

INNOVATIONS

Communicating Behind Bars Under Pandemic (Covid 19) Conditions

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Abstract

This study aimed to determine how inmates in San Jose City Jail manage to maintain a healthy relationship with their respective families amidst being incarcerated under pandemic (Covid 19) conditions. The researcher utilized a set of questionnaires to obtain data. Fifty respondents were selected via simple random sampling, while the interview schedule technique was employed to gather data as well. Descriptive statistics were used to interpret the data. All the respondents were male. The majority of them were single and Roman Catholic. Their common age range is from 28-37 years old, 12 among the respondents were high school graduates, 37 of the respondents used tagalog language, and 25 of the respondents' cases are about drugs. Regarding their communication medium, they all used television, and 29 of the respondents used it often. And out of 50 respondents, 39 of them did not use radios, 28 did not use newspapers, 42 did not use magazines, 33 did not use flyers, 44 used cellphones (for public use) and 28 of them used it very seldomly. Most of the respondents were visited very seldomly. While others were visited once a week, every Sunday, very often, every other day. Other respondents had no visits at all for some reason. Some of them were visited by their families especially their mothers, fathers, and children. The common topics every visiting hours were all about family affairs which are 58% of the respondents. Being industrious, thrifty, submissive, had long patience, dealing with inmates, repentance for their misdeeds, became god-fearing, and learning to pray were the changes of inmates in communicating now that they are in jail. By daily calls, the love, trust, understanding, care, respect for the families of inmates are still there. Also, inmates obey advice, and every visiting hour only happy moments while inmates do not make their family feel stressed are the ways of inmates to restore and maintain a healthy relationship with their families amidst being faced with the challenges of communicating behind prison bars. By visiting the inmates and if they are not able to visit, by calling, they give extra support and give what they need in jail like money and food. This makes inmates feel that they are still cared for and loved. Showing and telling inmates that their case is in progress makes inmates feel cared for. Every visiting hour, their families giving long but tireless preaching is the way of the family of inmates to restore and maintain a healthy relationship with the inmates even if faced with the challenges of communicating behind prison bars.

Keywords: 1. Communicating 2. Behind Bars 3. Pandemic (Covid 19) Conditions

Introduction

Communication is a social skill that has been around since the existence of man. Tied to communication is the environment which shapes the communication process. As a person interacts with others, he or she adjusts his/her attitudes and behaviors to adapt to their environment. For instance, in a workplace environment, communication is exchanged professionally and respectfully. As for those whose environment is the prison facility, the communication process in a prison is often more complicated than in most settings. This is due to restrictions on inmate interactions considering that the Philippines is under pandemic (Covid 19) conditions. Since the prison is such a dangerous environment, interaction with inmates can be intense and sometimes violent. With all the diverse backgrounds joined together with intolerance, hate, ignorance, manipulation, and anger, it is difficult for an inmate to focus on steps to effective communication.

Based on the study of Lucas and Tolentino (2002), we note that effective participation by the leaders can be seen in their ability to assert their rights and present new ideas during regular meetings. Likewise, the negotiation or mediation skills with other LGU officials (city or provincial officials) and how they mobilize their constituents during assemblies are required skills that officials must possess. Therefore, the officers in San Jose City Jail must have the power to organize and maintain orderliness among prison inmates.

Effective communication occurs when one communicates a message to another person where that message is clearly understood. However, there is no doubt that family members are stressed as well as the inmates given all the health protocols imposed by the Bureau of Jail and Management. Communication between family and inmates should be positive. It is hard to be positive all the time. Before the families speak with the inmates, they must focus on creating a positive interaction. Consider their mood at the moment and avoid talking about negativity and depressing topics. The reason why they should try to remain positive is that the inmates are in a very negative environment.

Given this premise, this study focuses on what is the life experience of inmates, their adjustments and transitions from being a man outside the prison and being an inmate. This study wants to know the strategies of inmates in getting and obtaining information from the outside while all of them are in jail. Also, this study wants to know how inmates and their families still have positive communication and still maintain healthy relationships as this can help inmates ease sadness and stress.

Therefore, there is a need to address this kind of problem in dealing with the need to communicate to the family and the outside world. This study will enlighten families and persons involved about the communication needs of the respondents.

Objectives

1. To describe the socio-demographic profile of the respondent.
2. To identify the communication media that facilitates inmates' access to information.
3. To determine how regularly the information resources are utilized by inmates in San Jose City, Nueva Ecija.
4. To determine implications of their current situation affecting communication with their family.
5. To describe how inmates restore and maintain a healthy relationship with family while faced with the challenges of communicating behind prison bars.

Related Review of Literature

Based on the study of Adedokun and Olorunsola (2010) showed that people were aware of what community development is all about. It was affirmed that with good communication, there would be collaborative efforts on issues of development. It was observed that many believed that when communication is effective, participation is enhanced. Many believed that the daily interaction of community members is essential for collective action. The study revealed that daily interaction among community members is a factor for the development and this means in all the community members do to exchange ideas and opinions, there is a need for use of words and so words must be put to use in such a way that everybody in the community would come to a proper understanding of what to do to bring about community development.

Moreover, Adedoku (2000), supporting the appropriate use of words in communication, believes that words are the instruments and the tools of the trade-in community development hence the importance of choosing and arranging words in such a way as to bring out the idea being expressed as exactly as possible out of one mind and into another.

According to the Inmate Information Handbook Federal Bureau of Prisons, "Physical contact between the inmates and his visitor(s) will be limited to a handshake, embrace, or a briefly closed mouth kiss, upon the initial arrival and after the visit. Once the inmates and visitors are seated, inmates may not slump in the chairs, put their feet on the tables, lay on each other, cross legs with another, embrace, massage, or anything else which involves excessive and constant touching. Visitors, except the small child, will not be permitted to sit on the lap of an inmate." Therefore, communication in prison is limited.

In addition, the study entitled "Family Support: What It Means To Male Inmates" found that the incarceration period is an extremely stressful experience, and the stress is best alleviated through support from significant others. Although couples in this study coped fairly well, there were signs they could have used some further assistance. (what study)

For this study, family support is defined, as "the relationship between individuals where contact is frequent through in-person interactions, phone calls, letters, and emotional support is an important and significant factor, the relationship must be beneficial to both parties". (DeGenova & Rice, 2002).

In addition, Inmate Information Handbook Federal Bureau of Prisons said that inmates have the right to visit and correspond with family members and friends and correspond with members of the news media in keeping with bureau rules and institution guidelines. "Incarcerated men and women who maintain contact with supportive family members are more likely to succeed after their release. Research on people returning from prison shows that family members can be valuable sources of support during incarceration and after release. For example, prison inmates who had more contact with their families and who reported positive relationships overall are less likely to be re-incarcerated." (Vera Institute study, 2012)

On the other hand, Arditti (2003) found that visitation seems to have both negative and positive effects on families. It provides an outlet for connection as well as a barrier to feelings of separation. Contact visiting includes face-to-face and physical contact. Another Vera Institute report, published in 2011, stated: "Research shows that incarcerated people who maintain supportive relationships with family members have better outcomes – such as stable housing and employment – when they return to the community. Many corrections practitioners and policymakers intuitively understand the positive role families can play in the reentry process, but they often do not know how to help people in prison draw on these social supports."

Society has shifted its focus from the punishment of prisoners to education, rehabilitation, and the use of their time while serving in prison (Lehman and Locke, 2005). Prison library becomes an important environment in their support for educational, recreational,

and rehabilitative programs. In addition, prisons were established to exploit devices and programs such as Adult and Remedial education for inmates, skills and vocational training, religious instructions, recreational and attitude change towards the achievement of reformation and rehabilitation of inmates to facilitate their social integration into the society after jail (Daramola, 2004). Prisoners as members of the larger society desire and deserve information (Omolola, 2015).

On the other hand, the article of CommGAP (2011) states that Governments have an interest in instituting regimes that are capable, responsive, and accountable. Providing citizens with adequate information on priorities, programs, and activities increases the likelihood that the public authority will be perceived as legitimate by citizens and stakeholder groups, contributing to stabilizing a country's political situation. The communication function underpins many processes of modern leadership and is complementary to various forms of technical expertise. In many cases, successful and sustainable public sector reform requires persuasion: seeking support from elites, encouraging change processes within bureaucracies, and striking an ethical balance between listening to and leading public opinion. Communication requirements often pull government institutions in opposite directions. On one hand, governments must operate in an impartial way to maintain credibility and meet transparency and accountability expectations. On the other hand, government institutions must also act as advocates for their policies.

Haney, (2002) states that offenders entering prison experience unusually high-stress levels, presumably in response to the loss of freedom, deterioration of personal relationships, ambiguity of incarceration, ignorance of prison norms, and feelings of hopelessness. Therefore, social support from those within the prison may become increasingly important to one's emotional well-being of a loss or the changing nature of social support from those on the outside. Support groups are often formed within the penitentiaries to help inmates cope with this change or loss, as well as to improve communication and life skills. (Morgan, Ferrel & Winterford, 1999). Since inmates are often aware of the disorganization occurring in their families' lives, they feel a sense of responsibility and guilt. (Paluch, 2004). In addition, prisoners often behave in a manner that demonstrates opposition to authority that aims to break or challenge prison rules. Although there have been laws enacted to protect prisoners' rights. (Solove, 1996). Therefore, Carlson and Cervera (1991) found that the best predictor of a successful release from prison (not re-offending) was having a stable and supportive family environment where the inmate will return to.

Research Methodology

The descriptive research design was used by the researcher of the study. The researcher used an interview schedule technique in the collection of data among respondents. The researcher used simple random sampling in choosing the respondents. The sampling name which is the list of all the inmates in San Jose City Jail was provided by the Jail Warden. A sample size of 50 inmates was randomly selected. The researcher used descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentages, and mean.

Results and Discussion

Profile of the respondent (Table 1)

Based on the gathered results, most of the respondents are single with a total of 46%, 34% of them are married, 18% of them are separated and 2% are widowed. The majority of the respondents use Tagalog as their means of communication at 74%, Ilocano at 20%, 4% of them are Ilonggo, and 2% use Maranao. Based on this data, not all inmates lived in San Jose or Nueva Ecija, few of them lived in Mindanao, Manila, and Cebu. So, given in the data gathered, inmates have different dialects because not all of them lived in San Jose City. In addition, when the researcher asked one inmate why in San Jose City Jail because he lived in Cebu, he answered that his family did not know where he is and they don't even know until now that he is a prisoner.

Most of the respondents are 28-37 years of age bearing 38% of the total of the respondents, 26% in 18-27 years of age, 38-47 gained with 22% while 48-57 gained 8% and 6% gained from the total of the respondents. All of the respondents are males who belong only to one cell. The educational attainment of the respondents is mostly in high school level with a total of 24% while both College level and High school graduate with 22% and 14% of them are Elementary level, 10% in Elementary graduate and 8% of the respondent are college graduates. This means that the respondents are literate and educated at the same time.

Communication Media Used by the Inmates (Table 2)

Results revealed that an electronic medium, which is the public use cellphone is being used by 88% of the population where 54% said they use it seldom. They call this the call center. In addition, they need to pay ten pesos for a three-minute call. The respondents only call when they have something important to say to save money.

In print media, 56% are not using newspapers, 38% with no answer and 6% answered they are using newspapers, while 2% of that use it seldomly. 66% are not using flyers while 34% are using them. 15% of that use it sometimes. 84% are not using magazines and the other 16% of the respondents use them while 6% of them use them sometimes. 78% of them are not using radios while 22% of them use radios but seldomly. All of them are using television whereas 58% of them said that they use television often while 42% use television sometimes. Inmates said that this is by night because in the morning they need to do their tasks, like cleaning their cell and washing their clothes.

Time and Day of Visitation (Table 3)

All of the respondents answered every Tuesday to Friday, one to four in the afternoon, and Saturday and Sunday nine am to four pm. This is understood,

because this is the rule in jail that everyone needs to follow. It is not intended to limit the rights of the respondents to visitation but to promote public safety and welfare of both the visitors and inmates (following paragraph (b) (2), Sec 4, R.A. 7438 in conjunction with Sec 63, R.A. 6975).

Cases of the respondents (Table 4)

The majority of the respondent's case in the community is drug use, as shown in table 4 with a total percentage of 25% of the respondents. The respondents said that they need to wait

for two to four years to be allowed to post bail. According to the article "Healthy Place," a person with depression may repeatedly use drugs as an escape from their depressive mood called self-medication. According to Drugs and Human Rights – HRW World Report, depression wasn't the cause of drug abuse, but it was a contributing factor. Also, thousands of low-level drug offenders are sent to prison and 80% of people in prison who are arrested are placed in prison due to abuse of drugs said in the article "Prison time for Drug User" so no doubt that in San Jose City Jail most of the inmates are in due to Drug cases, Our nation's prison population has exploded beyond capacity and most inmates are in prison, because of drug abuse. It is followed by rape cases with 12%, while 8% of the respondents' cases are Illegal Recruitment, Robbery is at 6%, 6% Theft cases, also Murder with 6%, while 4% is Homicide, 2% damage to property, 2% extortion, 2% human trafficking and 2% kidnapping cases.

Based on the interview done by the researcher, most of the respondents in the jail already spent 2-5 years because of their case and it may extend depending on the decision of the court. When the researcher asked why they did those, they said that they were out of their minds, they need money, and they need to do those for their families. They said they are already regretting what they have done. This is supported in the article "The free thought" that the most common reason people are in jail is that they are poor. Prisons are places where good and disobedient people are taken to be preyed upon by people who are criminals. When we are talking about prisoners we are not talking about one collective group of people but of many different groups of individuals who should be judged by their actions and their character. This means that every inmate has a very confidential story and it demands respect.

Frequency of Family Visitation (Table 5)

Despite the pandemic conditions with restrictions on a face-to-face visit most of the respondents were visited once a week with 30%. 22% of them were visited once a month, while 8% were visited twice a month. 8% of the respondent were visited every two months, while 10% were visited every visiting hour. 6% were visited every other day and 16% of the respondent were not visited at all.

The respondents that answered that they were visited every visiting hour were those newly incarcerated. The respondents that answered that they were visited once a week, once a month, twice a month, and every two months, said that their families were far from the prison and has no money to visit them often even if they want to; but they said that they understand it. The eight respondents that were not visited said that their families lived in Cebu, Mindanao, and Manila, and their families do not know that they are in prison. Others said that their families were angry at them and does not care about them and they understand it.

According to John Howard of Ontario, in his PDF entitled "Visiting a loved one inside" there is a lot of reason why someone is not able to visit a friend or family member in prison. Fortunately, there are other ways to stay in touch. Try sending letters and pictures to your loved one or family member in the prison. Letters from the people we care about can help us through tough times. Speaking also on the phone is another great way to stay in touch. Based on the interview done by the researcher, if the family of inmates can't visit them, they also send letters and pictures and make some calls since it can help inmates ease loneliness and to stay in touch with each other.

Visitors of the respondents in San Jose City Jail

Table 6 shows which members of the families and friends often visited the respondents. Most of the respondents said that their family often visited them especially their wives, children,

mothers, fathers, and siblings with a total of 70.00% of the respondents. 14.00% said that only their friends are the ones who visit them and the other 16% has no answer because they are not visited.

This could probably mean that in this situation of their life, only their family and friends can remember, support, and understand them. According to the article "Offenders Families Help Line" all visits give prisoners the chance to spend some quality time with their loved ones in a more relaxed environment and outside the constraints of a normal visit. These visits usually give families the chance to participate in activities and there is often the opportunity to share a meal.

Topics that they commonly discuss and talk about during visitation

When their loved ones are visiting them, what are the common topics that they are talking about? The researcher gave six common topics, family, politics, education, economics, technology and entertainment, and other answers. 58% of the respondents answered family affairs, 8% answered about education and the other 16% answered, it's about their case, 10% is about the life of an inmate in prison, and 8% about money, about changes and begging for forgiveness of their family for not visiting. Based on the gathered data, this means their topics when their family visits them can help inmates stay strong, to not lose hope because families show them that they cared, by giving inmates needs in the prison and by fixing his case and not letting inmates feel neglected (Table 7).

The changes of respondents since he became a prisoner

The fifth question, "what are the changes in the communication of the respondents", most of them answered, their way of communication now that they are in prison became more complicated because of the rules, this is 22% of the respondents. They are restricted when talking to their families not like before (Table 8). While 36% of the respondents answered they become industrious, and thrifty because the respondents said that it has a punishment if they do not. Some became God-fearing because it is the only way to lessen the sadness if they have no one to talk to and thrifty. After all, the respondents said that not all the time can they get what they want, only when they were visited by their family, also their food is limited so they need to contribute that's why they need money in the prison. 12% of the respondents answered they need to deal with inmates to lessen conflict in cells, even if they don't want to. In the observation of the researcher, some inmates are bossy and inmates that treat others as a slave, so to avoid misunderstanding between co-inmates, they need to deal with them. 30% of the respondents answered they became submissive, had long patience, repentance for their misdeeds, and learned to pray because this is their only way to stay strong and fight to live. This could probably mean that this will be the lesson for the respondents because they are not only regretting the sins they have done inside but also became more responsible people. According to the researcher, when she asked this question, most of the respondents she interviewed were teary-eyed and they said they want to come out of prison as soon as possible because according to them, life in prison is so difficult.

Ways of inmates to maintain a healthy relationship between their families.

The ways of inmates to maintain a healthy relationship between them and their families, there were 32% of the respondents answered, by daily calls, asking if they are okay and how the life of their families outside are and when their families will visit again, and 30% by the love,

trust, understanding, care, and respect for the family is still there so that the commitment to their family will never change, said by the respondent. While 20% of the respondents obey the advice of their families and during every visiting hours, only happy moments, no stress. Lastly, 18% has no answer, the researcher asked why but they chose to be silent (Table 9).

Ways of the family to maintain a healthy relationship with the respondents

Lastly, what are the ways of their families to maintain also the communication between them, 24% (Table 10) of the inmates answered by visiting them and if they are not able to visit, they call and but only positive conversations. Also, 18% of them answered by giving what they need in the jail-like money and food because according to the respondents they have limited stocks of food in the jail.

While 12% by making inmates feel that their families still care and love them. 6% by their families showing and telling inmates that their case is in progress and they will never let the inmates feel neglected. 22% responded every visiting hour, their families have long but tireless preaching. 16% of respondents have no answer because they are not visited. Based on the gathered data this means also the family of respondents do their part to maintain and restore a healthy relationship. According to also to John Howard in his article "Visiting a loved one inside?" keeping in contact with family also means that your loved one won't feel like a stranger when they return to the outside world.

Conclusion

The overall finding of the study is that inmates' communication with family and friends is a very important ability to cope with the anxiety of prison life. It is hard to be positive all the time but their family remains positive because their loved one is in a very negative environment. In this study, inmates and their families create positive interactions to maintain healthy relationships with their families and so that inmates will not feel like a stranger when they return to the outside world.

Recommendation

Build a library inside the jail, so that the inmates especially those who don't have a chance to study will learn good things while they are in the prison. Treat prisoners as patients, not criminals.

For the inmates, turn to faith and embrace hope, especially to those inmates who are not visited by their families. Avoid being alone, keep in touch with family and friends, get involved with programs provided by the prison that is designed to help inmates rehabilitate and that perhaps they may get a job in the prison. Stay positive and may this be the lesson in their life that will turn them into a better person and have a better life when the time comes that they can go out of that jail.

Third, for the family of inmates, avoid talking about negativity and depressing conversations. If they have something important to tell them, then do so but it should focus more on how they convey their message. Look at the positive side of the circumstance and keep it active in the conversation. For instance, if a relative or friend is sick tell them but include the positive outcomes or at least provide hope by remaining positive about the situation. Hope is comfort, comfort inmates with hope.

And last, for the next researcher who wants to study this type of topic, they should be brave enough to deal with different people in jail, different cases, and different behavior. It was

recommended to further study the life of inmates, like what his life is before he became an inmate and what his life is now in jail to determine their reasons for being there. It is recommended also to interview family members of the inmates to know their side and to strengthen and support this type of study.

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Disclosure statement

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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DescriptiveItem	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Civil Status		
Single		
Married	23	46.00
Separated	17	34.00
Widowed	9	18.00
	1	2.00
Total Dialect	50	100.00
Ilocano		
Ilonggo	10	20.00
Maranao	1	2.00
Tagalog	2	4.00
Total	37	74.00
Edad	50	100.00
18-27		
28-37	13	26.00
38-47	19	38.00
48-57	11	22.00
58-67	4	8.00
Total	3	6.00
	50	100.00
Sex		
Male		
Total	50	100.00
	50	100.00
	7	14.00
	5	10.00
	12	24.00
	11	22.00
	11	22.00

Religion		
Christian	4	8.00
Catholic	38	76.00
IglesianiCristo	5	10.00
Islam	3	6.00
Total	50	100.00

Table2. Communication Media

Medium	Response	Frequency of usage	Frequency (n)	Percentage %
Cellphone	No		6	12.00
	☐	Sometimes	28	56.00
	☐	Always	16	32.00
	Total		50	100.00
Newspaper	No		28	56.00
	☐	Sometimes	1	2.00
	☐	Always	2	4.00
	No response		19	38.00
Total		50	100.00	
Flyer	No		33	66.00
	☐	Sometimes	15	30.00
	☐	Always	2	4.00
	Total		50	100.00
Magazine	No		42	84.00
	☐	Sometimes	6	12.00
	☐	Always	2	4.00
	Total		50	100.00
Radio	No		39	78.00
	☐	Sometimes	6	12.00
	☐	Always	5	10.00
	Total		50	100.00
Television	No		0	100.00
	☐	Sometimes	2	42.00
	☐	Always	29	58.00
	Total		50	100.00

Table 3. Timeand Day of Visitation

Response	Frequency (n)	Percentage %
Tuesday-Friday(1pm-4pm) Saturday& Sunday(9am-4pm)	50	100.00
Total	50	100.00

Table 4. Cases ofthe respondents

Response	Frequency (n)	Percentage %
		%
Drugs	25	50.00
Rape	6	12.00
Illegal Recruitment	4	8.00
Murder	3	6.00
Robbery	3	6.00
Theft	3	6.00
Homicide	2	4.00
Kidnapping	1	2.00
Damageto Property	1	2.00
Human Trafficking	1	2.00
Extortion	1	2.00
Total	50	100.00

Table 5. Frequency ofFamily Visitation.

Response	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Onceaweek	15	30.00
Onceamonth	11	22.00
Everytwo months	4	8.00
Two times amonth	4	8.00

Everyvisitinghour	5	10.00
Everyother day	3	6.00
No visit	8	16.00
Total	50	100.00

Table 6. Visitors of the respondents in San JoseCityJail

Response	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Family	35	70.00
No response	8	16.00
Friends	7	14.00
Total	50	100.00

Table 7. Topics that they commonlydiscuss and talk about during visitation.

Response	Frequency (n)	Percentage (&)
FamilyAffairs	29	58.00
Attending to the case	8	16.00
Life in prison	5	10.00
Education	4	8.00
Changes	2	4.00
Asking for forgiveness	1	2.00
Money	1	2.00
Total	50	100.00

Table 8. The changes of respondents since hebecamea prisoner.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Industrious,religious, .and thrifty	18	36.00
Limited communication with family	11	22.00
Socialization,friendly	6	12.00
No more vices	2	4.00
More patient	2	4.00
Become jolly	2	4.00
Prayerful	2	4.00
I can't help my family	1	2.00
Learned how to forgive	1	2.00
Learned how to cope up	1	2.00

No more gadget	1	2.00
No money	1	2.00
Total	50	100.00

Table9.Ways of inmates to maintain a healthy relationship between their families.

Response	Frequency (n)	Percentage (&)
Daily calls	16	32.00
love, trust, understanding, care, and respect for the family	15	30.00
No answer	9	18.00
To become straight and kind	2	4.00
To change	2	4.00
I told them what I want to tell and all my secret	2	4.00
To become a good child.	1	2.00
Thrust	1	2.00
I told them not to do what I did	1	2.00
I still doing my role as a father	1	2.00
Total	50	100.00

Table 10.Ways of the family to maintain a healthy relationship with the respondents

Response	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Always visit and think positive	12	24.00
They gave me all my needs.	9	18.00
No answer	8	16.00
Calling and showing their love to me	6	12.00
Happy and no blaming.	5	10.00
They cheer me up	4	8.00
They attended to my case	3	6.00
They gave me advice.	2	4.00
They send a letter to me	1	2.00
Total	50	100.00