CORRECTIONAL SERVICE CANADA
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Virtual Correctional Program Delivery: A Literature Review

Virtual delivery of correctional programming is an acceptable and effective method of treating and reducing antisocial behaviour, even when compared to traditional, in-person methods of program delivery.

Why we did this study

The Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) delivers in-person correctional programs to target offenders' criminogenic need areas. However, the COVID-19 pandemic acted as a catalyst to change how CSC delivers these programs. To help inform the shift from delivering programs completely in-person to integrating the delivery of virtual correctional programming, the current literature review sought to answer three research questions:

   (1) What is virtual correctional program delivery and what are the various formats it takes?
   (2) What are the potential benefits and drawbacks of delivering correctional programs virtually?
   (3) What are the principles of effective virtual delivery to a diverse offender population?

What we did

In order to answer these research questions, a comprehensive search of various databases (e.g., JSTOR, Scholars Portal, ProQuest, PsycINFO, Criminal Justice Abstracts, government correctional agencies, and Google Scholar) was conducted.

What we found

A review of the literature indicated that virtual correctional program delivery (VCPD) is the incorporation of technology to replace or supplement the delivery of traditional classroom-based, face-to-face correctional programs. Furthermore, VCPD can be delivered via three methods: online learning platforms/pre-recorded lectures, tele- and/or videoconferencing, and virtual reality (VR) technology. The limited amount of research in this area indicated that these delivery formats have produced equal effectiveness when compared to – and in some instances, greater effectiveness when *supplemented* with – traditional, in-person delivery formats.

Identified benefits of VCPD include tailoring programs towards offenders' unique learning styles, increasing access to and timely completion of programming, and assisting in the development of technology literacy, among others. However, potential drawbacks also need to be considered, including security considerations, lack of or limited active program participation, and potential challenges with adequately addressing responsivity concerns.

Virtual correctional program delivery, like traditional, in-person program delivery, should follow the principles of risk, need, and responsivity (RNR). Additional principles of effective virtual delivery to diverse offender populations include ensuring that the material is accessible to all participants (e.g., using plain language, clean and organized slides, etc.) and promoting aspects of social interaction that might not come as naturally in virtual settings.

What it means

Overall, the emerging literature in this area – coupled with the ever-changing nature of correctional operations and the offender population – present a unique opportunity to integrate the use of virtual delivery in CSC's correctional programs.
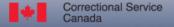
For more information

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