

# DEPARTMENT FOR CORRECTIONAL SERVICES

Rehabilitation programs for serious and  
high risk offenders:  
meeting the evaluation challenges

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Government of South Australia  
Department for Correctional Services



# DCS strategic plan 2011-2014

## Vision:

- A safer community by protecting the public and reducing reoffending

## Mission:

- Contribute to public safety through safe, humane management of offenders and provision of opportunities for rehabilitation and reintegration



# Strategic plan: Key objectives

- Contribute to public safety and confidence by targeting dangerous, serious and high risk offenders
- Provide targeted interventions and rehabilitation services



# Rehabilitation programs – target groups

- Sex offenders
- Violent offenders
- High risk general offenders
- Young offenders (18 to 26 years)
- Sex offenders with low cognitive functioning
- Female offenders with BPD at risk of suicide or self-harm



# Issues for evaluation of recidivism outcomes

- Inability to use randomised control designs
- Establishing valid matched comparison groups
- Sample size:
  - Sufficient follow-up periods
  - Cohorts



# Violence Prevention Program (VPP)

- Introduced in 2006
- Developed by New Zealand Corrections
- Runs for 7 to 9 months
- Delivered in custodial and community settings
- Group treatment (10-12 participants per group)
- Treatment targets include: Anti-social attitudes and beliefs, impulsivity, problem solving, empathy, emotion management

# Violence Prevention Program (VPP)

- To date, 12 prison and 3 community based programs have been completed
- 5 programs in progress or due to commence
- Total of 168 participants in finalised programs
- Completion rate 76% (n=128)
- Average follow-up period 27 months
- Offenders with follow-up period of >2yrs (n=43)

# VPP evaluation methodology

- Pre-post administration of psychometric tests to measure domains targeted by treatment
- T-tests for significant pre-post differences
- Calculate effect sizes for whole sample (Cohen's  $d$ )
- Scores compared to clinical cut-offs derived from normative data (Jacobson et al, 1984)
- Individuals assigned to treatment target cohorts on the basis of scores



## VPP review Proeve, M. & Dobbin, H. (2012)

- T-tests and effect size calculations were repeated for the sub-group of offenders with an identified treatment target
- Calculation of clinically significant change within the 'treatment target' group
- Clinical significance: critical value of 1.96 SDs outside of the mean of the dysfunctional group
- Post tx scores outside the critical value were taken as demonstrating clinically significant change

## Empathy measure

- Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) administered as a measure of general empathy
- Subscales: Empathic Concern, Perspective Taking
- At the time of the review,  $n = 105$  treatment completers
- Percentage in treatment target range: Empathic Concern 34.5%, Perspective Taking 69.0%
- Pre-post t-tests non-significant on both scales for whole sample, significant for tx target group

# Empathy measure - results

	<b>Effect size: whole sample</b>	<b>Effect size: treatment target group</b>	<b>Clinically significant change (%)</b>
Empathic concern	.08	.89	22.5
Perspective taking	.16	.49	20.6

# Conclusion

- Clinical significance approach provides more targeted measures of program efficacy
- Allows evaluators to report on outcomes of complex initiatives in the short to medium term
- Provides an indication of content areas to focus on in terms of the needs of the participant group
- For forensic programs, provides greater confidence in relation to positive findings