An Investigation into the Effectiveness of the Focus on Resettlement (FOR) Programme: A Reoffending Study

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The FOR programme is a short cognitive-behavioural intervention attended by offenders in prison just prior to release and which aims to increase their motivation to engage with services providing assistance with resettlement. Initial contact is made with these agencies before release with follow up post release thus providing a bridge from custody back into the community. This study used propensity score matching (PSM) to measure the effectiveness of the programme in reducing one-year proven reoffending for the participants from 2004 when it was first implemented to June 2009. Treated and control groups of equal size were used: a male sample of 473 and a female sample of 266. The study aims to assess whether the resettlement programme can contribute to reducing reoffending.

This is a historic look at data that had accumulated before significant changes to the content of the FOR programme were made, including an independent quality assurance process replacing peer audit, further training in writing objectives and a more robust framework for continuity between custody and community.

The full report has been submitted for publication in an academic journal – further details can be obtained from the author.

Key findings

- There was no significant change in reoffending rates for males who attended FOR (59.5%) compared to a matched control sample (56.5%).

- There was no significant change in reoffending rates for females who attended FOR (40.6%) compared to a matched control sample (44.0%).

- There was no significant difference in the time to first offence between the FOR group and the matched control sample for either the male or female analyses.

Introduction

The aim of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of the FOR programme in reducing future reoffending using a robust data matching design – Propensity Score Matching (PSM).

Although evidence from the US has not generally supported the use of re-entry programmes in reducing reoffending (e.g. Lattimore and Visher, 2009: Severson, Bruns, Veeh and Lee, 2011), the FOR programme differs in that it aims to address criminogenic needs through increasing participants' motivation to change rather than address these needs, such as gaining qualifications, or tackling substance misuse, directly. No substantial study of a prison based resettlement programme in England and Wales has been reported in a peer reviewed publication.

FOR is a cognitive-behavioural programme which aims to combine a strong emphasis on motivational work with a focus on resettlement goals and actions. Participants meet with resettlement agency representatives during the programme whilst still in prison to build continuity with these organisations, by for instance setting up appointments, once they are released. The criminogenic needs addressed by FOR are substance misuse, lack of accommodation and inability to gain employment potentially through a lack of education and / or training.

It is targeted at adults with a custodial sentence of one to four years or young offenders with a sentence of up to four years with these criminogenic needs and who are due for release from prison within three months.

The programme consists of 11 group sessions of 2 to 2.5 hours which includes skills building, motivational exercises, and goal setting and planning. There is also an individual goal setting meeting. A 'marketplace' session gives participants the opportunity to meet, interact and practice their skills with representatives from external organisations who provide support to participants in addressing their criminogenic needs.

The participants continue to follow an action plan they have developed during the programme once they have been released that aims to address their criminogenic needs and thus reduce reoffending.

The programme was accredited by the Correctional Services Accreditation and Advice Panel (CSAAP) in 2004 and has been delivered nationally by the Prison Service continuously since then.

Approach

Proven reoffending rates for participants in FOR were compared to a matched control group created using PSM.

Programme participants: All usable cases with full data on all covariates were used from the commencement of the programme until June 2009; see Table 1 below. The key variables (covariates) used in the matching were:

- Young offender (age 18 -20) / adult (21+)
- Risk – Offender Group Reconviction Scale v.3 (OGRS3)[1] – 2 year percentage
- Level of literacy and numeracy
- Motivation to address offending
- Problems with[2]:
  - Accommodation
  - Education, training or employment
  - Drugs and alcohol
- Previous attendance on an accredited programme
- Age at discharge
- Offence type
- Sentence length
- Number of previous convictions

See Annex A for a full list of the matching covariates and examples of scores pre and post-matching.

A limitation of using PSM methodology for establishing a matched control group is that it is dependent on data being available for all variables that are related to both the selection process and outcomes. The accuracy of findings is especially vulnerable to bias where an unmeasured variable of this category is not included in the logistic regression analysis. The researcher is not aware of any key variable that would affect the PSM analysis in this study.

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[1]   OGRS is a tool which predicts reoffending using static risk factors – age, gender and criminal history (Howard, Francis, Soothill, & Humphreys, 2009).

[2]   Taken from OASys which is a framework assessing risk and need (Home Office, 2006).

Controls: Tranches of offenders for three month periods were taken from each corresponding year (2004 to 2009) to develop a pool of potential matches from which a control group could be formed from the Inmate Information System: a database used by NOMS to hold prisoner information. Table 1 summarises sample sizes.

The 'Total untreated (potential pool)' is the total number of cases with full sets of data that, prior to the PSM process, were available for matching. The 'Matched control sample' is the number of these cases that were actually used in the control group.

Table 1: Sample sizes

Sample	Male	Female
Total untreated (potential pool)	2,065	498
FOR participants available for matching	495	385
FOR participants matched	473	266
Matched control sample	473	266

Measures: Data sources used were:
- Living Skills Programmes database
- Offender Assessment System (OASys)
- Inmate Information System
- Police National Computer (PNC).

Outcome: This study looked at 'proven one year reoffending', which is any offence that led to a caution, court conviction, reprimand or warning within a one year time period from the date of release. A further 'buffer period' of six months was added to allow for any offences committed within this one year period to be convicted in court. Analysis was also conducted looking at the time to first offence.

PSM was performed using all FOR selection criteria variables along with a number of other variables that potentially could affect selection on to the programme and which were potentially related to reoffending. Treated and control cases were matched using the 'greedy' matching procedure which takes the control case closest to a treated case based upon their propensity scores. Once a match is made both the treated and control cases are removed from the process and the next closest treated / control cases are matched. A calliper provides the maximum propensity score distance between a treated and control case for a match to be possible. The process continues until all possible matches are made within the calliper distance. Table 2 indicates mean scores of treated and control groups after matching on some covariates for the full

sample analysis. An expanded version is shown in Annex A.

Table 2: Examples of mean scores of covariates after matching for full sample analysis.

Variable	Male Treated	Male Control	Female Treated	Female Control
Age at discharge	26.1	25.9	28.1	27.8
Risk – OGRS3 – 2 year	73.8	74.5	59.0	59.6
Attendance on another accredited programme	31.7%	30.0%	31.6%	29.7%
Number of criminogenic needs addressed by FOR	2.25	2.26	2.29	2.25

A large number of cases in the total sample were found not to have met the suitability criteria for attendance on the programme (e.g. meet minimum risk level, released more than three months following FOR, did not have any criminogenic needs addressed by FOR): 30% of males and 58% of females. Propensity score analysis was therefore also run on suitable cases only as well as all cases.

Results

The one year reoffending rates for the FOR sample and the control sample, broken down by gender, are set out in Table 3. Using chi square, no differences were significant at the 5% level and therefore it is not possible to state that attendance on FOR significantly reduced reoffending rates. In addition, no significant differences were found in time to first offence between the treated and control group for either gender.[3]

Table 3: One-year proven reoffending rates for all cases

One-year reoffending rate %	Gender Male	Gender Female
FOR	59.5	40.6
Control sample	56.5	44.0

Reoffending rates for the suitable cases only are set out in Table 4. Chi square analysis again found no significant difference at the 5% level and therefore it is not possible to state that FOR significantly reduced reoffending rates for either male or female participants who met all suitability criteria.

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[3]   Male: Wald = 0.16 (1), p = 0.69. Female: Wald = 2.18 (1), p = 0.14).

Table 4: One-year reoffending rates for suitable cases only

One-year reoffending rate %	Gender	
	Male	Female
FOR	62.2	49.5
Control sample	61.7	55.1

Implications/Conclusions

These findings indicate that FOR does not reduce reoffending rates for either 'all participants' or only those meeting all suitability criteria, or impact upon time to first re-offence, compared to a matched control sample. There are a number of factors that could be affecting these findings.

- A large number of cases of female FOR participants were not matched. These cases were from the high propensity score category, and hence the most likely to be selected onto FOR. Loss of these cases might serve to bias the findings. A larger control pool, which included cases with high propensity scores, would be required to resolve this issue. These additional cases will become available as more data accumulates.

- Although the analysis on just those participants who met the suitability criteria did not find a significant effect, it is possible that the large number of unsuitable participants reduced the effectiveness of the programme. More accurate targeting for the programme is now in place.

- The FOR model of change is that criminogenic needs are addressed through: increased motivation, goal setting, and initiating and sustaining change. The use of reoffending as an outcome measure assumes that successful change in these behaviours results in reduced reoffending rates. Other factors may confound this link such as the availability of support and services which facilitate the reduction in criminogenic needs once the offender has been released. Data for these factors was not available for incorporation into this study.

- Other data collected outside this study has indicated that poor goal setting and action planning were operating up until 2009[4]. Significant work has taken place to address this

issue and further work continues to strengthen the bridge between custody and community (e.g. an action plan being passed to offender managers after release to address FOR criminogenic needs).

- During the period of this study a process of peer audit was the only method used to assess programme integrity and quality. Following a review and a number of changes, an independent quality assessment process is now operating.

Thus, whilst this study does not demonstrate any impact of FOR upon reoffending rates, the programme and associated processes have significantly changed since the time period covered by the study, ensuring closer alignment with 'what works' best practice. A further study using a more recent cohort would be required to evaluate the effectiveness of FOR since the introduction of these changes.

References

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Severson, E. S., Bruns, K., Veeh, C., & Lee, J. (2011). Prisoner re-entry programming: Who recidivates and when? Journal of Offender Rehabilitation, 50(6), 327-348.

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[4] Unpublished data collected during a monitoring process of the programme

Annex A: Propensity score matching variables and scores

Factors used for matching

Suitability factors:

i. Young offender with sentence 0 to 4 years or adult offender with sentence 1 to 4 years

ii. OGRS3 score

iii. Risk band (not suitable, borderline, suitable)

iv. Released within 3 months of attending FOR

2. *Static risk:*

i. Age at discharge

ii. Age at first offence

iii. Number of previous convictions

iv. Sentence length

v. Offence category

3. *Dynamic risk:*

i. Literacy problems

ii. Numeracy problems

iii. Learning difficulties

iv. Drugs use and obtaining drugs a major occupation

v. Difficulties coping

vi. Current psychological problems/depression

vii. History of self-harm.

viii. Interpersonal skills

ix. Impulsivity

x. Aggressive/controlling behaviour

xi. Temper control

xii. Ability to recognise problems

xiii. Problem solving skills

xiv. Awareness of consequences a problem

xv. Achieves goals is a problem

xvi. Understands other people's views is a problem

xvii. Concrete/abstract thinking

xviii. Motivation to address offending

xix. Attitude towards staff

xx. Attitude towards supervision / licence

xxi. Accommodation is a criminogenic need

xxii. Education, training & employability is a criminogenic need

xxiii. Drug misuse is a criminogenic need

xxiv. Alcohol misuse is a criminogenic need

xxv. Emotional well-being is a criminogenic need

xxvi. Substance misuse is a criminogenic need

xxvii. Thinking & Behavior is a criminogenic need

xxviii. Attitudes is a criminogenic need

xxix. Health concerns

xxx. Current psychiatric problems

xxxi. Total number of FOR needs

4. *Other factors:*

i. Year of discharge

ii. Prison of discharge

iii. Ethnicity

iv. Whether attended another accredited programme

Table A1: Example of mean scores of variables before and after matching and residual bias after matching: Male full sample

Variable	Sample*	Treatment Group	Control Group	% bias above 5% after matching
Total number of needs	Unmatched	2.26	1.95	
	Matched	2.25	2.26	-
Age at release	Unmatched	26.1	29.3	
	Matched	26.1	25.9	-
OGRS3 Score	Unmatched	74.0	62.4	
	Matched	73.8	74.5	-
Sentence length in days	Unmatched	663	679	
	Matched	665	651	-
Number of previous sanctions	Unmatched	14.8	12.5	
	Matched	14.7	14.6	-
Age at first offence	Unmatched	15.8	17.7	
	Matched	15.9	15.6	-
Attendance on another accredited programme	Unmatched	34.0%	22.7%	
	Matched	31.7%	30.0%	-

* No significant difference observed (p<0.05) for any covariate after matching

Table A2: Example of mean scores of variables before and after matching and residual bias after matching: Female full sample

Variable	Sample*	Treatment Group	Control Group	% bias above 5% after matching
Total number of needs	Unmatched	2.34	2.17	
	Matched	2.29	2.25	-
Age at release	Unmatched	27.6	28.8	
	Matched	28.1	27.8	-
OGRS3 Score	Unmatched	61.6	56.2	
	Matched	59.0	59.6	-
Sentence length in days	Unmatched	688	666	
	Matched	679	665	-
Number of previous sanctions	Unmatched	12.6	10.1	
	Matched	11.4	11.0	-
Age at first offence	Unmatched	18.8	20.0	
	Matched	19.4	19.1	5.4
Attendance on another accredited programme	Unmatched	34.6%	26.7%	
	Matched	31.6%	29.7%	-

* No significant difference observed (p<0.05) for any covariate after matching