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Correctional Service
Canada

Service correctionnel
Canada

RESEARCH REPORT

COMMUNICATIONS AND CORPORATE DEVELOPMENT

Research Report

Research Design for the Cognitive Skills Training Program

HV
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R47
1990

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=====**Research Report**=====

**Research Design for the
Cognitive Skills Training Program**

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This report is also available in French. Ce rapport est également disponible en Français.
It is available from the Communications Branch, Correctional Service of Canada, 340
Laurier Avenue West, Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0P9.

1990, N°. B-06

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Summary of the Research Design for
The Cognitive Skills Training Program

1. Intimate Selection Criteria Checklist

2. Interview by coach for referral to program

3. Subject file data

Research Design for the
Cognitive Skills Training Program

- a. File information
- b. SRI Scale
- c. CTS Grouping and Post-Test Analysis

Pre- and post-test semi-structured interview / Cognitive Abilities Behavior Rating Scale

Pre- and post-test paper and pencil cognitive assessment

Research Brief No. B-06

a. Antisocial attitudes
Criminal Sentiments Scale (Andrews, 1990)

b. Impulsivity
Eysenck Impulsiveness Questionnaire (Eysenck & Allsup, 1968)

c. Interpersonal sensitivity
Common Problem Situations

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Program progress report

- a. 10 day
- b. 20 day
- c. 30 day

Final report at program completion

Post-program evaluation

Post-program follow-up

June 1990

- a. 6 months post-release
- b. 12 months post-release

Summary of the Research Design for The Cognitive Skills Training Program

1. **Inmate Selection Criteria Checklist**
2. **Interview** by coach for referral to program
3. **Subject file data**
 - a. File information
 - b. SIR Scale (Nuffield, 1982)
 - c. CMS Grouping and Force Field Analysis (Lerner, Arling & Baird, 1982)
4. **Pre-and post-test semi-structured interview / Cognitive Abilities Behaviour Rating Scale**
5. **Pre- and post-test paper and pencil cognitive assessment**
 - a. Antisocial attitudes
Criminal Sentiments Scale (Andrews, 1985)
 - b. Impulsivity/empathy
Eysenck Impulsiveness Questionnaire (Eysenck, Pearson, Easting & Allsop, 1985)
 - c. Interpersonal cognitive problem-solving ability
Common Problem Situations
6. **Interim progress reports**
 - a. 10 day
 - b. 20 day
 - c. 35 day
 - d. Final report at program completion
7. **Participant evaluation**
8. **Recidivism follow-up**
 - a. 6 months post-release
 - b. 12 months post-release

Summary

The research design of the Cognitive Skills Training Program follows a simple, pre/post design. Prior to the beginning of training, all program participants are administered a battery of measures designed to assess their level of cognitive skills and their attitudes toward criminal behaviour. Following the completion of the program, offenders are reassessed using the same instrument so that changes can be measured. Members of the control group are assessed in the same testing periods as the program participants.

Selection

An Inmate Selection Criteria Checklist was developed specifically for this program and is administered to all offenders who are within one to two years of some form of conditional release and who might benefit from cognitive skills training. This measure, completed by case management staff in the institution, evaluates cognitive abilities and identifies high risk, high needs offenders. Offenders with high levels of cognitive skill deficits are referred for an interview with the program coach.

Following the interview with the offender, the coach makes a final judgement on the suitability of the offender. The names and Finger Print Serial (FPS) identification numbers of all potential participants are submitted to National Headquarters staff. A research officer, external to the project, randomly assigns subjects to either the program or comparison group. On the basis of available spaces, the maximum amount of offenders are placed in the treatment condition.

Pre- and Post-Test Assessment

The assessment battery includes a semi-structured interview to assess cognitive ability, a corresponding behaviour rating scale which is based on the interview (Cognitive Ability Behaviour Rating Scale), a measure of antisocial attitudes (The Criminal Sentiments Scale), a measure of impulsivity, empathy and risk-taking (The Eysenck Impulsiveness Questionnaire), and a measure of interpersonal cognitive problem-solving ability (Common Problems Situations). With the exception of the Cognitive Ability Behaviour Rating Scale, all measures are self-administered to offenders using a paper-and-pencil format. The entire assessment battery is administered by the program coach.

Subject File Data

Extensive information from inmate case file reviews is gathered by a trained research assistant. This information includes basic demographic data, the number and nature of institutional misconducts, the extent of participation in other personal development programs during the current incarceration and details regarding current offense, sentence, and behaviour and functioning in the community prior to incarceration.

Information is also recorded so as to score the Statistical Information on Recidivism Scale (SIR; Nuffield, 1982) for each offender. The SIR Scale is a statistically-derived instrument that combines measures of demographic characteristics and criminal history to predict the recidivism of offenders released from Canadian federal institutions. Finally, offender needs are identified using Case Management Strategies (CMS) Groupings (Lerner, Arling & Baird, 1986) and the prioritized Force Field Analysis of Needs. The CMS is designed to classify offenders into four groups (Limit Setting, Casework Control, Environmental Structure, Selective Intervention). These groupings have implications for how the offender should be managed. The Force Field Analysis identifies the specific offender needs which require attention.

Pre-test interview. The pre-test semi-structured interview is completed by the coach before any of the paper-and-pencil measures. This interview is composed of 29 items and surveys a broad range of cognitive skills.

Cognitive Abilities Behaviour Rating Scale. Following the interview, the coach makes overall global ratings of the offender's cognitive capabilities. The ability to recognize and solve interpersonal problems, to develop alternatives, recognize consequences, achieve and set goals, general egocentricity, social perspective taking ability, impulsivity and overall cognitive style are measured by this scale.

At post-test, both the interview and the rating scale are repeated for the comparison group by the coach. Since the coach is already familiar with the program participants, the rating scale is completed for them without the interview.

Criminal Sentiments Scale. The Criminal Sentiments Scale (Andrews, 1985) is a 41-item self-report questionnaire which measures key dimensions of criminal sentiments. Using 5-point agreement scales, the subject reports on attitudes toward the law, courts and police, tolerance for law violations, and identification with criminal others. High scores on attitudes toward law, courts and police indicate prosocial attitudes and high scores on the tolerance for law violations and identification with criminal others scales indicate antisocial attitudes.

Eysenck Impulsiveness Questionnaire. The Eysenck Impulsiveness Questionnaire (Eysenck, Pearson, Easting and Allsop, 1985) is a 54-item Yes/No self-report instrument which measures impulsiveness, venturesomeness and empathy.

Common Problem Situations. The Common Problem Situations is a 3-item role-playing measurement of problem-solving ability. Each situation is read to the offender who is asked to provide a solution. Written responses are recorded verbatim by the interviewer. The instrument includes a marital/interpersonal problem situation, a financial/employment situation and a situation which addresses companions and peer pressure.

Each item is scored on the basis of seven criteria: Identification of the problem, definition of the problem, recognizing fact versus opinion, gathering necessary information, developing alternatives, assessing consequences and verification of the solution.

Interim Progress Reports

Following three logical breaks in the program (day 10, day 20 and day 35), interim progress reports are completed by the coach for each program participant. These reports record how well the offender has done with respect to skill acquisition, motivation, level of participation and behaviour in the group and external settings. Global measures of final progress are also recorded at the end of the program.

Participant Evaluation

An evaluation questionnaire is completed by each group participant approximately two to three weeks following the completion of the program. Items concerning utility, practicality and overall satisfaction with the program are rated on a 4-point scale ranging from "Not at all" to "Extremely". Items concerning the application of the program skills to other situations are rated on a 4-point scale ranging from "Never" to "Always". Abilities of the coach are rated on a 4-point scale ranging from "Poor" to "Excellent". Additional open-ended questions concerning the participants' overall impressions of Cognitive Skills Training and recommendations for future program development are recorded in paragraph form.

Follow-Up

Recidivism is monitored for each of the treatment and control group members. The offenders' community adjustment is evaluated by recording new offenses and technical violations at 6 months and one year following any form of conditional release from the institution.

Outcome research will focus on assessing the effectiveness of the program in reducing the rate of recidivism. The research design also allows the study to investigate which individuals benefit most from the program. Examination of the SIR Scale scores and CMS Groupings will be used to investigate the influence of offender risks and needs on changes in behaviour. For example, we are interested in determining whether the program is differentially effective for low and high risk offenders. In addition, whether or not changes on any of the target behaviours are related to recidivism will provide an assessment of the effectiveness of specific program components.

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