The Native offender substance abuse pretreatment program: Intermediate measures of program effectiveness (R-35, 1994)

Native offenders represent over 11% of the offenders incarcerated in Canadian federal institutions and more than 38% of the total inmate population in the Prairie region of the Correctional Service of Canada. Recent research has found that substance abuse is a serious criminogenic factor for Native offenders. In particular, this research found that although Native offenders did not differ from non-Native offenders in terms of the severity of their drug-taking behaviour, Native offenders evidenced more severe alcohol problems than non-Native offenders.

This report highlights the preliminary results of a substance abuse pretreatment program designed specifically to meet the needs and concerns of Native offenders. Originally a one-year research and development demonstration project, the Native Inmate Substance Abuse Treatment was developed by the National Native Association of Treatment Directors and jointly sponsored by four government agencies.

A total of 120 offenders from eight different Correctional Service of Canada institutions from across Canada participated in the program. Although alcohol was the major presenting problem for these offenders, over 92% of offenders in the sample had moderate-to-severe substance abuse problems (drugs or alcohol).

The results of a battery of measures administered before and after the program indicated that there were significant improvements in terms of offenders’ knowledge and attitudes toward substance abuse, general problem-solving ability and recognition of Native cultural factors.

In general, ratings provided by program facilitators suggest that the overwhelming majority of offenders demonstrated improvement on a host of key performance indicators.

The authors also acknowledge that the results of this study are limited in scope due to the fact that it did not include a follow-up of offenders after the completion of the program.