Research *at a glance*

Indigenous Offenders: Major Findings from the DFIA-R Research Studies

The DFIA-R is a valid tool for Indigenous offenders and useful in pointing to areas of need associated with revocations.

Why we did this study

The Dynamic Factors Identification and Analysis-Revised (DFIA-R) tool is a key component of the offender intake assessment used by the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC). This research brief summarizes key findings of two large-scale research projects validating the revised tool and exploring alternative calculation methods of scoring offender need as they pertain to Indigenous offenders.

What we did

Offenders with at least one DFIA-R assessment were obtained through the Offender Management System resulting in 24,798 men (24% Indigenous) and 1,368 women (37% Indigenous) with data available. Of this group, 16,743 men and 992 women were released and had follow-up data allowing the examination of the relationship of ratings with community outcomes. Analyses focused on the prevalence of the ratings and indicators, which domain ratings influenced the overall need rating, and which indicators and domains were most strongly related to community outcomes.

As well, calculated domain and overall need rating methods were explored to determine whether they improved the tool. All analyses were disaggregated by gender and Indigenous identity when possible.

What we found

Need level on all domains was highest for Indigenous offenders. The two highest need domains for Indigenous offenders were the Substance Abuse and Personal/Emotional domains (> 80% rated moderate or high need, for each).

For Indigenous men, parole officer ratings on the Personal/Emotional, Substance Abuse, and Attitude domains had the greatest influence in the determination of a rating of high overall need.

DFIA-R ratings were generally more dynamic for Indigenous offenders, that is, more offenders had a reduction in need over time.

With the exception of the Marital/Family and Associates domains, ratings of higher need were significantly related to community outcomes for Indigenous men. For example, as indicated in the table below, Indigenous men who were rated as high need in the Employment/Education domain were 3 times more likely to return to custody compared to those rated as asset or no need (see Table 1 comparing the hazard for revocation for non-Indigenous and Indigenous men with high ratings on each domain to those with asset or no need).
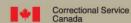
Table 1
Association between DFIA-R Domain Ratings of High Need and Any Return to Custody

Domain	Non-Indigenous Men (HR)	Indigenous Men (HR)
Employment/Education	3.81***	3.06***
Marital/Family	1.24***	1.11***
Associates	2.28***	1.62***
Substance Abuse	3.34***	2.45***
Community Functioning	2.98***	1.80***
Personal/Emotional	1.92***	1.58***
Attitudes	2.53***	1.60***

Note. HR = Hazard ratio; * <.05;** <.01; ***<.001

The majority of DFIA-R indicators were related to community outcomes for Indigenous men. We were unable to conduct these analyses for Indigenous women given lower numbers. Men with the strongest association with reoffending were those relating to substance misuse, antisocial peers, financial/employment instability, and emotional management concerns.

Some particularly strong indicators included:
- Associates with substance abusers (those with this indicator endorsed were > 4 times more likely to return to custody with an offence than those who did not have it endorsed)
- Job history has been unstable (> 3 times more)
- Early age of drug use (> 3 times more likely)
- Financial instability (> 2 times more likely)
- Impulsive (> 2 times more likely)
- Unstable accommodation (> 2 times more likely)

Examining alternative methods of scoring the tool showed that calculated ratings based on the percentage of indicators endorsed could improve the predictive validity of the tool for all groups over that of the structured professional judgment of parole officers.

What it means

These results support continued use of the DFIA-R tool with Indigenous offenders. Results suggest that interventions could be effective for Indigenous men if they focused on reducing substance misuse, reducing contact with antisocial peers, increasing financial stability/employment, reducing impulsivity, changing pro-criminal attitudes, and providing stable and safe accommodation. While we were unable to assess the impact of needs specifically on Indigenous women, they were included in a similar analysis of all CSC women offenders. These results pointed to the importance of addressing substance abuse, financial insecurity, education and employment needs and problems in intimate relationships for women.

While parole officer ratings were found to be reliable and valid, calculated ratings improved the value of the tool in predicting outcomes for Indigenous offenders.

For more information

Stewart, L. A., Wardrop, K., Wilton, G., Thompson, J., Derkzen, D., & Motiuk, L. (2017). *Reliability and validity of the Dynamic Factors Identification and Analysis – Revised* (Research Report R-395). Ottawa, Ontario: Correctional Service of Canada.

Wilton, G., Stewart, L. A., & Motiuk, L. L. (R-400). *Can the predictive validity of the Dynamic Factors Identification and Analysis – Revised be improved by calculated ratings?* Ottawa, Ontario: Correctional Service of Canada.

To obtain a PDF version of the full report, or for other inquiries, please e-mail the Research Branch or contact us by phone at (613) 995-3975.

You can also visit the Research Publications section for a full list of reports and one-page summaries.