THE INTERNATIONAL EVIDENCE

Do psychological programmes for violent offenders lead to reductions in violent behaviour?

In 2007, a review of 11 different interventions for violent offenders showed that they led to reductions in both general and violent recidivism. Comparing those offenders who participated in interventions to those who did not there was an 8 – 11% reduction in general recidivation and 7 – 8% in violent recidivation. The review showed that interventions using cognitive behavioural approaches were more effective than those which did not. Well designed, high intensity cognitive behavioural programmes have been shown to reduce recidivism by at least 20%.

In one example of a programme for violent offenders, 32% of those who had participated in the programme were convicted of a further violent offence, compared to 63% of offenders who had not participated in the programme.

Evaluation of the Canadian Violence Prevention Programme (VPP) with high-risk high-need offenders found a 9% rate of violent recidivism and a 25% rate of general recidivism for those offenders who had completed VPP compared to a 22% violent recidivism rate and a 41% general recidivism rate for a matched group of untreated offenders. The treated group also showed significant improvements in their institutional behaviour. Reductions in reoffending were only evident for those who completed the programme – not for programme drop-outs.

Anger is strongly associated with violent behaviour. In 1998, a review of 50 evaluations of anger management cognitive behavioural therapy programmes found greater levels of anger reduction in treated individuals compared to untreated individuals.

WHAT RISK FACTORS SHOULD TREATMENT PROGRAMMES ADDRESS?

The following risk factors have consistently been found to raise violent reoffending rates:

- association with criminal peers
- anti social attitudes and pro-criminal beliefs
- deficits in social-cognitive skills such as problem solving
- poor social perspective taking
- impulsivity
- intelligence
- psychopathy
- lack of insight into violent offending
- rehearsal of violent thoughts
- drug and alcohol abuse
- poor management of emotions (particularly anger)

NOMS PROGRAMMES: THE EVIDENCE

- Prison Service CSCP
  CSCP (Cognitive Self Change Programme) has not been evaluated in England and Wales. A review of CSCP in the USA found 50% recidivism in offenders who had completed treatment, and 70% recidivism in those who did not take the programme. Another American study reviewing the effects of a programme modelled on CSCP found that violent offenders who completed the programme were afterwards less likely to disobey a direct order or engage in assaultive behaviour in custody.

- Prison Service Chromis (Pilot Programme)
  Chromis runs on a small scale with prisoners on long sentences, and so its outcome has not yet been determined. There is some international evidence that psychopaths who completed a violence reduction programme committed less serious offences than psychopaths who had not.
**Prison Service & Probation CALM**

CALM (Controlling Anger and Learning to Manage It) is delivered in both prison and community. A study of the equivalent Anger and Emotion Management Programme in Canada found that the 3-year reoffending rate for programme participants was under 10% compared to a rate approaching 30% for the comparison group. Substantial reductions in both general and violent reoffending were observed but only for higher risk offenders who completed the programme; low risk offenders did not reoffend less after completing the programme. This study provides strong support for the well-established principle that programmes provided to higher risk offenders, targeting problems such as anger which are related to violence, can reduce violent offending. At 3-year follow-up, there were clear differences in both general and violent recidivism between treatment completers, non-completers and the untreated comparison group - see figure 1 below.

**Probation ART**

ART (Anger Replacement Training) is represented by the International Centre for Aggression Replacement Training (ICART), which promotes competent delivery and thorough evaluation. A study in England and Wales found a 1-year reconviction rate for ART completers of 20.4%, compared to 34.5% for an untreated control group, see figure 2. This study also found that non-completers who had had their order revoked before the completion of the programme had a 1-year reconviction rate of 65% compared to the programme completers’ rate of 20.4%.

In another study, after a 10-month follow up period 39% of offenders who completed ART reoffended, compared to 51% of un-treated offenders - see figure 2. This study also found a 7.8% increase in reconviction rates in the non-completer group compared to the programme completers. These findings support the efficacy of ART and add to the general evidence that those who start but don’t complete programmes seem to have higher reconviction rates.

**CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS**

There is sufficient international evidence now that violence can be reduced through interventions, specifically those that follow the risk, need and responsivity principles. The evidence also suggests that the most effective interventions use the cognitive-behavioural approach, are intensive in their session length and overall duration and include cognitive skills training, role-play and relapse prevention. Basic skills and empathy training have not been show to increase the effectiveness of violent interventions.

While ART is the only NOMS violence programme that has been evaluated so far in terms of its impact on recidivism, all accredited violence programmes incorporate the elements that have been identified as effective in reducing violent reoffending.

There is a continuing need for good quality evaluations to demonstrate the impact of violence interventions in order to refine programme delivery such that the most effective programmes are delivered in the most effective way to those offenders who are most likely to benefit.

NOMS will continue to evaluate its prison and probation programmes for violent offenders.
### NOMS Community Violent Offender Programmes

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>CALM (Controlling Anger and Learning to Manage It)</th>
<th>ART (Aggression Replacement Training)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aims to reduce offending by adult male violent offenders by regulating emotional arousal &amp; dysfunctional emotions by identifying triggers and risk factors. Focuses on developing rational thinking, communication and social skills, skills for problem solving during heightened emotional arousal and relapse prevention.</td>
<td>Aims to reduce offending by adult male and female violent offenders by weakening the link between anger and aggressive or violent behaviour. Develops skills for regulating aggression related to anger by identifying triggers and risk factors, moral development and perspective taking, communication and social skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For male medium to high risk offenders (OGRS 50–100). If scoring below 50 an individual could be considered if they present a high risk of serious harm. Offending is the result of or in part due to anger or poor emotional control as recorded in SSI/OASys/SDR Interview.</td>
<td>For male and female medium-high risk offenders (OGRS 50–100). If scoring below 50 an individual could be considered if they present a medium to high risk of serious harm. Offences are at least in part related to poor anger control leading to violent behaviour (OASys/SDR interview).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 sessions of 2-2.5 hours run over a period of 8-24 weeks.</td>
<td>18 group-based 2 hour sessions run over a period of 6 to 12 weeks</td>
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### NOMS Prison Violent Offender Programmes

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<td>Aims to reduce offending in adult male violent offenders whose level or combination of psychopathic traits disrupts their ability to engage in treatment. Challenges criminal thinking styles, attitudes and beliefs supporting violence. Aims to develop interpersonal problem solving, cognitive flexibility, critical reasoning, impulse control, goal setting skills, emotion regulation, relationship skills and insight into violence.</td>
<td>Aims to reduce offending by adult male offenders by challenging anti-social and pro-violent attitudes, use of imagined violence, cognitive distortions and hostile attribution. Aims to develop insight into violence, emotional self-control and cognitive skills.</td>
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<tr>
<td>For male medium to high risk offenders (OGRS 50–100). If scoring below 50 an individual could be considered if they present a high risk of serious harm. Offending is the result of or in part due to anger or poor emotional control as recorded in SSI/OASys/SDR Interview.</td>
<td>For male high risk offenders with a history of violent/threatening behaviour. High risk as determined by HCR-20 and VRS + the presence of criminogenic targets identified in the Chromis assessment battery Meets the DSPD criteria; PCL-(R) score of 30 or above; or score of 25-29 plus at least one DSM-IV personality disorder diagnoses other than anti-social personality; or two or more DSM-IV personality disorder diagnoses. More than 2.5 years left to serve</td>
<td>For male high risk offenders (OGRS3 75 or above) with 4 or more convictions for violence (actual, attempted or threatened harm to person(s). Or if less than 4 convictions but presence of un-convicted behaviour/prison behaviour (adjudications) and severity of act indicates risk of violence. Prior completion of Enhanced Thinking Skills (ETS) or assessed as not requiring.</td>
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<td>24 sessions of 2-2.5 hours run over a period of 8-24 weeks.</td>
<td>Includes an initial treatment need phase and development of an individual treatment plan. 5 core treatment components, the last of which is a rolling component. Completion time depends on the progress made through the components.</td>
<td>4 Core Treatment Blocks delivered at a rate of 4 sessions a week with 1 individual session every 2 weeks. Run on a rolling basis, taking 8 – 15 months to complete depending on individual needs</td>
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REFERENCES


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