

Rehabilitation of Criminals

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Rehabilitation means; To restore to useful life, as through therapy and education or To restore to good condition, operation, or capacity. The assumption of rehabilitation is that people are not permanently criminal and that it is possible to restore a criminal to a useful life, to a life in which they contribute to themselves and to society. A goal of rehabilitation is to prevent habitual offending, also known as criminal recidivism. Rather than punishing the harm out of a criminal, rehabilitation would seek, by means of education or therapy, to bring a criminal into a more normal state of mind, or into an attitude which would be helpful to society, rather than be harmful to society.

Criminal justice portal

This theory of punishment is based on the notion that punishment is to be inflicted on an offender so as to reform him/her, or rehabilitate them so as to make their re-integration into society easier. Punishments that are in accordance with this theory are community service, probation orders, and any form of punishment which entails any form of guidance and aftercare towards the offender.

This theory is founded on the belief that one cannot inflict a severe punishment of imprisonment and expect the offender to be reformed and to be able to re-integrate into society upon his/her release. Indeed, the United States Code states that sentencing judges shall make imprisonment decisions "recognizing that imprisonment is not an appropriate means of promoting correction and rehabilitation". Although the importance of inflicting punishment on those persons who breach the law, so as to maintain social order, is retained, the importance of rehabilitation is also given priority. Humanitarians have, over the years, supported rehabilitation as an alternative, even for capital punishment.

Practical difficulties

Rehabilitation theories present however the following deficiencies:

First, there is no sound scientific research to determine how different individuals react to the same rehabilitating methods.

Second, rehabilitation may depend more decisively on the individual psychological background, hence on his particular motives to commit crimes, than on the rehabilitating methods or philosophy.

Third, a rehabilitation program may prove to be too costly and complex to be successfully implemented in most countries.

Finally, rehabilitation must refer to the sociological findings on the socialization and resocialization processes, as change in life-long socially acquired patterns of behavior and values entails a much more complex - and sometime traumatic - change on the individual's structure of character.

Psychopathy and recidivism

Criminal recidivism is highly correlated with psychopathy. The psychopath is defined by an uninhibited gratification in criminal, sexual, or aggressive impulses and the inability to learn from past mistakes. Individuals with this disorder gain satisfaction through their antisocial behavior and lack remorse for their actions.

Findings indicate psychopathic prisoners have a 2.5 time higher probability of being released from jail than undiagnosed ones, even though they are more likely to recidivate.

It has been shown that punishment and behavior modification techniques do not improve the behavior of a psychopath. Psychopathic individuals have been regularly observed to become more cunning and better able to hide their behaviour. It has been suggested by them traditional therapeutic approaches actually make psychopaths if not worse, then far more adept at manipulating others and concealing their behavior. They are generally considered to be not only incurable but also untreatable.

Psychopaths also have a markedly distorted sense of the potential consequences of their actions, not only for others, but also for themselves. They do not, for example, deeply recognize the risk of being caught, disbelieved or injured as a result of their behaviour.