



Research Snippet

Aboriginal Offender Substance Abuse Program (AOSAP) and Cultural Engagement

KEY WORDS: *Aboriginal, prison, substance abuse, treatment*

Impetus

The Aboriginal Offender Substance Abuse Program (AOSAP) uses a blended approach to programming combining cultural healing traditions and contemporary best practices in substance abuse treatment. Research of the impact of the AOSAP (high intensity version) on post release outcomes has been completed and provides support for the effectiveness of the program approach (Kunic & Varis, 2009). However, the impact of the cultural aspects of the program has yet to be examined. One objective of the AOSAP is to connect participants with Aboriginal cultures as a means of promoting traditional values and individual healing. To assess the program's capacity to meet this objective, the Cultural Engagement Scale (CES) was developed.

What we did

To understand the change in AOSAP participant's level of engagement in Aboriginal culture, spirituality and traditional teachings, we examined the mean scores, pre and post, from each question of the CES. Data from 235 participants: 151 (64%) from AOSAP High Intensity version and 84 (36%) from AOSAP Moderate Intensity version were reviewed.

Table 1: CES Questions

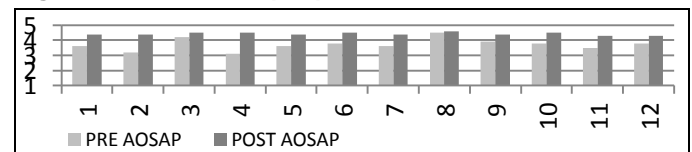
Cultural Engagement Scale questions
1. I practice traditional Aboriginal values in my daily life.
2. I have the necessary experience through Elders' teachings and spiritual ceremonies to guide my life.
3. Traditional healing is important to me.
4. I have had the opportunity to fully examine issues of my substance abuse in a traditional way.
5. I am spiritually connected to my culture.
6. I have knowledge about Aboriginal cultures and spirituality.
7. I am culturally prepared to deal with difficult life issues.
8. I see the importance of an Elder.
9. I seek the advice of an Elder when I need guidance.
10. I seek out opportunities to explore my culture as a way to understand myself.
11. I make a valuable contribution to my culture.
12. I have enough opportunity to engage in Aboriginal cultural activities.

The CES is scored on a five point scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

What we found

As shown in Figure 1, positive differences were seen for all questions from pre program to post program. With an already high level of agreement pre program, questions 3 and 8 show minimal change. Questions 2 and 4 show the greatest degree of change.

Figure 1: AOSAP CES pre/post



What it means

The results suggest that AOSAP is meeting its objective in terms of reconnecting participants with Aboriginal spirituality and their culture. Participants are entering the program with an already high level of agreement around the importance of traditional healing and the importance of Elders. Through completing AOSAP they gain cultural knowledge, experience with teachings and ceremonies, and the opportunities needed to explore culture as healing.

To understand the impact of culturally based programming, culturally specific research tools are required. This is a preliminary demonstration of a research tool developed by CSC for this use.

References

Kunic, D. & Varis, D.D. (2009). *The Aboriginal Offender Substance Abuse Program (AOSAP): Examining the effects of successful AOSAP completion on post-release outcomes in a cohort of male, Aboriginal offenders released from federal custody.* Ottawa, ON: Correctional Service Canada.

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