

The 151st International Training Course “Evidence-based Treatment of Offenders”

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The evidence-based treatment of offenders has had a great influence on correctional (probation) policies not only in America and Europe but also in Asia. Japan has started adopting the evidence-based treatment of offenders. However, in order to carry out such treatment, it is necessary to fully understand the risk assessment of offenders and the conditions of effective treatment (programmes), and there are issues to be solved in accordance with the unique circumstances of each country. Therefore, the main aim of this training course was to learn and deepen the participants' understanding of “evidence-based treatment of offenders” through experts' lectures and the participants' dialogues and discussions, and to share ideas for putting it into practice.

Firstly, since the theme of this training course was a relatively new topic that requires expertise, I undertook methods different from the conventional course, i.e., by allocating fifty per cent more time for lectures from overseas visiting experts and by prompting the participants to reconfirm what was learned from the lectures in the group workshops. During the group workshops, participants mutually confirmed their understanding of the presented material, and professors made supplementary explanations, thereby deepening the participants' understanding.

All of the visiting experts' lectures were excellent, and due to limitations of space, I will only touch on some of the many impressive contributions from the lectures. A synopsis of the lectures will be published in our Resource Material Series, so please refer to it for details.

Dr. Motiuk from Canada stated at the beginning of his lecture, “There are various theories to explain criminal behaviour; however, unless the theory is supported by empirical evidence, it cannot be applied in the correctional management. This is because theories should be able to explain, predict, and help reduce criminal conduct. Social learning theory satisfies the conditions, because it is based on the idea that ‘criminal behaviour, like other behaviours, is learned, and results from an interaction between important personal factors and the situation that the person encounters.’ Social learning theory has become the framework for treatment of offenders in Canada.” As such, he clearly explained theoretical foundations of the “evidence-based treatment of offenders.”

Dr. Latessa, from the United States, presented research finding that correctional treatment conducted in one state actually resulted in the increase of reoffence of low-risk offenders (offenders

who were assessed as being low in the probability of reoffending). Then he strongly asserted that high-risk offenders should be the targets of treatment programmes. Furthermore, he discussed conditions of treatment programmes effective for reducing reoffence, methods for interviewing offenders by treatment providers, a tool which is used for measuring the degree to which a certain treatment programme meets the conditions, and training methods for interviews which are effective in the prevention of reoffending. The content was concrete and based on the reviews and analyses of many programmes, so it was clear that the idea of evidence-based treatment is significantly prevalent throughout the United States.

Mr. Leo from Singapore spoke passionately about how the Singapore Prison Service introduced the evidence-based treatment of offenders and put the system into practice. He said, while showing a picture of the former Director of Prisons, that the introduction of evidence-based treatment in Singapore was because of the former Director's awareness of issues and that under his strong leadership, organizational restructuring and changing the staff's way of thinking were implemented.

Next, in the group workshops, participants were divided into two groups and each group was assigned a theme — either “Risk/Needs Assessment of Offenders” or “Evidence-based Offender Treatment Programme.” Each participant eagerly participated in the group discussions, and the groups proposed: (i) the amendment of laws and ordinances, (ii) organizational restructuring to make arrangements for the implementation system, (iii) training to equip staff with knowledge and skills, (iv) explanation of the cost-effectiveness of risk/needs assessment and treatment to the financing authorities to secure the budget, (v) collaboration with other countries to improve technical support, (vi) employing or training of staff who have expertise, (vii) promotion of communication among staff, (viii) establishment of staff support systems, (ix) utilization of scientific tools, (x) making a manual for implementing the programme, (xi) establishment of a monitoring system to assess programme implementation, (xii) public-awareness campaigns to improve public opinion and support, and (xiii) the necessity to establish the common system for sharing offender information. Moreover, the participating countries utilizing or developing risk/needs assessment tools — Colombia, Kenya, Jordan, Maldives, the Philippines, Samoa, Thailand, Vanuatu, Hong Kong, Korea, and Japan — had the opportunity to share information about their respective programmes.

Overseas participants made positive comments on the main theme of this training course, such as “Now I clearly understand the meaning [of evidence-based treatment of offenders], although I misunderstood it prior to participating in the training course”, and “I could get a new idea about the ways to evaluate the programme, so I would like to take it back to my country and advocate necessary solutions.” On the other hand, there were some comments that recognized the challenges

facing implementation, such as, “Many difficulties lie ahead to realize it, and we have a long way to go.”

Lastly, I would like to express my deep gratitude to each organization and everyone concerned who cooperated in implementing this training course despite their busy schedules. As the Programming Officer of this training course, I sincerely hope that the course will be helpful in the development of offender treatment in each country. Thank you very much.