

## TOWARDS A CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF RELIGIOUS AND FAITH BASED PROGRAMMING IN CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Part 1 of this chapter presented the empirical evidence confirming a negative relationship between religion and crime. As discussed, the debate continues on the exact nature of the relationship. Reviewing the literature, what becomes clear is the fact that religion can work in a number of ways to influence behavior. The majority of the theoretical literature is grounded in social control theory, particularly **social bonding theory** (Hirschi, 1969). Researchers and practitioners assert that religiosity influences social bonding in the development of relationships with conventional others, increasing commitment and involvement in legitimate activities, and bolstering the moral belief in right and wrong. Individuals committed to religious beliefs will be more likely to believe in the moral legitimacy of the criminal law. Further, religiosity may relate to closer attachments with parent and family, conventional peers, and avoidance of activities such as drug and alcohol use.

The important elements of the social bond are attachment (salience), belief, commitment, and involvement. These elements are related to the idea that the church—through religion or faith—acts as an agent of informal social control. Essentially, bonding is part of the socialization process, instilling in individuals a sense a morality and identity. Furthermore, bonding, by simple association, brings people into contact with other pro-social people and conventional associations. As people intermingle with pro-social others, the possibility of learning morality and pro-social values grows.

Furthermore, religion affects peer selection such that individuals committed to religion select peers with similar, conventional beliefs. Religious peer influence alters individuals' religious commitments through positive reinforcement, thus deterring crime. Hence, social learning theory can be easily integrated with social bonding theory. As the empirical literature shows, studies that utilize an integrated social learning, social control, and bonding theoretical model find support for religion as an important influence on behavior, even when controlling for social control and learning variables (Benda 2002; Benda and Corwyn, 1997; Johnson and Jang, 2001; Johnson, Jang, Larson, De Li, 2001). With regard to the religious processes of social control, closely related to bonding theory, is the theory of **deterrence**. Hellfire theory, a component of social bonding, suggests that religious people refrain from committing crimes because they fear the consequences, consequences that are spiritual, not secular. The spiritual consequences of beliefs act as a deterrent to crime. For instance the wrath of God or the possibility of not going to heaven, would keep someone from committing crime.

A third theory relevant to the religion's influence on criminal behavior is **desistance theory**. Desistance theory is part of developmental theorists' assertion that turning points can influence the life course of someone who has been engaged in criminal behavior. The influence of religion or faith can provide a turning point for individuals (at any point in their life), and help them move towards less criminal ways. Faith or religion would provide the means for increasing social stability and a reorientation of the costs and benefits of crime as aspects of one's life take on different meanings. Discussing desistance as related to bonding and social control, Sampson and Laub (2001, p. 19) state:

Most relevant for the study of desistance is the idea that salient life events and social ties in adulthood can counteract, at least to some extent, the trajectories apparently right and wrong. Individuals committed to religious beliefs will be more likely to believe in the moral legitimacy of the criminal law. Further, religiosity may relate to closer attachments with parent and family, conventional peers, and avoidance of activities such

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Most relevant for the study of desistance is the idea that salient life events and social ties in adulthood can counteract, at least to some extent, the trajectories apparently set in early child development. Our thesis is that social bonds in adulthood— especially attachment to the labor force and cohesive marriage—explained criminal behavior independent of prior differences in criminal propensity. In other words, pathways to both crime and conformity were modified by key institutions of social control in the transition to adulthood (e.g., employment, military service, and marriage). Thus, strong social bonds could explain desistance from criminal behavior in adulthood, despite a background of delinquent behavior.

As discussed by Clear in Section II of this paper, prisoners that “find religion” or renew their spirituality while in prison have indicated that they essentially have come to a turning point, finding a new way of life. Their commitment to their new life leads to a desistance from crime.

Another theory relevant to religion is **reintegrative shaming** and the concept of **restorative justice**. Braithwaite's theory, (1990) asserts that shaming, while maintaining bonds of respect and love, can have a rehabilitative effect. Religion can move individuals beyond the criminal mind-set of denial, externalization and minimization and come to accept responsibility for their crimes. Restorative justice is the related concept used to describe program models that broaden the participation in the criminal process beyond

that of criminal justice professionals. Restorative justice attempts to increase the role of victims and the community in order to repair the harm done by the crime and to bring about reconciliation among the victim, the offender, and the community as a whole.

Restorative justice relies less heavily on punishment to hold the offender accountable; instead, emphasizing reconciliation and the need to reintegrate offenders back into the community. Researchers have begun to assert that the combination of religiosity and shame provides a buffer from further criminal activity (Jensen and Gibbons, 2002). Many faith-based organizations are drawn to the restorative justice model for social services with offenders and victims because biblical understandings of justice align closely with restorative rather than retributive justice (Grimsrud and Zehr, 2002). Hence, restorative justice is people-focused, not rules-focused, and based on mercy and love with an intention of making things right. As discussed in Section II, restorative justice models are being used in criminal justice practice with cultural populations that historically rely on spirituality for moral development and personal and cultural growth. These populations include Native Americans and aboriginals.

With regard to criminal justice outcomes, these theories suggest mechanisms of behavior change that can be utilized in programmatic models. In theory, strong criminal justice prevention programs and intervention models would specify the causal processes that would guide intended outcomes. However, in reality, practice does not always follow from theory. As discussed in Section II, with the exception of restorative justice, little systematic knowledge exists regarding faith based programmatic models in criminal justice—regardless of whether it is for prevention, intervention, or aftercare.

In order to advance research and practice on faith-based criminal justice services and models, we have developed a broad conceptual model that synthesizes what we have learned from the literature review. The conceptual model is designed to elucidate key dimensions and characteristics that are important to faith-based programming and designed to bring about change in behavior and a reduction in crime. Eventually, we believe the framework can be used as a tool to guide program development as well as the tracking of goals, activities, objectives, and outcomes. In addition, the framework recognizes the multi-dimensionality of the concept of religion and how programmatic endeavors can be targeted to a variety of outcomes, and whether the outcomes are short term or long term. Furthermore, the framework enables articulation of process and end outcomes at multiple levels of change (e.g., individual, community, etc.). The framework can be used as a starting point to develop individual and more specific program logic models. These specified logic models could then include designation of inputs and outputs. Essentially, development of rigorous evaluation models—and models that provide formative feedback to programs—would be facilitated.

The framework is presented in Figure 1 at the end of this paper. The components of the framework include:

- Neighborhood-level background characteristics;
- Organizational characteristics;
- Individual-level characteristics, including religious characteristics;
- Program characteristics;
- Program model designation;
- Goals and objectives;
- Activities and outcomes at the individual, community and systems levels.

The framework was designed from findings on the importance of various individual, organizational, and neighborhood characteristics that are related to religious constructs that have a relationship to changes in behavior. Following the moral communities hypothesis and the literature showing the importance of religion in disorganized communities, we designated a number of important background characteristics of the

neighborhoods in which programs reside. These **neighborhood-level characteristics** include: (a) urbanicity and geographic location, (2) features of social disorganization, such as concentrated disadvantage and residential instability; and (3) social capital and (4) social and physical disorder. These neighborhood characteristics influence organizational context, individual level characteristics and program characteristics.

The **individual background characteristics** that are important to outcomes include demographic characteristics, such as age, race, and gender; criminal offending characteristics (at risk behavior, criminal history); and religious characteristics. Religious characteristics include a large category that is representative of theoretical literature establishing relationships between religious attachment, commitment, involvement and beliefs as well as other pertinent attitudes and beliefs. These particular characteristics are delineated in the framework.

**Organizational background characteristics** capture the importance of religious denomination of the organization, the nature of liberalism versus conservatism, the operating budget/resources available to the organization, and the nature of the organization's structure. This component captures the larger forces that impact the feasibility of having a successful operational criminal justice-related service program. The organizational capacity literature (not discussed in this paper) and empirical literature on religion (e.g., variation by denomination) demonstrate the importance of these variables. The characteristics of the organization influence the program model and the specific program characteristics that flow from the model. Organizational context will also somewhat influence specific goals and objectives within the program model.

The **program model** delineates the theoretical underpinnings of the programming. As stated at the beginning of this section, there are four central theories that underlie the empirical research linking religions to pro-social behavior and reduction in crime. These theories are (1) deterrence, (2) social control and bonding, (3) desistance and life course theory, and (4) restorative justice and reintegrative shaming. These theories have overlapping mechanisms for changing behavior, but generally, they are distinct theories. The theoretical framework for the programming then influences the types of characteristics that will be present that, in turn, will dictate goals and objectives and the domains of service provision.

**Program characteristics** are the specific characteristics that embody the program model. Faith-based programming can be single entity programs or collaborations with multiple partners. As discussed in previous sections of this paper, researchers have suggested that faith based services are often part of comprehensive initiatives, because congregations and FBOs do not always have the resources to provide sustained human service programming. Resources are an important component of program characteristics. The resources can be grouped as human resources, financial resources, and technological resources used to advance organizational outreach, internal organization, and fundraising. Within collaboratives, there are a number of characteristics that are important to success; these characteristics are listed in the framework, but not discussed here.

Programming must have **goals and objectives**. We suggest that the first step within articulation of a mission be the specification of goals and objectives under different "service" domains. Separation of objectives into domains will assist with linking activities to outcomes at multiple levels. It will also support the process of rational designation of outcomes as either short or long term. Domains can include, but are not limited to, corrections, community corrections, at-risk youth, community economic

development, and substance abuse. Explicit objectives give programs the ability to state measurable goals, thereby beginning the process of linking activities to outcomes. Different objectives require different methods or activities.

The **program activities** component of the framework involves articulation of activities to achieve stated objectives. Articulation of activities is part of the planning process. And planning is essential to the success of the effort. Specifying activities will assist with articulation of the underlying theory of change, and more specifically, how the activities can bring about the desired change.

The **outcomes** component defines the levels of change expected by the program. Faith based programs can seek change at the individual, community, and systems level. Most programs discussed in Section II of this paper focused on individual level change. With regard to individual level change, often, FBOs that have missions addressing the underlying causes of crime, target individual and family outcomes such as reductions in recidivism, substance use, gang affiliation and family violence. Activities often include providing individual social services or comprehensive services through case management.

Community level change can be divided into two areas: the aggregate aspects of individual level change and changes with regard to community functioning and the development of community capacity. Aggregate characteristics would include, for instance, community crime and drug arrest rates, high school completion rates or drop out. For a discussion of these characteristics see Roman, Caterina, and Gretchen Moore, with Susan Jenkins and Kevonne Small. "Understanding Community Justice Partnerships: Assessing the Capacity to Partner." Final Report to the National Institute of Justice. May 2002. and rates of teen birth. Community capacity, "community functioning" or quality of life-related indicators of change could include measures of community satisfaction, community confidence, voter turnout and participation in community organizations (i.e., civic engagement), and collective efficacy.

Systems change is the process of changing how business gets done for the betterment of the community. It can involve anything from bringing together actors from different institutional contexts who logically need to interact, but had not previously done so to wholesale systems change, including changes in policies and practices of institutions brought about collaboratively/jointly to accomplish mutually agreed upon reforms. Systems change utilizes strategic planning, expansion and diversification of funding sources and strategies through the support of key leaders in government and community organizations. Systems change can occur within a single institution (organizational change), as well as across institutions. Systems change goals may not be relevant to small faith-oriented programs with limited resources.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, we have developed a conceptual model that synthesizes what we have learned from the literature review of theory and practice. We consider this a draft conceptual model, since as this project progresses, we will learn more about existing programs that were not available through our limited review of the published literature.

The conceptual model is designed to elucidate key dimensions and characteristics that are important to faith-based programming. We are confident in the eventual utility of the framework to be used as a tool to guide program development as well as to track goals, activities, objectives, and outcomes. As we continue to research program practice we can validate the conceptual framework and begin to construct logic models for the varieties of existing programmatic models. Given the great variation in service provision, as well as

the current ambiguity in defining “religious-based” or “faith-based services” and models, the framework can contribute to systematic examination and review of the literature, as well the development and generation of new research questions.