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BAYLOR UNIVERSITY STUDY OF THE PRISONER'S JOURNEY (TPJ) PROGRAM

Frequently Asked Questions

Since 2014, "The Prisoner's Journey" (TPJ) course has been changing prisoners' lives. The eight-week in-prison course is an initiative of Prison Fellowship International (PFI). As of August, 2021, more than 460,000 inmates have graduated from the program, which runs in 39 countries spanning the globe, including Africa, Asia Pacific, Caribbean, Europe, Latin America and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

What is this study? A longitudinal evaluation of the impact of PFI's The Prisoner's Journey® (TPJ) program on prisoner rehabilitation, conducted by researchers at the Baylor University Institute for Studies of Religion (ISR).

Why is this study important or unique?

- This is the first study of its kind to examine faith-based programming in prisons on a multinational basis.
- Very few studies exist about prison populations in developing countries.
- PFI's commissioning, cooperation and funding this university research is a major contribution to the global study of prisoners and rehabilitation.

When was the study conducted? The first phase was conducted during a 40-month period from January, 2018 to April, 2021.

Where did the research take place? Seven prisons in South Africa and Colombia.

Who was studied? Nearly 900 prisoners. The average participant age was 35. Their charges were distributed across violent, property, sex, drug and other offenses in both experimental and control groups. Most participants were from Christian backgrounds, but positive outcomes emerged for participants from other faiths or without faith.

Does the study show anything about TPJ's impact on non-Christian populations?

- Participants in this first phase of the study were largely Christian (more than 80% identified as either Catholic or Protestant).
- Participants who identified as "no" or "other" religion comprised more than 10%.

What were the key findings?

- Participation in TPJ increased religious engagement among prisoners.
- This increased religious engagement contributed to:
 - crystallization of discontent (which motivates self-change)
 - sense of meaning and purpose in life
 - development of forgiveness, gratitude and self-control
 - increased motivation for new meaning and purpose in life, i.e., identity transformation
 - decreased negative emotional states and less interpersonal aggression
 - growth in willingness to take responsibility for their behaviors

What is the significance of TPJ and this study? This groundbreaking study provides evidence that the faith-based TPJ course transforms prisoners – and leads to culture change in prisons. TPJ outcomes are uniformly positive: for prisoners, prison officials and the community at large.

How will PFI use the findings from the study in the future?

- Identify best practices, develop benchmarks and build the material into PFI trainings.
- Researchers are submitting data and crafting articles for publication in 2021 and 2022.

What is the next phase of this study?

- PFI and the Baylor research team have planned this as a longitudinal study. They are working to extend and expand the study to more countries and increase diversity among participants.
- Researchers plan a component in which they can follow prisoners outside of prisons.