

Effectiveness of correctional treatment

A literature survey

Summary

Currently there is a discussion going on in the Netherlands concerning the effectiveness of the criminal sanction system, including correctional treatment.

An important question is if it is possible to develop a kind of reference tool (checklist) to assess or predict the effectiveness (defined as reducing recidivism and reinforcing rehabilitation) of sanctions and correctional treatment.

This literature survey (of mostly North-American literature) tries to answer this question. The survey has been limited to reviews of research literature (meta-analyses and narrative reviews) concerning effectiveness of correctional treatment in general and effectiveness of treatment designed for specific types of offenders: sexual offenders, violent offenders and drug addicts.

In spite of methodological problems and the difficulties of categorization of interventions, the meta-analyses show that some kinds of intervention can have some effect. Programs based on cognitive-behavioural principles seem to be the most effective.

Some general features of programs most closely linked with succes are:

- a theoretically sound concept;
- 'programme integrity';
- competent staff, good physical conditions, structured setting;
- thorough assessment of the offender and targeting his specific criminogenic needs;
- intensive service for high risk delinquents (those who have a great risk to recidivate);
- relapse-prevention and aftercare.

Cognitive-behavioural treatment also seems to be effective for specific kinds of offenders. Specialized treatment programs have been developed for some types of offenders, for example sexual offenders. Aversion therapy, therapy to change distorted thoughts and relapse prevention, or hormonal therapy in combination with other therapy can be successful. It is doubtful that therapy is effective with the most pathological sexual offenders, as they are often excluded from program participation by screening procedures.

In Canada, drawing on empirically based evidence, a cognitive skills training program was developed, *Reasoning and Rehabilitation*. Evaluation indicates some program success with delinquents who have 'cognitive deficits'.

In some countries an 'accreditation movement' has been initiated (England, Scotland, Canada) for prison programs as well as programs in the community (probation). The accreditation criteria are based on the findings of empirical research. The criteria seem applicable in the Netherlands, but they will have to be translated to the Dutch situation.

Effectiviteit van sanctieprogramma's: bouwstenen voor een toetsingskader; een literatuuronderzoek

E.M.Th. Beenackers

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