

Neuropsychological Disabilities in Executive Functions and Visuospatial Skills of Juvenile Offenders in a Half-Open Program in Santiago De Chile

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Abstract : Traditional interventions for young offenders are necessary but not sufficient to tackle the multiple causes of juvenile crime. For instance, interventions offered to young offenders often are verbally mediated and dialogue based, requiring important metacognitive abilities as well as abstract thinking, assuming average performance in a wide variety of skills. It seems necessary to assess a broader set of abilities and functions in order to increase the efficiency of interventions while addressing offending. In order to clarify these assumptions, Stroop Test, as well as Rey-Osterrieth Complex Figure Test were applied to juvenile offenders tried and sentenced for violent crimes in Santiago de Chile. A random sample was drawn from La Cisterna Half-Open Program, consisting of 50 young males between 18 and 24 years old, residing in different districts of Santiago de Chile. The analysis of results suggests a disproportionately elevated incidence of impairments in executive functions and visuospatial skills. As an outcome, over 40% of the sample shows a significant low performance in both assessments, exceeding four times the same prevalence rates among young people in the general population. While executive functions entail working memory (being able to keep information and use it in some way), cognitive flexibility (to think about something in more than one way) and inhibitory control (being able to self-control, ignore distractions and delay immediate gratification), visuospatial skills permit to orientate and organize a planned conduct. All of these abilities are fundamental to the skill of avoiding violent behaviour and abiding by social rules. Understanding the relevance of neurodevelopmental impairments in the onset of violent and criminal behaviour, as well as recidivism, eventually may guide the deployment of a more comprehensive assessment and treatment for juvenile offenders.

Keywords : executive functions, half-open program, juvenile offenders, neurodisabilities, visuospatial skills

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