

Understanding the program needs of youth justice clients in South Australia

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BACKGROUND

The Youth Justice Directorate is interested in developing its knowledge of the needs of young people in custody in order to deliver programs and services that are matched to these needs.

This poster reports the findings of a survey of new receptions at the Adelaide Youth Training Centre (AYTC) over a three month period.

AIM

To identify client needs in the following areas:

- Criminal thinking
- Mental health
- Youth Justice needs
- Childhood trauma
- Disability
- Anger

METHOD

Participants (N = 28)

- Males aged 14 to 18 years ($M = 16.04$; $SD = 1.11$).
- Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (53.6%).
- Guardianship of the Minister (28.6%).
- Involved with a worker from a service (57.1%).
- Self-reported a history of violent offending (21.4%).
- Most common offences: breach of bail or home detention and theft (both 28.6%).

Procedure

- Ethical approval was obtained to survey centre residents over a three month period.
- Participation was entirely voluntary and written consent was obtained from the young person.
- Assessments were 30 to 40 minutes in duration.

Measures

- GHQ-12 (Goldberg & Williams, 1988) – a mental health screening tool.
- The Client Outcome Tool (Day & Casey, 2012) – a case management self-report measure assessing offending behaviour, family cohesion, social competence, future orientation, and education, training and work needs.
- WHO Disability Assessment (WHO, 2010) – assesses functional disability.
- Short Anger Measure (Gerace & Day, 2014) – measures anger and aggressive impulses.
- The Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (Pennebaker & Susman, 1988) – assesses the experience and understanding of six trauma experiences (death, parental divorce, sexual abuse, violence, illness, and other).
- Psychological Inventory of Criminal Thinking (PICTS; Walters, 2010) – assesses attitudes and thinking styles that support and maintain a criminal lifestyle.

RESULTS

Mental Health

- Nearly all participants reported significant mental health needs (scores >9 on the GHQ; 81.5%).
- Higher level of need than that found in a Victorian young offender sample (community and detention; 51.1%; Casey & Day, 2015), and in an Australian normative sample of adolescents (53.9%; Baksheev et al., 2011).

Youth Justice Needs

- Young people rated their needs in the following order (highest to lowest):
 1. Family cohesion
 2. Offending behaviour
 3. Future orientation
 4. Education, training and work
 5. Social competence

Trauma

- Nearly all (85.7%) reported experiencing at least one traumatic event, the most common of which was the death of a close friend or family member, followed by parental divorce and personal victimisation.
- Of these, 70.3% reported this to be extremely traumatic.
- Only 3 (17.6%) reported confiding in others about their experiences.

Criminal Thinking Style

- 71.4% scored above the cut-off for General Criminal Thinking.
- 35.7% scored above the cut-off for proactive thinking (P), and 50% for reactive thinking (R).

CONCLUSION

The most significant areas of need for male young offenders in this study were: mental health, trauma, relationships with family members, and general criminal thinking.

A strong rationale exists for the delivery of programs which address traumatic experience, builds relationships with family members, and address attitudes that facilitate offending.

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