

# **Key Findings from the GMU Inmate Study**

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## **Primary Questions:**

- Can moral emotions (shame and guilt) help predict criminal recidivism?
- Can interventions targeted at moral emotions help reduce the rate of recidivism?

## **Participants:**

- 446 inmates held on felony charges enrolled in study and completed baseline measures shortly after arriving at the ADC
- Use of ADC programs and services and records of jail behavior tracked during period of incarceration
- Re-assess participants just prior to transfer or release
- Follow up participants at 1 and 3 years post-release

## **Initial Findings on Inmates' Moral Emotions**

- Shame and guilt can be validly assessed in an inmate population
- There's a lot of variance in inmates' capacity for moral emotions
- Shame and guilt appear to function similarly in an offender population
- Guilt is associated with low aggression, high empathy, acceptance of responsibility, fewer substance abuse problems, and safer sex practices prior to incarceration
- Shame does not inhibit aggression or encourage empathy; rather it's associated with a tendency to blame others, psychological symptoms such as anxiety and depression, and a history of substance abuse problems

## **Criminogenic Beliefs are Even More Important**

- Criminals who persist in a life of crime often hold a distinct set of beliefs that serve to rationalize and perpetuate criminal activity
- Inspired by clinical caseworkers at OAR, we developed the Criminogenic Beliefs and Assumptions Scale (CBAS)
- Criminogenic beliefs and crime go hand-in-hand. Criminogenic beliefs are highly linked to a history of criminal activity, clinicians' ratings of psychopathy and risk for violence, and misconduct during the period of incarceration
- Criminogenic beliefs predict post-release re-offense

## **Inmates Don't Get Worse During the Period of Incarceration**

- Criminogenic beliefs decrease slightly, on average.
- The change is especially strong for attitudes toward authority. Inmates leave the ADC feeling more positively about rules, laws, deputies, and police

## **ADC Programs and Services Make A Difference!**

- Program evaluation data show that psychoeducational programs and alcohol and drug services (including AA) reduce criminogenic beliefs.
- Involvement in religious programs and services increases inmates' adaptive feelings of guilt
- The Impact of Crime Workshop is especially effective at reducing criminogenic beliefs

