

# **A Spiritual and Psychological Approach for Crime Prevention in a Sample of Women Prisoners in Turkey**

## **Abstract:**

Assuming that one of the reasons for committing crime is likely caused by a movement away from our inner values and qualities, we conducted a series of individual and theme-focused group therapies with sixteen women prisoners in Ankara Ulucanlar Prison. The goal was to prevent crime repetition and rehabilitate the prisoners by enhancing their spirituality and psychological well being. Acquainting the prisoners with their core (inner) qualities and with the meaning of their existence, in individual therapy sessions, we tried to aid the prisoners in accepting, loving and forgiving themselves as well as giving a meaning to their experiences. In this way, the prisoners were better prepared for the subsequent group therapies. At the culmination we intended to make the prisoners apply the shared values to their daily life. Personal Orientation Inventory was administered to the participants as a pretest and posttest. Following an eleven months intervention, we found that the thoughts and behaviors of the prisoners changed positively both inside and outside of the prison. Prison managers, for instance, conveyed a significant increase in silence in the group exposed to intervention. These improvements were also seen in the analysis of a matched group. Therefore, we concluded that for the individual and theme focused group psychotherapy sessions had a significant positive influence on both behavior and thought of prisoners. The results are discussed in the light of research findings.

## **Introduction**

In the present study, assuming that disassociation from inner qualities and values is influential in committing crime, we carried out a series of individual and theme-focused group therapies with sixteen woman prisoners so as to prevent crime repetition and rehabilitate the prisoners through enhancing their spirituality and psychological well being. We tried to achieve this goal by helping each prisoner accept, love and forgive themselves; give meaning to their lives and self-actualize as a result. We assumed that, at the end of our study, as a result of individual and group therapies, the self-actualization level of prisoners would increase to a great extent. We also predicted that the number of true answers to the questions about anger (which is the leading cause of committing crime) would increase in the posttest. We, moreover, presumed that the number of true responses to the questions involving items like forgiving oneself, being hopeful about the future and living in the moment would also increase.

## **Procedure**

In July 2002, we presented a project involving the purpose and the method of our research to the Ministry of Justice. Soon after we received permission for initiating the study on August 13, 2002.

Administering Personal Orientation Inventory as the Pretest, we carried out theme-focused group therapies and individual therapies twice a week during a three month period, we applied for a time extension of six months.

In that period, besides individual and group therapies, we participated in the trials, which allowed us to become acquainted with the relatives of the prisoners who in turn, allowed us the opportunity to obtain more information about the prisoners. We also convinced the related department to provide the prisoners with certain books that we suggested such as Louise Hay's You Can Heal Your Life, Victor Frankl's Man's Search for Meaning, Stephan Covey's Seven Habits Of Highly Effective People and Mevlana's Mesnevi According The Subjects translated by Şefik Can. We, moreover, decided to show certain movies especially for the illiterate prisoners so as to reinforce our previous discussions and show them practical applications. For example, the movie Miserables adapted from Victor Hugo's novel Les Miserables reflects the awakening of a conscience; Patch Adams demonstrates the possibility of executing decisions taken at the expense of all negative conditions. Both movies were shown to the prisoners. All throughout the study, we arranged the activities when needed like singing songs and imaginal meditation. At the end, we readministered the Personal Orientation Inventory and terminated the study on July 30, 2003.

## **Method**

We carried out theme focused group therapies and individual therapies. In individual meetings, our goal was to help prisoners get in touch with their inner qualities and relate those qualities with the meaning of their lives. We, for this reason, focused on issues like loving, accepting and forgiving oneself. Therefore, the prisoners were better prepared for the group therapies in which the individuals were given more chance to know each other more closely. Realizing that the other members of the group also shared similar problems, the prisoners became more self-confident and hopeful. When discussing the issues in group therapies, we made use of spiritual techniques that allowed us to attempt to reach the inner world of the prisoners. We encouraged the prisoners to replace their authoritarian, steadfast and static values with more humanistic, flexible and dynamic ones.

Our study, broadly speaking, can be regarded as an experience of repentance. In individual therapy sessions, we gave support to the prisoners to encourage them to become aware of their lapses, and then to forgive themselves. We presented several examples of forgiveness from the Holy Teachings to enhance the prisoners' spirituality. The examples included religious holy books such as the Pentateuch, The New Testament, and Quran also mystics' writings such as Mevlana and Yunus Emre. In group therapies, combining the examples from the Holy Teaching and cultural figures, we explained the real meaning of values to encourage the prisoners to display good conduct inside and outside of the prison.

### **Instruments**

In the study, the Personal Orientation Inventory, developed by Everett Shostrom (1968) was used as pretest and posttest. Since the individuals differ in terms of their self-actualization level, relying on Maslow's theory, Shostrom developed the Personal Orientation Inventory to determine the individual's self-actualization level.

The Personal Orientation Inventory consists of 150 two-choice comparative value and behavior judgments. 23 of 150 pair of items constitute the *Time Competence Scales* and the *Time Incompetence Scales* while 127 items constitutes *The Inner-Directed Support Scales* and *Outer Directed Support Scales*. These two pairs of scales are the basic scales of the inventory and each contains different types of items.

The level of self-actualization is defined as the full utilization of all one's abilities and potentials so as to be more productive, independent and self-confident. In our study, the level of self-actualization was evaluated on the basis of the sum of the scores obtained from the *Time Competence Subscales* and *Inner-Directed Support Subscales*.

Time Competence means the capacity to live in the present and to connect meaningfully past and future actions to the present, rather than blaming the past and being hopeless about the future. (23 items)

Inner -Directed Support is the tendency to trust in one's inner feelings and behave in accordance with one's own value system rather than being dependent on the external authorities. (127 items)

### **Results**

As reported by the prison management, a **decrease** in arguments among the prisoners and an increase in the silence in prison were the first positive outcomes of our group psychotherapies. We also found that the thoughts and the behaviors of the prisoners changed positively both inside and outside of the prison. These results were observed in the analysis of match group as well. **We found our research paired samples t-test a significance** rate of 0.000.  $\alpha=0.05$ . We, therefore, concluded that the individual and the group therapy sessions had a significant positive effect on the prisoners.

Since Ulucanlar Prison where we carried out our study was also a jail, some of the arrested people were being released and some penalized people were being sent to other prisons. Therefore, we could not form a control group. We suggest that our study should be replicated with larger samples in bigger prisons.

### Paired samples t-test results (POI)

	Mean	Standart Dev	T
<b>Total Puan</b>			
Pretest	77,38	16,041	
Posttest	132,13	7,173	18,03***
<b>İnner Support</b>			
Pretest	67,31	12,903	
Posttest	113,56	5,537	19,926***
<b>Time Competence</b>			
Pretest	10,56	3,162	
Posttest	18,31	2,858	8,598*

\*\*\* -  $p < 0.01$

\* -  $p < 0.05$

### Analysis of Questions Related to The Themes

We analyzed the items involving the statements such as anger management, forgiving oneself, being hopeful about the future, living in the

moment and understanding religious beliefs, which were the basic topics discussed in the theme focused group therapies. As demonstrated in the frequency tables of pretest and posttest, we found that there was a significant positive increase in the scores obtained from the responses to the statements related to the topics discussed in the group psychotherapies.

### One Sample of Table Related to The Themes

#### Question 91

A ) People should always control their anger.( F )

B ) People should express honestly felt anger ( T)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<b>1. TEST</b>	True Answer	5	31,3	31,3	31,3
	False Answer	11	68,8	68,8	100
	Total	16	100	100	
<b>2. TEST</b>	True Answer	16	100	100	100
	False Answer				
	Total	16	100	100	

### Discussion

In our study, during individual therapy sessions, we learned that most of the crimes were committed during premenstrual period, menstruation and early menopause. In particular, the women who had killed their husbands acknowledged that fact. Talking about the day she had committed murder, Firuze remembered that she had not had her menstrual period for six months, and had just recently visited the doctor. She also said she had frequently felt heat inside her head that had caused her to lose consciousness. Moreover, she reported that she poured water on her head immediately after murdering her husband, and then watered the flowers in the garden.

Early in their lives, most of the prisoners lost their parents and were exposed to violence. Frezya lost her mother at the age of eight and lived with her aunt. Orkide lost her father and always suffered from that pain as a girl. Nilüfer lost her father at the age of 10. Papatya had an authoritarian family.

Obtaining permission from the prison management, we showed two movies: Patch Adams and Sefiller. We received positive feedback from the prisoners who viewed the films. The movie Patch Adams modeled the

transformation of seemingly negative incidents of life into positive events. It showed the beauty of love, faith and decisiveness; and the answer to the question of what life expects from each individual was explained. The prisoners' understanding of life changed and they wholly accepted their life experiences. The movie *Les Misérables*, adapted from Victor Hugo's novel, involves a story of repentance and personal transformation.

“ First, I liked the film very much because I found similarities with my life in the film.” The prisoners reported that the films were so influential that after viewing them, it added meaning to their own lives, and they were empowered with revived hope.

We realized that the prisoners with a substance abuse problem needed more spiritual support to give meaning to their lives. Orkide was an artist, for instance, and she acknowledged that she rarely had a religious commitment in her life. In one of my visits to the prison, I went up to her room. Zambak, Orkide, Karanfil and Firuze were there. Orkide had a trial but it was again postponed. I saw her praying. She was also reading the Quran and praying for her father. She said, “I felt hopeless here, and now I feel closer to my Creator. I do not know whether I will be able to keep praying outside the prison.” When she was incarcerated, she admitted that she did not have any purpose in her life. After being imprisoned for six months. She said, “I wanted to be a good person and to be with my Creator.” She also thought that she was pleased to be in prison; although she was kept there unfairly because of a crime she did not commit. She also perceived that period of unjust imprisonment as a compensation for the faults she deliberately made in her life.

We found a significant increase in the responses given to the questions about the anger between pretest and posttest. Özcan reported that homicide was the most common type of crime amongst the women prisoners in Turkey (38.6 %). This implies that the women can even hurt their closest relatives. The reason women are so weak and lack skills to manage their emotions are society's failure to teach the principles of anger management, problem solving skills, impulse control methods and empathy.

When we look at the stories of prisoners, we see that they had difficult times in their childhood. That is, they lost their parents and were exposed to physical and emotional violence. Negative effects of inharmonious childhood experiences continue all throughout life. The findings of a study conducted with the offenders who committed the most violent crimes showed that being an adopted child or growing up in an orphanage were the primary factors distinguishing the more violent criminals from the others. They were also emotionally neglected and were not given the opportunity to live in a harmonious life.