



Rivista di Criminologia, Vittimologia e Sicurezza

*Organo ufficiale della
Società Italiana di Vittimologia (S.I.V.)*

*World Society of Victimology (W.S.V.)
Affiliated Journal*

Anno XVIII

Gennaio-Dicembre 2024

Rivista di Criminologia, Vittimologia e Sicurezza

Rivista quadrimestrale fondata a Bologna nel 2007

ISSN: 1971-033X

Registrazione n. 7728 del 14/2/2007 presso il Tribunale di Bologna

Redazione e amministrazione: Società Italiana di Vittimologia (S.I.V.) - Via Sant'Isaia 8 - 40123 Bologna - Italia; Tel. e Fax. +39-051-585709; e-mail: augustoballoni@virgilio.it

Rivista peer reviewed (procedura double-blind) e indicizzata su:

Catalogo italiano dei periodici/ACNP, Progetto CNR SOLAR (Scientific Open-access Literature Archive and Repository), directory internazionale delle riviste open access DOAJ (Directory of Open Access Journals), CrossRef, ScienceOpen, Google Scholar, EBSCO Discovery Service, Academic Journal Database, InfoBase Index

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Reintegration and Therapeutic Communities in Greece. The Experience and Views of Participants (a case study: Kethea en Drasi)

Aikaterini Ntaflou[•], Konstantinos Malafantis^{°}*

Riassunto

È ormai noto che la tossicodipendenza delle persone incarcerate in Grecia e in altri paesi è una condizione molto diffusa. La dipendenza è generalmente affrontata all'interno degli istituti penitenziari come una patologia multidimensionale (biologica, sociale, psicologica, ideologica, culturale, economica e altro). Oltre a questo, la dipendenza è profondamente legata alle procedure disciplinari e al reinserimento dei detenuti. Questo chiama in causa una serie di questioni. In particolare, non si tratta soltanto della cessazione dell'uso delle sostanze, ma anche della modificazione dei comportamenti di dipendenza attraverso l'educazione. Per raggiungere questo obiettivo, sembra cruciale l'adozione di sistema di valori e di competenze socialmente accettabili tramite programmi educativi solidi e orientati. Lo scopo del presente caso studio (condotto nell'ambito di una ricerca post dottorato) è stato quello di esaminare i punti di vista di 47 persone incarcerate che partecipavano al programma terapeutico comunitario denominato KETHEA EN DRASI durante la fase della ricerca riguardante i programmi terapeutici rieducativi. I dati sono stati analizzati utilizzando questionari e processi di codificazione induttiva per categorizzare le percezioni rilevanti. Sulla base dei risultati ottenuti, si può sostenere che la partecipazione a programmi terapeutici ed educativi riesce a far ottenere simultaneamente sia il controllo che il trattamento delle dipendenze e a insegnare ai partecipanti a coltivare le competenze necessarie per il loro reinserimento sociale e professionale.

Résumé

Il est bien connu que la toxicomanie chez les personnes incarcérées en Grèce et dans d'autres pays est un phénomène très répandu. La toxicomanie est généralement abordée dans les établissements pénitentiaires comme une pathologie multidimensionnelle (biologique, sociale, psychologique, idéologique, culturelle, économique et autres). En outre, la dépendance est profondément liée aux procédures disciplinaires et à la réinsertion des détenus. Cela soulève un certain nombre de questions. En particulier, il ne s'agit pas seulement de l'arrêt de la consommation de substances, mais aussi de la modification du comportement addictif grâce à l'éducation. Pour atteindre ce but, l'adoption de systèmes de valeurs et de compétences socialement acceptables par le biais de programmes éducatifs solides et orientés semble cruciale. L'objectif de cette étude de cas (réalisée dans le cadre d'une recherche postdoctorale) était d'examiner les points de vue de 47 personnes incarcérées participant au programme thérapeutique communautaire appelé KETHEA EN DRASI pendant la phase de la recherche concernant les programmes thérapeutiques rééducatifs. Les données ont été analysées à l'aide de questionnaires et de processus de codage inductif pour catégoriser les perceptions significatives. Sur la base des résultats obtenus, les auteurs peuvent affirmer que la participation à des programmes thérapeutiques et éducatifs permet d'atteindre simultanément le contrôle et le traitement des addictions et d'apprendre aux participants à cultiver les compétences nécessaires à leur réinsertion sociale et professionnelle.

Abstract

Substance addiction issues among incarcerated individuals in correctional facilities in Greece and abroad are notably prevalent. Addiction is generally addressed within correctional systems as a pathology with biological, social, psychological, ideological, cultural, economic, and other dimensions. Beyond this, addiction is deeply intertwined with the disciplinary process and the reintegration of prisoners. This involves a range of issues. In particular, it involves not only the cessation of substance use but also the modification of addictive behaviors through education. To achieve this goal, adopting a socially acceptable system of values and life skills through strong and oriented education appears to be crucial. The purpose of this case study (conducted as part of postdoctoral research) was to examine the views of 47 incarcerated individuals who

[•] Department of Sociology, Panteion University, Athens

^{*} Department of Primary Education, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (UOA)

[°] The following contributed to the collection and statistical processing of the research: Dr. Brailas Alexios, Department of Psychology, Panteion University; MSc. Katagis Vasilis, Scientific Supervisor of the Therapeutic Program KETHEA EN DRASI; Tsalera Eirini, Head of the Education Department KETHEA EN DRASI

participated in the therapeutic community program of KETHEA en DRASI during the research period regarding therapeutic correctional education programs. The data were analyzed using questionnaires and inductive coding processes to categorize relevant perceptions. According to the study's findings, participation in therapeutic and educational programs simultaneously achieves control and treatment of addictions and educates participants in the cultivation of life skills necessary for their social, educational, and professional reintegration.

Key words: therapeutic communities; reintegration; education; rehabilitation

1. Statement of the Problem

Social reintegration is a crucial component of the correctional policy within any criminal justice system, as well as the functioning of communities. Internationally recognized standards for the treatment of incarcerated individuals emphasize the importance of crime prevention and recidivism reduction as part of the protection of society. However, research (Bierens and Carvalho, 2011; Gottschalk, 2011) indicates that an incarcerated person who has not been assisted in resolving basic life issues (employment, education, addictions) is more likely to return to prison soon after their release. Recidivism is thus seen as a key measure for evaluating the success or failure of any official social reaction to crime (Zarafonitou 2004: 228). It is also considered a multifactorial phenomenon with an inductive nature (Aseltine, et.al. 2000), and thus a symptom of fundamental deficiencies in individuals' lives. These deficiencies are typically cumulative and impact various aspects of individuals' lives.

Substance addiction to drugs and alcohol is a major cause of criminal behavior leading to incarceration and, consequently, to recurring behaviors and actions (Coretta, 2012; Green, et al. 2016). The interaction between individual and other factors with criminal behavior is not linear but rather a cyclical process defined by mutual and interactive influence. According to the literature, this interaction has a strong impact on individuals' illegal behaviours, particularly delinquency and substance abuse (Piko & Balaizs, 2012; Buelga, et al. 2017).

Related studies even link it to prison overcrowding (Katagis, et al. 2011). A large percentage of the prison population is addicted to substance use. Unfortunately, for these individuals, the rates of relapse into the same drug or alcohol addiction that initially led them to criminal behaviour are quite high. Studies indicate that approximately 40-60% of individuals relapse within 30 days of completing their program, with 85% relapsing within the first year (<https://americanaddictioncenters.org/rehab-guide/success-rates-and-statistics>).

One must consider this cyclical process of relapse as a mutually reinforcing cycle that needs to be interrupted within the framework of correctional systems. In this context, treating addiction within therapeutic communities, both inside and outside correctional facilities, and fostering personal empowerment and education are crucial elements for building resilient communities (Wangari & Kuria, 2013), but primarily for the individuals themselves.

There are various theories regarding substance use. From the sociocultural theory (Mamman, et al., 2014) to the learning theory (Bandura, 1986), the key concept involves evaluating the specific nature of the relationship between the user and the substance and how this relationship influences behavior in different ways.

For the purposes of this study, the personality theory of substance use is most relevant. This theory focuses on specific personality traits that are more closely associated with substance abuse. These

traits, such as low self-esteem, high sensitivity and impulsivity, emotional dependency on others, low tolerance for frustration, and poor coping skills, could increase the likelihood of substance use (Calamai, 2021).

Therefore, in this research, substance dependence and use are defined as dangerous behaviors that could be described as a *"maladaptive pattern of use leading to clinically significant harm or distress"* (Κραε, 2019). Such behavior is linked to personality traits, but individuals can be trained through appropriate and personalized treatment and education to manage these traits without resorting to substance use.

This explanation is necessary because, according to the WHO (WHO Expert Committee on Drug Dependence and World Health Organization, 1969), the dependency syndrome resulting from repeated substance use leads to a “strong desire to take the substance, difficulty controlling its use, and persistence in its use despite harmful consequences” (Κραε, 2019). These substances can, in fact, influence individuals' behavior and cause significant biological changes in the body (Volkow et al., 2019). For all these reasons, this study places particular emphasis on the Centers for Treatment and Rehabilitation of Substance-Dependent Individuals, specifically focusing on these individuals' assessments, their experiences, and the meaning they attribute to treatment as part of their education towards social reintegration.

2. Introduction – The Framework

International practices regarding how criminal justice systems should manage social deviations related to the use of addictive substances are not uniform, and there are significant differences among them. Various and different policies sometimes

interpret substance use as a crime and other times as a form of illness (Marsden, et al., 2017). This confusion leads to ambiguous policies, particularly concerning the extent to which therapeutic interventions are considered, based on experience, to complement the activities of criminal justice systems (Best, et al., 2010) in supporting social reintegration.

For the purposes of this research, the structure of KETHEA EN DRASI was chosen: The process of rehabilitation, as defined by the KETHEA EN DRASI program, does not mark the beginning of correction but rather the formation of the personality of each individual-inmate and member of the therapeutic program. The KETHEA EN DRASI Therapeutic Program, (<https://www.kethea-endrasi.gr>), based in Athens, provides counselling support, treatment, and social reintegration services to incarcerated and released users and former users of addictive substances. Specifically, it offers services at Korydallos I Correctional Facilities, at Korydallos II Correctional Facilities, at Korydallos Hospital “Agios Pavlos”, at the Women's Correctional Facility in Eleonas, Thebes, and in the city of Livadeia, through the operation of Counselling Centers and Therapeutic Communities. In Korydallos I Correctional Facilities and Korydallos II Correctional Facilities, as well as in the Women's Correctional Facility in Eleonas, Thebes, a Therapeutic Community operates in a specially designated area. The daily program includes therapy, education, and training services. Within the framework of a multidimensional and comprehensive therapeutic intervention, both within and outside the correctional system, the program's functions aim at the social, educational, and professional reintegration of individuals, as well as the

development of skills that will help them take control of their lives.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Purpose and Hypotheses of the Research

This study examines the perspectives of incarcerated individuals who are dependent on substances regarding the educational and therapeutic programs they participate in. Specifically, it describes their relationships with peers and educators, their well-being during the implementation of these programs, their psychological state, and their satisfaction with these programs. Additionally, the relationship between these variables is explored. The perspective of incarcerated individuals provides insight into which aspects of correctional education they perceive as beneficial during their treatment for dependencies and their expectations for release. To capture the complexity of the dynamic processes within therapeutic relationships and the behavior of incarcerated individuals, the research is based on the following hypotheses.

Hypotheses: The research is based on three working hypotheses:

- Hypothesis 1:

The correlation between the learner's relationship with peers and educators in improving teaching and learning processes is high among incarcerated individuals. Completing their studies is an opportunity for self-actualization.

- Hypothesis 2:

For successful reintegration, educational-therapeutic well-being is an interlinked process where the educator's role, organizational matters, teaching and learning processes, and interaction mechanisms are equally significant parts.

- Hypothesis 3:

Improving educational practices within therapeutic communities using ICT (Information and Communication Technology) generally has a positive impact on dealing with daily life and learning within the correctional process.

3.2. Research Sample

To be eligible for participation in the study, individuals had to meet the following criteria: 1) be over 18 years of age, 2) have access to medication prior to participation in the study, and 3) be incarcerated and undergoing treatment in facilities supported by KETHEA en DRASI due to their substance and alcohol dependency issues.

The research sample consists of 47 individuals (both women and men) who are incarcerated in a total of 3 correctional institutions in Greece. Most respondents are men, with an average age of 40.80 years. Most of the respondents are unmarried, childless, and live in urban areas. Additionally, most of the sample comprise high school graduates who have been incarcerated for up to one year.

3.3 Research Instrument

To achieve the research objectives, a 6-part questionnaire was used. The first section consists of 6 closed-ended questions and 1 open-ended question, which study the demographic characteristics of the respondents. The second section examines the relationship of incarcerated individuals with their peers and educators during educational and therapeutic programs. This section includes 10 Likert-type questions, answered once for each group of individuals, with responses ranging from 1-Almost always true to 4-Rarely true. The third section contains the "Workplace PERMA Profiler" questionnaire, which studies well-being during the implementation of therapeutic and

educational programs. This section includes a total of 13 Likert-type statements, with responses ranging from 1-Never/To a very small extent to 5-Very often/To a very large extent. The fourth section includes the “Psychological Well-Being” scale, which investigates the respondents' satisfaction with the programs, with 11 statements answered on a scale from 1-Strongly disagree to 7-Strongly agree. The fifth section contains the “Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ)”, which examines respondents' satisfaction with the programs. This scale includes 15 Likert-type statements, with responses ranging from 1-Very satisfied to 5-Very dissatisfied. The sixth and final section focuses on the respondents' satisfaction with various aspects of education and therapy. The scale is 5-point, ranging from 1-Very satisfied to 5-Very dissatisfied, and includes a total of 14 statements.

3.4 Data Collection and Analysis

The questionnaire was distributed to all individuals participating in the therapeutic programs of KETHEA EN DRASI during the research period, specifically in February 2024. The participants completed the questionnaires during their classes at the two correctional facilities in Korydallos and the corresponding facility in Elaionas, Thebes. To ensure ethical standards, necessary clarifications about the research tool were provided beforehand, and an informational introductory note was given following international standards. This note informed the participants about the research objectives, emphasizing their anonymous and voluntary participation. Additionally, it included an estimated completion time for the questionnaire and encouraged respondents to answer all questions honestly.

The data analysis was conducted using SPSS v.25, with Microsoft Excel also used as a supplementary

tool. Specifically, percentages and frequencies were calculated to present all the variables in the questionnaire. To address the research question, Pearson's linear correlation coefficient was used. The results are presented through appropriately designed tables and graphs within the programs in the original research.

3.5 Research Results

After processing the questionnaires, it appears that most participants in the therapeutic program during the research period are men (95.7%), with women making up 4.3% of the sample.

The participants are mainly individuals of young and middle age (the average age is 40.80 years). The majority (93.5%) reside in urban areas and are mostly unmarried.

A significant portion of the research sample (42.6) has family obligations. Specifically, 29.8% of them have 1 child, 8.5% have 2 children, and 4.3% have 3 children.

The profile of the research participants shows, as expected, low educational levels. Notably, a large portion of the sample (73.3%) has minimal or no education (40% have a high school diploma, 24.4% have a middle school diploma, and 8.9% are illiterate). However, it is noteworthy that 22.2% of them have higher qualifications (17.8% have a postgraduate degree, and 4.4% have higher education). This suggests that while the educational level is significant, it is not the only factor influencing the criminal behavior associated with dependencies among the individuals in this study.

The research participants reported being in confinement for only one year (78.7%). A smaller percentage (12.8%) stated that their confinement period was 1 to 3 years, while 8.5% reported 4 to 10 years. This information highlights a critical aspect that should receive attention in both current and

future research. It emphasizes the significant value of correctional policies that have demonstrated immediate responses to treat the majority (78.7%) from the start of their incarceration. However, it raises the question of why the remaining 21.3% of individuals under dependency required at least 3-10 years of incarceration before participating in therapeutic programs. It seems that these individuals are mostly middle-aged, underscoring the importance of pursuing timely and as immediate as possible correctional and therapeutic policies. Moreover, relevant studies suggest that positive reinforcements related to criminality or drug use are likely to shape attitudes in adult life (Jolliffe et al., 2017).

As previously mentioned in the methodology section, the goal of the research is to capture relationships within the therapeutic community. We have explored the variable-score that pertains to the good relationship of respondents with their peers participating in the therapy and education program. The variable consists of an average of 10 statements, with values ranging from 1 to 4, where higher values indicate a better relationship with peers. The respondents show a particularly good relationship with their peers (2.95). However, the reliability of the variables was examined using Cronbach's Alpha, which appears to be low, with a value of 0.586. Reliability is defined as "the degree to which a measurement tool produces consistent results" (Kinnear & Gray 2006: 548).

We have also explored the level of good relationships that respondents report with their program instructors. The variable-score consists of the average of 10 statements, with values ranging from 1 to 4. Higher values correspond to better relationships with instructors. The mean score of good relationship with instructors appears to be

notably high once again (3.19), although the reliability index (Cronbach's Alpha) remains low at 0.574. It is believed that the low value of these indices indicates the emotional and psychological vulnerability of the research population (incarcerated) on critical issues concerning their relationships.

The research also investigates the positive feelings that individuals derive from the environment during the implementation of the education and therapy program. The variable is composed of the average of 4 statements and accepts values from 1 to 5, with higher values corresponding to an increase in positive feelings in the environment. The Cronbach's Alpha test revealed a high level of reliability with a value of 0.839. The level of positive feelings in the respondents' environment is above average (3.34).

Focusing more on the level of educational engagement of the participants, we observe that the variable, as before, ranges from 1 to 5, with an increase in the average score corresponding to a higher level of educational engagement among respondents. It is composed of the average of three corresponding statements, and the level of educational engagement among the respondents is notably high (3.95).

Hereupon, the variable-score representing the relationships between respondents and instructors during the programs appears to range from 1 to 5, with higher scores indicating better relationships between respondents and instructors during the programs. It is also composed of the average of two statements. The Cronbach's Alpha test was used again to assess the reliability of the statements, which is acceptable with a value of 0.749. It is evident that the level of positive relationships

between respondents and instructors during the programs is also high.

The extent to which respondents find meaning and purpose in achievement through the therapy and education programs is also analyzed. The variable-score consists of an average of 4 statements, ranging from 1 to 5, with an increase in score corresponding to a higher level of meaning and purpose in achievement. The average level for the sample is above average (3.46).

The level of psychological well-being of the respondents is examined. The variable ranges from 1 to 7, with an increase in score corresponding to an increase in the overall psychological well-being of the respondents. Additionally, it consists of the average of 11 statements, while the reliability test of the variables, Cronbach's Alpha, is slightly low but acceptable, with a value of 0.601. It is evident that the level of psychological well-being of the respondents is above average (4.53).

Additionally, the level of satisfaction of the respondents with the dimensions of the education they receive is also investigated. The variable is comprised of an average of 15 statements, and it takes values from 1 to 5. The increase in the average corresponds to the increase in the level of satisfaction with the dimensions of education. Cronbach's Alpha reliability test showed particularly high reliability for the group of statements, with a value of 0.933. It is observed that the satisfaction of the respondents with the dimensions of the education they receive through educational and therapeutic programs is above average (3.74).

Moreover, the level of satisfaction of the respondents with the program's priorities is analyzed. The variable-score consists of the average of 14 statements, and the Cronbach's Alpha test indicates high reliability with a value of 0.817. At the

same time, the variable takes values from 1 to 5, with an increase in the average corresponding to an increase in the respondents' satisfaction. The satisfaction of the respondents with the priorities is above average (3.28).

To investigate the research question posed, the Pearson linear correlation coefficient was used, which was split into two parts to explore the results more efficiently. 15 statistically significant correlations are presented. More specifically, an increase in the level of good relations with peers appears to be associated with an increase in the level of good relations with instructors in general ($r=0.480$, $p=0.001$), an increase in positive emotions ($r=0.362$, $p=0.013$), an increase in mental well-being ($r=0.298$, $p=0.042$), and an increase in satisfaction with the dimensions of education ($r=0.318$, $p=0.029$). Additionally, a higher level of good relations with instructors generally correlates with an increase in positive emotions in the environment ($r=0.683$, $p<0.001$), relationships with instructors during programs ($r=0.643$, $p<0.001$), and the level of meaning and purpose achievement ($r=0.320$, $p=0.028$), but also with a decrease in satisfaction with the program's priorities ($p=-0.488$, $r=0.001$).

At the same time, a higher level of positive emotions in the program environment correlates with an increase in the level of educational engagement ($r=0.402$, $p=0.005$), the level of relationships with instructors during programs ($r=0.728$, $p<0.001$), and the level of meaning and purpose achievement ($r=0.647$, $p<0.001$). Furthermore, an increase in educational engagement is associated with an increase in the level of meaning and purpose achievement ($r=0.518$, $p<0.001$). Finally, the higher the level of good relations with instructors during programs, the more the level of meaning and purpose achievement

increases ($p=0.443$, $p=0.002$), while the level of satisfaction with the program's priorities decreases ($p=-0.460$, $p=0.001$).

Two more statistically significant correlations are observed. Specifically, as the level of meaning and purpose increases, the level of mental well-being also increases ($r=0.330$, $p=0.023$). Additionally, a higher level of satisfaction with the educational dimensions is associated with a higher level of satisfaction with the program's priorities ($r=0.565$, $p<0.001$).

4. Conclusion

This research explored the perspectives of incarcerated individuals with substance dependencies regarding the educational and therapeutic programs they participate in. The sample consisted of 47 individuals, most of whom have been incarcerated for up to 1 year. The majority are men, with an average age of 40.80 years. Most of the participants reported limited family obligations, being unmarried and childless, living in urban areas, and having low educational attainment.

A key aspect of the research was to highlight the crucial role of education and the relationships that incarcerated individuals develop with their peers in the treatment and educational programs, as well as with their instructors. This focus was reinforced by the fact that incarceration alone fails to reduce recidivism rates globally (Petrich, et al., 2021). Moreover, incarceration often negatively impacts the mental health of prisoners (Fazel, et al., 2016; Wallace, et al., 2020), as well as the correctional systems themselves and their institutional costs (Gonçalves, et al., 2016).

From this perspective, the research underscores the importance of addressing substance dependencies

and providing targeted treatment and education as part of the prisoners' well-being and rehabilitation. We believe that it is crucial to consider how incarceration may encourage the emergence of psychological symptoms or exacerbate pre-existing ones, thereby increasing the prevalence of dependencies and disorders within prisons. This discussion inevitably leads to the critical point at which addiction treatment and relevant education should be introduced.

According to the "General Strain Theory" (G.S.T.), individuals may experience three types of strain: (i) failure to achieve positive goals, (ii) loss of positive stimuli, and (iii) the presence of negative stimuli (Agnew, et al. 2019). These factors can lead to emotions and coping mechanisms that are not always constructive. Poor responses to these elements and maladaptive behaviors during or after incarceration are critical factors in reintegration and, more importantly, in their education. Therefore, it was particularly important for this research to document the impact of treatment on incarcerated individuals with dependencies and to analyze the potential mediating effects of various factors.

Treatment marks the beginning of a contract that requires the participation of the incarcerated individuals. However, participation in therapeutic educational programs within correctional facilities is not automatic nor always an easy choice. Nevertheless, it appears to allow individuals to experience positive feelings within the program environment and to maintain high levels of educational commitment. The research reveals that incarcerated individuals find meaning and purpose through treatment and educational programs. The feelings they gain from participating in these programs are positive, enhancing their mental well-being and satisfaction with the educational aspects.

Their satisfaction with the program's priorities ranks lower, which should be evaluated to improve the treatment and educational program with new technologies and interactive lesson modules.

Exploring the initial research question, it was found that an increase in good relationships with peers is positively associated with good relationships with instructors, increased positive emotions, mental well-being, and satisfaction with the educational aspects. Additionally, improved relationships with instructors are associated with an increase in positive emotions, relationships with instructors during programs, and a sense of meaning and purpose, but also with a decrease in satisfaction with the program's priorities. Positive emotions are also positively and statistically significantly linked to educational commitment, relationships with educators, and a sense of meaning and purpose. Moreover, an increase in educational commitment leads to a higher sense of meaning and purpose, while an increase in the sense of purpose also leads to improved mental well-being. Finally, a higher level of satisfaction with the educational aspects is correlated with increased satisfaction with the program's priorities.

On this basis, the therapeutic programs and the education provided to participants are significant. They confirm that identifying and managing the critical “indicators” for treating dependencies and criminal behavior requires mutual interaction between therapy, education, and positive outcomes in reducing crime and substance abuse. The therapeutic framework plays a crucial role in managing risky behaviors and in social reintegration through addiction treatment and education in new behavior patterns. Educational projects can be targeted by considering differences (gender, age, etc.). Various interventions could focus on a

multidimensional level. For example, the so-called family-based approach to the treatment and prevention of drug abuse and criminal behavior among youths offers such possibilities. For this reason, we consider it beneficial to include new methods of educating individuals using new technologies. Technology can enable entirely new models of behavioral healthcare and therapeutic tools based on technology to influence the quality and reach of treatment support and rehabilitation systems.

These programs can be designed to ensure fidelity in the delivery of interventions and allow anonymity, which may be particularly important for some individuals when dealing with sensitive issues such as substance use and other criminal behaviors. Additionally, these programs can also be highly cost-effective (Kay-Lambkin, et al. 2009). In this context, the therapeutic educational system has the potential to replace part of its traditional interaction with individuals with a technology-based intervention. This could allow for better management of therapeutic tools, offering autonomous interventions and access to care in situations where space-time possibilities might be limited or even undesirable for individuals who do not wish to participate in traditional care models.

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