CORRECTIONAL SERVICE CANADA

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The Use of Technology in the Delivery of Correctional Intervention Programs: A Rapid Review

Results on the efficacy of technology-based treatment modalities are promising; however, more research is needed.

Why we did this study

Alongside the proliferation of technology in contemporary society, there has been increased attention on the role technology can play within the criminal justice system. The impetus of the current study was to review the literature on what technology has been used in the provision of correctional treatment programming, the effectiveness and viability of these methods, and also identify any best practices recommended when implementing these modalities.

What we did

A comprehensive search of several databases including ProQuest, government correctional agencies, the Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews, the Campbell Systematic Reviews, and Google Scholar was conducted. Where possible, focus was placed on studies centering on correctional interventions; however, this research was limited and the search was broadened to include the areas of distance education learning, telehealth, substance use treatment, and virtual reality therapy.

What we found

Available literature indicates that the use of technology to assist in the delivery of services and interventions within correctional populations are found in a number of jurisdictions; however, technology is not routinely utilized in correctional intervention programs. More commonly, it is used in the provision of substance misuse treatment, intimate partner violence treatment, health services, and distance education learning.

Evidence is promising for these interventions, with much of the research demonstrating that alternative methods of program delivery are just as effective as face-to-face methods, with similar or greater reductions in substance misuse and recidivism.

However, concerns have been raised regarding the use of technology in the correctional environment. These concerns include:
- Operational challenges integrating technology into the correctional environment (e.g., security concerns, technological malfunctions)
- Privacy and confidentiality concerns
- Responsivity issues for older offenders and individuals with cognitive deficits, ADHD, or other learning disabilities
- Decreases in the strength of the therapeutic alliance

Best practices that should be followed when implementing technology-based programs include: considering the adaptability of the program to alternative methods of delivery, adequate testing of technology, investments in staff training, and ensuring that program delivery is sensitive to the individual needs and learning styles of the offender. For instance, this could involve presenting information in multiple formats (e.g., text, audio, and video).

What it means

Overall, alternative methods of program delivery that utilize technology are promising, particularly for remote locations or as individual adjunct maintenance sessions or counselling options. However, more research is needed before firm conclusions can be made with regards to the efficacy and viability within the correctional setting, especially in comparison to face-to-face group delivery. Conclusions were limited due to the few research studies focusing on correctional intervention programs and those that did exist were generally small-scale studies.

For more information

Wardrop, K., & Sheahan, C. (2018). *The use of technology in the delivery of correctional intervention programs: A rapid review* (Research Report R-423). Ottawa, Ontario: Correctional Service of Canada.

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