



Research at a glance

Prevalence Rates, Profile, and Outcomes for Federally Sentenced Offenders with Cognitive Deficits

KEY WORDS: *cognistat, offenders, cognitive deficits, recidivism*

What it means

Although cognitive deficits are associated with areas related to successful functioning in the community, they do not appear to pose a particular challenge to institutional or community management. Offenders with cognitive deficits may require assistance with education and employment to improve their reintegration potential. Interventions like correctional programs could help these offenders manage impulsivity and poor planning caused by their cognitive deficits.

While the Cognistat was the clinical tool utilized for data collection in the current study, it is unsuited to a large scale assessment of offenders. The recent inclusion of a self-administered IQ screening tool in the Computerised Mental Health Intake Screening System (CoMHIS) is a preferable alternative that will provide Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) with valuable ongoing information on the intellectual functioning level of incoming offenders and also assist staff in individual case planning and supervision.

What we found

Twenty-five percent of the incoming men offenders had some level of cognitive deficit (21% non-Aboriginal offenders and 38% Aboriginal offenders). Lower educational achievement, unstable employment history, learning disabilities, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) were found to be significantly associated with the presence of cognitive deficits in this sample. Offenders with cognitive deficits served a larger proportion of their sentence prior to first release and had more admissions to segregation. Level of cognitive deficit, however, was not consistently related to institutional charges or completion of required correctional programs. Furthermore, level of cognitive deficit was not related to returns to custody on release, even when significant covariates were held constant. Likewise, level of cognitive deficit was also not associated with returns to custody with an offence.

Further analysis did not demonstrate a significant relationship between offenders serving a current

sentence for a violent offence and cognitive deficits. While offenders with cognitive deficits were more likely to have serious alcohol problems, they were not more likely to have significant problems with drugs. Although offenders with cognitive deficits had more symptoms of ADHD, they were not significantly more likely to have a diagnosis for a mental disorder.

Why we did this study

Impaired cognitive function has been associated with criminal behaviour. There was no information on the rates of cognitive deficits within the CSC population, or the extent to which such deficits may impede participation in the offenders' correctional plans and affect key correctional outcomes.

What we did

Over a 14 month period between 2006 and 2007, all incoming men offenders in the Regional Reception and Assessment Centre in the Pacific region were approached to participate in an assessment of cognitive function using the Cognistat, a neurocognitive screening measure. In total, 488 men (93%) consented to participate. We examined the percentage of offenders with cognitive deficits and the association of cognitive deficits with other offender characteristics and correctional outcomes such as institutional charges, correctional program completion, and community outcomes after release.

For more information

Stewart, L.A., Sapers, J., Cousineau, C., Wilton, G., & August, D. (2014). *Prevalence rates, profile, and outcomes for federally sentenced offenders with cognitive deficits* (Research Report R-298). Ottawa ON: Correctional Service of Canada.

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