
OPTIONS for Preparing Inmates for Community Reentry: An Employment Preparation Intervention

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to adapt and experimentally test the effectiveness of a research-based, employment-focused group counseling intervention (OPTIONS). OPTIONS was designed to increase male inmates' exploration and identification of employment interests and options, identification and development of employment-search skills, and knowledge of vocational options, goal planning, and identification and use of contextual supports. A randomized block design and measurements at pretest, posttest, and 1-month follow-up were used to examine the effects of OPTIONS. Participants included 77 ($n = 38$ treatment, $n = 39$ control) adult male inmates. Results indicated that OPTIONS participants had higher career search self-efficacy, problem solving, and hopefulness scores at posttest and follow-up than did treatment-as-usual control group participants.

Keywords

career intervention, work, inmates, reentry, recidivism, ex-offenders

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As indicated in the statistics presented in the introductory article (Varghese & Cummings, XXXX), the United States has experienced exponential growth of incarcerated offenders in recent decades, with the vast majority of these offenders likely to be released. Stable employment is one of the strongest predictors of offenders' postrelease success, including recidivism, whereas finding employment is one of the greatest barriers to successful reintegration for offenders and ex-offenders (Varghese & Cummings, XXXX). The potential is great, therefore, for vocational and work preparation programs to improve inmates' financial, personal, and professional success and ability to contribute more fully as citizens. Moreover, vocational and work preparation programs have the potential to help decrease recidivism rates. There is limited evidence as to whether or not such work preparation programs are effective at reducing recidivism and improving employability of offenders because so few high-quality studies have been conducted (Varghese & Cummings, XXXX). Yet the important role of employment to inmates' successful reentry into society is undeniable, and the potential for vocational and employment interventions is great (Filella-Guiu & Blanch-Plana, 2002; Varghese & Cummings, XXXX).

The purpose of this study, therefore, was to adapt, deliver, and experimentally test the effectiveness of an employment counseling group intervention (OPTIONS; Chronister & Fitzgerald, 2008) designed to improve inmates' ability to negotiate the employment search and vocational goal planning processes. No other studies were found that examined an employment preparation intervention of this nature for male inmates.

Theoretical and Empirical Foundation for OPTIONS

The OPTIONS intervention program (Chronister & Fitzgerald, 2008) is an adaptation of the manualized and experimentally tested ACCESS (Advancing Career Counseling and Employment Support for Survivors of domestic violence) intervention program (Chronister, 2006). ACCESS was grounded in social cognitive career theory (SCCT; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994) and a counseling for empowerment model (McWhirter, 1994) and designed to enhance the career development outcomes of domestic violence survivors (Chronister & McWhirter, 2006). Targets for the ACCESS intervention included SCCT constructs such as self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and contextual supports and barriers, with a focus on enhancing short- and long-term goal planning, action, and attainment. Similarly, congruent with a counseling for empowerment model, ACCESS used group facilitation processes

designed to increase participants' critical consciousness about the effects of domestic violence on their lives and career development. Chronister and McWhirter (2006) defined critical consciousness as the process of becoming more aware of the self (identity), others (context), and the relation of self to others (power dynamics) and accordingly gaining a critical understanding of control and responsibility in one's life situations. ACCESS uses six processes to facilitate critical consciousness: dialogue, group identification, problem posing, identifying contradictions, power analysis, and critical self-reflection (Chronister & McWhirter, 2006). Although it is a manualized treatment program, the philosophical and clinical foundation of the ACCESS intervention provides curriculum flexibility to meet the needs of each unique group and individual member of the group (Chronister & Davidson, 2010). A thorough review of the theoretical and research foundation of the ACCESS intervention is provided by Chronister and McWhirter (2006). A primary focus of this section is the curriculum adaptations made to create OPTIONS.

The Theoretical Foundations of OPTIONS

The first author adapted the ACCESS curriculum content to be more theoretically pertinent to the vocational development needs of male prison inmates. SCCT (Lent et al., 1994) and cognitive behavior theory served as the theoretical foundations for OPTIONS. SCCT is an excellent fit for career intervention with inmates because SCCT tenets address the impact of multiple, embedded contexts on individual development and behavior, the dynamic and bidirectional relationship between individuals and their contexts, and the agency and power that individuals may exert. Moreover, SCCT represents an application of Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory to describe the influence of learning experiences, self-efficacy and outcome expectations, and perceptions of contextual supports and barriers on individuals' identification of career interests and opportunities, goals, and goal pursuit. The first author used SCCT to construct the specific OPTIONS program goals, which were to increase inmates' (a) self-efficacy beliefs for searching for and obtaining employment, (b) employment-related skill identification and development (e.g., problem solving), (c) positive outcome expectations, or hopefulness, for performing employment activities, (d) critical consciousness of the impact of their contexts and criminal history on their career development, and in particular their experiences of contextual barriers, (e) development of short- and longer-term career goal planning skills, (f) knowledge of community resources and contextual supports and development of life skills to access such resources, (g) awareness and development

of career search skills, and (h) exploration of career interests (Brown & Lent, 1996; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994, 2000). Each OPTIONS goal represents a specific SCCT construct, or relationship among SCCT constructs, that is targeted for change.

The most significant OPTIONS curriculum modification was the inclusion of more cognitive behavior theoretical approaches and effective reentry program best practices. First, the curriculum included more cognitive behavioral theoretical tenets and approaches to intervention activities and discussions in an effort to target cognitive skill deficits and erroneous beliefs associated with negative employment outcomes and recidivism (Andrews et al., 1990; Gendreau, 1995, 1996; Wilson, Bouffard, & Mackenzie, 2005). SCCT and cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) are complementary as both theories identify similar individual beliefs and attitudes as critical to human development. For example, participants were encouraged to examine their thoughts related to their ability to find employment and encouraged to modify irrational or faulty thinking. Second, the OPTIONS curriculum and group facilitation also focused more on modeling prosocial skills and behaviors within the group (Andrews et al., 1990; Gendreau, 1995, 1996; Wilson et al., 2005). Third, OPTIONS activities and discussions targeted the criminogenic needs of the offender, or those needs that when changed alter the probability of recidivism (Andrews et al., 1990; Bourgon & Armstrong, 2005; Gendreau, 1995, 1996). Examples of criminogenic needs include antisocial attitudes and behaviors toward authority, criminal companions, illegal leisure activities, substance abuse, and unemployment (Andrews et al., 1990; Bourgon & Armstrong, 2005; Gendreau, 1995, 1996). The main criminogenic need targeted by OPTIONS was unemployment; however, addressing antisocial attitudes and behaviors was an inherent aspect of the intervention as well, and these were targeted with the use of more cognitive behavioral facilitation approaches. Antisocial attitudes and behaviors were identified, discussed, and addressed throughout the intervention via group conversations, journal activities, and in-group practice of prosocial job interviewing skills. In addition, the OPTIONS intervention focused on identifying positive support persons rather than relying on deviant peers and criminal companions.

OPTIONS Program Structure and Activities

The structure of the OPTIONS program remained the same as that of ACCESS (Brown & Krane, 2000; Chronister & McWhirter, 2006). OPTIONS comprised five 2-hour sessions facilitated by a trained group facilitator. The intervention also used all five intervention components found by Brown and

Krane (2000) to enhance the effectiveness of career choice interventions: written exercises, information about the world of work, individualized assessments and feedback, strategies for finding employment support, and role modeling. Each of these components was used to target theoretically relevant variables for change as described previously.

OPTIONS activities that targeted SCCT constructs specifically included journaling exercises, employment skills and interest assessments, emotion identification and relaxation exercises, goal identification and planning, group discussion of previous personal and professional accomplishments, and mock job interviews. OPTIONS group facilitation techniques were the same as those used in the ACCESS program to facilitate participants' critical consciousness of how their life experiences, and in particular their criminal history, have influenced their career development. Group leaders posed questions such as "How do you think your experiences with incarceration have influenced your belief in your skills and interests in specific careers/jobs?" and "How do racism and access to fewer economic resources influence your ability to secure employment?" Group facilitators identified contradictions in offenders stated beliefs and experiences and encouraged critical self-reflection to increase offenders' awareness of privilege, power, strengths, weaknesses, and so on.

Study Goals and Hypotheses

The primary study goal was to experimentally test the effectiveness of the OPTIONS program to improve outcomes on variables relevant to inmates' job preparation. One limitation encountered in designing this study was the lack of measures that had been developed and tested on offenders that were relevant to the topic of employment and had strong psychometric properties. We selected constructs and measures that were theoretically relevant and related, targeted by the OPTIONS intervention, and relevant to the reentry process and for which there were psychometric data collected with other adult populations. The three outcome constructs that we measured were career search self-efficacy, perceived problem-solving ability, and hopefulness. Career search self-efficacy was chosen because the OPTIONS curriculum is specifically designed to enhance participants' self-efficacy regarding skills and behaviors associated with looking for work and career opportunities and pursuing such opportunities. According to SCCT, self-efficacy plays a crucial role in the identification of career interests and the formulation of goals related to education and employment (Lent et al., 1994). Potential implications are that if inmates have increased self-efficacy and feel more

confident about their ability to find a job, they may be more likely to apply for jobs, thereby increasing their chances of obtaining a job. In addition, their increased self-confidence may be apparent in their interviews and may make an employer more interested in hiring them.

Problem-solving ability is self-efficacy related to analyzing a situation and identifying a problem, generating and weighing alternative courses of action, and implementing an appropriate course of action (Heppner, Witty, & Dixon, 2004). Research has shown brief interventions specifically targeted at problem solving result in increases in participants' perceived problem-solving ability (PSI scores) (Heppner et al., 2004). Perceived problem solving was chosen because offenders inevitably face problems and challenges when searching for and obtaining employment. Offenders are likely to encounter many challenges and setbacks on reentry, including finding and obtaining employment, finding housing, addressing their criminal history with employers, and building relationships with friends and family. These contextual barriers may affect offenders' career-related self-efficacy and outcome expectations as well as their ability to persist toward their goals despite barriers encountered (Brown & Lent, 1996). Increased problem-solving skill development may help offenders negotiate successfully the numerous and unique barriers that they will encounter on reentry, which in turn may help increase offender success and learning and decrease recidivism risk.

In regard to hopefulness construct, Snyder and colleagues (1991) found that individuals with higher levels of hopefulness were more likely to focus on success rather than failure, to set challenges for themselves, and to perceive a greater number of pathways to meet their goals. Snyder and colleagues also found that individuals with higher levels of hopefulness had higher levels of self-efficacy and self-esteem as compared to individuals with lower levels of hopefulness (Snyder et al., 1991). Study hypotheses predicted that inmates who participated in OPTIONS intervention would show greater improvements on career search self-efficacy, problem-solving ability, and hopefulness at posttest and 1-month follow-up than inmates in a "treatment-as-usual" (TAU) control group.

Method

Participants

Participants were 77 adult male inmates ($n = 38$ treatment, $n = 39$ TAU control) housed at an Oregon Department of Corrections medium-security release facility. Participants were between the ages of 18 and 72 years

($M = 32.55$), were able to write, speak, and read English, and were willing to participate for the study's duration of approximately 3 months. All inmates were within 6 months of their release. Demographic information was collected on race/ethnicity. Participants self-identified as follows: 43 White/European American, 2 Asian/Pacific Islander, 7 Black/African American, 9 Latino, 8 Native/American Indian, and 8 Biracial/Multiracial. The average sentence length was 51.32 months. On average, participants had been incarcerated approximately 8.93 times as adults and 2.64 times as juveniles. The average number of different jobs held was 10.31. At the conclusion of the OPTIONS intervention, 61 participants completed posttest measures (treatment $n = 31$, control $n = 30$), and of those 61 participants, 47 participants returned 4 weeks later to complete follow-up measures (treatment $n = 23$, control $n = 24$).

Preliminary Analyses

A series of independent samples t tests were conducted to examine pretreatment equivalence of the experimental groups—that is, treatment intervention ($n = 38$) and TAU control ($n = 39$) groups. Results indicated that there were no pretreatment differences between the treatment group and the TAU control group with respect to career search self-efficacy (CSSE), $t(75) = 0.86$, $p = .39$; problem solving (PSI), $t(75) = 0.86$, $p = .48$; and hopefulness (HOPE), $t(75) = 1.05$, $p = .30$. In addition, there were no significant differences between the groups with respect to age, $t(75) = -1.15$, $p = .25$; sentence length, $t(75) = 0.69$, $p = .49$; number of times incarcerated as an adult, $t(75) = 1.2$, $p = .23$; number of times incarcerated as a juvenile, $t(75) = -0.34$, $p = .73$; educational attainment, $t(75) = 0.32$, $p = .75$; or number of jobs held, $t(75) = -1.05$, $p = .30$. Participant education levels were as follows: 10% achieved eighth grade or less, 15% achieved some high school, 67% had a high school diploma or GED, approximately 4% had an associate's degree, and one participant had a graduate or professional degree. Present study correlations confirm strong, positive relationships between perceived problem-solving ability and career search self-efficacy ($r = .58$, $p < .01$), career search self-efficacy and hopefulness ($r = .64$, $p < .01$), and problem-solving ability and hopefulness ($r = .67$, $p < .01$).

Facilitators

Intervention groups were cofacilitated by two female, counseling psychology doctoral students. Each facilitator attended three 2-hour trainings led by

the first author and a 4-hour contractor training with the assistant warden at the correctional institution. Training with the first author included learning the content and facilitation strategies associated with each OPTIONS session and training on working in group settings with inmates. The contractor training covered basic safety information as well as helpful tips for working in a correctional setting. In addition, facilitators received 2 hours of supervision each week with the first author to review/discuss any clinical or administrative issues pertaining to the delivery of the OPTIONS intervention.

Measures

Demographics. Participant demographic information was collected using a demographic questionnaire designed for use in this study. Items included age, race/ethnicity, education, length of sentence, previous number of incarcerations, prior theft convictions, and program involvement (e.g., substance abuse treatment, education, vocational programs) while incarcerated.

Career search self-efficacy. The Career Search Self-Efficacy Scale (CSSE; Solberg et al., 1994) is a 35-item self-report measure used to assess an individual's confidence in performing career search tasks. The CSSE was used to measure offenders' levels of self-efficacy related to the career or job search process. A 10-point rating scale is used to indicate the degree of confidence in one's ability to complete certain tasks, such as utilizing one's social network to gain employment (Solberg et al., 1994). Scores are calculated by summing all items and may range from 0 to 315, with higher scores indicating greater career search self-efficacy. With a sample of 229 community college students, the CSSE yielded a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of .97 (Solberg et al., 1994). Evidence of adequate convergent and discriminant validity was obtained in the same study (Solberg et al., 1994). In the present sample, a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of .98 was calculated.

Problem solving. The Problem Solving Inventory (PSI; Heppner, 1988) is a 35-item self-report measure used to assess an individual's perceived problem-solving ability. A 6-point rating scale is used to indicate the degree to which the respondent agrees with statements such as "When a solution to a problem has failed, I do not examine why it didn't work" (Heppner, 1988). For the purpose of this study the subscale scores were not used. The overall total score was used to measure perceived problem-solving ability. Scores range from 32 to 192, with lower scores indicating higher levels of perceived problem-solving ability. The PSI has been empirically validated with a variety of different populations, with Cronbach's alpha estimates ranging from .90 to .91 (Heppner, 1988). Adequate concurrent and discriminant validity estimates

also were calculated with the aforementioned populations. In the present sample, a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .93 was calculated.

Hopefulness. The Hope Scale (Snyder et al., 1991) is a 12-item self-report measure used to assess an individual's level of hope. A 4-point rating scale ranging from 1 (*definitely false*) to 4 (*definitely true*) was used by respondents to indicate the degree to which items such as "I can think of many ways to get out of a jam" and "I've been pretty successful in life" apply to them. The overall score was used to measure participants' levels of hope. The Hope Scale was administered to six separate groups of University of Kansas psychology students, one outpatient clinical sample, and one inpatient clinical sample (Snyder et al., 1991). Cronbach's alphas were calculated with these samples and ranged from .75 to .84 (Snyder et al., 1991). Adequate concurrent and discriminant validity estimates also were obtained by comparing the Hope Scale with a variety of different measures (Snyder et al., 1991). For the present sample, a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of .84 was calculated.

Procedures

The university institutional review board provided a thorough review of this research because the participants were a protected population. Inmates were recruited for voluntary participation in the study via fliers posted in the housing units, on the recreation yard, and in the education department. In addition, verbal announcements were made during reentry preparation classes. Potential participants were informed about the experimental nature of the study. Inmates expressing interest met with one of the trained group facilitators to determine if they were within 6 months of release and could understand and speak English. If study criteria were met, they read and signed an informed consent document and completed the pretest measures. Participants then were matched based on age and release date and randomly assigned to either the OPTIONS treatment intervention ($n = 38$) or a control group ($n = 39$).

Six OPTIONS treatment intervention groups (i.e., waves of data collection) were conducted, and each of the six groups had a minimum of three participants who attended all five sessions. Each treatment group was facilitated by the same facilitator. No groups were closed because of low attendance. One participant was dropped from the study after the first group because he was at high risk for violent behavior in the group. His data were not reported or used in any analysis. The treatment group completed the posttest measures at the conclusion of their final session. The TAU control group completed posttest measures on the same day as the treatment group. Both groups returned 1 month later to complete follow-up measures. Follow-up at

1 month was chosen to ensure all inmates were able to complete the follow-up measures while still incarcerated. It can be difficult to locate offenders once they are released from prison. In addition, the motivation to complete the follow-up measures would likely have decreased as well. Although a longer follow-up period would have been more ideal, timelines and constraints within the Department of Corrections regarding contact with participants once released made 1-month follow-up the most feasible choice.

Experimental Groups

Treatment as usual (TAU). The TAU group received the Portfolio Re-entry Program (PREP), a transitions program offered to all inmates prior to release at the facility. Approximately 25% of inmates in the Oregon Department of Corrections are transferred to the release center at Oregon State Correctional Institution (OSCI) when they are 6 months from release. All releasing inmates at OSCI are given the opportunity to participate in PREP. Approximately 90% of releasing inmates choose to participate in PREP, which provides inmates with a variety of skills and opportunities to learn about resources available to them once they are released. The PREP intervention includes a resume-writing component, but does not address specific job-related issues such as work interests, job-planning processes, job search, or interpersonal skills. PREP consists of two monthly meetings beginning 6 months before release for a total of 12 meetings. Both the treatment and TAU control groups participated in PREP. Participants in both the treatment and TAU control groups were in various stages of the PREP program; therefore, the timing of the OPTIONS intervention was not influenced by the sequencing of PREP sessions.

OPTIONS intervention. Based on findings in the current literature, a career counseling/employment preparation intervention (ACCESS; Chronister & McWhirter, 2006) was modified to use with the inmate population. ACCESS was originally designed for use with domestic violence survivors and was developed using SCCT and research in vocational psychology, as well as relevant research from counseling for empowerment, group counseling, and the domestic violence literature. Chronister and McWhirter (2006) used an experimental design to test the effectiveness of ACCESS and found that women who participated in ACCESS in comparison to a wait-list control group reported significant increases in their career search self-efficacy at posttest and follow-up.

The OPTIONS intervention consisted of five weekly group sessions lasting approximately 120 minutes each. Groups initially comprised six to seven

inmates. The intervention focused on various aspects of the job-preparation process. The focus of Session 1 was participants' identification of their skills and identification of their personal and professional accomplishments. Participants completed SKILLS (Career Information System; University of Oregon, 1991), a paper-and-pencil assessment that measures one's skill preferences by matching the individual's life experiences and preferences to future vocational choices. The activities in this session are consistent with recommended SCCT counseling strategies, in that participants potentially increased both self-efficacy and outcome expectations by discussing previous personal and professional accomplishments, and through vicarious learning from one another (Brown & Lent, 1996).

Session 2 focused on identifying job interests and choices. Participants utilized the Career Information System (CIS; University of Oregon, 1991), an Internet-based system of vocational information created by the University of Oregon and used in a majority of Oregon schools and other schools, universities, and social service agencies across the United States. CIS is available in all U.S. states and provides employment and educational information specific to each state. CIS is an essential component of the OPTIONS curriculum, as it allows offenders to obtain information about specific jobs and the limitations of a felony record. For example, if an inmate wanted to be a barber, he could utilize CIS to obtain specific information about the requirements to become a barber, the typical workload a barber might experience, any licensing or education requirements, and any limitations on becoming a barber with a felony record. This allows participants to identify careers that are off-limits, careers that may have additional barriers, and careers that are generally easier for ex-offenders to obtain. CIS was used to encourage inmates to consider a full range of educational and career options when setting their goals and developing their vocational and life plans. The activities in this session are consistent with recommended SCCT counseling strategies, in that participants were assisted in constructing the broadest possible array of occupational possibilities, were able to identify careers that may have had more barriers than others, and were encouraged to begin setting attainable personal goals (Brown & Lent, 1996).

Session 3 examined the reality of life as an ex-offender in terms of the job search process. Inmates learned about how to disclose and discuss their criminal history and about dealing with the limitations of a felony record. Participants were able to engage in mock job interviews to practice real world scenarios. This session allowed participants the opportunity to identify barriers in the job search process, identify solutions to the barriers, and increase positive outcome expectations by participating in hands-on practice

of job interviewing skills. Session 4 focused on fostering inmates' identification and use of support persons. It also addressed building job search skills and self-efficacy. Participants engaged in a group discussion about the types of support they wanted and needed to succeed and live their lives free from crime.

The fifth and final OPTIONS session focused on goal planning and use of support networks to pursue and attain goals. Inmates talked about their short- and long-term personal goals and outcome expectations for attaining those goals while completing a written goal planning worksheet. The session closed with inmates describing their overall program experiences.

Results

Attrition Analyses

Independent sample *t* tests were also conducted to determine differences between treatment participants who completed the OPTIONS treatment intervention and those who dropped out. Results indicated that there were no statistically significant differences between intervention completers and non-completers with respect to pretest scores on CSSE, $t(36) = -0.01, p = .77$; PSI, $t(36) = -0.26, p = .80$; HOPE, $t(36) = 0.72, p = .47$; or demographic variables including age, $t(35) = 0.74, p = .06$; length of sentence, $t(34) = 1.12, p = .07$; number of times incarcerated as an adult, $t(36) = 0.20, p = .46$; educational attainment, $t(36) = -0.56, p = .13$; and number of jobs held, $t(31) = 0.86, p = .25$.

Treatment Intervention Effects

Within-group differences. It was hypothesized that participation in the OPTIONS intervention would result in high career search self-efficacy, increased perceived problem-solving ability, and increased hopefulness. Analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were used to examine within-group changes on outcome variables from pretest to posttest and from posttest to follow-up. ANOVA results for the OPTIONS treatment intervention group indicated that there were statistically significant score differences from pretest to posttest on measures of CSSE, $F(1, 67) = 14.16, p < .001$; PSI, $F(1, 68) = 5.08, p = .03$; and HOPE, $F(1, 67) = 5.42, p = .02$. ANOVA results for the OPTIONS treatment intervention group indicated there were no statistically significant score differences from posttest to follow-up on measures of CSSE, $F(1, 52) = 0.29, p = .59$; PSI, $F(1, 53) = 0.03, p = .87$; or HOPE, $F(1, 52) = 0.815, p = .37$.

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations for Dependent Measures Across Time

Dependent Measure	Control Group		Treatment Group	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Pretest				
CSSE	203.46	65.93	216.04	62.01
PSI	98.20	22.38	94.14	27.31
HOPE	21.97	4.57	23.05	4.47
Posttest				
CSSE	213.24	63.24	262.35	32.10
PSI	94.41	24.06	79.52	26.72
HOPE	23.20	3.67	25.25	3.08
Follow-up				
CSSE	222.54	46.27	267.10	31.90
PSI	91.92	22.59	78.32	26.41
HOPE	23.50	3.46	26.00	2.84

CSSE = Career Search Self Efficacy (score range = 0-315); HOPE = The Hope Scale (score range = 8-32); PSI = Problem Solving Inventory (score range = 32-192).

ANOVA results for the TAU control group indicated there were no statistically significant score differences from pretest to posttest on measures of CSSE, $F(1, 67) = 0.387, p = .54$; PSI, $F(1, 68) = 0.76, p = .39$; or HOPE, $F(1, 67) = 1.44, p = .23$. ANOVA results for the TAU control group also indicated there were no statistically significant score differences from posttest to follow-up on measures of CSSE, $F(1, 52) = 0.363, p = .55$; PSI, $F(1, 53) = 0.068, p = .80$; or HOPE, $F(1, 52) = 0.094, p = .76$.

Between-group differences. All data were analyzed using 2 (experimental group) \times 2 (time) ANOVAs. All ANOVA assumptions were met, as verified by examination of box plots and use of a randomized block design. Means and standard deviations on pretest, posttest, and follow-up measures are presented in Table 1.

It was hypothesized that inmates who participated in the OPTIONS employment treatment intervention would show greater increases in career search self-efficacy at posttest and 1-month follow-up than inmates in the TAU control group. The first ANOVA showed a statistically significant main effect at posttest for CSSE, $F(1, 134) = 9.55, p < .001, \eta^2 = .07$, Cohen's effect size (ES) = .89, observed power = .87. In other words at posttest, approximately 51% of the treatment group scored higher than the TAU. The second ANOVA showed a statistically significant main effect at follow-up

for CSSE, $F(1, 104) = 27.71, p < .001, \eta^2 = .21$, Cohen's $ES = .98$, observed power = .99. At follow-up approximately 55% of the treatment group scored higher than the TAU. These results supported the first hypothesis and indicated that OPTIONS treatment intervention participants had higher career search self-efficacy scores at posttest and follow-up than did participants who did not participate in the OPTIONS treatment intervention.

It also was hypothesized that participants in the OPTIONS employment treatment intervention would perceive that they had greater problem-solving abilities at posttest and 1-month follow-up than participants in the TAU control group. The first ANOVA showed a statistically significant main effect at posttest for PSI, $F(1, 135) = 4.86, p = .03, \eta^2 = .04$, Cohen's $ES = -.57$, observed power = .59. In other words at posttest, approximately 38% of the treatment group scored higher than the TAU. The second ANOVA showed a statistically significant main effect at follow-up for PSI, $F(1, 105) = 8.62, p < .01, \eta^2 = .08$, Cohen's $ES = -.54$, observed power = .83. At follow-up approximately 33% of the treatment group scored higher than the TAU. These ANOVA results supported the second hypothesis and indicated that OPTIONS treatment intervention participants reported higher problem-solving abilities than those who did not participate in OPTIONS.

Finally, it was also hypothesized that OPTIONS participants would feel more hopeful at posttest and 1-month follow-up than participants in the TAU control group. The first ANOVA showed a statistically significant main effect at posttest for HOPE, $F(1, 134) = 5.07, p < .05, \eta^2 = .03$, Cohen's $ES = .59$, observed power = .61. In other words at posttest, approximately 38% of the treatment group scored higher than the TAU. The second ANOVA showed a statistically significant main effect at follow-up for HOPE, $F(1, 104) = 12.67, p < .01, \eta^2 = .11$, Cohen's $ES = .74$, observed power = .94. At follow-up approximately 43% of the treatment group scored higher than the TAU. These results supported the third hypothesis and indicated that OPTIONS treatment intervention participants reported feeling more hopeful at posttest and follow-up than did participants who did not participate in OPTIONS.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to adapt, deliver, and experimentally test the effectiveness of a research-based employment counseling group intervention (OPTIONS) that was designed to address the employment search and vocational development needs of inmates preparing for reentry into the community. Study results supported all three hypotheses: OPTIONS participants reported higher career search self-efficacy, perceived problem-solving ability,

and hopefulness at posttest and follow-up than did TAU control group participants. Although over time the mean score trends for the control group participants increased for all three dependent variables, these increases were not statistically significant.

SCCT and the criminal justice and employment intervention literatures were used as theoretical and empirical guides for adapting the OPTIONS intervention. SCCT identifies self-efficacy and outcome expectations, which are strongly associated with hopefulness, as key variables that enable individuals to exercise personal control over their vocational pursuits. Study results suggest that an SCCT-guided employment preparation intervention is possibly a viable option to be utilized when addressing the vocational development of male inmates. Results also suggest that brief group interventions that are designed to address the employment search and vocational needs of male prison inmates who are transitioning to the community can be used to enhance knowledge and skill development.

Study Implications

Prison administrators are interested in learning more about effective programming that will support offenders as they transition to the community. The OPTIONS program is cost-effective, is not time-consuming, and can be conducted within the prison setting by persons who are familiar with inmates' reentry challenges and prison life. Policy makers are looking for ways to decrease recidivism. As prisons fill at an alarming rate and funding is scarce for building and operating new facilities, attention is shifting to resources that will provide the offenders with skills that will assist with successful reentry. This study provides some initial evidence that a brief group career counseling intervention can affect key variables that may be useful in preparing an offender for community reentry.

Study results also suggest that interventions targeting self-efficacy should be studied further to investigate the link between increased career search self-efficacy and career-related behaviors such as increased career search activity. If inmates have increased self-efficacy and feel more confident about their abilities to find jobs, they may be more likely to apply for jobs and take greater risks in terms of the types of jobs for which they apply. These work behaviors, in turn, may increase inmates' chances of obtaining work. Several major components of the OPTIONS intervention targeted career search self-efficacy, namely, the SKILLS assessment and utilization of CIS.

Problem-solving ability is an important component of an effective employment preparation intervention. Targeting problem solving can assist offenders in

managing the multiple challenges faced on reentry. Offenders would likely benefit from strong problem-solving skills and support to respond prosocially and effectively to challenges. The OPTIONS program addressed problem solving through discussion of challenges related to finding employment, discussion of strategies to overcome specific challenges that inmates face, and practice of problem-solving techniques such as using "I" statements.

Targeting hopefulness with career interventions for inmates may facilitate inmates' goal-directed activity. Although the OPTIONS intervention does not specifically address hopefulness, several components of the intervention were aimed at increasing hopefulness indirectly. OPTIONS provided support and activities that facilitated participants' identification of short- and long-term goals, contextual supports for reaching those goals, and goal planning for success. Each of these OPTIONS activities was future oriented and designed to promote participants' career preparedness, future orientation, and outcome expectations, all of which are associated with hopefulness. Another aspect of the intervention was helping participants identify their strengths. The participants utilized the SKILLS assessment to identify and highlight the personal and professional strengths they felt they possessed and those they felt they would most like to utilize in an employment setting. This SKILLS activity as well as receiving support from other group members and the group facilitators during this process might have increased participants' self-efficacy and sense of hope that they could pursue and attain different vocational options.

The results of this study underscore extant literature about best practices in offender programming. Cognitive behavioral principles were a foundation of the OPTIONS program consistent with the empirical literature supporting CBT and cognitive interventions as the most effective types of interventions with offenders (Andrews et al., 1990; Gendreau, 1995, 1996). The OPTIONS intervention adheres to the responsivity principle in that the intervention teaches new prosocial skills to the offender, such as anger management techniques and strategies for a successful employment interview (Bourgon & Armstrong, 2005; Gendreau, 1995, 1996). The OPTIONS program is consistent with best practices in that the intervention targets unemployment, a major criminogenic need (Andrews et al., 1990; Bourgon & Armstrong, 2005; Gendreau, 1995, 1996).

An indirect effect of OPTIONS was the sense of connection that inmates developed in the group, across racial lines, in particular. The men talked about how race and socioeconomic status affected their ability to find employment. Group facilitators and members discussed barriers to employment other than a felony record, such as race, ethnicity, discrimination, and so on. Group facilitators supported this line of critical thinking about how experiences of marginalization and oppression affected their life courses and futures. However, a significant challenge for the group facilitators working in the prison setting

was facilitating critical consciousness about larger systems of oppression while also fostering men's responsibility taking for their behavior. Discussions focused on empowering all group members to stay focused on their goals, understand the impact of contextual barriers on their career development and employment, and identify contextual supports and skills that will help them persist with their vocational goals and employment pursuits.

Directions for Future Research

Prior to this study, normative data for career- or employment-related measures designed for inmates had not been collected. Future research could provide further validation of present study measures. Creation and validation of measures specifically designed for inmates would not only add to the literature but also provide a useful reentry tool for professionals working with inmates.

With regard to theory development, there are many career-development theories, and SCCT seems to be a possibility for conceptualizing the career development of offenders and the potential impact of incarceration on career development. To date, the literature is void of career-development-theory-based interventions for offenders. In the future, researchers might examine the efficacy of using other SCCT variables in employment interventions.

We also recommend that this study be replicated with a larger sample and that longitudinal data on employment and recidivism be collected. Further research of the efficacy of employment preparation interventions that begin while an inmate is incarcerated and continue with a community reintegration component once an inmate leaves the prison setting would be useful. In addition, it would be beneficial to examine the extent to which this intervention affects inmates' ability to maintain employment.

Strengths and Limitations

There are several study strengths to note. First, we used a randomized block design, with participants matched on age and release date. This design minimized error variance and pretreatment differences and allowed for strong generalizability of results. Second, OPTIONS was implemented and examined in a naturalistic setting in an effort to show that this kind of intervention could be implemented in correctional settings. Third, this study provided a manualized employment preparation treatment intervention adapted specifically for inmates preparing for release into their communities, making this a useful starting point for future research with other incarcerated populations. Finally, this was the first time the measures in this study (CSSE, PSI, and HOPE) were used with male inmates.

A major limitation of the study was that no data were collected on employment and recidivism postrelease. Longitudinal data on these variables for the treatment and control groups would have highlighted the impact of the intervention on actual employment. Another limitation was participant attrition. At the conclusion of the OPTIONS treatment program, 79% of the original sample ($n = 61$) returned to complete the posttest measures. Four weeks after the conclusion of treatment, 77% of the participants who completed the posttest measures returned to complete follow-up measures ($n = 47$). Overall, 61% of the original sample completed the study, for an attrition rate of 39%. Although the attrition rate could have potentially affected the power to detect significant changes in some outcomes, the attrition rate for the TAU control group was the same as that for the intervention group. There were also no differences on outcome or pretest variables between those who remained in the study and those who dropped out. Possible reasons for attrition include offenders being released earlier than expected, being transferred to another institution, or being isolated from the general population for disciplinary reasons or protective custody.

Another limitation of the study was dosage. Participants were engaged in both PREP and OPTIONS programming simultaneously, and were in various stages of the PREP program. Results indicated there were significant treatment effects. It is possible significant treatment effects were the result of OPTIONS participants receiving more treatment than TAU control because of their involvement with both programs at the same time or more individualized attention, as OPTIONS groups consisted of 6-7 inmates, whereas PREP classes consisted of 75-90 inmates. This study was a pilot study implemented in a real-world prison setting, which means that prison inmates will always be involved in various prison programming that might confound with other interventions being tested. An area for future research is to conduct a larger trial that is able to control for such programming confounds.

Finally, an additional limitation of this study was that the magnitude of the intervention's effect was somewhat small, based on the effect sizes assessed at posttest and follow-up. This suggests that although the results were significant, the intervention had only a small impact on career search self-efficacy, problem solving, and hopefulness. However, it is also important to consider that with offenders, who have high rates of recidivism and frequently demonstrate antisocial cognitions and behaviors, even a small effect size can be meaningful. If this intervention can prevent recidivism in even a small number of offenders, then the argument can be made that the practical utility of the intervention outweighs the small effect.

Summary

This experimental study provides preliminary empirical evidence of the effectiveness of OPTIONS, an employment preparation group intervention, for increasing offenders' career search self-efficacy, perceived problem-solving ability, and hopefulness. In addition to providing a much-needed resource to inmates preparing to transition to the community, this study makes a contribution to a relatively small amount of research on effective job-preparation tools for inmates. Future research and practice may be enhanced by replicating this study with a larger sample from different correctional facilities.

Authors' Note

The opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the opinions of the Federal Bureau of Prisons or the Department of Justice.

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