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FROM SELF-AWARENESS TO COMMITMENT: STAGES OF RELIGIOUS TRANSFORMATION AMONG CHRISTIAN INMATES IN A CLASS IIA NARCOTICS PENITENTIARY

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ABSTRACT

Religion serves as a primary source of spiritual and moral guidance that enables individuals to cope with problems, reduce stress, and manage anxiety. Numerous studies have demonstrated that religiosity plays a significant role in fostering mental health and promoting more positive ways of dealing with life pressures. Incarcerated individuals constitute a population that experiences considerable emotional and psychological strain during their imprisonment. They frequently participate in religious development programs as a means of managing negative emotions through repentance and religious practice. This study aims to explore the experiential process of religious transformation among Christian inmates at the Jakarta Class IIA Narcotics Correctional Facility. Employing a qualitative approach, the research involved five informants who participated in in-depth and semi-structured interviews. The findings reveal that inmates' transformation unfolds through several stages, including self-awareness, social support, motivation, and self-actualization, ultimately culminating in the development of personal commitment. Christian inmates who underwent religious guidance and experienced such transformation demonstrated greater consistency in practicing religious awareness. These findings provide strong evidence to recommend the enhancement of methods and strategies for Christian spiritual rehabilitation programs within the Jakarta Class IIA Narcotics Correctional Facility..

INTRODUCTION

Religion can serve as a vital element for inmates because it provides spiritual and moral support, helps reduce stress and anxiety, and offers a more positive and meaningful outlook on life. A number of studies on inmate religiosity have found that religious activities significantly contribute to preventing or minimizing recidivism. Salas-Wright et al. (2015) reported substantial evidence supporting the notion that religious involvement functions as a protective or preventive factor against criminal behavior. Individuals with strong religiosity tend to evaluate

their transgressions within a religious framework and practice their faith in daily life. Religiosity is reflected in several dimensions: ideological (belief), ritualistic (religious practices), experiential (religious experience), intellectual (religious knowledge), and consequential (behavioral outcomes) (Glock, 1965).

Transformation is understood as a process of restructuring one's previous self-concept and identity in light of future perspectives and one's social environment (Uswatusolihah, 2017). Such transformation occurs due to changes in personal environment and psychological conditions.

Religious transformation is defined as a shift in religious orientation from conventional religious life toward a more mystical form of religiosity as a result of meditative or contemplative practices (Subandi, 2009). Changes in religious experience (conversion) are categorized into two types: ordinary conversion and mystical conversion. Mystical conversion refers to a dramatic shift from conventional religious life to a religious experience imbued with mystical dimensions within the same religious context.

The process of self-transformation typically begins with an awareness of the need for change, followed by consistent and continuous efforts to reform oneself. Although self-transformation can be challenging, it offers significant benefits when successfully achieved. The outcomes of self-transformation may improve quality of life, enhance well-being, increase success, and foster meaningful contributions to society.

Garfinkel explains that personal transformation refers to a shift from one extreme condition to another that is entirely opposite to the initial state (Saloom, 2016). In principle, behavioral transformation toward more positive patterns—whether progressing from previously negative behaviors or enhancing already positive ones—constitutes a learning process experienced by every individual. Those who undergo such personal change are individuals who have succeeded in overcoming significant obstacles and challenges throughout their lives.

The implementation of religious development programs within correctional facilities serves as a method to reform inmate behavior and assist them in preparing for a more positive and meaningful life after release. Personality development through religious approaches is expected to equip inmates with the capacity to avoid repeating past mistakes. In this regard, the correctional facility facilitates religious activities by providing access to places of worship, prayer rooms, and Bible study groups led by external religious instructors to support inmates' spiritual understanding. This study examines the process of religious transformation among Christian inmates at the Jakarta Class IIA Narcotics Correctional Facility.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study design, which aims to examine in depth the environmental interactions, positions, and

conditions of a research unit—such as an individual, community, or institution—within its real-life context. The research was conducted by observing the condition of the study subjects as they naturally occurred. Data were collected through in-depth interviews. These interviews were conducted directly with primary sources, including informants and research subjects within the correctional facility. Five individuals participated as interview informants: a correctional officer managing the church, a church teacher or pastor, a peer of the subject, and three inmates at the Jakarta Class IIA Narcotics Correctional Facility.

The data consisted of self-reports based on the beliefs and experiences of the participants. The interview procedure began with determining the interview objectives, preparing a list of questions, conducting the interview, and proceeding through the introductory, opening, and main stages, before concluding the session. The interview questions addressed various dimensions of religiosity, including beliefs, religious practices, experiences, religious knowledge, and application.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Christian spiritual development programs are provided at the Jakarta Class IIA Narcotics Correctional Facility, including a Bible School designed specifically for inmates. The primary objective of this program is to enable Christian inmates to deepen their understanding of the Bible, thereby improving their religious life and overall personal conduct. The Doulos Bible School is a collaborative initiative between the correctional facility and the Doulos Foundation. As of 2023, this program has been in operation for 12 years and has graduated more than 500 Bible scholars. The Bible School is conducted once a week over a period of ten months, with the expectation that inmates will experience improved life conduct and enhanced spiritual growth, enabling them to serve as positive examples upon their release.

The curriculum offered in this Bible School mirrors the content typically taught in theological seminaries. The program accommodates approximately fifty participants each cycle, and upon completion, inmates receive a certificate. Graduates who have been released often return to the correctional facility to participate in church services and ministry activities.

Data from interviews conducted at the Jakarta Class IIA Narcotics Correctional Facility were used to examine more deeply the process of religious transformation experienced by Christian inmates, as well as the contributing factors. Based on the interviews and observations, the findings indicate that a religious transformation has indeed occurred among Christian inmates. This transformation did not arise spontaneously; rather, it progressed through several stages. The religious transformation experienced by Christian inmates at the Jakarta Class IIA Narcotics Correctional Facility unfolded through specific phases, as illustrated in the figure 1.

Figure 1. Religious transformation



This religious transformation does not occur suddenly among inmates; rather, it unfolds through various stages shaped by personal experiences and actions. Drawing on the theory of Personal Transformation, which refers to individual changes occurring at a personal or psychological level, this framework is closely related to the concept of learning—progressing from ignorance to understanding, or from an inability to an ability. Based on interview findings, religious transformation among the informants manifested as behavioral change from one state to another. This is supported by their accounts, revealing that individuals who initially had minimal religious background—failing to perform obligatory worship and lacking basic religious knowledge—eventually became highly disciplined and consistent in carrying out both mandatory and additional religious practices. The concept of learning was also evident, as informants described a gradual process beginning with fundamental acts such as prayer, which eventually evolved into the capacity to deliver sermons to other congregants.

Human development generally encompasses two domains: physical and spiritual. The peak of physical development is referred to as maturity,

whereas spiritual development is measured by one's level of ability. Achieving a certain level of spiritual ability is termed spiritual maturity (Jalaluddin, 2015). William James broadly categorizes religious attitudes and behaviors into two types: (a) the sick soul and (b) the healthy-minded. These two types reflect markedly different religious dispositions.

The interviews revealed that the informants belong to the category of the sick soul. This religious attitude is observed among individuals whose prior religious background was disrupted or unstable. In this context, the informants fit this category because their adoption and practice of religious teachings did not stem from sustained spiritual maturity, but rather from inner suffering—one of which arose from the

criminal acts they committed. Such background factors contributed to their sudden shift in religious attitude. William James refers to this phenomenon as “the suffering.” Individuals who have endured profound distress may suddenly exhibit strong religious devotion toward their faith.

Further examination of their religious attitudes revealed two contributing factors: internal and external. The internal factor relates to the individual's sense of distance from God; people who live far from religious values often feel weak and unsupported when facing life's hardships. Given this psychological state, inmates develop a strong emotional drive to draw closer to God and commit themselves more earnestly to religious devotion.

The external factor pertains to circumstances outside the individual that shape their religious orientation—namely, criminal behavior. The informants, all inmates convicted of narcotics-related offenses, admitted that their crimes stemmed from a lack of religious grounding. They attempted to conceal their inner turmoil through compensatory behaviors, such as drug use. However, these efforts often failed to alleviate their psychological distress, leaving them emotionally unstable and prone to engaging in further negative behaviors. This emotional condition deprived them of inner peace,

generating feelings of regret, guilt, social rejection, and despair. These experiences compelled the informants to seek a source of inner tranquility. Such awareness ultimately motivated them to undergo religious transformation.

CONCLUSION

This study explores the process of religious transformation among inmates that leads to the development of religious awareness. The religious transformation experienced by Christian inmates at the Jakarta Class IIA Narcotics Correctional Facility does not occur instantaneously; rather, it unfolds through several stages. The process begins with the emergence of self-awareness, in which inmates recognize a shared condition—namely, their previous lack of connection with God—and subsequently develop an awareness to repent and begin a new life. This self-awareness is shaped through social support from various sources, including family, friends, and others. Self-awareness then fosters the emergence of conversion, characterized by gradual changes across multiple dimensions of religious consciousness: belief or ideology (religious belief), religious practice, experiential understanding, religious knowledge and intellect, consequences or application of faith (religious effect), self-actualization, and commitment.

The findings of this research recommend enhancing the implementation of Christian spiritual development programs at the Jakarta Class IIA Narcotics Correctional Facility by increasing the number of spiritual development staff to optimize the supervision and coordination of religious activities..

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