PREDICTING RECIDIVISM WITH ABORIGINAL OFFENDERS

Question: Do the Central Eight risk/need factors predict recidivism with Aboriginal offenders?

Background: Offender risk assessment involves judgements of the relevance of certain characteristics to future criminal behaviour. Research has established eight theoretically-based risk/need factors (i.e., the Central Eight) that have shown to be predictive of recidivism with a variety of offender types (e.g., youth, sex offender, mentally disordered) and outcomes (e.g., general, violent, sexual recidivism). These eight factors include: criminal history, procriminal attitudes, procriminal associates, antisocial personality pattern, employment/education, family/marital, substance abuse, and leisure/recreation.

The development of actuarial risk assessment instruments has been based largely on Caucasian male offenders. In Canada, risk assessment instruments developed on non-Aboriginal male offenders are, for the most part, also administered to Aboriginal offenders. Critics have suggested that using these instruments may introduce a cultural bias that may negatively and unfairly affect the assessment of risk with Aboriginal offenders, who are over-represented in the offender population.

Although individual studies assessing the ability of risk assessment instruments (e.g., Level of Service Inventory scales,

Community Risk/Needs Assessment) to predict recidivism with Aboriginal offenders have demonstrated promising findings, there is a need to understand the major risk/need factors and their relevance to Aboriginal offenders at a more general and theoretical level.

Until now, this research has been largely narrative and qualitative in nature. The present review is a quantitative and theoretically-founded examination of whether the Central Eight predicts recidivism with Aboriginal offenders and, if so, how their validity compares to when they are applied to non-Aboriginal offenders.

Method: A comprehensive review of the literature (including published and unpublished research) on the ability of the Central Eight risk/need factors to predict recidivism (both general and violent) with Aboriginal offenders was conducted. The search yielded 44 useable sources of data, representing 49 independent Aboriginal samples (drawn from 32 reports/articles and 12 datasets). The total sample size of Aboriginal offenders in this review was N = 57,315.

Answer: All of the Central Eight risk/need factors significantly predicted both general and violent recidivism with Aboriginal offenders. The best predictors for general recidivism were criminal history, antisocial personality pattern and procriminal

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associates. For violent recidivism, the best predictors were criminal history, antisocial personality pattern and procriminal attitudes.

Further analyses found criminal history, alcohol/drug and antisocial personality pattern predicting general recidivism better for non-Aboriginal offenders than for Aboriginal offenders. For the remaining five factors, there were no significant differences between the two groups in predicting general recidivism. For violent recidivism, no differences were found between the two groups on the predictive ability of the Central Eight.

Two side issues must be noted. Firstly, despite our efforts, we were unable to identify studies that examined culturally-specific risk factors in relation to recidivism. Secondly, there was a large amount of variability across the studies in this review, which speaks to the need for more research in this area.

Policy Implications:

1. The Central Eight risk/need factors, many of which are commonly included in offender risk assessment instruments showed satisfactory predictive ability for both general and violent recidivism with Aboriginal offenders.

Administering assessment instruments that measure the Central Eight to Aboriginal offenders is empirically defensible.

2. Further research is needed to understand why three of the Central Eight demonstrated significantly lower predictive validity estimates for Aboriginal offenders compared to their non-Aboriginal counterparts.

3. Aboriginal offenders represent a culturally distinct segment of the Canadian population and yet, there has been no systematic exploration of the possible culturally-specific risk factors. Correctional researchers are encouraged to undertake research in the area to improve our understanding of risk factors relevant to Aboriginal offenders.

Source: Gutierrez, L., Wilson, H. A., Rugge, T., & Bonta, J. (2013). The Prediction of Recidivism with Aboriginal Offenders: A theoretically informed meta-analysis. *Canadian Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice,* 55 (1)*,* 55-99.

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