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Summary of the Evaluation Report on the effects of the CoVa training course of the Dutch Probation and After-Care Service

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This study examines the effects of the Cognitive Skills training course (CoVa). This is one of the eight new behavioural interventions for adult justitiabiles that have been provisionally approved by the Commission for the Approval of Behavioural Interventions of the Ministry of Justice in the Netherlands. The objectives of this study were twofold. The first objective was to determine which of the instruments used by participants in the CoVA training course were suitable to be used with this target group. The second objective was to measure the intervention's effect on four cognitive skills: impulsiveness, problem solving, perspective taking, and moral and critical reasoning.

In the original set-up of the study, six instruments were used to measure these cognitive skills. Eventually, five of these six instruments proved suitable to apply to the target group of the CoVa training course. During a two-year period, 330 CoVa participants successfully executed both a prior measurement and an after measurement with part of the instruments. In the end, 162 participants filled out the following questionnaires: 'My Own Influence' - this being a Dutch translation of Locus of Control (the 18-items version), and 'Ways of Thinking', a Dutch translation of the Barrat Impulsivity Scale (the 11 to 30-items version). The remaining 168 participants filled out the following questionnaires: 'Thinking and Acting' (this is a Dutch translation of the Eysenck Impulsivity Scale, from which two of the 24 items were omitted because detainees cannot answer to them), combined with Gough's Socialisation Scale, from which one of the 46 items were omitted for reasons that remain unclear. 'Criminality', again, combines two instruments: the Psychological Inventory of Criminal Thinking Styles (PICTS - 17 items) and the Crime PICS II scale (20 items). 'Thinking, Feeling, and Acting' is the Dutch translated version of the Novaco Anger Scale (73 items). What is involved here is a so-called psychometric evaluation of the objectives. We did not look at the validity of the instruments used. During the analysis in this study, we assumed that the questionnaires really do measure what they are intended to measure. While analysing the instruments, we examined the size and significance of the intended difference between the before and after measurements. In addition, we included the effect size in our analyses as an indicator.

Based on our data, the first important conclusion is that whenever we found a significant difference between before and after measurements, this always represented a change in the predicted direction.

Our second conclusion is that, in general, the effect size is small. We found an acceptable effect size with regard to two parts only. These are the extent of responsibility for one's own behaviour, measured by Locus of Control, and the Lack of Planning Scale, included in Barrat's Impulsivity Scale. The effect of the CoVa training course was greatest with regard to this last attitude.

In the area of socialisation (Gough's Socialisation Scale), the participants in CoVa already showed a higher (and thus 'better') score during the prior measurement than during each of the measurements carried out among the English criminal populations who were subjected to this test. The score of the 'normal' English and Dutch population on this attitude shows, however, that there still is ample room for improvement for the CoVa participants as well. The CoVa training course produced a small (but significant) effect for this attitude.

Concerning impulsiveness (measured with the aid of Eysenck's Impulsivity Scale), we also found a small but significant effect. As was the case with regard to socialisation, the normal population scores much 'better' on this scale, leaving much room for potential improvement for the participants.

Furthermore, we also examined the differences between subgroups discerned by us among the CoVa participants. We eventually found the highest number of sub-scales with regard to which we could establish an effect among the sub-group at high risk for recidivism. We found a modest effect on six sub-scales. The following sub-scales were involved: Gough's Socialisation Scale, Eysenck's Impulsivity Scale, Locus of Control, the Lack of Planning Scale of the BIS-11, the total score BIS-11, and the cognitive indolence (CI) of the PICTS.

This means that the positive effect generated by the CoVa training course is greatest among this group. Beforehand, the expectation was that the effect of the CoVa training course among the sub-groups at high risk for recidivism would be greater than among other groups. Our analysis confirms this.

Based on the results of the analyses, we recommend the use of the following (sub-)scales in subsequent research: CAPL from the BIS-11, Eysenck's Impulsivity Scale, Gough's Socialisation Scale, Locus of Control, and Cognitive Indolence from the PICTS. These can be used to further evaluate and monitor the results of the CoVa training courses in the future.