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Cognitive determinants of offending behaviour**Karin Spenser**

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Prosociality is important in the study of offending behaviours. This is explained by the belief that the risk of offending is lowered if a person is possessed of certain cognitive skills. As a consequence several rehabilitative interventions, aimed at improving these skills, have been developed in the UK. However, despite the recognition that psychometric measurements can provide an understanding of individual cognitive abilities, with the exception of IQ, most do not require potential participants to be pre-screened before participation. Evidence relating to the success of these programmes has been mixed. Indeed, for some interventions research has indicated little or no difference in terms of recidivism at the two year mark between those who took part in the programme and those who did not. Yet, the theoretical premise, that programmes aimed at improving cognitive abilities in offenders will have a positive effect on recidivism, remains robust. The overriding aim of this study was to consider the potential benefits of assessing individual cognitive abilities in offenders, prior to programme participation. To do this, 400 male and female, offenders and non-offenders has completed questionnaires measuring a number of cognitive abilities. Significant differences were detected between the offenders and the non-offenders, with the offenders scoring lower than the non-offenders. It is therefore suggested that, like IQ, consideration of cognitive abilities may be of long term benefit. Simply, a more focused intervention, aimed at the specific cognitive needs of an individual, or group of offenders, may have a greater the impact in terms of reducing re-offending.

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