



# Research at a glance

## Dialectical Behaviour Therapy within a Women's Structured Living Environment

**KEY WORDS:** *Mental Health, Women Offenders, Dialectical Behavior Therapy*

### Why we did this study

One of the strategic priorities for the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) is ensuring that we have "improved capacities to address mental health needs of offenders" in an attempt to facilitate their safe community re-integration and reduce their risk of recidivism.

One approach to this issue has been the implementation of a series of Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) initiatives, designed for women with mental health and behavioural dysregulation needs. This research presents the results of an evaluation of the comprehensive version of this initiative, offered within the Structured Living Environment (SLE) units in the five regional women's facilities.

### What we did

Assessments related to outcomes in the area of offender functioning in the institution, changes in psychiatric symptomatology, patterns of psychological symptoms, coping strategies, subjective moods, self-control, negative experiences and pessimism, and post-release outcomes were examined.

Data were collected from November 16, 2001 to May 30, 2004. A total of 94 women contributed data regarding their participation in DBT during the data collection period.

### What we found

This study demonstrated that women who participated in DBT attained improvements of moderate to high magnitude on a wide variety of measures of psychological symptoms and well-being. Given the sample size available for analysis in this study, the number of areas in which statistically significant results were obtained is noteworthy, and suggestive of a strong treatment effect associated

with participation. Furthermore, there were no measured areas in which women demonstrated deterioration after participation.

The post-release findings suggest that while DBT participants have their conditional releases revoked at higher rates than average, the large majority of these revocations are due to technical reasons, and their actual rate of re-offence is relatively low.

### What it means

The study provides support for the success of DBT within a SLE. The intervention is meeting its goals in terms of decreased negative psychological symptoms, increased coping skills, and increased institutional functioning. Additionally, there is very preliminary support to suggest that involvement in DBT may contribute to lowered rates of self-injury.

Overall, the adaptation of DBT to the correctional environment appears to meet the unique needs of women with important mental health and behavioural dysregulation needs thereby providing support for its continued delivery to women within the SLE.

### For more information

Blanchette, K., Flight, J., Verbrugge, P., Gobeil, R., & Taylor, K. (2011). *Dialectical Behaviour Therapy within a Women's Structured Living Environment*. R-241 Ottawa, Ontario, Correctional Services Canada.

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