; $t = 2.99$, $p = .004$ for PO; $t = 2.41$, $p = .020$ for CH; $t = 4.31$, $p = .001$ for CN; and $t = 4.88$, $p = .001$ for PI).

Lastly, an analysis of the results from Group 3 ($n = 50$) showed significant results on all but the CH subscales. Each subscale ($t = 3.30$, $p = .002$ for EN; $t = 3.51$, $p = .001$ for JU; $t = 3.64$, $p = .001$ for PO; $t = 3.64$, $p = .001$ for CN; and $t = 3.83$, $p = .001$ for PI), had varying degrees of significance, similar to Group 2, that was previously presented (see Table IV).

Table IV
*Paired Samples t Test Comparing of **Group 3** Subscale Pre and Post Test Scores*

Subscale	Test	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
EN	Pre	50	18.86	6.93	3.30	0.002
	Post	50	16.20	5.59		
JU	Pre	50	20.20	7.23	3.51	0.001
	Post	50	16.94	6.16		
PO	Pre	50	25.64	8.27	3.64	0.001
	Post	50	22.10	6.75		
CH	Pre	50	21.92	6.95	-0.13	0.896
	Post	50	22.04	8.04		
CN	Pre	50	33.86	7.95	3.64	0.001
	Post	50	30.40	8.20		
PI	Pre	50	22.96	7.37	3.83	0.000
	Post	50	19.82	6.54		

Going further, we conducted an analysis of variance (ANOVA) that compared the group means between each experimental group as well as the control group. Significant differences in group means were found at the pre-test measurement, indicating that there was significant divergence among each group's reported criminal thinking [$F(3) = 3.36$, $p = .02$], at the beginning of the study (See Table V). However, as can be seen in Table V, the post-test ANOVA found no significant differences between any of the group means [$F(3) = 1.48$, $p = .22$]. Given that the prior Tables 1 – IV show that each experimental group had significant gains from pre-test to post-test, we know that all four groups essentially had reductions in criminal thinking that, when judging by the data in Table V, seemed to have less variance from one another.

Table V
Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) of pre-test and post-test

Test	Sum of Squares	<i>df</i>	Mean Square	<i>f</i>	<i>p</i>
Pretest	248.03	3	82.67	3.36	0.02
Posttest	103.78	3	34.59	1.48	0.22

This observation simply reinforces what was noted earlier regarding the reduction in the value of the standard deviation in the data from pretest to posttest. Initially, respondent data points had significant variability giving rise to a higher standard deviation and significant differences in group means. Over time, this deviation was reduced due to consistency in responses that reflect lower criminal thinking, and this resulted in differences between the groups no longer being significantly different from one another.

Discussion

When comparing each of the three experimental groups, it was Group 2 that had the best outcomes, both in terms of the overall reduction in criminal thinking and in terms of the number of subscales that were significant. As noted before, this group was taught by an inmate mentor and staff member team, which very likely may be the best approach when implementing the TOPUCU curriculum with incarcerated populations. We believe that this is a very important finding in this study that can have serious implications to future uses of this and/or other psychoeducational curricula utilized within correctional facilities.

To further explain the observed outcomes with Group 2, it is important to note that neither Group 1 nor Group 3 achieved significant reductions in cold-hearted (CH) thoughts and beliefs among participants. This subscale is considered important as the ability to empathize with others is a primary ingredient in reducing an offender's likelihood of victimizing others in

society. This is especially true with potentially violent offenders. Though the other subscales may provide clues as to likely recidivism among participants, the CH subscale is unique in that it can be an effective clue as to the likelihood that an offender will likely commit an assaultive crime. Further, even if the individual is not prone to future acts of crime, this subscale may also be an indicator of how well the individual can navigate and cultivate relationships with others. This has numerous implications, including the offender's potential success in a marriage, parenting children, or enjoying the camaraderie of fellow co-workers at the work site. This subscale provides a glimpse of not only the cognitions of the individual, but the latent affective characteristics that may exist, as well. These negative emotional views can, of course, impact behaviors that follow.

In addition, it is important to note that the weakest reductions in criminal thinking were those obtained in Group 3, which was taught by program staff. To be clear, this approach was still successful and achieved significant results, overall. However, it may be that regardless of the attempt, there is an unspoken but felt distance between those who are behind bars and those who are among the free world. Indeed, research abounds that demonstrates that the prison subculture often idealizes values that run counter to mainstream society. Thus, the ability for pro-social and – presumably - functional staff to get offenders who are socialized to condone and even reward unlawful and undesired behaviors, may be particularly difficult.

Rather, it may well be that inmate mentors who work with inmate participants, have a better chance at affecting these types of beliefs. This has a good deal of intuitive appeal given that both are in a similar plight and, in as in the case of this study, they may literally live in close quarters near one another in a therapeutic community. Therefore, we speculate that the mentors

who taught participants in Groups 1 and 2 had special knowledge of their participants that went beyond that which staff could possess.

With all this said, we do note that Group 2 had the most success across all subscales, including the tendency to have empathy deficits (the same as a low score on the CH subscale). This again makes sense because addressing more complicated psychological constructs related to personality, mood, and coping, may benefit from a trained clinician's expertise, with optimal benefits being obtained when this expertise is tempered with a pragmatic approach that is provided by the inmate mentor. Thus, again, we support the idea that offender involvement in this programming is beneficial while, at the same time, being careful to not dismiss the need for trained staff involvement, at some level, as well.

Lastly, we would like point out that even the control group saw overall reductions in criminal thinking, though these were not significant. While we do not intend to show-case non-significant outcomes, we do think that this could potentially demonstrate that, even when left to their own devices, participants would be likely to achieve at least some reduction in aberrant thinking. This makes sense because any type of therapeutic environment should see at least some trend in this direction, especially when compared to individuals who are not in any type of therapeutic programming, whatsoever. This means that, at the very least, the TOPUCU curriculum is an excellent adjunct to other programming that offenders may receive. It may well be that optimal results for other programs can be obtained if they add TOPUCU to the process.

Limitations

We cannot completely attribute these gains solely to the TOPUCU curriculum because there are other potential influences, as with any study of social or psychological phenomenon. However, all participants received fairly identical training in other programs with which the

participated, simultaneously, while completing TOPUCU. Thus, it is clear that these individuals are at least equivalent. Randomization achieved by selection of participants through systematic selection on intake lists protected against sampling bias.

However, while the sample sizes for each group are sufficient for the statistical analyses performed but are, nevertheless, smaller than what we would have preferred. It would have been ideal to have a much larger sample size, perhaps 100 or more in each group, to make our findings more robust. Perhaps in the future larger samples can be utilized but, for now, we have had to suffice with the participants included in this study due to constraints on time, resources, and practical limits of the institution, itself. Because of the smaller sample sizes, there are some traditional threats to the internal validity of studies that are of potential concern more so than usual, in a study. These additional threats are further discussed beyond our concerns with the size of the study.

Testing

In many studies, testing effects is a potential concern. According to Salkind (2012), this threat to the internal validity of a study occurs when the pretest affects performance on later measures (such as the administration of a post-test). In other words, the experience with the pretest, alone, might make the participants test-wise, and their scores may reflect this more than the effectiveness of the treatment approach. The time between test administrations can help to reduce this threat as well as the use of different versions of an instrument designed to test the same variables. However, our study had, at the most, 11 weeks between administrations and, in some cases, due to concerns about programmers transferring to other areas prematurely, being gone on medical or legal trips, and other such challenges of the prison environment, some were tested as little as 8 weeks later. While we do not believe that this has had a serious impact on the

study, some impact is likely due to the fact that our sample sizes for each experimental group and the control group are so small.

Regression to the Mean

In sampling and testing probability, phenomenon is observed wherein test results on either extreme of a continuum (such as a very high or very low score) will result in future scores that regress toward the mean average of scores on subsequent testing; especially when using the same test (Salkind, 2012). This regression usually occurs due to the inherent unreliability of tests (no test or survey is perfectly reliable) and the measurement error that is produced, placing participants more in the extreme end of scores than they realistically should fall (Salkind, 2012). Given the lower probability that a participant will again score in the extreme part of a scoring distribution, the odds are greater that they will score in an area more in the center of the distribution with additional testing. There was some evidence of this in our study, over time, due to scores becoming more consistent at post-test, where less deviation from the mean average was observed.

Maturation

This is defined as change over time, often caused by biological or psychological influences. These changes can overshadow those that are the result of the treatment, itself (Salkind, 2012). For example, when treating people with substance abuse, if one were to take the addict fresh from their drug use and simply put them in an environment away from the drug, provide them with three wholesome meals a day, fresh water, some type of low-impact exercise routine, and get them on an appropriate sleeping schedule, after several weeks, improvements on their vital life signs (i.e. heart resting rate, blood sugar, and so forth) would likely be significantly improved. This would occur regardless of whether any actual treatment program

were introduced. The same concept exists when we take offenders out of general population and place them in a more stable and socially supportive therapeutic environment; there is some improvement realized simply by proxy of their being moved. There is some evidence of this because even the control group in this study had a reduction in criminal thinking, this reduction was just not yet significant. Could it be that, with more time they would have also achieved significant reductions in their criminal thinking? We suspect the answer is yes because we have observed this when persons are allowed to stay for longer periods of time due to personal safety (returning to general population would put them in danger with another inmate) and because we see this among persons being held for mentor status, sans any additional programming. While this is true, we can still say that it would appear that TOPUCU does successfully speed up the process of reducing criminal thinking, even among those who might desist from this on their own, over time.

Recommendations

Our findings lead us to think that additional research on how blended approaches of instruction using both inmate and staff personnel can be implemented could be quite valuable. Research that can delimit the reasons that this may be the case can result in observations that can translate to specific guidance when implementing this type of psychoeducation. Research in the field of education tends to examine the means of educational delivery but this same area of inquiry does not often extend to psychoeducational programs. This should not be the case; the delivery of TOPUCU may have as much to do with overall outcomes as does the curriculum, itself.

Another potential area of research that might prove valuable is to examine which aspects of the TOPUCU curriculum seems to have more significant impact for programmers. Similar to

our study that examined specific subscales of the Criminal Thinking Scale (CTS), we propose that a study that examines each of the seven lessons that are part-and-parcel to the TOPUCU model might allow developers to further tweak and refine the curriculum. This is particularly true given that there is not widespread proliferation of research on the TOPUCU curriculum. Thus, any type of research on the curriculum holds potential for being beneficial.

Lastly, we propose that other studies with much larger sample sizes and much more diverse sample sizes should be conducted. This study is more exploratory than anything, serving as a decent first-shot at researching outcomes associated with this curriculum. Studies with more participants or those with male and female participants might be very useful. Likewise, research on a curriculum that is translated into Spanish or any other language other than English could produce interesting and useful findings. In short, this curriculum is need of much more research that can examine a variety of dimensions to the curriculum, rather than the one dimensional approach that we have provided, herein.

Conclusion

This study is unique because it is one of the very few to test the use of the TOPUCU psychoeducation curriculum. Further, this study examined three different types of delivery, exploring the use of peer instructors within the prison environment as well as professional staff within a therapeutic community. This study has found support for the idea that TOPUCU can be effective in reducing criminal thinking, instilling changes in thinking and changes in subsequent behavior; this is the intended purpose of the TOPUCU model. Findings from this study also point toward the strength of a blended or hybrid model of delivery, one that requires both an inmate peer instructor and a professional staff person, to optimize the impact on criminal thinking across subscales. The observed support for this model's efficacy in changing thinking and behavior

means that it is likely to be a very good addition to any treatment program, as an adjunct program or even a stand-alone program. Treatment administrators should consider the use of TOPUCU as a means of instilling a method of generating genuine self-change in individuals who wish to do so.

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