



Research at a glance

Offender Incentives and Behavioural Management Strategies

KEY WORDS: *Incentive, behaviour management, contingency management.*

Why we did this study

Incentive programs and behavioural management strategies have been applied in a wide range of settings. This research involves a two-part report that examines the effectiveness of incentive systems and behaviour management strategies and discusses implications for the introduction of these in a correctional setting.

What we did

A review of literature on factors that influence behaviour was conducted and explored existing strategies to manage or modify behaviour in different settings including clinical populations (e.g. substance abuse and mental health treatment settings) and prison populations.

The feasibility of introducing a behaviour management system in a correctional setting was the focus of the consultation process and included consideration of measurement, policy development, and implementation issues.

What we found

In general, this review suggests that individual incentives (e.g. tokens, vouchers, money) and systemic incentives (levels with gradations of privileges, contingency management) have shown promise in non-correctional settings (e.g. drug and alcohol treatment and mental health treatment settings). Introduction of these in correctional settings, however, have shown mixed results. An evaluation of the incentive-based system in the United Kingdom suggests that few improvements to prison behaviour were observed and several unintended consequences, including a negative impact on staff-prisoner relations, were reported. When applied in a fair and consistent manner, other incentive systems have shown positive outcomes.

Several points for consideration in the implementation of a behaviour management system in a correctional

setting are raised. These included, for example, the consistent and transparent translation of policy guidelines into practice guidelines, the need for sustained training and commitment of frontline staff tasked with implementing the system, and the need to identify and better define meaningful incentives for offenders.

What it means

The authors underline several challenges evident in the experiences of other jurisdictions and identify factors that could impact the implementation of an incentive-based offender management strategy within the federal correctional system.

Future research should focus on offender successes and strategies to increase offender engagement as part of building and strengthening an offender accountability framework.

Note

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For more information

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