

TYRO LEADERSHIP BRIEF: AN EXAMINATION OF THE TYRO LEADERSHIP CURRICULUM ON RECIDIVISM AND PARENTING ENGAGEMENT

THE TYRO LEADERSHIP PROGRAM IS PROVEN TO EQUIP INDIVIDUALS WITH THE SKILLS NEEDED TO ENACT TRANSFORMATION. TYRO LEADERSHIP TEACHES THE LIFE SKILLS NEEDED TO BE RESPONSIBLE PARENTS, PARTNERS, BETTER COMMUNICATORS, RELIABLE EMPLOYEES, AND POSITIVE ROLE MODELS. (TYROLEADERSHIP.COM)

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Introduction

The increasing population of jails and prisons across the United States has created serious challenges for incarcerated individuals, their families, and within their communities. Overcrowding, reentry of incarcerated people into society, and recidivism remain significant challenges as U.S. correctional facilities release approximately 600,000 individuals back into communities each year (Campers, 2012; King, 2016; Miller, 2021). According to available data, the United States reports the highest rates of both incarceration and recidivism in the world (Fazel & Wolf, 2015). Recidivism refers to "a person's relapse into criminal behavior, often after the person receives sanctions or undergoes intervention for a previous crime" (Durose et al., 2014). Lack of preparation for transitioning back into the community is a major factor contributing to an individual's chances of recidivating. Upon release, "the world to which they return is drastically different from the one they left regarding the availability of jobs, family support, community resources, and the willingness to assist ex-offenders" (Seiter & Kadela, 2003). Further, traditional prison and parole systems do very little to facilitate successful reintegration following incarceration.

Becoming caught in what is seemingly an endless cycle within a justice system that has shifted toward punishment instead of rehabilitation can result in feelings of disempowerment, helplessness, and low self-efficacy (Allred, Harrison, & O'Connell, 2013). Originally coined by Bandura in 1977, self-efficacy is an individual's belief in his or her own capacity to independently accomplish the various tasks needed to achieve a desired outcome. Therefore, implementing prison-based interventions that increase individuals' self-efficacy and prepare them for reentry is critical.

The TYRO program is an international movement that equips individuals, institutions, and organizations with skills they need to be responsible parents, partners, reliable employees, and positive role models. This program is the cornerstone of The RIDGE Project, Inc. (RIDGE) and is foundational to all other courses and programs offered by the organization.

Described as a holistic, multi-faceted character-building program, TYRO Leadership helps individuals overcome the challenges of incarceration by focusing on: 1) resilience and fortitude; 2) leadership; 3) communication skills; 4) self-regulation skills; and 5) relationship strengthening. Variations of the TYRO curriculum have been demonstrated as effective in assisting reentry and reducing recidivism (Johnson, Wubbenhorst et al., 2014), and an emerging body of literature is demonstrating the efficacy of the leadership version of TYRO curriculum.

The Scope of the Problem

Data from the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) report that 70 percent of prisoners released in 2012 were arrested again within five years and this rate is even higher for "high

risk" individuals including persons that had a juvenile record. This data includes prisoner records released by 34 states, representing 80 percent of the state prison population nationwide (Department of Justice [DOJ], 2021). Research shows that key factors that increase an individual's probability of recidivating include difficulty overcoming negative stigmas associated with incarceration, failure of adequate social program assistance, financial stress and lack of employment, lack of basic verbal and writing skills, and lack of familial support (Bailey, 2007; Cole & Bosworth, 2010). While incapacitation via prison means people are unable to commit additional crimes in the community (Zimring, 1995), there are many positive social connections that the individual is unable to experience (Western, 2000). With a lack of programs to assist in healthy and successful reentry, individuals released from incarceration are left to experience the struggles and burdens of reentry on their own, leaving them with high stress levels and a high likelihood of relapsing back into crime and contributing to the increasing prison population. Unsurprisingly, little evidence exists that incarceration alone reduces recidivism, and some evidence even suggests that it has a criminogenic effect (Cullen et al., 2011). Similarly, reentering citizens who manage to find and join a reentry assistance program experienced better outcomes regarding housing and employment (Bloom, 2007; Bouffard, 2007; Lattimore, 2009).

Not only are the difficulties faced through incarceration a challenge for individuals who experience it firsthand, but families with a relative in prison are also negatively affected. In 2016, an estimated 684,500 state and federal prisoners were parents of at least one minor child, with nearly half of state prisoners (47%) and more than half of federal prisoners (58%) having reported being a parent (Maruschak et al., 2021), which means that roughly 1 in every 28 children (about 2.7 million children) have a parent who is incarcerated (The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2010). This creates tremendous adverse impacts on children due to social, emotional, neurodevelopmental (Arditti, 2012; Shlafer et al., 2013), academic, and mental health problems, and even externalizing problems such as self-injury or violent behavior towards others (Craige, 2011). While it can be difficult to separate the effects of parental incarceration on children from the effects of factors that existed before incarceration, studies suggest that there is an independent effect on a child's behavior, academic performance, and mental health (Christian, 2009). What is known is that these children are exposed to a host of risk factors leading to long-term emotional and financial instability. Parental separation, ongoing patterns of instability, identification with the incarcerated parent, social stigma, and deception about the whereabouts of the incarcerated parent or the reasons for incarceration are contributing factors to these challenges. These children lack an ability to cope with the trauma related to parental separation and the stigma experienced when a parent is incarcerated (Wright & Seymour, 2015).

While many families suffer from economic strain and financial instability because of parental incarceration (Christian, 2009), incarceration is also expensive for the community. The average cost of incarceration for federal inmates during the 2015 fiscal year was \$31,977.65, or \$87.61 per day (Qureshi et al., 2016), putting a hefty burden on taxpayers. For example, a Vera Institute of Justice study quantifying the economic impacts of incarceration on taxpayers, found that in 2012 a total of \$39 billion was spent in taxpayer money on incarceration across 40 states (Henrichson & Delaney, 2012). An interesting trend discovered recently in the United States shows that there seems to be an increasing prison population but a decreasing crime rate (King et al., 2005), with a study conducted by Dr. Ryan King at Ohio State University revealing that recidivism is the contributing factor. While it is true that crime rates are decreasing in the United States, incarceration rates are continuing to increase due to reentering individuals violating their parole or committing new crimes, therefore recidivating back into incarceration (King, 2016).

Risk Factors Associated with Recidivism

The stigma of being a criminal: a harmful one-word label that generally supersedes all other roles in an individual's life, such as father, mother, brother, sister, friend, or citizen, has the power to produce negative psychological and behavioral consequences. Being labeled a "criminal" leads to stereotypical descriptors such as untrustworthy, unintelligent, and dangerous (Hirschfield & Piquero, 2010). This devaluing by one's community affects self-esteem and self-efficacy, creating barriers to finding successful employment, enjoying supportive relationships, and sometimes leading to a higher likelihood of risk-taking and criminal behavior (Corrigan, 2006; Shomerus, et al., 2011). One of the risk factors for criminal behavior consistent across the literature is criminal thinking (Bonta et al., 1998; Hubbard & Pratt, 2002; Simourd, 2004). Cognitive restructuring is a technique that can help people identify, challenge, and alter stress-inducing thought patterns and beliefs, enabling people to replace stress-inducing thought habits with more accurate and less rigid thinking habits (Cognitive Restructuring, 2019). The goal for the reentering individual is to remove themselves from and overcome this negative social stigma and create a positive future for themselves and their families.

Research shows a correlation exists between education level prior to incarceration and recidivism (Harlow, 2003). Studies such as Harer (1995) and Tolbert (2002) have shown that when inmates had more opportunities to increase their level of education, recidivism was lower regardless of race and ethnicity. While overall educational attainment among Americans has risen since 1980, the percentage of incarcerated individuals with less than a high school diploma continues to increase (Tyler & Brockmann, 2017). In a 2014 Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) survey of 1,300 prisoners, 30 percent of incarcerated adults had less than a high school diploma, and significantly lower levels of

literacy compared to the general population (Greenberg, Dunleavy et al., 2007). Out of 883 Texas prisoners in one 8-year recidivism study, participation in postsecondary education programming while in prison had a significant impact, with only 27 percent of Associate's degree holders and 7.8% of Bachelor's degree holders recidivating, compared to 43 percent of people who did not participate in postsecondary education programming (Yoon, 2019).

Family ties and support are also vital for returning citizens as they reintegrate following release. Incarcerated individuals who maintain communication with a supportive family are significantly more likely to succeed after their release (Shanahan & Agudelo, 2012), with people who managed to stay crime-free and successfully reintegrate into their communities indicating their families as the most important factor keeping them from going back to prison (Visher & Courtney, 2006). Unfortunately, only about two-thirds of the prison population stay in regular contact with their children by phone, mail, or visitation while incarcerated (Mumola, 2000). According to Markson, Losel, Souza, and Lanskey (2015), "the benefit of a positive family influence in developing and supporting resilience in resettlement can be understood, for example, from social bonding theory and social capital perspectives" (p.425). Their study investigated whether inmates' family relationships with their ex-partner and children before and during imprisonment supported resilience in resettlement. The authors looked at positive post-release outcomes in the following areas: accommodation, employment, health, alcohol and drug dependency, finances, family relationships, and coping skills. They found substantial correlations between family relations and these measured outcomes, even when controlling for commonly reported personal and social risk factors.

Another recidivism risk factor is lack of employment following release. Research examining the relationships between education, employment, and recidivism is consistent among authors who suggest that those who fail to obtain stable employment are less likely to successfully reenter society (Brenda, Harm et al., 2005, Brennan, Dieterich et al., 2009; Horney, Osgood et al., 1995; Kim, Joo et al., 2008; Makarios et al., 2010; Ulmer, 2001). Some research suggests that finding and maintaining a legitimate job can reduce a reentering individual's chances of reoffending, and that higher wages correlates with less recidivism (Visher et al., 2008). Finding a job is often one of the most serious concerns among ex-inmates who frequently have few job skills and experience large gaps in their work history. A troubling trend shows that incarcerated individuals are more likely to be poor, unemployed, and to have grown up in neighborhoods with high rates of poverty and unemployment. Some former offenders also face laws restricting them from certain forms of employment, housing, and community activities which can result in further discriminatory ostracizing (Pogorzelski et al., 2005). Furthermore, many businesses indicate skepticism when considering hiring an ex-offender (Holzer, Raphael et al., 2007). Petersilia (2001) reported that most former prisoners leave prison with no savings and that 60 percent of inmates released from prison fail to enter the

labor market within the first year of release. Having no savings and no prospects for income has a direct impact on a person's ability to find housing or care for their children.

Race and ethnicity are two other major contributing factors to incarceration and recidivism. Recidivism rates are high across all race and ethnicity groups. As of 2017, American Indians and Alaska Natives face the highest levels of recidivism at 79 percent but are one percent of the total prison population. Black prisoners have the second-highest recidivism rate, at 74 percent over five years, and are about 40 percent of total prisoners (DOJ, 2021).

The TYRO Leadership Impact

Used by community groups across several states and specifically designed for the needs of current and former prisoners, the TYRO Leadership Program works to instill the attitudes and character qualities required for successful relationships with families, in the workplace, and in society. Through cognitive restructuring, developing self-regulation, enhancing resiliency, and teaching positive role modeling, the program is designed to combat root challenges of incarceration. Class activities help individuals recognize and change the underlying assumptions, beliefs, attitudes, and thinking patterns that contributed to their decisions and behaviors that led to their incarceration. They learn to become aware of the harmful impact of their past behaviors on their children and families, while being encouraged to accept responsibility for their choices and instill new, more hopeful ways of thinking about their future.

The TYRO Leadership Program also builds an understanding of child developmental phases and the behaviors associated with each, while emphasizing the importance of parental involvement. Participants discuss the specific obstacles their children face due to their parent's current or previous incarceration, and specific actions they can take to create protective factors in their children's lives. To reinforce this theme, all participants are required to write letters to their children as assigned homework. These workshops also provide education about the negative impacts of unhealthy relationship cycles and provide participants with a clear path to developing healthy relationships with their children and their co-parent that assist in reestablishing trust and cohesion.

TYRO Leadership Study

Study Population

In 2016, RIDGE was awarded a Second Chance Act grant funded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) with the primary goal of lowering recidivism rates. For this project, RIDGE recruited 220 inmates from Richland Correctional Institution and Trumbull Correctional

Institution to participate in their TYRO program and receive mentoring services and support upon release. This report focuses on the outcomes, including recidivism rates, for the subset of individuals (n=42) who "completed" the TRYO Leadership Program (these participants received at least 840 minutes of programming and completed at least eight of the 10 sessions within the TYRO Leadership Program). The purpose of this examination is to understand the benefits to and outcomes of those individuals who complete the TYRO Leadership Program. Table 1 provides additional characteristics of the sample analyzed.

Table 1. Sample Characteristics of Participants

| Variable Variable | N | Mean/ Percentage |
|------------------------------|----|------------------|
| Age | 38 | 40 |
| Number of Children | 28 | 1.6 |
| | | |
| Race | 42 | |
| Black | | 64.3% |
| White | | 33.8% |
| Native American or Alaskan | | 2.5% |
| | | |
| Education | 42 | |
| Below High School | | 9.5% |
| GED or High School Diploma | | 3.9% |
| College or Vocational School | | 58.6% |
| | | |
| Marital Status | 42 | |
| Married | | 2.4% |
| Divorced or separated | | 14.2% |
| Unmarried | | 76.2% |

Analysis

The main analysis of interest was to determine whether participants had lower recidivism rates than comparable Ohio state rates. In addition, this brief attempts to demonstrate the changes in measurements from participant surveys administered at two points in time of the TYRO Leadership Program (2016 – 2020). The pre-survey (baseline)

instrument was provided at the beginning of the program, just after consent was acquired from the participant. The post-survey was given 12 months following completion of the program. Since the length of time between measurements was consistent, the results were expressed as scalar changes from baseline survey.

Survey choices were scored from lowest to highest and assigned a direction based on the questions and answer choices. Responses for all survey items in this study were scored based on the item directionality. All statistical comparisons were made using the scale point change during the life of the program. The items chosen were based on the availability of the collected data. All items were tested for normality, and items explored in this study were chosen to reduce the number of tested sets and to provide the necessary power to detect true differences, Correlation analysis and analysis of normalcy was carried out for the data before the application of a paired t-test.

Recidivism Rates

A recent publication from the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (ODRC) published three-year recidivism rates for individuals who were released from prison in 2015 and 2016, which overlaps with the sample of this study. The three-year recidivism rate for those released in 2016 was 20.78 percent who had committed a new crime and 32.69 percent which included technical violations. This represents the lowest recidivism crime rate in 15 years in Ohio. The overall one-year recidivism rate for this group was 12.07 percent, and the two-year recidivism rate was 24.82 percent (ODRC, 2021). The one-year recidivism rate for those who completed the TYRO Leadership Program (2016-2017) was 19.5 percent. At first glance, this appears to be worse than that of the average incarnated population of that time, however a closer examination is required to understand the context and importance of these findings.

Risk Levels: To assess risk of recidivism, Ohio uses the Ohio Risk Assessment System (ORAS). A major goal of the ORAS was to conform to the principles of effective classification. In doing so, the ODRC hoped to efficiently allocate supervision resources and structure decision-making in a manner that reduces the likelihood of recidivism. As a result, ORAS was developed to classify the risk level of offenders in the system while also identifying both criminogenic needs and barriers to programming. Ohio is not alone in assessing risk levels; different methods and classification systems exist across states and withing the federal prison system. A 2016 study of federal community supervised offenders indicated that 78 percent of offenders were classified as low or low/moderate risk, 18 percent were classified as moderate risk and only five percent were classified as high risk. To be eligible to participate in the RIDGE's Second Chance Act funded TYRO Leadership Program, participants were required to be assessed at a "moderate" or "high" risk level six months prior to their release date.

ORAS Risk Levels and Ohio Recidivism Rates: The overall rates reported above from ODRC are the averages for all persons released from prison in that time period, and includes persons of all genders, race, and most importantly, assessed risk factors (the likelihood of reoffending based on an individual's historical data as described above). To assess risk of recidivism, Ohio uses the ORAS, which was developed as a statewide system to assess the risk and needs of Ohio offenders in order to improve consistency and facilitate communication across criminal justice agencies. The goal was to develop assessment tools that were predictive of recidivism at multiple points in the criminal justice system. Specifically, assessment instruments were to be developed at the following stages: 1) pretrial, 2) community supervision, 3) institutional intake, and 4) community reentry. Validation work conducted by the University of Cincinnati (Latessa et al., 2010) clearly indicated that one-year recidivism rates were correlated with predicted ORAS risk levels with low-risk males recidivating at 9.1 percent, moderate risk males recidivating at 34.3 percent, high-risk males at 58.9 percent, and very high-risk males at 69.2 percent.

TYRO Comparable Recidivism Rates: As documented above, it is inaccurate and inappropriate to compare the recidivism rates for the individuals in the TYRO Leadership Program with the average recidivism rate for all persons released from Ohio facilities. This is because the average overall recidivism rate for Ohio is dominated by low-risk offenders that recidivate at much lower rates than the moderate- and high-risk individuals enrolled in the TYRO Leadership Program (around 78% low risk and 22-23 % moderate [18%] and high risk [5%]). Figure 1 below shows the risk level classification for the persons that completed the TYRO Leadership Program and percentage of those individuals who recidivated in one year.

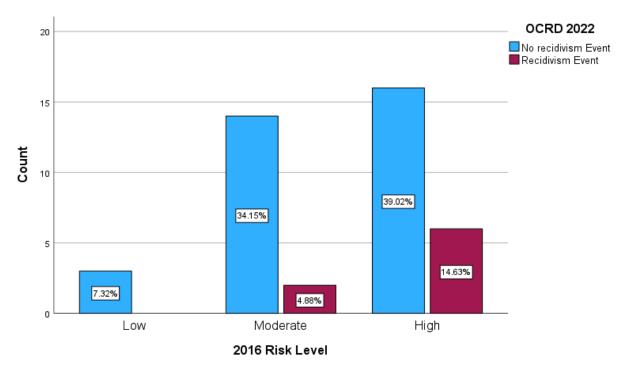


Figure 1. TYRO Leadership Graduates Recidivism rate by Risk Level Category

R= 27. P< 0.00

Data for risk level and recidivism came from ODRC. The primary measure of recidivism for this analysis was arrest for a new crime or violation of probation or other institutional violations. Although data were gathered on a variety of other potential outcome measures (e.g., conviction, probation violation), we do not provide a breakdown as not all participants had detailed data. In addition, risk level rates of very high participants were assigned the high rating.

Table 2 displays comparable data from the TYRO project as compared to the validated ORAS rates and Ohio recidivism data. These data indicate that while the TYRO Leadership sample had an overall one-year recidivism rate of 19.5 percent (which is higher than the state overall average of 12.07 for that same time period), the recidivism rates are less than a quarter of what they should have been predicted to have been based on the ORAS risk scores of the participants, suggesting at least a 75 percent reduction in recidivism at one year after release.

Table 2. Risk Level Data from ORAS and TYRO

| Risk Level | Ohio ORAS 1 year | TYRO Leadership 1 |
|----------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| | Recidivism | year Recidivism |
| Low | 9.1% | 0% |
| Moderate | 34.3% | 4.88% |
| High (and very high) | 60.16% | 14.63% |

Parenting and Co-Parenting Engagement

Table 3 below gives the mean score for the baseline and post-survey items and standard deviation (SD) for the individual variables. Paired t-tests were performed for the entire set of items used in the parent dataset. Hotelling's T2 was used to make an overall comparison of the percentage changes for the selected variables. This test is a multivariate extension of the paired t-test which simultaneously compares the percentage differences for all variables to a vector of zeros. A statistically significant result indicated that some difference or linear combination of differences is not equal to zero. After the significant result, individual paired t-tests were performed on the items of interest as presented in Table 4. No multiple comparison adjustment was made for these comparisons. For this analysis, we have limited the presentation of the items studied to those that focus on parenting and co-parenting engagement items that were significantly different and were of immediate interest.

In general, we saw that the average score for the items categorized as parenting items increased from baseline to post and from post to follow-up survey. After participation in the program, the men felt that they had the skills necessary to make relationships works. This score went up by nearly a full point (0.923). Average scores for how overwhelmed they are by financial obligations also went up by more than a point. This could signal that the inmates were acquiring an understanding of their financial responsibility to their families and themselves. More importantly their co-parenting attitudes changed positively. Men, on average, were not only providing positive encouragement but also sharing how important the co-parent was to their child. Both scores for these items went up by 0.5 and 1.69 points respectively. This change in co-parenting engagement can be further evidenced by the items measuring how often they disagreed with their partners or talked about ending their relationships, which went down significantly. The scores for both negative behaviors went down by 0.87 and 0.9. This result suggests that there is a significant effect of the TYRO leadership mentoring program on coparenting behavior. Additional testing is suggested with participants from a variety of programs using the same curriculum to better capture factors that are contributing to group differences.

Table 3. Item Choices and Scoring Matrix for Selected Items

| Item | Scaled Ascending (1 – 7) |
|--|----------------------------|
| My partner and I have the skills a couple needs to | Strongly disagree |
| make a relationship last. | Disagree |
| I am overwhelmed when I think about my financial | Somewhat disagree |
| situation. | Neither disagree nor agree |
| I can make a positive contribution to any work | Somewhat agree |
| environment no matter what difficulties I face | Agree |
| | Strongly agree |

| I have given my child's/children's other parent | |
|--|---------------------------|
| encouragement and emotional support | |
| I have let my child/children know that their other | |
| parent is an important and special person | |
| | Scaled Ascending (1 – 7) |
| How often I have told my child I have loved | N/A |
| her/him | Never |
| How often do you and your partner calmly discuss | 1 or 2 days a month |
| something? | 3 or 4 days per month |
| | 2 or 3 days per month |
| | Almost every day |
| | Scaled Descending (1 – 7) |
| How often do you and your partner disagree about | N/A |
| making major decisions? | Never |
| How often do you discuss divorce, separation or | 1 or 2 days a month |
| ending your relationship? | 3 or 4 days per month |
| | 2 or 3 days per month |
| | Always |

Table 4. Paired T-test for Parenting and Co-Parenting Engagement

| _ | Mean* | Std. Deviation | n t | N | p |
|---|-----------|----------------|-------|----|------|
| My partner and I have the skills a couple needs to make a relationship last. | .923 | 1.998 | 2.355 | 25 | .027 |
| I am overwhelmed when I think about my financial situation. | 1.370 | 2.404 | 2.962 | 26 | .006 |
| I can make a positive contribution to any work environment no matter what difficulties I face | .500 s | 1.291 | 2.049 | 27 | .050 |

| parent ei | ren my nildren's other ncouragement tional support | | 2.743 | 2.813 | 22 | .010 |
|------------|---|--------|-------|--------|----|------|
| that their | dren know r other parent ortant and | .292 | 1.922 | 3.292 | 23 | .003 |
| | n I have told I have loved | .667 | 1.308 | 2.497 | 23 | .020 |
| your part | n do you and ner calmly omething? | -1.091 | 2.045 | -2.502 | 21 | .021 |
| your part | n do you and ner disagree aking major ? | 870 | 1.766 | -2.361 | 22 | .027 |
| • | • | 909 | 2.068 | -2.062 | 21 | .052 |

^{*}Unit of analysis is respondent. n=42. Sign. level 5%

Conclusion

TYRO programming began with TYRO Dads, an intervention for fathers impacted by incarceration, with a goal of impacting recidivism. Due to its success at facilitating more successful reentry for these men, it has now grown to include a suite of curriculum topics focused on parenting and co-parenting competencies, conflict resolution, communication skills, financial and employment readiness, and child development, and been expanded to populations beyond men affected by incarceration.

Factors like increased connection to family, children, and partners are all proven mitigators for recidivism and incarceration. Even when faced with risk factors such as poverty, racial oppression, unemployment, and lack of education, people with higher self-efficacy who are more invested in the lives of their children and their partners are generally less likely to engage in behaviors that lead to incarceration. Not only does the program teach participants how to handle conflict and about the importance of their relationship with their children, but it also focuses on helping participants retrain their thinking processes to better understand themselves and overcome destructive cycles of poverty. This analysis shows that the TYRO Leadership Program is an effective and holistic approach for reducing recidivism rate of male incarcerated adults and provides protective factors such as improved parenting and coparenting engagement that are proven to alleviate the burden of this protected population.

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