



# Research in Brief

## Prevalence and Profile of Reactive and Instrumental Violent Offenders

*Reactive and instrumental violent offenders in CSC differ in their criminal histories and risk and needs ratings.*

### Why we did this study

Previous research has distinguished two groups of violent offender subtypes: reactive violent offenders (RVOs) and instrumental violent offenders (IVOs); the former's violence occurring in response to perceived provocation and the latter's being primarily goal-directed (Cornell, 1996). This analysis examined the prevalence and the profiles of IVOs and RVOs within a sample of federally-incarcerated violent offenders.

### What we did

Criminal histories of 401 violent male offenders were classified as IVO or RVO subtypes based on relevant criteria such as degree of planning or motivation of offence<sup>1</sup>. IVOs and RVOs were then compared on a number of offence and risk-related variables.

### What we found

Overall, 62% of the sample was classified as predominately IVOs and 37% as RVOs. With regard to offence history, more RVOs were serving a current sentence for assault or a homicide-related offence, relative to IVOs, who were more likely to be serving a sentence for robbery-related offences. No group differences in previous violent adult or youth convictions were observed; however, RVOs were more likely to have previous domestic violent convictions (32% vs. 14%).

In addition, compared to IVOs, RVOs were more likely to have committed a *homicide* (13% vs 27%) or to have caused *serious* (10% vs. 16%) or *severe injury* (9% vs. 18%) to their victims; whereas, IVOs were more likely (35% vs. 8%) to have *threatened a victim with a weapon*. IVOs were significantly more likely to have committed their violent index offence against a stranger than RVOs (77% vs. 35%). RVOs victim's were more likely to be an acquaintance (25% vs. 12%), a specific relationship (22% vs. 10%), or a romantic or familial relationship (10% vs. 1%).

<sup>1</sup> Groups were categorized using the Aggression Rating Form (Vitacco et al., 2006). Approximately 1.5% ( $n = 6$ ) had insufficient information to code offence category.

Differences in dynamic risk-related needs were also observed by subtype. More RVOs than IVOs were assessed as having considerable needs within the *personal/ emotional* domain (89% vs. 77%) For example, RVOs were more likely to *have difficulties solving interpersonal problems, being aggressive, and having a low frustration tolerance*. IVOs were more likely to have issues with *managing their time poorly and being thrill-seeking*. Comparatively, IVOs, had considerable needs within the *Criminal Associates* domain than RVOs (49% vs. 35%). Notably, however, *community functioning* was an asset for more RVOs than IVOs (54% vs. 39%). Finally, a subset of the current sample was assessed on the *Violence Risk Scale (VRS; Wong & Gordon, 2006)*.<sup>2</sup> Although both groups were assessed as high risk (scores > 50) at both pre- and post-program, IVOs were assessed at a higher risk level than RVOs.

### What it means

Despite challenges noted in the literature in distinguishing IV and RV offenders, differential patterns emerged between these subtypes based on type of violent offences, severity of violence, victim relationship, and risk and specific criminogenic needs. Future research could examine program and release related outcomes to understand the broader impact of these differences between subgroups.

### For more information

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<sup>2</sup> This is a risk assessment tool originally designed to evaluate changes in risk associated with treatment completion. It is comprised of 6 static and 20 dynamic predictors theoretically and empirically validated to be predictive of violent recidivism.