

Behavioural intervention So-Cool

Process evaluation

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SUMMARY



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Instigation

The behavioural intervention Sociaal-Cognitieve Oplossingen Leren (Social-Cognitive Solutions Training) (So-Cool) is an individual behavioural intervention for young people aged from 12 to 18 years (with an extension up to 23 years)¹ with an IQ of 50-85 who commit offences and have deficiencies in social problem-solving skills. The main aim of So-Cool is to reduce recidivism among delinquent young people with a mild intellectual disability (MID). The intervention is based on the Social Information Processing Model (SIP) and focuses on increasing social skills and social problem-solving and self-confidence. The training can be imposed by the juvenile court or the prosecutor as part of a training order. There are two variants: a standard variant of 40 hours and an extended variant of 50 hours. The implementation of the So-Cool training order was outsourced in 2012 by the Child Protection Board. The intervention is currently implemented by two organisations: Jan Arends (part of the Calder group) and the William Schrikker Groep (WSG). The intervention will be outsourced once again in 2016.

In 2013 So-Cool was recognised by the then Ministry of Justice Accreditation Committee for Behavioural interventions. This means that the programme met all the quality criteria set by the Ministry of Security and Justice. The policy management board of Sanctions and Youth at the Ministry of Security and Justice requested that a process evaluation be carried out during the period in which the intervention accreditation process was being reorganised. It believed that it was important to carry out a process evaluation as this provides insight into the feasibility of an effectiveness and impact study. To be able to assess the effectiveness of an intervention it is necessary to have some insight into the integrity of the programme.

DSP-groep was commissioned by the Scientific Research and Documentation Centre of the Ministry of Security and Justice to carry out a process evaluation of the So-Cool behavioural intervention between July 2015 and May 2016.

Central research question

The question that is central to the evaluation is:

Is the So-Cool behavioural intervention implemented as set out in the programme instructions? What are the possible bottlenecks in the implementation and what are the underlying causes of these?

Note 1 When So-Cool was developed, it was possible to impose So-Cool on young people aged 12 - 18 years with an extension up to 23 years. Since the introduction of the Adolescent Learning Order on 1 April 2014 all training orders that are recognised as interventions are also possible for young people up to the age of 23 years.

The central questions were divided into five main questions:

- 1 To what extent is the So-Cool behavioural intervention implemented in accordance with the instructions that were approved by the Ministry of Justice Accreditation Committee for Behavioural Interventions for the three areas target group, implementation and context? To what extent are the effective elements referred to in the instructions implemented in practice?
- 2 If bottlenecks occur in the implementation of the So-Cool behavioural intervention, what are the causes of these?
- 3 What are the factors conducive to the implementation of the So-Cool behavioural intervention and what are the obstacles?
- 4 How do the organisations involved assess So-Cool behavioural interventions and what are their experiences?
- 5 What can be concluded from the results of this process evaluation about the possible feasibility of an effectiveness study and an impact evaluation?

We looked at three areas of programme integrity:

- 1 the target group (characteristics based on inclusion criteria and contraindications)
- 2 the effective elements
- 3 the context (requirements and conditions for the implementing professionals and organisation)

Method

We used several research methods to answer the research questions:

- analysis of the documents relating to the programme instructions
- interview with managers from WSG and Jan Arends
- group interviews with supervisors and trainers as well as representatives of the national staff organisation of the Child Protection Board
- analysis of the details registered by the Child Protection Board relating to So-Cool training orders imposed, So-Cool training orders recommended by the Board, and So-Cool indications between 1 January 2014 and 1 July 2015
- file research in the Child Protection Business Process System (for contraindications) (n=100)
- observation of group supervision by trainers
- questionnaire for trainers and supervisors about requirements
- brief file research regarding training sessions (n=100) and comprehensive file research regarding training sessions (n=40)
- observations of current training sessions (n=14)
- interviews with juveniles (n=14), buddies (n=2) and parents (n=6).

In order to assess the effective elements we operationalised the effective elements on the basis of the programme instructions and set up an assessment framework.

Effective elements
<i>Modified duration and phasing</i>
<i>Extensive diagnostics</i>
<i>Customisation</i>
<i>Didactic modifications</i>
<i>Network and generalisation</i>

Inflow, throughput and outflow

In 2014 and in the first half of 2015 So-Cool was launched 349 times: the standard variant 267 times and the extended variant 82 times. A third of the So-Cool training orders are imposed without So-Cool recommendations by the Child Protection Board. In the case of 13% of the juveniles no National Instrument for Juvenile Criminal Law (LIJ) was applied. Over half of these (8% of the juveniles who are given So-Cool) enter the training via a school absenteeism study. The extent to which So-Cool is imposed in the various areas of the Child Protection Board differs. Over 80% of the So-Cool training orders are completed in full and around 20% are terminated prematurely.

Target group

On the basis of the details from the registration system of the Child Protection Board we determined the extent to which the young people who participate in So-Cool meet the inclusion criteria and contraindications. The intervention is intended for young people with a medium General Recidivism Risk (in Dutch: ARR), an IQ of 50 - 85 and deficiencies in problem-solving skills. Only 9% of the juveniles meet all the inclusion criteria set out in the So-Cool instructions. Juveniles who do not meet all the inclusion criteria above all have a higher ARR (59%) than set out in the inclusion criteria. This indicates the inflow of a more serious target group than is intended. An important explanation for the non-compliance with the inclusion criteria set out in the instructions is the broader criteria that are adopted in the LIJ with regard to the instructions. All the child welfare investigators decide on their recommendations in part using the LIJ. The LIJ indicates, for a So-Cool, if there is a medium ARR and/or a medium Dynamic Risk Profile (DRP) This is in contrast to the instructions that refer only to a medium ARR. On the basis of these broader criteria the target group that is eligible for So-Cool is six times larger than on the basis of the criteria set out in the instructions. However, only 56% of the participating juveniles comply with the broader indication criteria in the LIJ.

Implementation of effective elements

Most of the effective elements set out in the instructions are sufficiently implemented in accordance with the instructions. We note that in the case of some effective elements there is room for improvement. The modified duration, comprehensive diagnostics, customisation and didactic modifications are for the most part implemented in accordance with the instructions. As regards the supervision some attention needs to be devoted to the didactic modifications in the form of modified communication. This is not equally well implemented by all the trainers.

With regard to the working element 'network and generalisation' improvement is possible as regards the involvement of parents and buddies. Although improvement is needed, we cannot quantify this as the involvement of parents and buddies is not clearly registered. The qualitative interviews show that the trainers put a lot of effort into involving parents and buddies but this is not sufficiently successful. The same is true of the practical meetings. It is not clear from the records whether the two prescribed meetings always take place. Booster sessions are scheduled in most of the training sessions but it is not clear if they always happen.

Context

All the trainers and supervisors meet the requirements for education and supervision as set out in the instructions. However, the video monitoring has not yet been implemented as prescribed at the time of the fieldwork. The required recordings are being made at the end of 2015 but are not yet being assessed using the video monitoring form. The supervisors and the trainer have recently amended the form.

The intervention is implemented by two organisations. On the whole there are no differences between the organisations as regards the implementation of the intervention. However, we do note differences in the way in which supervision is organised, the way in which the details about the training sessions are registered, and the background of the trainers (at WSG all the trainers have experience with the MID target group).

Bottlenecks in the implementation

There are no major bottlenecks in the implementation of the So-Cool training order. The following bottlenecks are mentioned:

- The referral of the juveniles to So-Cool (the time taken between the imposition of the order and the start of So-Cool) sometimes takes a long time. In the case of the MID target group it is important that the order starts as soon as possible after the offence. If there is too much time in between they cannot adequately make the link between the offence and the training order. The time in between can influence the extent to which So-Cool has an effect.
- There is insufficient material available for concrete exercises. Concrete material for exercises is important as regards responsiveness for the MID target group. The trainers often have to provide this themselves at the moment. As a result some trainers possibly overuse pen and paper, which does not fit well with the target group.
- A lot of attention is devoted to finding and involving buddies and parents but this is not yet being sufficiently implemented.
- Modified communication is not equally well implemented by all the trainers. This means that the information possibly does not get through to all the juveniles. This is a point of attention for training and instructions.

Factors that are conducive to implementation and obstacles to implementation

The main factor conducive to So-Cool is customisation. The training can be adapted to suit the juvenile's individual requirements. The instructions prescribe this customisation.

The main obstacles in the implementation are:

- There is no good, clear registration of the effective elements in both of the implementing organisations. At the moment the two organisations register the elements in different ways, and how and what has to be registered has not been clearly operationalised for all the effective elements.
- There is too little material available for concrete exercises. Concrete material for exercises is important as regards responsiveness for the MID target group. It is difficult to make material available centrally as the trainers carry out the training at a location near the juvenile and there is no 'central' office where trainers regularly go.

- The video monitoring still has to be started in accordance with the requirements set out in the instructions.
- The selection of the target group.
- A lack of clarity about using rewards. Greater attention could be devoted to this in the training and supervision.
- Not all the trainers implement the modified communication well enough. This is partly a result of the trainers' experience with the target group and a lack of attention paid to this in the supervision.

Appreciation

All the people involved value the intervention (juveniles, parents, buddies, trainers and supervisors) as do most of the collaboration partners. In some regions the community service coordinators indicate that the quality of the trainers varies and there is a desire to see greater diversity in the pool of trainers. The trainers and supervisors on the other hand indicate that the collaboration with the community service coordinator varies from region to region – and from person to person. There is above all a lack of clarity concerning whose role it is and whose responsibility it is to involve other chain partners in the training. There is also a need for clearer communication at the start of So-Cool for juveniles and parents about the involvement of parents and buddies and the need for booster sessions.

Opportunities for effectiveness studies and impact evaluation

All the measuring instruments that should be used for the effectiveness study are used. However, supervisors and trainers do not think that the Self-Perception Scale for Adolescents is suitable. In their opinion it is not a suitable instrument for achieving the objective of measuring 'the increase in self-confidence' among this target group. The tool is too 'difficult' for most of the participants. If a more suitable tool cannot be made available for this target group, the trainer believes that a modified instruction can possibly be considered for use. Nor is the most recent version of the Social Information Processing Test used. The Social Information Processing Test has been further developed since the start of So-Cool, a validation study has been carried out, and standard scores will be available sometime this year. So it is to be recommended that the most recent version of the Social Information Processing Test be used for measuring problem-solving skills.

The inflow of juveniles into So-Cool is sufficient for the implementation of an effectiveness study and for the measurement of progress regarding the programme's objectives among the participants (study of change). An effectiveness study should however make a distinction between the juveniles who do meet the inclusion criteria and those who do not.

The inflow is now also sufficient for the implementation of a recidivism study. However, it is not clear whether a sufficiently large control group can be put together. A major bottleneck is that the criterion 'mild intellectual disability' is not properly registered in the Child Protection Business Process System so it is not easy to put together a control group that meets this criterion. There are also possibilities for carrying out an impact study without a control group.

A point of attention when carrying out an effectiveness study is the falling numbers of suspects and imposed punishments among juveniles over the last few years (Kalidien & De Heer-de Lange,

2015)². The reduced inflow can have consequences for the required period for being able to select a sufficient number of participants for an effectiveness and recidivism study.

Conclusion

We can conclude the following about the three parts of the programme integrity (target group, effective elements and context) that we have studied. The So-Cool target group inflow is not the intended target group. The Child Protection Board uses different criteria to those set out in the instructions. The inflow is of a more serious target group. This can have consequences for the effectiveness of the intervention. A better selection of the intended target group could possibly lead to a greater effect on the programme objectives. Most of the So-Cool effective elements are sufficiently implemented in accordance with the instructions. There is some room for improvement in the implementation of a few effective elements. There could be some improvement above all with regard to 'network and generalisation'. Good monitoring and registration of the effective elements is recommended to achieve good quality control. The trainers meet the supervision and training requirements. Video monitoring for monitoring programme integrity is not (yet) being carried out. On the basis of the programme theory an impact can be expected and studied.

Note 2 Kalidien S.N. & de Heer-de Lange, N.E. (2015). Criminaliteit en rechtshandhaving 2014. Ontwikkelingen en samenhangen. WODC/CBS, Den Haag.



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