Summary

Correctional treatment programs for adult offenders

Current state of affairs and possibilities for innovation

Background and research questions

Since 2005, all correctional treatment programs offered by the three probation organizations in the Netherlands are considered for accreditation by the Dutch accreditation panel for offender programs. The aim of this procedure is to select a limited, specific, and effective number of correctional programs for offenders which directly intervene in offending related problems and therefore lead to a reduction of repeat offending. The aim of this study, commissioned by the Research and Documentation Centre of the Ministry of Security and Justice, is to analyze whether the current set of available programs (and programs being developed) meet the requirements and which improvements can be made. This study analyzes: 1) which criminogenic needs are not sufficiently addressed in the available correctional programs, and 2) which groups of offenders are not reached with these correctional programs. Therefore, the current supply of programs is critically analyzed using new scientific results on effective interventions and experiences from the probation practice.

The study answers the following questions:

1a Which criminogenic needs are insufficiently addressed in the correctional treatment programs available as of 2010?
1b For which unaddressed criminogenic needs is a correctional treatment program expected to be an effective intervention? Which evidence-based adjustments, additions, or new programs should be introduced? What are the costs of these changes?

2a Which groups of offenders are not being reached by the correctional treatment programs available as of 2010? What are the estimated sizes of these groups?
2b What is the estimated size of the demand for correctional treatment programs for offenders who are currently ineligible for these programs?
2c Which offenders are not participating in the correctional treatment programs or parts thereof? What is the estimated number of non-participants? What are the causes of this non-participation?
2d Which evidence-based innovations are found in the literature and practice helping to reach the non-reached offender with suitable interventions? What are the costs of these innovations?
This study only analyzes the correctional treatment programs of the three probation organizations. These programs represent only a small part of the complete supply of treatment, support, and care that can be committed during detention or probation. These other interventions are not included in the current study. For many of the criminogenic needs or offender groups for which there are no correctional treatment programs available at the probation organizations, other suitable interventions may be at hand. In the conclusions of this study, we try to account as much as possible for the position of the correctional treatment programs of the probation organizations within the total supply of interventions. The information on the availability and accessibility of correctional treatment programs at the probation organizations supplied by this study, is important for making informed choices between internal and external interventions.

**Methods**

In this study, we used a large number of data sources. *Firstly*, previous studies and internal memoranda of the probation organizations were analyzed on: a) the composition of the offender populations, b) the correctional treatment programs of the probation organizations, and c) the allocation of offenders to correctional treatment programs. *Secondly*, the documentation on the accredited or temporarily accredited correctional treatment programs (Theoretical Manuals) and the methods of diagnosis (RIsC-Manual, version 3) of the probation organizations were systematically analyzed to examine which criminogenic needs and groups of offenders are not addressed according to the formal descriptions of the correctional treatment programs. *Thirdly*, we used databases with RISc-information on all offenders who began a supervision period at a probation organization in 2010 and those for whom in 2010 advice was requested by the Dutch Prison Service to set up a reintegration program. These databases enabled us to estimate the criminogenic needs prevalent in these populations for which no correctional treatment programs are offered by the probation organizations. Moreover, we estimated the sizes of the groups of offenders who are in need of one of the correctional treatment programs but are currently ineligible or believed to be ineligible for these programs. The estimations should be treated with care because the databases were incomplete with respect to important characteristics such as the type of offense, IQ, and specific psychiatric problems. Although missing in the database, these characteristics are used in the recommendations on interventions given by the probation organizations. *Fourthly*, digital files of the client follow-up system (CVS) and of RIsC were analyzed. These analyses show the course of correctional program participation and give explanations for no-show and dropout from the programs. As a
result of no-show and dropout, offenders are not actually reached by the program. The explanations are not analyzed separately for the different correctional programs. This will have to be done in evaluations of the actual functioning of the specific correctional programs.

Fifthly, interviews were held with 33 staff members of the three probation organizations. The respondents were policymakers (13), trainers of one or more correctional programs (13), program supervisors (5), and RISc-advisors (2). The information from the interviews specifies and clarifies the formal information from the manuals and registrations. Moreover, the interviews provide insights from daily practice about possible innovations in the current correctional programs. Only professionals from the probation organizations were interviewed. This means that no external reflection is included on the supply of the probation, for example from forensic care, the prison services or the public prosecutor.

Sixthly, the scientific literature was analyzed and ten academic experts from different fields were consulted. This allowed us to present new scientific knowledge on a) criminogenic needs, eligibility criteria for participation, and risk factors for dropout, and b) effective methods to address criminogenic needs in correctional programs and to reach more offenders. Because of the large number and variety of topics, this is not a complete review of the recent literature on correctional treatment programs. The literature that is discussed was selected in two ways. Firstly, by following the conclusions from our other data sources about the criminogenic needs that are not addressed and groups of offenders who are not reached. Secondly, we tried to describe the most important recent developments in the literature on correctional treatment programs in general.

Results

Insufficiently addressed needs

The results (Chapter 3) show that important criminogenic needs such as inadequate social and problem-solving skills, a pro-criminal attitude, problematic drug or alcohol use, and impulsivity are well addressed by the current set of available programs. This list includes the needs that are most prevalent among offenders (90% of offenders have problematic impulsivity and 83% have a strong pro-criminal attitude). However, some important needs are not, or not completely, addressed by the correctional programs of the probation organizations. Those needs can be categorized in three different types. The first category contains structural needs, which concern the work situation, the financial situation, and the housing situation. More than 70% of the offenders have problems of this type. The correctional programs focus at (cognitive) skills in these fields, such as thinking skills, attitudes, and social
skills. For the practical support and facilities necessary for finding and maintaining work, housing, and reducing debts, offenders can be referred to external interventions such as debt settlement assistance, work programs and supervised living. The recent literature shows that only integrated programs addressing both training of (cognitive) skills in specific fields and providing practical support, reduce the risk of future offending. The correctional programs of the probation organizations, however, are only marginally integrated in the external trajectories arranging the actual structural needs.

The second category contains criminogenic needs concerning personal relations, such as problematic family relations and the influence of criminal peers and family members. More than two thirds of offenders have problems of this type. Moreover, the potential protective effects of pro-social network members are insufficiently utilized in the programs. There is growing evidence that social networks have a positive effect on the motivation for behavioral change and therefore on reduced offending. Probation organizations have a system-focused intervention available which focuses on social relations, but this intervention appears to be insufficiently linked to the correctional treatment programs.

Finally, there are insufficiently addressed psychological problems such as low self-esteem, stress, callous-unemotional (CU) traits and sexual deviance. More than 70% of the offenders have problems with self-esteem or stress and more than 30% of the offenders have CU-traits. Incidentally, not all these psychological problems can be treated in the correctional treatment programs of the probation organizations (for more details, see the conclusion of this summary).

Unreached offender groups

There is a substantial number of offenders with criminogenic needs who are not being reached by the matching correctional programs of the probation organizations, either because they are not allocated to the programs (see Chapter 4), or because they do not participate as a result of no-show or dropout (see Chapter 5). The most important factor for non-allocation is a short sentence period. Factors leading to both non-allocation and non-participation are intellectual disabilities, insufficient knowledge of the Dutch language or illiteracy, severe addiction or psychiatric problems, dominant behavior, a fragile personality, and severe disruptions in daily living caused by, for example, destructive social relationships, instable housing or debts. Factors especially associated with dropout are a (severe) lack of motivation, problematic thinking skills, attitude and behavior.

275 The prevalence of these needs could not be estimated in this study.
276 Because these traits are not screened adequately, we used an item that is indicative for these traits, namely ‘taking responsibility for the current offense’ (RSc-item 2.10).
At present, offenders with short sentences are not being reached by the correctional programs because the duration of the programs is too long to fit into the short sentence periods. In this report, we describe that the criminogenic needs regarding, among others, attitudes and thinking skills as well as the risk of future offending of this group of offenders is high. For this reason, the availability of cognitive behavioral programs for this group would be highly desirable (Chapter 4).

The official contra-indications severe psychiatric problems, severe addiction, intellectual disabilities, severe lack of motivation, and severe disruptions in daily living all apply to more than 20% of offenders, with extremes to 45-50% concerning psychiatric problems for offenders in probation supervision. Dominant behavior is present in almost 20% of the offenders. These are all factors that are difficult to diagnose. Yet, only few additional diagnostic instruments are deployed. Therefore, it remains unclear whether inclusion and exclusion decisions with respect to the correctional programs are always correct.

The factor ‘fragile personality’ is not an official contra-indication for the correctional programs of the probation organizations. However, in many interviews this factor was mentioned as a contra-indication for participation. Fragile or vulnerable offenders are people with low stress tolerance and low self-esteem. Because of these traits they are vulnerable within the group or unable to combine different tasks. These traits are indeed much less prevalent among participants in the correctional program (Chapter 5) than in the general population of offenders under the supervision of the probation organizations (Chapter 4). This difference indicates that the traits are indeed a reason for non-allocation to the programs.

Finally, for most offenders a severe lack of motivation does not lead to non-allocation to the programs of the probation organizations. However, motivational problems are a major risk factor for dropout (Chapter 5).

In addition to the formal contra-indications and risk-factors for non-participation we found, offenders are also not being reached because the process of allocation to the correctional programs does not seem to function adequately as of yet. Factors to be considered in this process are: contra-indications are more strict than necessary for the effectiveness of program-integrity; a lack of clarity in the description of the contra-indications in the manuals of the different correctional programs; a lack of knowledge on the part of RISc-advisors about the content and possibilities of the correctional programs; insufficient use of additional diagnostic instruments and validated screening instruments; and long waiting periods and uncertainty about the start of training groups. Regarding these issues, we offer a number of suggestions for improvement.
Conclusions and suggestions for improvement

This study shows that the available correctional treatment programs of the probation organizations include most of the elements necessary to address the relevant criminogenic needs and groups of offenders. However, certain deficiencies can still be found both in the system and in the practice of the correctional programs. These deficiencies have resulted in a situation where some important criminogenic needs are not addressed and certain groups of offenders are not reached by the programs. The improvements we suggest focus mainly on improving the currently available programs and only to a lesser extent on the development of new programs (Chapter 6 and Chapter 7).

A major problem in the system of the correctional programs is that the programs have a rather isolated position in the complete reintegration process of the offenders. The correctional programs should be integrated more systematically within the interventions focused on structural needs (housing, work, and the settlement of debts) and the system approach as used in the system-focused intervention of the probation organizations. For this purpose programmatic trajectories should be developed. This could be done in the form of so-called ‘approved activities’. Better integration of the programs in broader trajectories will probably improve the motivation of offenders and the effectiveness of the correctional programs. Moreover, as a result of increased integration of programs, offenders who are currently not being reached because of severe disruptions in their daily lives may be eligible for correctional treatment programs in future.

Concerning the practice of the correctional programs we describe improvements in three categories: 1) the process of inclusion and exclusion with respect to the correctional programs, 2) the process of improving the motivation of offenders for the correctional programs, and 3) adjustments within the correctional programs.

Firstly, it is important that the process of professionalization of the inclusion and exclusion for the correctional programs will be continued. Currently, it is highly probable that offenders are wrongly included (for example offenders with intellectual disabilities), or wrongly excluded (for example, offenders of partner violence). False inclusion is expected to increase the dropout risk. False exclusion may result in offenders for whom no interventions are found or who are allocated to external programs while a matching program is available at the probation organizations. Our analyses show that the situation can be improved by: 1) removing ambiguousness in the exclusion criteria for the

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277 If a social network is not at hand, it is possible (and it seems to be effective) to intervene using a ‘created network’ in which both volunteers and professionals participate. Such networks are already used in interventions for sexual offenders (COSA).

278 These are structured interventions that address the criminogenic as well as the social needs of offenders. They offer a broader scope of intervention possibilities than the accredited correctional programs. They are focused not only on direct criminogenic needs, but also on factors that affect rehabilitation and resocialisation and therefore indirectly reduce future offending risks.
different correctional programs and dropping unnecessary exclusion criteria (such as partner violence), 2) improving the diagnosis by using more validated instruments for screening (for example the PCL-SV, a screenings version of the Psychopathy Checklist and a screener for intellectual disabilities) and adaptations to some specific RvSc-items (for instance self-esteem), and 3) to increase the knowledge on the part of the advisors about the correctional programs.

Secondly, continuous and far-reaching attention for the motivation of offenders is necessary. At this moment, a severe lack of motivation (a problem affecting 20% of offenders) is an official exclusion-criterion. However, in practice this criterion is not used very strictly, because motivation is a dynamic factor and can therefore change over time. Still, offenders with a lack of motivation who are allocated to the correctional programs, drop out twice as often as well-motivated offenders. Therefore, a lack of motivation is an important reason why offenders are not effectively being reached by the correctional programs of the probation organizations. Moreover, this is a type of dropout for which there are no external interventions available, as opposed to, for example, offenders with an intellectual disability or psychiatric problems where such external interventions are probably available. With respect to motivation problems the probation organizations therefore have an important responsibility. Two possible adjustments within the correctional programs themselves may improve the motivation for correctional programs. Firstly, the formulation of personal goals using the structured PACI instrument (Personal Aspirations and Concerns Inventory), and secondly, the introduction of individual intake sessions preceding the start of all training groups. Moreover, easily accessible interventions which focus solely on the development of motivation for change, may also be introduced. Such interventions can be either specific sessions with specialized probation officers based on methods of motivational interviewing, or the group intervention called: ‘in an upward Spiral’ developed for offenders with addiction related problems. To increase the motivation to make efforts to change ‘structural’ or ‘system’ factors such as housing, work, finances, or social relations, the intervention program ‘Focus On Reentry’ (FOR) can be used. For these interventions, a more formal position should be created such as, for instance, the status of ‘approved activity’. It is also important to monitor the effects of these interventions on the successful completion of the correctional programs to improve our knowledge about what works and what does not work in the Dutch probation context with respect to motivating offenders.

The report shows that no priority should be given now to the development of new correctional programs by the probation organizations. The available set of programs is promising and priority should be given to improving the

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279 However, a formal status as an accredited correctional treatment program should also be considered. This is, for example, the case in England for the program FOR as a cognitive behavioral program for short-sentenced offenders.
implementation of the existing programs. However, there are legitimate fears that certain criminogenic needs will remain unaddressed even after the suggested improvements have been realized. Therefore, some additions to correctional treatment programs deserve further consideration. With respect to the non-addressed criminogenic needs ‘CU-traits’ and ‘sexual deviance’, external treatment (in the forensic care) appears to be most suitable, given the intensive specialist treatment that is required. For the criminogenic needs ‘low self-esteem’ and ‘stress’, correctional programs in the probation context or in prison appear to be effective. The international literature on the effectiveness of programs based on Acceptance and Commitment and Mindfulness suggests that such interventions can provide an effective addition to the currently available programs. In addition to positive effects on low self-esteem and stress, effects were found on general psychological well-being, drug use, coping skills, hostility, and self-respect within offender populations.

Certain groups of offenders are bound to fall outside the scope of the correctional programs of the probation organizations regardless of any improvements. These are offenders with a short sentence, and large numbers of offenders with intellectual disabilities and offenders with complicated psychiatric or addiction problems, a fragile personality or low stress tolerance.

We recommend extending the current set of programs with the described FOR program to offenders with a short sentence. This program can reach a large and currently unreached offender group with considerable criminogenic needs. Moreover, for these offenders there is currently no supply, neither within or outside the probation organizations, that is directly focused on improving their thinking skills, attitudes, social skills and behavior. The literature shows that a motivating cognitive behavioral correctional program increases the effectiveness of structural support and facilities during sentence and aftercare when it comes to reducing future offending risks (Chapter 6).

For offenders with intellectual disabilities the supply of adapted programs (so-called ‘plusversions’) which better match the intellectual capacities of these offenders could be created. Such a program is already available for the ‘CoVa-training’.

Finally, offering individualized versions of existing programs could contribute to solving the current uncertainty and long waiting periods preceding the start of specific training groups. Moreover, some of the offender groups that are currently not being reached by the programs of the probation organizations (e.g. offenders with psychiatric problems and offenders with a fragile personality or low stress tolerance) may be reached with individual versions. For some of these offenders, especially those with severe psychiatric problems, it is questionable whether or not they should participate in programs offered by the probation organizations. Perhaps external treatments, such as are available in the ‘SG-LVG’ sector (treatment centre for people with severe
behavioral problems and intellectual disabilities) or in the forensic care, are more effective for those offenders. This issue obviously requires a more fundamental discussion. The present study hopes to contribute to this discussion. Furthermore, this study hopefully contributes to the improvement of the diagnoses with respect to the correctional programs, the practice and integration of the current correctional programs and decisions about developing new correctional programs. Finally, this report provides information about the cost-aspect of the suggested improvements.