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# THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE THERAPEUTIC COMMUNITY PROGRAM FOR NARCOTIC INMATES: A LITERATURE REVIEW

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## ABSTRACT

The increasing number of narcotics-related inmates in various correctional institutions underscores the need for a rehabilitation model that not only focuses on stopping substance use but also on improving the quality of life and psychosocial well-being of inmates. The Therapeutic Community (TC) program has long been used as a community-based rehabilitation approach that emphasizes behavioral change, the formation of a new identity, and the strengthening of social support. However, evidence regarding its effectiveness, particularly within the Indonesian correctional context, remains scattered and shows varied outcomes. This study aims to synthesize empirical findings on the implementation of TC for narcotics-related inmates and to assess its impact on quality of life, mental health, and recovery success. The method employed is a systematic narrative literature review by exploring various national and international databases using predetermined keywords. The synthesis results indicate that TC contributes to a reduction in risky behaviors, improvements in psychological and social functioning, and, in some studies, is associated with a decrease in recidivism. Enhancement of quality of life emerges as one of the most consistent findings. However, there are several challenges, such as resource limitations, inconsistencies in implementation, and insufficient aftercare services. This study provides a comprehensive overview of the effectiveness of TC and emphasizes the need for further research tailored to the Indonesian correctional context.

**Keywords:** Therapeutic community; Narcotics inmates; Health community

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Drug abuse has become an urgent and escalating global issue in recent decades. Globally, the latest data shows that drug abusers have reached 296 million, representing 5.8% of the world's population aged 15-64 (BNN, 2024). In Indonesia, the situation is equally alarming. According to the results of the 2023 survey on the prevalence of drug abuse, the prevalence rate reached 1.73%, equivalent to 3.33 million Indonesians aged 15-64 (Chaterina & Belarminus, 2025). The Coordinating Minister for Political, Legal, and Security Affairs even stated that Indonesia is currently in a "drug emergency," where the country is no longer just a consumer but also a producer of narcotics (Damanik, 2025).


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The impact of this drug epidemic is acutely felt within the Indonesian correctional system. Based on data from the Directorate General of Corrections in 2023, overcrowding in correctional institutions (Lapas) has reached a critical level with 264,000 inmates, despite an ideal capacity of only 146,000. More alarmingly, approximately 60% or 158,000 of the total prison population are narcotics inmates, with 80% of them being users (Chaterina & Belarminus, 2025). Even in 2022, the overcrowding rate reached 109%, with 290,000 inmates across Indonesia and a capacity for only 132,000 (ICJR, 2024). The Director General of Corrections even warned that without strategic measures, within the next three or four years, all prisons would be filled with narcotics inmates (Ditjenpas, 2021).

This overcrowding situation is not merely a physical capacity issue but also triggers various human rights violations and creates an environment unconducive to inmate recovery and rehabilitation (Lubis, 2021). Unhealthy conditions, suboptimal supervision, and even the rampant circulation of narcotics from within prisons indicate the failure of the correctional system in carrying out its rehabilitative function. Research shows that in February 2022, there were 103,081 drug users in prisons across Indonesia, and the majority of law enforcement actions ensnared users (40.6%) compared to dealers (Bagaskara, 2022).

In this context, a purely punitive or penal approach has proven ineffective in addressing the problem of drug abuse. The modern correctional paradigm demands a more holistic approach based on rehabilitation, not merely punishment. One internationally proven effective approach is the Therapeutic Community (TC). TC is a community-based rehabilitation method emphasizing behavioral and identity change through active participation in a therapeutic community. This approach uses the principle of "community as method," where active participation in the community becomes the primary tool for behavioral and identity change, not just stopping drug use (De Leon & Unterrainer, 2020).

Recent international evidence indicates that TC programs implemented in correctional settings are associated with favorable outcomes, including reductions in problematic behaviors and improvements in psychosocial functioning. Contemporary studies suggest that TC-based interventions can support rehabilitation goals by enhancing self-regulation, social skills, and emotional stability when implemented with adequate institutional support and professional supervision. These findings underscore the potential role of TC as a core component of correctional rehabilitation strategies in addressing narcotics-related offenses.

Beyond behavioral outcomes, increasing attention has been given to the impact of TC programs on the quality of life of incarcerated individuals. uality of life is understood as a multidimensional concept encompassing physical health, psychological well-being, social relationships, and functional capacity. Recent studies have demonstrated that participation in structured rehabilitation programs such as TC is associated with improvements in mental health, emotional stability, and social functioning, all of which are essential for successful recovery and reintegration into society (González-Saiz & Vergara-Moragues, 2021).

In Indonesia, TC programs have been progressively introduced in several correctional institutions as part of efforts to address the rising number of narcotics inmates. While these programs generally follow national rehabilitation guidelines, recent evaluations indicate that their implementation still faces significant challenges. Some studies have shown that TC programs have not fully addressed the core dimensions of addiction, and participants continue to experience psychological vulnerability and concerns related to relapse during and after program participation (Hamja et al, 2022). Moreover, Indonesia's distinct cultural, social, and correctional contexts require careful adaptation of TC models to ensure their effectiveness and sustainability.

The Class I Makassar Correctional Institution is one of the prisons facing problems of overcrowding and a high number of narcotics inmates. As a Class I prison in Eastern Indonesia, Makassar Prison has a strategic role in the implementation of narcotics rehabilitation programs. However, to date, there has been no comprehensive research specifically examining the influence of the TC program implementation on the quality of life of narcotics case WBP at Makassar Prison.

Based on the above exposition, several fundamental issues need to be further examined. First, although the effectiveness of TC has been proven internationally, research on the implementation and impact of TC within the context of the Indonesian correctional system, particularly in South Sulawesi, remains very limited. Second, most TC research in Indonesia has focused more on program implementation aspects and compliance with BNN standards, but few have delved deeply into its impact on the quality of life of WBP, encompassing physical, psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions. Third, given the overcrowding condition reaching 109% and 60-70% of prison inmates being narcotics inmates, evaluating the effectiveness of TC-based rehabilitation programs becomes crucial to inform better correctional policies. Fourth, the Indonesian government through BNN and the Ministry of Law and Human Rights requires strong empirical evidence to develop and expand TC programs in various prisons across Indonesia.

This literature review aims to comprehensively examine the literature on Therapeutic Community programs applied to inmates, both nationally and internationally, identify and analyze empirical evidence on the influence of TC programs on various aspects of inmates' lives, particularly their quality of life, explore factors influencing the success or failure of TC program implementation in correctional institutions, and identify gaps in existing research and recommend directions for future research, particularly within the context of Indonesia and Correctional Institutions.

## 2. METHODS

This research method employs a systematic narrative literature review approach to collect, evaluate, and synthesize various scientific findings regarding the Therapeutic Community (TC) program for inmates and its impact on quality of life. This approach was chosen for its ability to integrate evidence from diverse quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods research designs, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness and variations in TC program implementation within the correctional context.

The literature search process was conducted through several international and national databases, such as PubMed, Scopus, and Google Scholar, to capture both global perspectives and relevant local contexts. The search strategy was developed using keywords reflecting the studied population, intervention, and outcomes, such as *inmates*, *prisoners*, *narapidana* (inmates), *therapeutic community*, *rehabilitation*, *quality of life*, *well-being*, and *recidivism*, combined with Boolean operators to optimize search results. Literature from the last ten years was prioritized, although studies of historical value were still considered.

Literature selection was carried out in several stages. The first stage involved screening titles and abstracts to ensure topic relevance. Articles that matched the criteria then underwent a full-text reading to assess their alignment with the inclusion criteria: research explaining the implementation of TC for inmates or ex-inmates, assessing aspects of behavioral change, psychological condition, quality of life, recovery process, or recidivism, and published in accredited or reputable scientific journals. Articles of an opinion, editorial, or non-empirical nature were excluded. All articles that passed the selection were extracted using a worksheet covering

information on research design, respondent characteristics, details of TC implementation, assessment instruments, main results, and study limitations. To ensure the quality of findings, each article was analyzed using methodological assessment instruments appropriate to their respective research designs, such as the Newcastle-Ottawa Scale for observational studies and the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) for qualitative studies. This assessment was not used to exclude articles but rather to weight the interpretation of the strengths and limitations of each study. The review results were then synthesized narratively using a thematic approach. This process involved identifying patterns, similarities, and differences in findings across studies related to TC effectiveness, behavioral changes, psychosocial dynamics of participants, improvements in quality of life, and implementation challenges in various correctional contexts.

The entire process was conducted with an emphasis on scientific rigor and analytical consistency. The literature used was analyzed proportionally according to its methodological context, avoiding conclusions without an empirical basis. Potential publication bias and study design limitations were also considered to maintain the objectivity of the review's findings. Through this approach, the study is expected to provide a complete picture of TC's effectiveness and its relevance for the development of correctional policies, as well as to offer directions for further research to strengthen narcotics rehabilitation programs for inmates in Indonesia.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study compiles and synthesizes twelve studies that discuss the implementation and effectiveness of Therapeutic Community (TC) for narcotics-using inmates across various institutional contexts. Most of the research employed qualitative or mixed-method approaches, while several other studies adopted experimental or quasi-experimental designs. This methodological variation provides a rich foundation for assessing the influence of TC on behavioral change, psychological condition, and the quality of life of inmates.

In general, all the studies affirm that TC programs have significant potential in helping inmates modify narcotics use behavior, improve psychological functioning, and strengthen readiness for reintegration. However, their effectiveness heavily depends on the quality of implementation, program duration, staff readiness, institutional support, and participant characteristics. Some studies found improvements in quality of life and a reduction in psychological symptoms, while others indicated challenges such as relapse, unstable motivation, and contextual barriers like prison overcrowding or stigma towards certain treatment methods.

The following section outlines the results thematically based on the patterns of findings from these twelve studies, followed by a critical discussion and its implications for the Indonesian correctional context.

**Table 1.** Literature studies

| No | Authors/ Year/ Journal | Title | Method | Findings |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Hamja, Hakim, L. N., & Kartini, M. (2022)/ Jurnal *Dinamika Hukum* | The Effectiveness of Coaching Prisoners with the Therapeutic Community Method in the Cirebon Class IIA Narcotics Penitentiary | Empirical Research (survey, observation, interviews, and literature review with descriptive qualitative analysis) | TC can be implemented optimally, but still faces issues: 1) the program is not yet focused on the fundamentals of resident addiction, and 2) residents are still struggling with thoughts |

| No | Authors/ Year/ Journal | Title | Method | Findings |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | related to the effects of relapse. |
| 2. | Warih & Setiawan (2024)/ *Journal of Social Politics and Governance (JSPG)* | Implementation of Social Rehabilitation Program Policy for Narcotics Inmate (Case Study Purwokerto Class IIB Narcotics Prison) | *Descriptive Qualitative (using Merilee S. Grindle's policy implementation theory)* | The implementation of the social rehabilitation program at Purwokerto Class IIB Narcotics Prison is assessed as effective, both in terms of the policy/program content and the implementation context. |
| 3. | Basrida Ayu Utami & Sokhivah (2024)/ *WISSEN : Jurnal Ilmu Sosial dan Humaniora* | Group Intervention in the Therapeutic Community Program for Correctional Inmates with Substance Abuse at Class IIA Tangerang Juvenile Correctional Institution | *Qualitative Program Analysis (focus on group intervention as a medium for behavioral change)* | The TC program uses a group approach (such as therapy groups and socialization) to influence negative attitudes and behaviors related to narcotics use. The goal is to equip inmates before they return to society. |
| 4. | De Leon & Unterrainer (2020)*/ Frontiers in Psychiatry* | The Therapeutic Community: A Unique Social Psychological Approach to the Treatment of Addictions and Related Disorders | Review Perspective/Theoretical (Analysis of the "Community as Method" concept and the evolution of TC over 50 years) | TC has shifted from a fringe method to a mainstream approach. Its core approach is "community as method," where active participation in the community is the primary tool for behavioral and identity change (lifestyle recovery), not merely stopping drug use. |
| 5. | González-Saiz & Vergara-Moragues (2021) / *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* | In-Treatment Changes in Quality of Life-Related Variables in Therapeutic Communities for Cocaine Abusers: Are These Changes Associated with Clinical Outcomes? | Prospective Longitudinal (Sample: 142 cocaine-dependent patients in 6 TCs in Andalusia, Spain, evaluated after 3 months) | After 3 months in TC, there was a significant increase in quality of life (large effect, d=0.92) and a decrease in health problems and depressive symptoms (d=0.20). This initial improvement in quality of life was strongly associated with better treatment outcomes at discharge. |

Several studies assess TC implementation from the aspects of program structure, compliance with standards, and alignment with the needs of inmates. Warih & Setiawan (2024)

confirm the effectiveness of TC implementation from a policy perspective. Their study shows that the successful implementation of the program at Class IIB Purwokerto Correctional Institution was supported by the quality of internal policies and the implementation context, including staff commitment and organizational support. This reinforces the view that TC's success is not solely determined by the program curriculum, but also by the institutional environment, human resource capacity, and work culture. Utami & Sokhivah (2024) highlight the role of group-based interventions in TC. They found that activities such as group therapy, group dynamics, and reflection sessions were effective in shaping behavioral change. Through intensive interaction, inmates learn to accept feedback, develop empathy, and understand the consequences of their behavior. This aligns with the TC principle of "community as method," where the community itself becomes the primary tool for change (De Leon & Unterrainer, 2020). These findings indicate that the implementation of TC in Indonesia has progressed significantly. However, its effectiveness remains highly influenced by institutional readiness, the capacity of mentoring staff, and the availability of supporting facilities.

The most prominent impact identified in this synthesis is the improvement in the quality of life of inmates following participation in TC programs. This influence can be observed across various indicators, including reduced depressive symptoms, improved social functioning, and enhanced perceived well-being. González-Saiz & Vergara-Moragues (2021) also provide strong evidence from a longitudinal study of 142 cocaine-dependent patients. They found a significant increase in quality of life with a large effect size (d = 0.92) after only three months in TC. Furthermore, improvements in quality of life during the early stages of the program were strongly correlated with successful treatment outcomes at discharge. This indicates that quality of life is not merely an ancillary result but an important predictor for long-term recovery success

The TC model emphasizes the community as the method for change, involving group dynamics, discipline, self-reflection, and social learning. The program has been proven to improve mental health and quality of life, which are key factors in preventing recidivism. However, long-term success heavily depends on the continuity of the program after participants leave the prison. Without aftercare, the risk of relapse remains high even if participants show improvement during the program. From a theoretical perspective, TC aligns with the psychosocial approach which emphasizes changes in identity, values, and social relationships. This reinforces the *community as method* concept described by De Leon & Unterrainer (2020).

## 4. CONCLUSION

The results of this literature review indicate that the Therapeutic Community (TC) program has proven to have a positive impact on narcotics-using inmates, both in international and Indonesian contexts, particularly in improving quality of life, reducing psychological symptoms, decreasing risky behavior, and supporting the process of identity recovery through the "community as method" mechanism. Most studies confirm that TC is capable of producing meaningful behavioral changes; however, its long-term effectiveness heavily depends on the quality of implementation, resource readiness, program consistency, support from mentors, and the availability of aftercare services. This synthesis also reveals that several challenges persist, such as suboptimal focus on the roots of addiction, stigma, structural barriers in prisons, and limitations in psychosocial support, all of which impact the risk of relapse. Although TC has been implemented in several prisons in Indonesia, research specifically assessing its influence on the quality of life of inmates remains limited, particularly in Eastern Indonesia, including the Class I Makassar Prison. Therefore, further research is necessary to deeply explore the effectiveness of TC

in local contexts, understand the psychosocial dynamics of participants, and identify program adaptation strategies most suitable for the characteristics of inmates and the challenges of the Indonesian correctional system.

The findings of this literature review highlight the need for more targeted follow-up research to evaluate the effectiveness of the Therapeutic Community program in local contexts, especially through longitudinal research designs and mixed-method approaches capable of capturing sustained changes in quality of life after inmates return to society. Furthermore, future studies should consider the role of contextual factors such as institutional capacity, family support, psychosocial conditions, and the readiness of aftercare services, as these elements have been proven to influence recovery success. The development of quality of life measurement instruments more sensitive to the dynamics of the correctional system and evaluative studies in various types of prisons are also crucial to ensure that TC program adaptations can be implemented more accurately and effectively.

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