

Addressing Aggression in Carceral Settings

Testing the use of Aggression Replacement Training (ART®)

Agency: Pennsylvania Department of Corrections (PADOC)

Trial Duration:
02/25/19–05/16/19

Pracademics*: Tracy Smith, Cheryl Horner, De'Andra Walker, Ross Miller, and Robert Flaherty

Context
Aggression and violence are constant threats in prisons. Although most prison facilities offer some type of anger-management program, most of these programs have not been evaluated.

Key Finding
Measures of overall functioning and hostility improved for those in the intervention group (ART®) at some trial sites.

*BetaGov provides ongoing training to agency personnel to become research-savvy "Pracademics" who can lead trials.

Why BetaGov Spark?

Background

Aggressive and violent behaviors may not be unusual in prisons, but they also occur in the community after release. Although most prison facilities offer some type of anger-management program, most have not been validated. Anger-management programs typically help to recognize signs anger and calm down and deal with the situation productively.

The Administrative Segregation Programming Subcommittee of the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections (PADOC) developed this trial to test a program for reducing hostility (anger) and increasing positive functioning. Aggression Replacement Training (ART®) has been found effective in adolescent samples for which it was developed, but it has not been validated in adults.

Design

Four facilities with high numbers of violent incidents participated, including State Correctional Institutions (SCI) Benner Township, Houtzdale, Huntingdon, and Mahanoy. Counselors were trained over two days to deliver the intervention. Volunteers interested in participating in ART were assessed with the Violence Assessment Reduction Tool (VART). Those meeting VART criteria were randomly assigned to the intervention or the control group. ART was provided over a 10-week/30-hour duration. The control group did not participate in ART. Counselors completed the Overall Functioning Scale (OFS) and participants completed a hostility scale before and after the ART program (Time 1, Time 2) for both intervention and control groups.

Lessons Learned

122 participants were enrolled across the four facilities; however, missing data leave only 60 participants with matched responses at both timepoints. Although comparisons between and across conditions were planned for each facility as separate trials, lack of OFS data for the control group

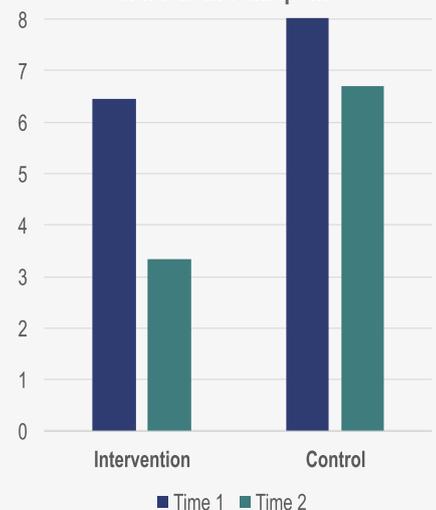
at each site impedes comparing intervention groups with control groups. Comparing only the intervention groups, a statistically significant improvement in OFS from Time 1 to Time 2 was found only at SCI-Mahanoy and SCI-Benner Township ($p < 0.05$).

Comparing the hostility scores at each facility, a statistically significant improvement from Time 1 to Time 2 was found only for the intervention group at SCI-Mahanoy ($p < 0.05$). No other statistically significant differences were found by sites. Exploratory analyses combining scores from all facilities found a statistically significant improvement in hostility scores for the intervention group compared with the control group at Time 2 ($p < 0.05$).

Next Steps

These results suggest that further testing of this program is warranted.

Hostility scores by condition and timepoint*



*higher scores = higher hostility

Sometimes a rigorous trial of an innovative idea just isn't possible, but with a Spark project a practitioner can learn important information about the idea, the agency, and the sample. What's more, a positive signal may inform a future randomized controlled trial and more definitive results. Spark projects meet Pracademics where they are comfortable—giving them the opportunity to learn about research and apply that learning to internal research projects.