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# Evidence-based interventions during detention

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## - SUMMARY -

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Amsterdam, 26 May 2021  
Publication no 20114

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# Summary

## Introduction

The reason for this study is a motion tabled by MP Van Wijngaarden requesting an inventory of judicial programmes to reduce recidivism and to investigate under which conditions interventions can be broader implemented in prisons. The motion considers that actively improving the basic conditions for successful reintegration decreases the chance that detainees reoffend after a prison sentence. The Research and Documentation Centre of the Ministry of Justice and Security commissioned RegioPlan Policy Research to conduct the inventory.

The notion 'intervention' can be understood in a narrow, broad, or integral sense. In this study, the focus is on interventions in the narrow sense (trainings and courses) with attention to broader programmes where possible (support and work). Interventions in the integral sense (the broader organisational climate including culture and treatment) may be important for reintegration and the effectiveness of narrow interventions, however, they are outside the scope of this study.

## Objective and research question

The aim of this study is to gain insight into the offer of effective (preferably evidence-based) judicial interventions to improve the basic conditions for successful reintegration and reducing recidivism among adult detainees. The main question is: which evidence-based interventions are deployed in Dutch penitentiaries (or could be deployed) during detention and what are the preconditions to effective realisation? Evidence-basedness is a strict requirement and therefore, the study also focuses on interventions that are not evidence-based, but are substantiated by scientific or practical knowledge and, preferably, have been subject to process evaluations.

## Methods

To answer the research question, use was made of the online database of the Judicial Interventions Recognition Committee (*Erkenningscommissie Justitiële Interventies*), the Lab Project (*Project Lab*) of the *Koers en kansen* programme, and documentation of the Custodial Institutions Agency (*Dienst Justitiële Instellingen, DJI*), and the after-care and resettlement organisations (*reclasseringsorganisaties, 3RO*). Nineteen semi-structured interviews were held with DJI officials, penitentiaries in the Netherlands and on Bonaire, 3RO and expert organisations for specific target groups and problems (such as mild intellectual disabilities and language deficiencies). First, an inventory of promising interventions was made. After that, the penitentiary programmes aimed at basic conditions were listed. Subsequently, all interventions and programmes were described that meet the minimal conditions for evidence-basedness. Finally, by means of interviews, the insights on the preconditions, obstacles, and feasibility of application in detention were mapped out.

## Findings

### *Recognised interventions to decrease recidivism among adult detainees*

The database of the Judicial Interventions Recognition Committee (EJI) contains 34 recognised interventions, 10 of which are (specifically) aimed at adults. They focus on risk and protective factors and intend to reduce reoffending by means of influencing criminal behaviour. The focus is on problems to do with psychosocial functioning, addiction, aggression, mild intellectual disability (*LVB*), parenting, and cognitive and problem-solving skills. The interventions are carried out by the after-care and resettlement organisations. In penitentiaries, trainings have also been offered that are variations of evidence-based interventions. Recognised interventions are not aimed at the basic conditions for reintegration. The offer of evidence-based interventions for detainees that serve a short sentence is limited. Three quarters of the detainees are detained for less than three months, a quarter of whom stay for a period shorter than two weeks in the penitentiary. Therefore, the time for detainees to participate in interventions during the detention period is limited.

#### *Unrecognised behavioural interventions to decrease recidivism among adult detainees*

According to respondents in penitentiaries, at least two interventions aimed at violence and aggression regulation are offered (on alcohol abuse and relational violence) that are regarded as unrecognised by the Judicial Interventions *Recognition Committee* (EJI). Nevertheless, they have already been optimised or continue to be developed within the framework of the Quality Forensic Care programme (KFZ).

#### *Other behavioural interventions aimed at decreasing recidivism*

Only few interventions have emerged that are known in the work field, but not (yet) offered in detention. *Insofar as they are mentioned*, the interventions concerned are deployed outside detention, for example as part of suspended sentences or other special conditions.

#### *Reintegration trainings to improve the basic conditions*

In addition to the interventions recognised by EJI, unrecognised interventions are also offered in penitentiaries. Six easily accessible reintegration trainings of DJI are specifically aimed at basic conditions (housing, income from work or a benefit, debt counselling, identity certificate and (health) insurance, and building up or strengthening a positive, supportive social network). These reintegration trainings are documented and (mainly) underpinned by practical knowledge.

#### *Reintegration projects included in Koers en kansen*

Nine interventions included in the programme *Koers en kansen* focus on enhancing the skills of detainees regarding basic conditions for a safe return to society. These pilots are accompanied by evaluative research, and more information on the results will become available in the future.

#### *Programmes of civil society organisations*

These programmes are mainly aimed at influencing the mindset of detainees and at strengthening positive social relations, (partly) with the objective to reduce the risk of recidivism. Central to part of these interventions is a restorative approach. Four interventions are documented, however, not on evidence-based data.

#### *Interventions for target groups with (extra) problems*

No specific interventions have been found for the target groups of detainees with low literacy and psychological problems. Four evidence-based interventions are focused on detainees with mild intellectual disabilities (LVB'ers). For detainees with addiction problems three evidence-based interventions are available.

The package of interventions that is offered differs per penitentiary. It is influenced by the perceived problems of detainees and the target groups present, and in addition also by the views of prison employees about the effectiveness of interventions and preferences for certain types of interventions. Several logistic, physical, and organisational factors hinder the offer of interventions: the busy day schedule, lack of space and a shortage of qualified trainers. The familiarity with interventions also plays a part. In addition, there is a perceived lack of intrinsic motivation among participants: it is observed that some detainees are mainly extrinsically motivated to participate in interventions, because under the promotion and demotion regime this yields profit. With regard to interventions funded by local budgets (for example for activities that relate to restorative detention), the costs may form a hindrance.

At the moment, the costs of interventions do not determine the offer of interventions. However, the offer of non-evidence-based interventions provided by external parties is perceived as expensive and this may entail that they are not being used. This applies, for instance, to trainings with a specific approach, such as restorative detention. There seems to be a need among prison employees for a national list of interventions, experiences, costs, and funding.

## Conclusion

The Van Wijngaarden motion calls on the Minister of Legal Protection to present an overview of evidence-based interventions to be applied in detention, in order to pursue the aim to reduce recidivism more effectively.

There does not appear to be a large unused potential of new or extra evidence-based interventions that could be deployed to further the aim to reduce recidivism. Familiarity with the current offer, however, could be increased. Certainly, continuity is also important, because a large part of the detainees is serving short sentences.

For an enhanced effort to reduce the risk of recidivism, a better utilisation of existing evidence-based interventions is not the only important aspect. The combination of narrow (evidence-based) interventions and reintegration trainings aimed at basic conditions can be interpreted as a broad intervention, that could contribute to a safe return to society. The detention climate in penitentiaries also appears to be important. As an integral intervention, it could contribute to a different mindset of detainees – not in the least because many detainees stay too briefly in the penitentiary to be able to participate in narrow interventions.



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