



Research at a glance

Assessment, Intervention, and Prevention of Self-Injurious Behaviour in Correctional Environments

KEY WORDS: *self-injurious behaviour; offender suicide; best practices*

Why we did this study

Self-injurious behaviour (SIB) can be defined as any type of direct bodily harm or disfigurement that is deliberately inflicted on oneself that is not considered to be socially acceptable, such as cutting, head banging, and ligature use. To contribute to a safer environment for offenders and staff, CSC must respond to SIB in an effective manner and work towards the reduction and prevention of this behaviour. This literature review was undertaken to determine the best practices for preventing and treating SIB in correctional settings.

What we did

A literature review was conducted on evidence-based practices addressing the assessment, treatment and prevention of SIB, with a focus on correctional settings.

What we found

CSC's offender population has high rates of many factors associated with SIB, such as depression, anxiety, substance abuse, impulsivity and history of childhood trauma and therefore is likely to be at an elevated risk for SIB.

A number of risk assessment tools have the potential for early identification of offenders at risk for SIB, but currently no instrument has been proven to be empirically valid in correctional settings.

SIB presents a challenge for effective treatment. Research indicates that certain interventions can reduce the frequency and severity of SIB. Therapeutic treatments such as cognitive behavioural therapy, dialectical behaviour therapy, and manual assisted cognitive therapy have demonstrated effectiveness for treating SIB in both the community and in correctional settings. Further, certain elements common to these therapies such as creating a positive therapeutic relationship, conducting an incident analysis, and training individuals on techniques of cognitive restructuring have been associated with reductions in SIB among program participants. These elements are consistent with current correctional programs and conceivably could be incorporated into existing programs to improve prevention and treatment of SIB. A

number of systemic interventions have also been proposed and are supported in the literature such as staff suicide awareness training and offender peer support programs.

Correctional staff working closely with offenders who self-injure require additional support in dealing with this behaviour, as it can lead to increased stress and burnout. Evidence in the literature supports increased training for staff that promotes understanding of the dynamics of SIB and the provision of support services such as critical incident stress debriefing and employee assistance programs.

What it means

CSC has implemented a number of policies and initiatives that are in-line with evidence based practices for the treatment and prevention of self-injury. The research examined in this literature review presents a number of options that CSC could develop or adopt to improve current management of SIB.

For more information

Usher, A., Power, J. & Wilton, G. (2010). *Assessment, Intervention, and Prevention of Self-Injurious Behaviour in Correctional Environments*. R-220
Ottawa: Correctional Service of Canada.

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