



Research at a glance

The Effectiveness of Correctional Programs with Diverse Offenders: A Meta-Analytic Study

KEY WORDS: *correctional programs, diverse offenders, cognitive-behavioural treatments, recidivism*

Why we did this study

Canada's federal offender population increasingly represents a broad range of ethnic and cultural groups. Some critics have suggested that the current correctional model may not be appropriate for all ethnic groups. There is evidence to suggest, however, that cognitive-behavioural treatments, which form the basis of CSC's correctional programming, are appropriate for individuals from a wide range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The present study seeks to examine the effectiveness of CSC's correctional model for offenders of diverse ethnic backgrounds, as well as estimate base rates of reoffending for those groups.

What we did

A meta-analysis of all previous outcome research on CSC correctional programming was conducted. Studies were selected for inclusion if they investigated cognitive-behavioural interventions, included federal offenders from a wide range of ethnic groups, used recidivism as an outcome measure, and employed a comparison group methodological design. Participants were grouped into four different ethnic groups: Aboriginal, Black, Caucasian, and Other. Overall mean effect sizes were calculated for each group using the odds ratio.

Base rates of reoffending for each ethnic group was also estimated. A person-year analysis was applied to control for time-at-risk.

What we found

Overall, it was found that all ethnic groups showed decreased likelihood of recidivism after participating in correctional programs. Odds ratios ranged from 1.36 to 1.76, in favour of treatment. For example, Aboriginal offenders who participated in correctional programming had odds of success that were 1.45 times greater than Aboriginal offenders who did not participate in programming. No significant

differences were found between ethnic groups with respect to magnitude of effect size.

Base rates of readmissions to custody were also calculated for offenders in the treatment and comparison samples for each ethnic group. The highest rates of recidivism were found for Aboriginal offenders, followed by Caucasian, Black, and Other offenders.

What it means

Results indicate that CSC's correctional programs are equally effective across a broad range of ethnic groups. Offenders who participate in programs are less likely to recidivate than non-participants, regardless of ethnic background. While the cognitive-behavioural treatment model appears to be effective in addressing criminal recidivism for offenders with diverse cultural backgrounds, the results do not preclude attending to responsivity issues related to culture within the treatment model. Offender ethnicity and culture remain important responsivity factors in effective correctional programming.

For more information

Usher, A. & Stewart, L. (2011). *The effectiveness of correctional programs with diverse offenders: A meta-analytic study*. Research Report R 246. Ottawa, ON., Correctional Service of Canada.

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