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CONSORTIUM

Australian Consortium for Research Excellence
in Reducing Persistent Violence and
Sexual Offending

Prevention and Intervention Summary Report

Are psychological treatments for adult violent offenders associated with change in dynamic risk factors? A meta-analysis of intermediate treatment outcomes

- ✓ Psychological treatments for violent offenders have a significant positive effect on reducing anger and impulsivity, and in improving social problem solving and general social skills.
- ✓ There is a need for more high-quality studies that evaluate the effects of violent offender treatment on both dynamic risk factors and recidivism.

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Centre for Forensic
Behavioural Science

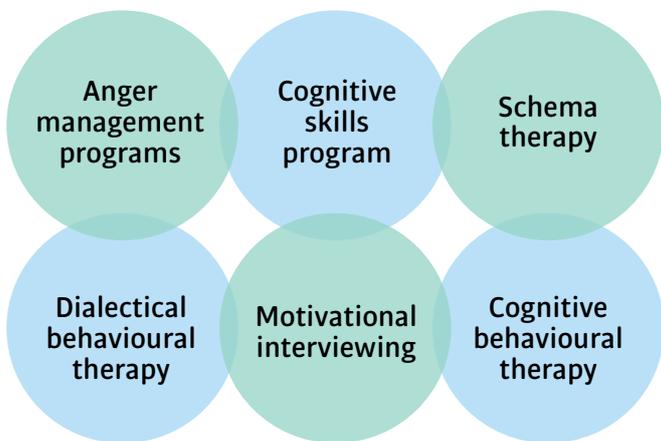
Background

Violent behaviour is a significant problem. Its consequences span strain on the justice and health sectors, long-lasting psychological impacts for victims and their families, weakened public perceptions of safety, and reduced quality of life for perpetrators. Treatments for violent offenders can be effective in reducing violent reoffending. This reduction may occur through a weakening in the strength of ‘dynamic risk factors’ – changeable factors thought to influence an individual’s likelihood of engaging in violence. But, it is unclear whether dynamic risk factors actually change in violence treatments, for whom change is most likely to occur, and which treatment features are most relevant to change.

Aim of the review

We conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis of research studies that evaluated the effectiveness of psychological treatments in adult violent offenders across correctional (i.e., violent offenders in prison, supervised on community corrections orders, or released on parole) and forensic mental health settings (i.e., mentally disordered violent offenders in psychiatric in-patient facilities or receiving out-patient treatment). We were interested in the impact of treatments on dynamic risk factors.

Psychological treatment approaches



The review forms part of a larger systematic review that also examined the impact of psychological treatments delivered to violent offenders on reoffending and the factors that influence the effectiveness of treatment. A summary of findings of the broader review can be found [here](#).

Approach to the review

We conducted a comprehensive search for studies that evaluated the effects of psychological treatment among adult violent offenders. To be included in our review, studies were required to:

- a. include a comparison group of violent offenders that did not receive the treatment under consideration; and
- b. measure the effects of treatment on at least one dynamic risk factor.

A total of 22 independent evaluations were identified, 18 of which provided enough information to be included in the statistical analysis. These studies were conducted between 1990 and 2017. Most were conducted in the UK (13), with the remaining conducted in the US (4), Australia (3), the Netherlands (1), and Canada (1).

What is a systematic review?

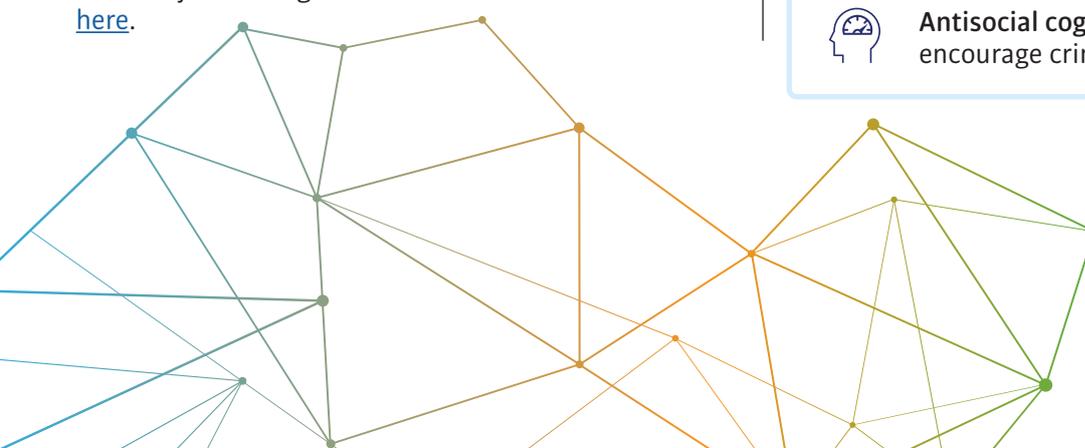
- Combines *all* relevant research that exists on a particular topic.
- Follows pre-defined ‘rules’ for locating, selecting, and evaluating relevant studies.
- Integrates and summarises the results from all relevant studies and provides conclusions and recommendations.

What is a meta-analysis?

- Refers to how the results of a systematic review are integrated.
- Provides a descriptive summary of the results and uses statistical procedures to combine and summarise the results.

Dynamic risk factors examined in the review

-  **Trait anger:** A lifetime tendency to experience anger generally or in response to provocation.
-  **Impulsivity:** Tendency to engage in behaviour with little or no planning or forethought.
-  **Social problem solving:** Extent to which a person attempts to identify or engage in helpful coping responses for everyday social problems.
-  **General social skills:** Absence of problems in social functioning.
-  **Antisocial cognitions:** Ways of thinking that encourage criminal or harmful behaviour.



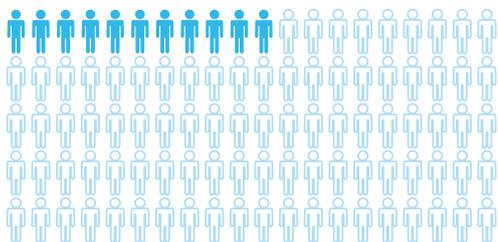
Are psychological treatments with violent offenders effective in generating change in dynamic risk factors?

Psychological treatments delivered to violent offenders across correctional and forensic mental health settings were effective in reducing anger and impulsivity, and in improving social problem solving and general social skills. We did not find a statistically significant treatment effect for antisocial cognitions.

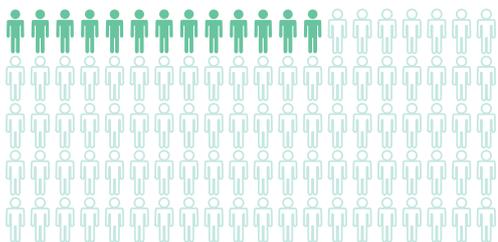
Impact of treatment on dynamic risk factors

For every 100 violent offenders who receive psychological treatment (compared to those who did not receive treatment):

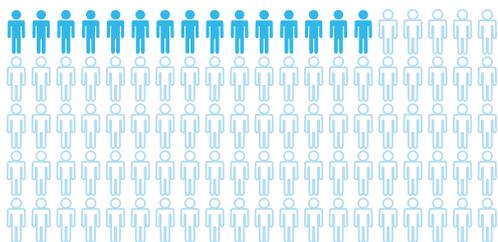
11 will have a more favourable outcome on **trait anger**



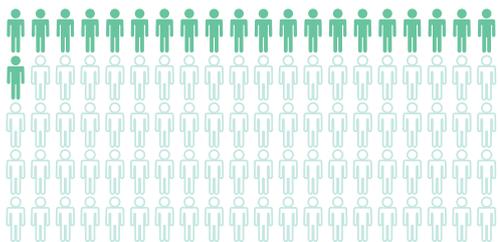
13 will have a more favourable outcome on **impulsivity**



15 will have a more favourable outcome on **social problem solving**



21 will have a more favourable outcome on **general social skills**

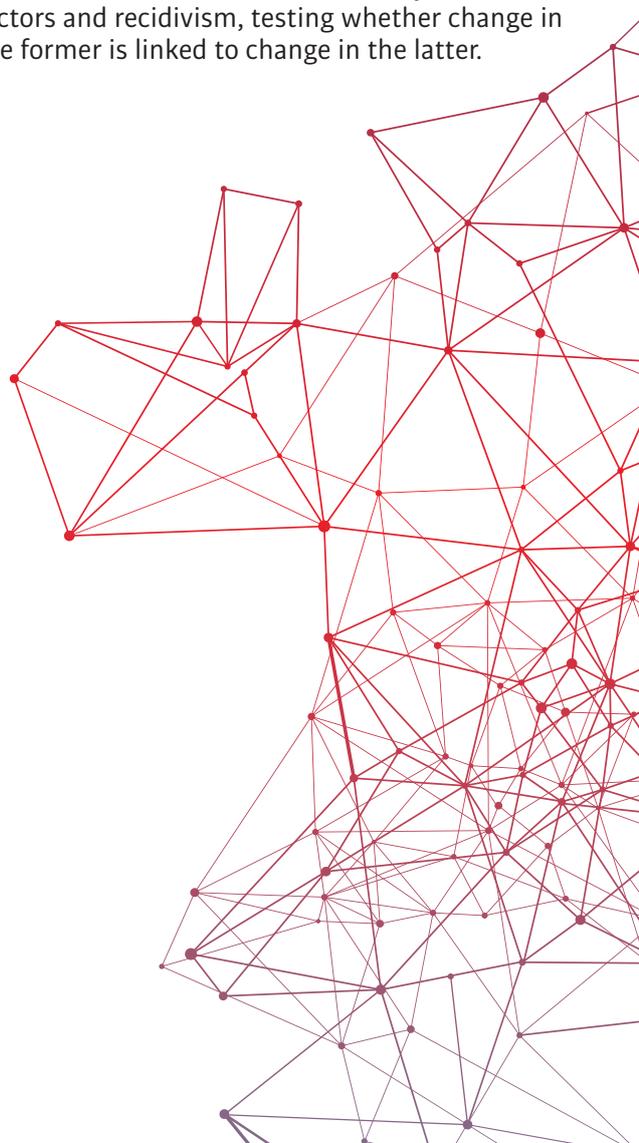


Key limitations

- ⚠ There are a relatively small number of high-quality studies in this area. This makes it difficult to draw firm conclusions.
- ⚠ Determining factors that impact the effectiveness of treatment was limited by the level of detail described in each study.
- ⚠ The dynamic risk factors available for analysis were not exhaustive.
- ⚠ Although we found improvements in anger, impulsivity, social problem solving, and general social skill, we don't know whether these improvements resulted in reductions in violent recidivism.

Key implications

- ✅ On average, psychological treatments for violent offenders have a significant positive effect on anger, impulsivity, social problem solving, and general social skills.
- ✅ There is a need for a greater volume of high-quality studies that evaluate the effects of violent offender treatment on both dynamic risk factors and recidivism, testing whether change in the former is linked to change in the latter.





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Detailed study findings can be found here: Papalia, N., Spivak, B.; Daffern, M., & Ogloff, J.R.P. (2020). Are Psychological Treatments for Adults With Histories of Violent Offending Associated With Change in Dynamic Risk Factors? A Meta-Analysis of Intermediate Treatment Outcomes. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 47(12), 1585-1608. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093854820956377>

Detailed study findings of the larger systematic review can be found here: Papalia, N., Spivak, B., Daffern, M., & Ogloff, J.R.P. (2019). A meta-analytic review of the efficacy of psychological treatments for violent offenders in correctional and forensic mental health settings. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, 2019;e12282. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cpsp.12282>

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