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The Affects of Conflict Resolutions Skills of Pre-Release Inmates' and their Families

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The Affects of Conflict Resolutions Skills of Pre-Release Inmates' and their
Families

A Thesis

Presented to the
Department of Counseling
and the

Faculty of the Graduate College of the
University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirement for the Degree of
Master of Arts

University of Nebraska at Omaha

By

Haley Foster

December 2000

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THESIS ACCEPTANCE

Acceptance for the faculty of the Graduate College, University of Nebraska, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts, University of Nebraska at Omaha

Committee

Miriam C. DeLong, Ph.D.
Scott Hampton

Chairperson *Janneth Seabery*
Date *November 30, 2000*

The Affects of Conflict Resolutions Skills of Pre-Release Inmates' and their
Families

Haley Foster, MA

University of Nebraska, 2000

Advisor: Dr. Jeannette Seaberry

This research examined the effects of a program designed to teach a model of conflict resolution to pre-release inmates and their partners. Three inmates and their significant others were given tools that assessed their conflict resolution style and the cohesion and adaptability of their family unit at the start of an eight-week group. These scores were compared to scores taken at the end of the eight-week group and after 90 days. The scores showed a significant increase in the participants' style of conflict resolution. However, certain limitations need to be considered because of inconsistency in research tools and the low number of participants.

Dedication

To my family, Ron, Skyler and Madison, who never said quit.

I love you all very much!

To friends, family, and co-workers for you all your support.

Also would like to thank, Dr. Jeannette Seaberry for her patience and support

and

To the rest of my committee for their help and dedication to higher education.

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CHAPTER I

Analysis of the Problem

Introduction

There are approximately 1.3 million people under correctional supervision in the United States (Gilliard & Beck, 1998). Many of these people are married or in significant relationships. In 1995, the Bureau of Justice Statistic (BJS) [1995] reported that 18% of all inmates were married and it is believed that a substantial number of the remaining inmates were involved in common law marriages or relationships that have produced children. The BJS (1995) also reported as many as 32% of incarcerated males have two or more children under the age of 18 and about 90% of those children are currently living with their mothers. Furthermore, the mean stay at a correctional facility in the United States is 5.5 years. It is reasonable to conclude that the majority of the people being released from prison will be returning to a family situation. These family situations need to be healthy to support the ongoing problems the inmate will face during his return to the family.

The loss of social support by friends and family as a consequence of being incarcerated can result in unmet needs for the offender upon release. The loss of family support during imprisonment discourages the offender's faith that he can improve his position in life. When the inmate is released, he is even more

socially delayed and has fewer available social personal resources to help integrate into the family (Hairston, 1988).

The ongoing maintenance of family networks mitigates the negative effects of the institution and supports the transition from prison to community. Rebuilding and maintaining the primary family unit while incarcerated can be essential in helping the prisoner overcome social deficiencies and build a stronger base of skills to rely upon when it is time to transition back into the family and community. Family reunion programs have shown to be beneficial in addressing the needs of the offender and his family caused by incarceration (Hairston, 1988). These programs can improve the family relationship by helping the inmate transition back into the family and feel connected, further increasing the cohesiveness of the family and decreasing the chance of recidivism (Bayse & Allgood, 1991; Carlson & Cervera, 1991; Hairston & Lockett, 1987).

The ability to process and handle conflict within the family has been shown to help the cohesion of the family. Jacobson (1978) showed that couples with severe marital problems who received communication and problem-solving training reported greater marital adjustment than those who received no training, suggesting that an increase in problem solving ability may lead to greater relationship satisfaction. In addition, Burleson and Denton (1997) showed when stress is present in relationships, couples tend to express significantly more negative intentions toward each other than couples that are not in distress. These studies suggest that teaching couples conflict resolution skills such as

balancing emotions and reason, understanding of partners' intentions, proper communication skills, trust building, alternatives to coercion and acceptance of the outcome of the conflict may increase the cohesion of the family.

Importance and Purpose of the Study

Literature indicates both the inmate and his family perceive the release from prison as being stressful (Broody-Hart, 1997; Cobean & Power, 1978; Hairston & Lockett, 1987). Families are in need of help in managing the transition of the inmate to the home. Vandeusen, Yarbrough and Cornelsen (1985) suggest that when working with distressed family systems, the first goal is to "prevent the family from falling into a tendency to detour conflict, while helping members to learn to work through these problems responsibly" (p.22).

Minimal research has been done on how to approach the rebuilding of the relationship between an inmate and his or her partner. Most prisons have few or no programs to help maintain family ties. The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between teaching conflict resolutions skills to pre-release inmates and the perceived cohesiveness of their families. Inmates and their significant others were used as research study participants because of the importance of reducing the stress related to the transitioning of the inmate back into a family setting after extended stays in correctional institutions. If an increase in the cohesiveness and adaptability of the family reduces the stress and decreases the likelihood that these inmates will recidivate, every effort should be made to intercede.

Research Hypothesis

A program consisting of teaching conflict resolution skills to prerelease inmates and his significant other will increase the conflict resolution styles the inmate and his significant other and increase the cohesiveness and adaptability in the family relationship.

Scope of the Study

This study was conducted with three inmates that are currently residing at the Community Corrections Center-Omaha and with three persons that had identified themselves as wives and/or significant others of the aforementioned inmates.

Definition of Terms

The terms used in this program are defined in the following manner:

Conflict Resolution Skills Program: A program designed to teach skills needed to resolve conflict in an appropriate manner based on a model of negotiation designed by Roger Fisher and Scott Brown (1988).

Prerelease Inmates: Inmates that are currently residing in a community based correctional institution that facilitates the return of inmates into their communities as responsible and productive citizens.

Families of Inmates: Wives, significant others, parents or other family members with whom the inmate will be residing and/or sharing household responsibilities upon his or her release from a correctional institution.

Family Cohesion and Adaptability Scale: A scale established that sufficiently measures the cohesiveness and adaptability of the family (Olsen, Bell, & Portner, 1979).

Conflict Resolution Scale: A scale that effectively measures a family's ability to resolve conflict. Two conflict management surveys were used for this purpose. These surveys are designed to provide information about the various ways people react to and try to manage the differences between themselves and others. The pre-test tool was designed by Jay Hall, Ph.D. (1996) and post and 90 day follow-up tool was designed by Sandra Kammerma (1993).

Family cohesiveness and Adaptability: Defined as the emotional bonding that family members have toward one another. The family is able to experience and balance its needs and the needs of its members and is also able to be independent from and connected to the family (Walsh, 1993).

Limitations of the Study

Two limitations for this study are based on the nature of the population. Random selection was not utilized in this study and the number of participants was low. These subjects were not required to participate in this research by statutes of either the IRB or correctional regulations. Therefore, the inmates housed at the Community Correctional Center-Omaha were asked to volunteer for this program. Prior to the onset of the study, prison personnel stated that the inmate population was seen as unmotivated to do anything above what was recommended for release, and therefore sufficient participation may not be

possible. The ability to generalize this study and make inferences to the general population is not feasible because of the low number of participants.

Two surveys were used to measure the conflict resolution styles of the inmates and their partners. The Conflict Management Survey (Hall, 1996) proved too complex for the subjects to comprehend. Although the two outcomes of the conflict resolution tools correlated well, certain limitations need to be considered when comparing the pre- and post-tests, and the pre- and 90-day test.

Chapter II

Literature Review

This chapter examines studies that offer significant reasons to improve the relationship of the inmate and his family. It takes an in-depth look at the process of helping transition the inmate back into the family for reasons of reducing the recidivism rate and to improve the relationships within the family. Finally, it will examine the use of conflict resolution skills as a means to increase the cohesion of the family.

When looking at the problems that are associated with the incarceration of an inmate, it is important to examine how incarceration affects him, his wife, their relationship and the other members of his family. The inmate has to deal with issues stemming from the effect of the incarceration. Research has revealed the problems associated with incarceration:

“Some intrapersonal concerns and issues that confront the male offender upon release from prison include: (a) stigma of a prison record; (b) anger and rage at self, others, institution and authority figures; (c) search for someone or something to blame; (d) grief over his loss; (e) fear of the future; (f) need for sympathy and pity for his suffering; (g) distrust of the criminal justice system and its representative, including his parole officer; (h) offender’s perceived inability to accept the role of a man or woman in publicly compromising situations; (i) post traumatic stress disorder” (Goodwin & Elson, 1987 p. 57).

The effect these issues have on the inmate will impact his relationship with his significant other. The Nebraska prison system offers no assistance with intrapersonal skills or with the offender’s ability to think through or get ready to

handle the reentry into his former family unit (Kaslow, 1987). Studies reveal that the inmate's adaptation into his family is crucial to his overall adjustment to society as a whole (Kaslow, 1987).

Not only does the man bring emotional and volatile issues into relationships once released from prison, but also the wife or partner has to deal with changes in her life as a result of her partner's incarceration. The partner left at home has to effectively deal with the change in her relationship and her finances. She had the increased stress of taking care of the children alone and providing for them emotionally, financially and being solely responsible for them. She had to explain and defend her partner to friends and family. Upon the release of the inmate, the wife has to deal with issues consistent with the return of a constant partner. These issues include the need to change her present role, the loss of some control over family matters, continuation of enabling behaviors and the resumption of pre-incarceration patterns of antisocial behaviors (Goodwin & Elson, 1987).

The adult relationships are not the only relationships that need to be considered when addressing issues related to the release of the inmate. Imprisonment of a family member can also affect the children. The Nebraska Department of Correctional Services (1998) reports that the mean stay for men in a correctional facility is approximately 3.5 years. Research shows that a prolonged absence of a parent from the home not only threatens family cohesion but also puts excessive strain on the parent-child relationships (Hairston &

Lockett, 1987). A child's schoolwork, emotional state and the child's relationship with other children can be affected by the incarceration of a family member (Swan, 1981). The child can become depressed, feel abandoned and exhibit acting out behavior in school. These behaviors can result as conflict in the relationship between the child and the parent in the home (King, 1993).

The Prison Fellowship Ministry estimates that only 15 % of marriages will survive the incarceration period and of that number, only seven % survive the first year after release (as cited by Dallao, 1997). The importance of preserving these relationships should be addressed in programs aimed at reducing the rate of recidivism of the offenders.

A study done by Goeke (1980) showed that one of the main causes in the destruction of a marriage is that each member has a different perception of the relationship. The study focused on the factors related to the alienation of the married male inmate and his family. The offender and his wife were interviewed during the incarceration period. Of all the subjects interviewed, 41% were anticipating many problems upon the return of the husband. The study showed that 50% of the wives responded that they never or only occasionally took advice from their husband on important matters; 25% felt that the husband should have input about how things are handled. Also, 33% of wives stated that they shared family events with their husband, while 59% of the husbands responded that they have considerable influence on important decisions and 65% felt that their wives were attentive to sharing with them the important things involving the family. The

wives stated that the problems that related to the incarceration of the husband were creating pressures on the relationship within the family systems, and they tended to displace these pressures onto the inmate. The only perception that both the husband and wife agreed upon was that the incarceration was destroying their marriage. Fifty percent of the wives indicated that imprisonment was very bad or destroying the marital relationship; 67% of the husbands thought that this was also true (Goeke, 1980). The study shows the tremendous need to realign the relationship between the inmate and the wife prior to return of the inmate when the perceptions of the offender and the wife differ to a significant degree. Without the ability to discuss the impact of the incarceration, the relationship is doomed to repeat previous patterns.

When looking to realign the relationship the entire family system has to be taken into consideration. Goodwin and Elson (1987) stated that:

From a family systems perspective all parts of a family are functionally interrelated. A change in one part of the family system (e.g. a family member becoming involved in the criminal justice system) can affect the homeostatic balance of that family and subsequently affect all parts of the system and its overall functioning. Family members must then adapt their roles and function until a new balance is achieved. Thus, an individual who exhibits dysfunctional or antisocial behavior may reflect a family system that is dysfunctional. Also, the etiology of an individual's antisocial behavior may not be completely clear from an assessment of that person alone and can often be better understood when viewed in the context of a family system that is in disharmony or out of balance. It is from this family perspective that counseling and rehabilitation interventions need to be planned and implemented (p. 57).

When looking at the homeostatic balance of the family with a significant member incarcerated, it is easy to assume that again this balance will be interrupted when

the member returns home. Conflict within the family will have differing effects on how the offender will reintegrate into a community. Families that have strong relationships find it distressful reintegrating the offender into the family. Those families with a past filled with conflict and difficulty will be even more problematic if not impossible (Wright & Wright, 1992).

Cobean and Powers (1978) reviewed programs that included family members in the treatment process within prison and after release. The study showed that the pre-release stage of confinement is characterized by tension and anxiety. The inmates may have apprehension about unresolved family issues and/or social problems. Families may have fear that the offender has not changed his behavior. "Guilt could be another common emotion resulting from the conflicting emotions regarding the spouse's release. The spouse can experience stress from thoughts of having to revert back to pre-imprisonment family roles after having grown accustomed to being independent" (Cobean & Powers, 1978, p. 36). Prison programs that address these issues with the inmate and his or her family are needed. The programs need to facilitate the offender's return to the home by focusing on the families during this period, allowing the expression of the family's feelings (Cobean & Powers, 1978).

It is important to discuss how specific family programs have impacted the relationship between the offender and his family. Studies have shown that integrating the family into the rehabilitation of the inmate can decrease the rate of recidivism. Vandusen, Yarbrough and Cornelsen (1985) conducted a study

involving families in therapy with persons on probation or parole. The aim was to deter conflict while helping members learn to work through their problems more responsibly. The study showed that when the family was involved with therapy, the offenders were more likely to abstain from alcohol or drugs, keep or find employment, maintain independent living and make some gains on psychosocial functioning. These issues are all high predictors of recidivism when not managed.

Johnson and Selber (1998) conducted a quasi-experimental study on participants of a program that included supportive and educational counseling with the offender and the family together. The program was designed to help the reintegration of the inmate by providing support, information and education for successful coping and problem-solving skills for the inmate and his family. Of those who completed the program, 67% remained in the community after five years. This study would indicate the potential of programs that address the family's role in the rehabilitation of the offenders.

Wright and Wright (1992) reviewed the literature that looked at the relationship between criminality and marriage. The study contends that maintaining an active family interest while incarcerated and establishing a mutually satisfying relationship after release was associated with decreases in subsequent re-offenses. The research also showed that reducing conflict and violence and increasing problem-solving skills within a child's family might assist the individual to establish a mutually satisfying relationship as an adult. The

study further suggested that if interventions are going to be made with the inmate, the literature supports the inclusion of the entire family to help learn skills needed to resolve problems and to establish healthy and appropriate methods of relating (Wright & Wright, 1992).

Sampson and Laub's (1990) study suggested that an individual's attitudes about and commitment to the marital relationship affects the likelihood of criminal behavior. The individuals who received the necessary socialization to support marital responsibility and family cohesion were less likely to offend. Stanley, Markman, St. Peters, & Leber (1995) showed that an increase in the ability to handle conflict in the relationship properly increases the cohesion of the family. The study showed that couples that experience normal marital problems have troubles managing problems without appropriate conflict resolution skills. Inmates bring a vast array of other issues to the marital table. If conflict resolution skills are not present in the marriage, the inmate will be less motivated to stay within the realms of acceptable behavior and revert back to criminality. Stanley et al. (1995) did a longitudinal study with 135 couples designed to teach skills and ground rules for handling conflict. The study found that if either partner feels less able to deal with conflict, the couple has significant problems preserving the quality of their relationship. Research further concludes that marriages that learn to handle conflict well will have fewer episodes of physical aggression (Hahlweg & Markman, 1988; Stanley, Markman, Peters, & Leber, 1995).

The structure of the family has to be optimal for the integration of the inmate. Research shows that the quality of the family interaction is related to antisocial behavior (Olsen, Sprenkle & Russell, 1983). Wilson (1983, as cited by Vandeusen, Yarbrough & Cornelsen, 1985) stated that repeated episodes of re-arrest could be triggered by dysfunctional patterns in the offender's family.

Families that were balanced in regards to cohesion and adaptability had more positive communication skills. Positive communications skills were stated as empathy, supportiveness, understanding and consistency. These skills allowed for family members to express changing needs and preferences. Negative communication skills precluded the ability of the family members to address needs restricting their ability to feel connected and adapt well to changes (Olson, Sprenkle, & Russell, 1983).

In designing a program that addresses the reintegration of families, it is important to look at what intervention styles have proven to be most effective. Klein, Bartholomew, and Bahr (1999) focused on the characteristic of family education groups that were proven most effective in dealing with inmates and their families. The study showed that programs that dispensed information to or about family members facilitated interaction between professionals and family members and gave inmates and family opportunity to share feeling and concerns about other family members were most effective in helping inmates strengthen the family unit.

This chapter provides a framework to evaluate the use of a transition program for inmates that utilizes a conflict resolution model. Specific research addresses the effect of the incarceration on all members of a family and the importance of including the family in programs where the main objective is to increase the cohesiveness and adaptability of the family and to reintegrate the offender into the family and community. Not only will the prisoners benefit from programs that utilize this information, but their partners, the children of these families and the general public will also benefit. Teaching proper ways to handle stressful situations with a population that has seen, participated in and has been a part of violence and aggression for a significant time will provide a safer environment for our neighbors, our children and us.

Chapter III

Methodology

Research Design

This study is a pre-experimental single group pre-post test research project constructed to examine the relationship between teaching conflict resolution skills to pre-release inmates and the perceived cohesiveness and adaptability of their family.

Subjects

This study utilized inmates at the Community Corrections Center- Omaha (CCC-O). CCC-O houses approximately 120 male inmates and 18 female inmates; of these 30% are married ("Nebraska Department of Correctional Services" 1998). Prison officials reported that many others are in a significant relationship. This study specifically targeted inmates who were in a relationship with another person and who anticipated residing with that person upon their release from prison. The study did not exclude any type of relationship; this could include a girlfriend, wife, common-law wife, parent, or other relative, although all participants were male inmates and their significant others were female partners or wives. The inmates participated strictly on a volunteer basis. The participants were recruited through the use of flyers and correctional personnel. In addition, a mini lecture on the benefits of the study was given to inmates and visitors.

The group was limited to three inmates and their partners that completed a pre-group interview for a total of 6 participants. All participants were over the age of 18; they ranged in age from 24 to 43 years. The ethnicity of the participants was four African-American participants and two Caucasian participants. All participants that were included in the study were less than two years from their release, and they received no compensation for their participation in the group.

All participants, the inmate and his family member, were invited to a pre-group interview where the process of the study and the group was again explained. The informed consent was explained to them, and they were required to sign it before participation in the group. Each participant completed three sets of surveys that were given at the start of the group sessions, at the end of the group sessions and at a 90-day follow up.

Instrumentation

The Conflict Management Survey (Hall, 1996) (CMS) (Appendix A) and the How Do You Handle Conflict? (Kammerma, 1993) questionnaire (Appendix B) measure conflict resolution skills. The CMS is a 12- item self-assessment that addresses personal, interpersonal, group and intergroup conflicts. The respondent chooses from five possible answers ranging from completely characteristic to completely uncharacteristic. This scale proved to be too difficult for the participants to comprehend, therefore The How Do You Handle Conflict? questionnaire was substituted for the CMS at the post and 90-day follow-up. The

How Do You Handle Conflict? questionnaire is a 30-item questionnaire that describes possible responses to various conflict situations. The respondent is asked to rate, on a Likert scale with one being never and five being always, how closely the responses describe their behavior. Each tool produces a score that indicates the respondent's choices of one of five conflict management styles. Based on a Spearman-Brown item test approach to estimating reliability, the reliability of the CSM ranged from .70 to .87 (Hall, 1996).

The conflict management styles from the CMS are similar with the How Do You Handle Conflict? management styles. CMS styles of conflict management are as follows: (a) Win-Loss Style, in which the respondent indicates that there is only one of two possible outcomes to conflict, winning or losing, (b) Yield-Lose Style which indicates the respondent's concern for the effect of conflict on the well-being and durability of the relationship and seeking to appease others and ignoring and avoiding the conflict, (c) Lose-Leave Style, in which the respondent avoids the conflict, (d) Compromise Style, in which the respondent tries to alleviate the effects of losing by persuasion and manipulation, and (e) The Synergistic Style, in which the respondent looks to discover the outcome that is best for the goals of those involved (Hall, 1996). How Do You Handle Conflict? questionnaire interprets the scores in a similar way. The Withdrawing- Avoiding Style is similar with the Lose-Leave Style of the CMS. The Going to a Third Person Style is similar with the Yield-Lose Style of the CMS; it also is concerned with the outcome and how it is going to affect the relationship. The Compromise

Style, of each questionnaire is similar. The Win-Lose Style is similar to the Win-Lose Style of the CMS and the Win-Win Style is similar to the Synergistic Style of the CMS, in which emphasis is put on an outcome that is best for the common goals and relationship.

The cohesion and the adaptability of the family were measured using the FACES II scale (Olsen et al., 1979) (Appendix C). The scale is a 30-item self-assessment questionnaire that asks the respondent to describe his/her relationship. The respondents were to answer the questions and rate how frequently, on a scale that ranges from 1 (almost never) to 5 (almost always), the described behavior occurs in their relationship. The scores are then tallied for adaptability and for cohesiveness. The family cohesion scores assess the degree to which the family is separated or connected. These scores range from disengaged to enmeshed. The adaptability scores assesses to the degree that the family system is flexible and able to change. These scores range from rigid to chaotic. The reliability of this test in internal consistency is .91 for cohesion and .80 for adaptability. The test- retest reliability was at .83 for cohesion and .80 for adaptability (Olsen, Bell, & Portner, 1979).

The inmates and their partners were given separate CMS in the pre-group to assess their conflict resolution skills. Each participant was assigned an identification number that corresponded to each survey he or she was asked to fill out. The investigator read each question aloud and the participants were asked to fill in a corresponding answer. This was done so as not to exclude any

participant with low reading levels. The participants were also given the FACES II scale to address the family's stability concerning adaptability and cohesion. This test was administered in the exact same way with the investigator reading the questions and the participant filling in the answers. The How Do You Handle Conflict? questionnaire and the FACES II survey were given at the end of the eight-week group session.

In addition, a brief questionnaire (Appendix D) was given to assess the helpfulness of the study and the effectiveness the sessions had on decreasing stress related to the transition of the inmate back into the home. These same measures were given after 90 days to see if the techniques taught had a lasting impression on the family and to see if the participants continued to use the techniques taught.

Procedures

The groups was held on eight consecutive Sundays for 90 minutes per session and were held right after visiting hours, so participation would be higher than if the partners had to return at an additional time. The group was held in a private area of the Community Correction Center-Omaha, so that audio and visual confidentiality would be kept. The inmates and partners were informed that this was completely voluntary.

Framework

The sessions were based on Fisher & Brown's (1988) model of negotiation. The model emphasizes the inability to balance emotion with reason,

skills, building trust in the relationship, the process of coercion and the alternatives to coercion and acceptance.

Fisher and Brown (1988) believe that a person can build a relationship as they negotiate their wants and needs. The ability to deal with differences in a relationship is based upon several basic elements. The first element is the ability to balance reason and emotion. This is based on behavioral theory, which states how a person feels can affect how they think and behave. The model contends that a person needs to acknowledge their emotions, talk about them, take responsibility for them and then recruit constructive emotions.

The second step is to try to understand the other person and his/her position. A person needs to examine the other's interest, his/her perception of the problem and his/her values to effectively resolve a conflict. When discussing a conflict a person needs to reverse roles with that person and try to see what is fueling the behavior of that person.

The next step is to learn to communicate effectively, to consult with the person before deciding on a situation and to listen to them. Fisher and Brown (1988) list three barriers to effective communication: "(a) assuming there is no need to talk, (b) communicating in one direction, meaning that you simply tell someone something instead of talk with them, and (c) sending mixed messages" (p.86). The model suggests that a person combat these barriers with three strategies that strengthen the relationship: (a) consult before deciding, (b) listen

actively, and (c) plan the communication process by clarifying your purpose, using privacy and planing the encounters.

The next step is becoming trustworthy and reliable. Fisher and Brown (1988) state that an individual needs to unconditionally pursue a high degree of reliability in his or her own behavior and to accurately assess the other person in the relationship and the risks involved by relying on the other person.

The model then addresses using persuasion not coercion. A person would be avoiding coercive behavior by not attacking the individual but the problem, by not trying to win the conflict and by not committing to a solution too early. The person would also do this by not taking positions, by limiting the choices or breaking the will of the other person and by not worsening a person's walk-away alternative.

The final step in the model is acceptance of the individual by showing him/her the respect they deserve, by listening and showing concern and by being open to that person and trying to seek understanding.

The program incorporated these techniques in the eight sessions using lecture and group discussion. The curriculum was executed in the following way:

Session One:

- Pre-test
- Give overview of healthy relationship and healthy conflict resolution skills.

Session Two

- Understanding how emotions affect relationships and the ability to resolve conflict.
- Discussion about emotions pertaining to incarceration that may be present now and how those emotions may affect your relationship and actions.

Session Three

- Understanding how other people feel.
- Teach and discuss empathy and understanding effectively.

Session Four

- Appropriate communication skills.
- Roadblocks in effective communication.
- Negotiation skills.

Session Five

- Discussion on Trusting your partner and improving trust in your relationship.
- What will it take to become reliable and trustworthy?

Session Six

- Discuss boundary issues and explore appropriate boundaries.

Session Seven

- Learning to accept differences.
- Exploring how we have changed over the length of incarceration.

Session Eight

- Debriefing and closure.
- Post-test

For detailed vignettes of sessions see (Appendix E).

Data Analysis

For the purpose of data analysis the conflict resolution styles were ranked ordered based on the suggestion of the CMS (Hall, 1996). The styles were ranked ordered from most destructive to optimal in the following way:

1. Lose/Leave- the person avoids the conflict altogether.
2. Win/Lose- the person indicates only one of two possible outcomes to conflict.
3. Yield/Lose- the person concern is for the effects of the conflict on the relationship and seeks to please others.
4. Compromise- lessens the effects of the conflict by persuasion and manipulation.
5. Synergistic- works towards an outcome that best for the goals of the relationship.

A t-test was used to compare the scores from the conflict resolution surveys and the FACES II scale at the pre-interview and at the end of the 8-week session for each individual. A t-test was used to also compare the scores at the pre-interview and the 90-day follow-up. The confidence interval was 95% ($p=.05$). Two questions were asked to assist in addressing the research hypothesis. The first question asked, "Did individuals show improvement in their ability to resolve conflict in a manner in which there is a balance between the concern for the relationship and its goals and concern for each other's personal goals?" The next question asked, "Did improving the conflict resolution skills of the individuals increase the cohesion and adaptability of the family?" The relationship will show an increase in the cohesiveness of the relationship if there is an increase in scores along the balanced range of the FACES II scale. An individual that scores along the balance range shows flexibility and structure and is connected but is also able to function separately.

CHAPTER IV

Data Analysis

This chapter presents the results of the analysis of the data collected using the Conflict Management Survey, How Do You Handle Conflict? (Kammerma, 1993) and the FACES II Scale (Olsen, Bell, & Portner, 1991). The surveys and questionnaires were hand scored using the guidelines provided within the tools. A paired samples t-test on the SPSS-PC was run on all surveys and questionnaires with a 95% confidence interval of the difference.

Primary Research Question

Does teaching conflict resolution skills of couples in transition increase the perceived cohesiveness and adaptability of the family unit and increase the participants' ability to resolve conflict effectively?

Data Analysis

All six participants completed the pre and post-tests. However, one participant was not available for the 90-day follow up.

The research revealed that the conflict resolution scores did increase. The mean scores of the pre-test were 1.3 (SD = .52). At post-test, the mean scores of the participants increased to 3.8 (SD= 1.5). At the 90-day follow-up, the analysis showed an increase of the mean scores to 3.8 (SD= 1.6). A paired t- test analysis showed significance in the increase between the pre-test and post-test ($n=6$, mean of sample = -2.5, SD= 1.64, $t(5) = -3.7$, $p > .05$) and

between the pre-test and 90-day follow-up ($n=5$, mean of sample = -2.4 , $SD=1.82$, $t(4) = -2.954$, $p > .05$). These results show that the participants style of conflict resolution increased from a Lose/Leave Style to a Compromise Style.

The pre-test/post-test mean scores of the FACES II scale for adaptability were compared using a t-test to determine if there was significant difference between the scores of the two tests. The analysis showed a slight increase from the mean score on the pre-test ($n= 6$, $m= 45.2$ $SD = 6.7$) to the post-test ($n= 6$, $m= 45.34$, $SD = 1.89$) although not at a significant level. However, there was a significant increase at the 90 day post-test ($n = 5$, 50.4 , $SD= 5.94$) between the pre-test scores and the 90-day follow-up scores.

The pre-test/post-test mean scores of the FACES II scales for cohesion were compared. The mean scores for the post-test ($n=6$, $m= 50.16$, $SD=7.08$) showed an increase over the pre-test scores ($n=6$, $m= 49.16$, $SD=7.78$), although this increase was not significant. The scores on the 90-day follow-up ($N= 5$, $m=57.6$, $SD= 7.12$) also increase over the pre-tests scores but not at a significant level.

The informal questionnaire given to each participant at the end of the session to assess the helpfulness of the group also provided positive results. Four out of the six participants agreed that they felt that the course had helped them to better resolve conflict in their relationship. The remaining two stated that they somewhat agreed. Half of the participants agreed that they were more comfortable confronting problems in their relationship, while the other half

somewhat agreed that they were more comfortable. All but one agreed that they felt closer to their partner. The remaining one was undecided. The inmates stated that they would again participate in a program that addressed these issues. The partners of the inmates also agreed that they would participate again but to a lesser extent than the inmates. The comments given by the participants reflect that they had become more aware of the problems associated with the transition home that they felt more comfortable addressing them and they were aware additional work needed to be done if the relationship was going to survive.

CHAPTER V

Summary

From a family systems perspective, if one individual of that unit is showing signs of dysfunction, one must look at the whole family. When an adolescent is showing destructive tendencies and anti-social behavior the treatment should focus on the whole family. When addressing these issues in therapy it is important to look at the parenting styles of the caregivers, the discipline techniques, the communication patterns of the family and the conflict resolution styles. Therapists and counselors look to heal the family unit, not just the individual. It would be deemed unfair to separate the identified client from his family unit, teach him effective techniques to deal with social situations and then send him back into the dysfunctional unit and expect him to use the techniques taught.

The above example seems illogical, yet this is exactly what is taking place in correctional institutions across America. Inmates are being taught rehabilitative skills and how to function in society but are then sent back to a family unit that either enables his anti-social behavior or is ineffective in deterring this behavior. The offenders end up back in volatile situations, where frustration and stress are commonplace and the expectation of society is that the offenders practice skills learned without reverting back to old behaviors.

This research was designed to improve the relationship of the offender and his family unit, in hopes of easing the transition of the inmate back into the home and to furnish the inmates and families with the skills so that they are able to resolve conflict more effectively.

The results of the analysis showed when intervention addressed issues of conflict resolution and provided a model that teaches effective ways of dealing with conflict, the participants' styles of conflict resolutions increases. The scores on the adaptability scale also increased. This increase suggests that the family's ability to adapt to changes in roles and rules improved. The family's ability to adapt to the inmate's release was the key point in the process of this research.

Limitations

It is important to keep in mind the limitation of this study and effects these limitations could have had on the data. The data showed that the participants' scores on the conflict resolutions tools increased significantly. This could be, in part due to the change in the research tool. The CMS tool proved to be too complicated for the participants to comprehend. The participants asked for clarification on the meaning of some words and basic definitions were given. This could result in scores that did not accurately reflect the participants' style of conflict resolution. The participants may have answered randomly because of unclear definitions or the incomprehension of the question or answer. Also, the survey tools were read to participants by the researcher. The reader's inflection in voice tone or style of speaking could have skewed the way in which the

participants answered the questions. These could have greatly affected the result of the study and therefore tainted the results of the conflict resolution surveys.

The second conflict resolution tool was much easier to comprehend. This may also have an effect on the scores. The participants may have been able to pick out the "best" answer after learning about conflict and styles of conflict over the eight weeks. This could mean that the participants learned a more effective resolution styles or the participants just knew which answers were perceived as more beneficial to the relationship. Although both of the tools' outcomes were similar, it is unrealistic to think the results were not tainted. Ideally, the same tool should be used to measure the variables at the start of the study, at the end and during any follow-ups.

It is also important to look at the number of participants. Ideally, to be able to generalize and trust the validity and reliability of this study the number of participants should be higher. The presumption for such a low number could be a result of the volunteer nature of this program and a result of not effectively addressing of what the program would consist or the benefits of the program to the inmates or the families. The inmate's participation of other rehabilitative programs that are offered by the correctional system may have tainted their perception. The inmates may have discredited the effectiveness of a program designed to help improve his relationships. The family members may not have felt comfortable getting any more involved in the prison system.

One inmate's partner dropped out of the study at the 90-day follow-up, although the reasons for her lack of participation in the follow-up is unknown, it must be taken into consideration when analyzing the data. If this participant showed little or no increase in her scores on any tool, then the lack of her score at the time of the 90-day follow-up would have skewed the results.

Recommendations

This study gives thought to future programs and research designed to look at the involvement of the family in the rehabilitation of the offender. In the future it may be beneficial to involve case managers, parole officers and prison personnel in the recruitment of participants. Ideally, a short presentation should be given to address the content of the program and the benefits to the inmate and their family. The benefits could then be addressed to the inmates and families in an unhurried manner and a complete understanding of the program could be given to the inmate, in hopes of improving the number of participants in the study.

To address the reliability and validity of this study future research should consider having several groups included in the data analysis. When discussing issues related to the transition home, it is beneficial to have small groups of eight to twelve participants. In addition, it would be ideal to run the groups closer to release of the inmate. The participants in this study release dates ranged from two years to six months. The affects of the group could benefit the inmates more

if ran in conjunction with weekend furloughs, so techniques could be practiced and discussed in the home setting.

Future research should continue to look at programs that contribute to addressing the needs of the inmates' family prior to the return of the inmate. The feedback given from the participants showed that programs designed to make inmates and family members aware that there will be adjustment problems and discovering ways to handle these problems prior to the onset may improve the chances of the inmate returning to productive lives.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A
Conflict Management Survey
(CMS)

The greater the number of people involved in an enterprise the more likely are differences of opinion. Groups – particularly in intergroup situations – often give a good deal of thought to the manner in which differences might be resolved. How would you be inclined to handle open conflict between your group and another with which your group must negotiate?

- a. Given the probability of conflict in the first place, I would encourage my group to be prepared in its thinking and to identify in advance those areas upon which compromise is not possible and those areas in which they are willing to bargain as a built-in “safety valve” should conflict erupt.
- b. Realizing that conflict is inevitable in relations between groups, I would have my group anticipate areas of resistance and draft logical answers to objections prior to open conflict, so that when differences did emerge we could mobilize ourselves in an over-whelming presentation of facts, figures, and logic.
- c. Recognizing that a conflict of ideas may be healthy, I would first press for the identification of any shared concerns or goals between groups as a basis for evaluating positions and promoting mutuality. Then, I would encourage a search for alternatives which could be viewed according to mutual goals criteria.
- d. Suspecting that the only real result of conflict can be the disruption of negotiations and the impairment of continued friendly relations, I would have my group really assess the importance of its position and encourage it to reconsider with the objectives of minimizing disagreements and promoting harmony.
- e. Realizing that it is important to reconcile a conflict to the point where all parties involved can at least “live with it” and recognizing that the relationship must continue, I would have my group submit the issue to an impartial arbitrator.

Completely Characteristic : : : : : : : : : : : Completely Uncharacteristic
 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

It is common for negotiations between groups to result in a deadlock with neither side able to accept the position of the other. In your opinion what are the most likely reasons for the failure of a group to successfully resolve conflicts with other groups through collaboration?

- a. A lack of motivation on the part of groups to live together peacefully, and instead a motivation to win at any cost without regard for the common good.
- b. The lack of a clear stand or failure to back up the group's position with an accurate presentation of the information on which the decision was based.
- c. The lack of responsible behavior on the part of those selected to represent the groups which results in their placing more emphasis on maintaining their own positions of power than on disposing of the issue with a minimum of turmoil.
- d. The tendency of groups to enter negotiations with the idea that somebody has to win and somebody has to lose which results in limited abilities to see either the value of other points of view or to capitalize on the emergence of new alternatives.
- e. The tendency of groups to force their selected representatives to abide by “the party line” and requiring them to accomplish the difficult task of selling the group's point of view in its entirety, rather than identifying for them those areas in which compromise is possible.

Completely Characteristic : : : : : : : : : : : Completely Uncharacteristic
 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Appendix B

How Do you Handle Conflict?

4-2 How Do You Handle Conflict?

Name: _____ Date: _____

Purpose: It can be stated with confidence that people will face conflict throughout their lives. Dealing with conflict effectively is an important factor in human dynamics. There are different ways of dealing with conflict. This exercise will help you identify the methods you use.

Directions: The following statements describe possible responses to various conflict situations. Read each statement carefully, and circle the number on the scale below each statement that most closely describes your behavior.

Response Scale:

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|-------|--------|-----------|-------|--------|
| Never | Rarely | Sometimes | Often | Always |

- | | | | | | | | |
|---|-------|---|---|---|---|---|--------|
| 1. When strong conflict occurs, I prefer to leave the situation. | Never | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Always |
| 2. I feel very comfortable about taking a conflict between a friend and me to a third person. | Never | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Always |
| 3. I try to find a compromise when a conflict occurs. | Never | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Always |
| 4. I find conflict exciting and challenging. | Never | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Always |
| 5. I tend to concentrate on the problem and the issues in a conflict rather than the other person. | Never | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Always |
| 6. When conflict occurs, I act as though there is no real problem and try to "get along." | Never | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Always |
| 7. I prefer to have a third person help solve a conflict between a friend and me. | Never | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Always |
| 8. I'm willing to give a little if the other person in a dispute is also willing to give on some things. | Never | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Always |
| 9. It's important that I win, even if the problem or issue in a disagreement is not really important to me. | Never | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Always |
| 10. I search for a solution to a conflict that both the other person and I can find acceptable. | Never | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Always |

Response Scale:

1 2 3 4 5
 Never Rarely Sometimes Often Always

- | | | | | | | | |
|-----|--|---|---|---|---|---|--------|
| 11. | I would quit a job if many conflicts occurred daily. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Always |
| | Never | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 12. | It's easier to have an outsider settle a dispute than to argue it out alone with another person. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Always |
| | Never | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 13. | I like to find what each person wants most strongly, then work for a point in the middle. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Always |
| | Never | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 14. | I hate to lose or not get my own way. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Always |
| | Never | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 15. | I like to look at lots of possibilities and options before trying to find a solution to a conflict. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Always |
| | Never | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 16. | When conflict occurs, I prefer to get out of the situation rather than work to resolve the conflict. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Always |
| | Never | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 17. | I like to take disagreements to someone who has authority and have that person make a ruling. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Always |
| | Never | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 18. | I believe resolving conflict requires that each person give up something. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Always |
| | Never | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 19. | When someone tries to get me to back down or give in during a conflict, that makes me hold my position more strongly. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Always |
| | Never | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 20. | When I especially need to have my plan accepted or when an issue is very important to me, I tell the person with whom I am in conflict. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Always |
| | Never | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 21. | I prefer to walk away from conflict if there is strong personal disagreement. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Always |
| | Never | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 22. | I prefer to have a counselor decide for two people in conflict, not just ask the two people to listen to each other. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Always |
| | Never | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 23. | I believe working out a middle-of-the-road agreement is best, even if both people are still somewhat unhappy about not getting their own way completely. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Always |
| | Never | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 24. | When I work to resolve a conflict, I work to win. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Always |
| | Never | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |

Appendix C

FACES II

FACES II: Couples Version
 David H. Olson, Joyce Portner & Richard Bell

| | | | | |
|-------------------|---------------------|----------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| 1 Almost Never | 2 Once in Awhile | 3 Sometimes | 4 Frequently | 5 Almost Always |
|-------------------|---------------------|----------------|-----------------|--------------------|

Describe Your Marriage:

- ___ 1. We are supportive of each other during difficult times.
- ___ 2. In our relationship, it is easy for both of us to express our opinion.
- ___ 3. It is easier to discuss problems with people outside the marriage than with my partner.
- ___ 4. We each have input regarding major family decisions.
- ___ 5. We spend time together when we are home.
- ___ 6. We are flexible in how we handle differences.
- ___ 7. We do things together.
- ___ 8. We discuss problems and feel good about the solutions.
- ___ 9. In our marriage, we each go our own way.
- ___ 10. We shift household responsibilities between us.
- ___ 11. We know each other's close friends.
- ___ 12. It is hard to know what the rules are in our relationship.
- ___ 13. We consult each other on personal decisions.
- ___ 14. We freely say what we want.
- ___ 15. We have difficulty thinking of things to do together.
- ___ 16. We have a good balance of leadership in our marriage.
- ___ 17. We feel very close to each other.
- ___ 18. We operate on the principle of fairness in our marriage.
- ___ 19. I feel closer to people outside the marriage than to my partner.
- ___ 20. We try new ways of dealing with problems.
- ___ 21. I go along with what my partner decides to do.
- ___ 22. In our marriage, we share responsibilities.
- ___ 23. We like to spend our free time with each other.
- ___ 24. It is difficult to get a rule changed in our relationship.
- ___ 25. We avoid each other at home.
- ___ 26. When problems arise, we compromise.
- ___ 27. We approve of each other's friends.
- ___ 28. We are afraid to say what is on our minds.
- ___ 29. We tend to do more things separately.
- ___ 30. We share interests and hobbies with each other.

Appendix D
Informal Questionnaire

Race _____

Age _____

Sex: Male _____

Female _____

Number of people living in home _____

Are you an inmate in the Community Correctional Center-Omaha? Yes _____ No _____

Please respond to the following questions using the key below. Check the appropriate number.

| | | | | |
|-------|----------------|-----------|-------------------|----------|
| Agree | Somewhat agree | Undecided | Somewhat Disagree | Disagree |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

1. Do you feel that this course has helped you resolve conflicts in your relationship with your partner better?

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____

Comments _____

2. Are you more confident in confronting problem areas in your relationship with your partner?

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____

Comments _____

3. Do you feel that you have a closer relationship with your partner?

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____

Comments _____

Appendix E

Group Vignettes

Session 1:

Participants completed research tools.

Facilitator/Researcher gave an overview of program. Participants and facilitators discussed characteristics of healthy relationships. Participants identified key aspects of healthy relationships. Facilitator asked if there were rules in arguments and conflicts. Participants feedback reflected that they were unclear if any rules existed.

Session 2:

Facilitator asked what emotions are involved in arguments. Participants gave
Indicated that anger and hurt are sometimes involved. Participants identified fear and anger at correctional system and wives identified anger at partner when he was sentenced. Participants Identified issues of anger and resentment over partner's either not being there to confide in or the inability to do anything about situations. Participants identified that these feelings caused them to withdraw from the relationship or become angrier when addressing issues with partner.

Session 3:

Discussed what empathy was, how you can tell someone is empathetic and how do you feel when you know that person is being empathic. Participants knew what empathy was but had trouble identifying the behavior. Facilitator gave information on empathic statements and statements used to clarify another person's position on a topic. Group role-played and practiced statements with situational suggestions from participants.

Session 4:

Talked about communication skills such as using "I" statement and effective listening skills. Participants identified behaviors that cause frustration when communicating with partner. Participants identified blaming, justifying, and ignoring as causes of frustration when dealing with partner. Facilitator discussed ways to express wants and needs effectively. Participants role-played asking for favors.

Session 5:

Discuss what behaviors people show that makes them trust worthy. Discussed what behavior makes someone not trustworthy. Discussed with both partners what they would they needed from their partner to establish trust.

Session 6:

Discussed with participants what are personal boundaries. Participants identified personal and role boundaries in the family. Participants identified how they know when their boundaries are violated. Participants role-played saying no and protecting boundaries. Participants role played expressing wants and needs appropriately from previous session.

Session 7:

Discussed what happened when partner does not get his/her way. Participants set goals for the family and family relationship. Participants volunteered situations that caused conflict and practiced identifying solution that fit into family goals.

Session 8

Discussed steps in conflict resolution model. Clients identified how these steps work in negotiating wants and needs. Participants completed tools.



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September 8, 1999

Haley Foster
Community Counseling
421 Kayser Hall
UNO - Via Courier

IRB # 216-99-FB

TITLE OF PROPOSAL: Conflict Resolution and it's Effects on Adult Prerelease Inmates Family Relationships

DATE OF FULL BOARD REVIEW 07-15-99 DATE OF EXPEDITED REVIEW _____

DATE OF FINAL APPROVAL 09-08-99 VALID UNTIL 07-15-00

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects has completed its review of the above-titled protocol and informed consent document(s), including any revised material submitted in response to the IRB's review. The Board has expressed it as their opinion that you are in compliance with HHS Regulations (45 CFR 46) and applicable FDA regulations (21 CFR 50.56) and you have provided adequate safeguards for protecting the rights and welfare of the subjects to be involved in this study. The IRB has, therefore, granted unconditional approval of your research project. This letter constitutes official notification of the final approval and release of your project by the IRB, and you are authorized to implement this study as of the above date of final approval.

We wish to remind you that, under the provisions of this institution's Multiple Project Assurance for compliance with DHHS Regulations for the Protection of Human Subjects (MPA #1509), the principal investigator is directly responsible for submitting to the IRB any proposed change in the research or the consent document(s). In addition, any unanticipated adverse events involving risk to the subject or others must be reported to the IRB. This project is subject to periodic review and surveillance by the IRB and, as part of their surveillance, the IRB may request periodic reports of progress and results. For projects which continue beyond one year from the starting date, it is the responsibility of the principal investigator to initiate a request to the IRB for continuing review and update of the research project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Ernest D. Prentice/bb'.

Ernest D. Prentice, Ph.D.
Co-Chair, IRB

EDP/meb