

Case need domain: “Personal and emotional Orientation”

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This review examines the empirical literature that documents a link between personal and emotional need factors and criminal and recidivistic behaviour. We presented empirical evidence to support the continued use or the elimination of each of the principal components and subcomponents of the Case Needs Identification and Analysis (CNIA). Where empirical information was limited, we used theoretical judgments to recommend how the constructs should be used in the future. The empirical and theoretical literature supports the continued use of the cognition and behavioural principal components and the elimination of the self-concept, mental ability, mental health and intervention principal components. We provide some recommendations for a pared-down personal and emotional domain.

The personal and emotional domain of the Correctional Service of Canada’s risk and needs assessment protocol, the CNIA, is a broad grouping of criminogenic needs that are believed to predict recidivism. Criminogenic needs are dynamic risk factors that help reduce recidivism when they are coupled with appropriate treatment. The indicators include a large number of items that attempt to assess cognitive deficiencies such as weak problem-solving skills and rigid thinking, behavioural problems such as impulsivity and a tendency to take risks, and other personal characteristics such as neuroticism and mental disorder.

In addition to examining the link between personal and emotional need factors and criminal recidivism, we will address two other issues. First, we will provide information that will help us to determine whether regrouping will improve assessment within the personal and emotional domain. Second, we will provide guidelines for grouping existing items.

Methodology

Initially, we used the PsycLIT bibliographic software to search for studies that have examined constructs in the domain. Keyword searches focused on variations of the wording of indicators. We narrowed the searches to studies that focused on samples that contained criminal populations, including adult and juvenile offender groups. We also cross-referenced to assemble relevant literature. Overall, we identified several hundred relevant references.

When we uncovered several studies with identical findings, we chose the most typical study for this review. We also eliminated a number of studies that were off topic, or that repeated findings found in other studies with better methodologies. This review represents our best judgment of the studies that provide the best information about the various personal and emotional need factors. Thus, when a number of studies were available, we generally featured recent, predictive studies with adult offenders that used a prospective design. However, evidence derived from juvenile samples was included if there was a paucity of research from adult-based samples.

The personal and emotional need domain consists of 7 principal components, 25 subcomponents and 46 indicators. To simplify the review process, we frequently combined subcomponents and indicators. In many cases the individual need indicators were too specific to furnish definitive information about the constructs. Our review of the studies led to our reassigning some indicators to alternative principal components or subcomponents. We argue that the ethnicity,

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religion, family ties and gang membership indicators provide redundant information that could be better covered in other domains. Therefore, we have not included these subcomponents in the review.

Self-concept

This part of the review focused on the possibility of including the indicator physical prowess and self-esteem in the CNIA. While the concept of physical stature and criminality has garnered some interest,² recent references to it are rare. Therefore, the inclusion of an indicator such as physical prowess is problematic in the CNIA.

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Cognition

We organized our examination of the literature around the following constructs: impulsivity, problem-solving ability, interpersonal skills and empathy. Impulsivity serves as a broad category for many of the indicators included under the cognitive and behavioural domains. For this reason, we subsumed related subcomponents and indicators under the impulsivity rubric. These include "manages time poorly," "poor self-monitoring" and "lacks conscientiousness." The link between impulsivity and delinquency is not disputed in the delinquency literature.⁴ A variety of studies based on adult samples have produced similar results.

Little research has been done on the link between general problem-solving skills and criminality among adult offenders. The majority of research is based on delinquent subsamples; few studies have examined the relationship between general problem-solving and recidivism. At the same time, evidence suggesting that general problem-solving skills should not be assessed as a criminogenic need is

slim. That there is a link between criminal behaviour and problem-solving has high face validity as evidenced by the many interventions designed to increase problem-solving skills. In addition, the delinquency literature shows that an offender's level of problem-solving skills helps predict the likelihood of recidivism. In theory, problem-solving is also related to impulsivity. Although we need more data to assess the dynamic and predictive qualities of problem-solving skills in adult samples, this construct should remain an important component of the CNIA protocol.

There has been much development in the program area and considerable discussion along theoretical lines, but little research addresses the relationship between interpersonal skills and criminal behaviour, especially recidivism. However, given the weight of theoretical arguments linking interpersonal skill deficits and criminal behaviour and that the broader interpersonal conflict construct predicts recidivism,⁵ we believe that interpersonal skills should continue to be assessed as a criminogenic need.

Lack of empathy has frequently been perceived as a major factor in the development of criminal behaviour and in the perpetration of certain types of crimes. In the adult offender studies, we found mixed evidence of a relationship between empathy and recidivism. Nevertheless, the theoretical arguments combined with the evidence supporting a relationship between empathy and recidivism are persuasive enough to lead us to

recommend that empathy be retained. It may be necessary to develop some methods of measurement to assist those who must assess offender empathy.

Behavioural

Assertion, neuroticism, aggression, risk-taking, coping and sexual behaviour are some of the subcomponents included under the behavioural principal component. Some of the original subcomponents and indicators within

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the behavioural domain have been reported in the cognitive subcomponent described above. Poor coping skills, which has been shown to be a major deficit area for offenders,⁶ is included under problem-solving.

There is some evidence that offenders lack assertiveness. However, no studies show a link between assertiveness and criminal behaviour. While assertiveness in isolation may not be highly correlated with criminal offending or recidivism, a lack of assertiveness may promote recidivism when combined with other skill deficits. Therefore, until strong evidence regarding the lack of predictability of assertiveness becomes available, it appears that assertiveness should be retained as an indicator.

Neuroticism refers to a more pervasive personality trait that includes such features as ongoing anxiety and worry, as well as insecurity, nervousness and emotionality. Neither the literature about juveniles nor that which discusses adult offenders provides strong evidence that neuroticism should be regarded as a critical factor. Further, treatment of neuroticism does not seem to be related to recidivism. Consequently, it should be dropped from the personal and emotional domain.

We grouped the three constructs of aggression, anger and hostility because of their similarities and their like descriptions in the literature. While aggression appears as a separate construct in many studies, anger and hostility are frequently grouped together. In recent years the construct of anger has been used more frequently than hostility.

While more research on the relationship between anger management skills and post-release recidivism is required, the abundance of evidence regarding the differing levels of anger control between criminal and non-criminal populations suggests that anger management is an important construct. The inability to control anger may account for much of the violent crime committed by recidivist offenders, especially those who are prone to violent behaviour when angered. For this reason, we recommend that anger

indicators be included in the personal and emotional need domain. There is also ample evidence to suggest that offenders who have aggressive tendencies are at higher risk of committing crimes after being released than those who do not have these tendencies. The evidence also suggests that measures of aggression that are taken during incarceration help predict the likelihood of violent behaviour. Therefore, aggression should remain in the domain as a criminogenic need indicator.

A penchant for risk-taking refers to a preference for activities that involve risk or danger. Generally, the data suggest that risk-taking should be included in the domain. Although the evidence is limited, it seems likely that gambling is a criminogenic need and an indicator of risk-taking behaviour.

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The majority of the research on the ability to predict criminal behaviour and recidivism based on sexual behaviour is limited to the study of sex offender populations. The data in a recent meta-analysis support the inclusion of deviant sexual preferences and deviant sexual attitudes as indicators of criminogenic need.⁷ Given the nature of sex offending and the interest in sexual recidivism, sexual behaviour items that predict recidivism could be grouped as a separate domain. The Service's policy focus on sex offenders also justifies the use of a separate assessment domain.

Mental ability, mental health and interventions

The ability to predict delinquency, adult criminality and recidivism based on mental ability has frequently been controversial among researchers. It is unclear whether the knowledge of mental deficiency in an offender would help predict recidivism. As well, the evidence does not support the inclusion of mental deficiency as a criminogenic need within the personal and emotional need domain.

Offenders with mental disorders are often viewed as a dangerous subgroup that have a high rate of post-release recidivism, especially

violent recidivism. However, a recent meta-analysis⁸ showed that offenders with mental disorders were less likely to commit general or violent crimes on release than other offenders. Therefore, mental health indicators should be eliminated from the domain.

Lastly, we argue that “interventions” should be excluded as indicators of criminogenic needs. These interventions, such as participation in programs, the taking of prescribed medications or undergoing an assessment in the personal and emotional need domain, are not reliable predictors of recidivism. While a history of intervention may help to predict the likelihood that some offenders will commit crimes again, in other cases the ability to predict recidivism based on interventions may be weakened. This would occur, for example, if interventions were prescribed for an offender who did not demonstrate high needs in the personal and emotional area or who had lowered the likelihood of recidivism by participating in interventions.

Conclusions and recommendations

There is a need for more literature that deals with personal and emotional need factors as predictors of recidivism, and particularly as dynamic predictors of recidivism. Within the existing literature there is sufficient evidence to recommend the elimination of some of the current principal components of the personal and emotional need domain. There is evidence in the literature to support reorganizing the principal components of the domain and streamlining them by simplifying and reducing the number of subcomponents. More work is also required to define subcomponents by

generating specific indicators that can be measured based on available case management sources.

We recommend a reorganization based on the following principles:

- a fit between need factors related to recidivism and existing categories of program delivery within the Service;
- a realignment of indicators from subcomponents that are no longer considered different from other subcomponents;
- greater conceptual distinctness between subcomponents;
- a reduction in overlap between principal components; and
- greater emphasis on dynamic need factors related to recidivism.

We believe that the personal and emotional need domain would be best represented by four principal components:

1. cognitive — problem-solving skills and thinking styles;
2. self-control — impulsivity and life planning deficits;
3. interpersonal — interpersonal problem-solving and empathy; and
4. aggression — aggressive tendencies and anger.

We also recommend that, to bolster the validity of the domain, more effort be devoted to refining existing indicators and generating additional indicators and corresponding scoring instructions. ■

¹ 159 Gilmour Street, Ottawa, Ontario K2P 098.

² D. A. Andrews and J. Bonta, *The Psychology of Criminal Conduct* (Cincinnati, OH: Anderson Publishing Co., 1994).

³ L. A. Bennett, “Self-esteem and parole adjustment,” *Criminology*, 12 (1974): 346–363.

⁴ R. R. Ross and E. A. Fabiano, *Time to Think: A Cognitive Model of Delinquency Prevention and Offender Rehabilitation* (Johnson City, TN: Institute of Social Sciences and Arts Inc., 1985).

⁵ E. Zamble and F. Porporino, *Coping, Behaviour, and Adaptation in Prison Inmates* (New York, NY: Springer, 1988).

⁶ P. Gendreau, T. Little and C. Goggin, “A meta-analysis of the predictors of adult offender recidivism: What works!” *Criminology*, 34 (1996): 575–607.

⁷ R. K. Hanson and M. T. Bussière, “Predicting relapse: A meta-analysis of sexual offender recidivism studies,” *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 66 (1998): 348–362.

⁸ J. Bonta, M. Law and K. Hanson, “The prediction of criminal and violent recidivism among mentally disordered offenders: A meta-analysis,” *Psychological Bulletin*, 123, 2 (1998): 123–142.