

Abstract

Authors: Maria Danielsson, Axel Fors, Ingrid Freij, Martin Lardén and Niklas Långström

Effectiveness of a Group-Administered CBT program in Sweden (2003-2006) on Criminal Recidivism: A Quasi-Experimental Study

Objective: We conducted a quasi-experimental study of the effectiveness in reducing criminal recidivism among individuals who participated in a general offender treatment program used within the Swedish Prison and Probation Service (Kriminalvården).

Background: The Swedish Prison and Probation Administration supply over 15 different treatment programs for clients with the aim to reduce recidivism rates. As part of the accreditation process each treatment program undergoes a thorough effectiveness evaluation.

The program “Breaking with crime” (in Swedish: Brotts-Brytet), was developed within the prison and probation services in Sweden and has been used since 1994. It is a manual-based group program administered over eight to ten weeks for a total of 50 hours. Both clients in prison and on probation are offered the program with the aim to decrease recidivism in general crime such as theft, burglary, and fraud.

Method: In the present study a total of 10868 clients who had either been released from prison or commenced a sentence of probation in Sweden between January 1, 2003 and December 31, 2006 were followed for an average of 1,9 years. 988 clients who had completed Brotts-Brytet during the period constituted the treatment group. They were compared to a control group of 9880 clients who had not participated in any treatment programme during the period. The control group was chosen using a stratified selection based on sentence. Both groups were followed until first new crime leading to a conviction, death, or end of follow-up on September 1, 2007, whatever occurred first. Data were analyzed in multivariate Cox regression models, taking into account identified confounders of the association between treatment participation and criminal recidivism.

Results: 79% (n=781) participated in a prison-based program and 70% (n=695) completed the entire treatment program. We found no statistically significant difference in recidivism rates either between treatment and control groups, or specifically between program completers and controls when controlling for identified confounding factors.

Conclusion: Results are discussed in terms of program development and changes during the inclusion period which might influence treatment integrity and program efficiency. Other study limitations included restricted data on individual risk (e.g. impulsivity, motivation, pro-criminal attitudes) that might vary between treatment and control groups and differentially affect recidivism.