



Research at a glance

Drug Detection Strategies: International Practices within Correctional Settings

KEY WORDS: *drug detection, interdiction, mandatory drug testing, drug detection dogs, ion scanner, x-ray technologies detection*

Why we did this study

Keeping drugs out of federal correctional institutions is a high priority for both the Correctional Service of Canada and the Government of Canada. The existence of drugs within prisons is a danger to those who work there as well as those who reside there. In addition, it can impede the rehabilitation process of many offenders with substance abuse problems. This literature review responds to recommendations by the Independent Review Panel on Federal Corrections to examine best practices in drug interdiction policies and practices in other correctional jurisdictions.

What we did

An international review of the literature on drug interdiction strategies was undertaken focusing specifically on the United Kingdom, the United States and Australia. The review examined the use of the most commonly used drug interdiction practices including; drug detector dogs, trace (ion scanner) and bulk (X-ray) technologies and mandatory drug testing by various international correctional jurisdictions.

This is an under-researched area of corrections. When available, empirical studies that explored the impact of different interdiction methods on the presence and availability of drugs in correctional environments were also examined.

What we found

The most common forms of drug detection practices and strategies are all currently being used by CSC and are capable of detecting drugs. However, each method has unique benefits and limitations. Drug detector dogs can be trained to detect most or all drugs of interest, although the short duration of time the dogs are able to work is a limitation. Trace detection tools are highly specific, which enables them to detect small amounts of many substances, but they are very costly and require specific training to operate. Urine testing is the most common form of mandatory drug testing across jurisdictions, however, adequate indications of overall drug use can be compromised by varying half-lives of drugs (i.e. how long drugs remain in the body).

The available literature indicates that drugs can be brought into prisons through various means including visitors, prisoners, staff, mail, and poorly guarded perimeters. Most studies focused on one method of entry, making it impossible to evaluate the relative effectiveness of different

interdiction activities. Further, studies were not easily comparable due to differences in the collection and presentation of data.

What it means

Taken together, we confirmed that drug interdiction tools are capable of detecting drugs. However, which tool or combination of tools yield the most effective approach remains unclear. The available literature contains serious methodological limitations that make it difficult to draw firm conclusions. To address this problem, studies on the efficacy of drug interdiction practices need to include a standardized method of tracking all searches and uses of detection tools.

To address these information gaps, the Addiction Research Centre is collaborating with the Atlantic Region on a multi-site project to examine the impact of drug interdiction strategies on the presence of drugs in the institutions. This employs a standardized data collection system in the collection of search and seizure information. The results of this study will provide the Service with valuable information on the effectiveness of the drug interdiction activities used in federal correctional institutions.

For more information

Dastouri, S, Johnson, S & Moser, A. (2012). *Drug Detection Strategies: International Practices within Correctional Settings*. Research Report, R258. Ottawa, Ontario: Correctional Service Canada.

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