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BEHAVIOUR CHANGE: IDENTIFYING THE EXTERNAL FACTORS WHICH HELP DIRECT THE EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT OF STOPPING REOFFENDING OR HELP MAINTAIN RECIDIVISM

A study of driver offenders who have made a decision to stop driving while disqualified.

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Abstract

The prediction of criminal behaviour is perhaps one of the most central issues in the New Zealand Department of Corrections today. In order to understand more fully the human diversity involved in criminal activity, the current focus is on the psychology of criminal conduct and the internal variables operating to maintain this behaviour. Given the usefulness of combining a variety of predictors of criminal behaviour, both internal and external, the study attempts to redress the gap that appears to have emerged with the concentration on internal predictor variables. This endeavour is on a small scale. The research participants are a group of eight (8) recidivist driver offenders, who have completed the nine week phase of the Driver Offender Treatment (DOT) programme and ten (10) support people. An inquiry reveals their understanding of the external factors which either direct the course of recidivism or the effective management of their decision to stop driving while disqualified. The central argument, and one that has provided the motivation to carry out this study, is that external factors, such as support people, play a major part in the lives of offenders who have decided to stop or significantly reduce their reoffending. In the management of sentences, the Community Probation service has traditionally targeted its resources to the offender. The assumption of the current study is that factors operating in the offender's environment are also instrumental in the goal of reducing

reoffending. It is proffered that these factors are given more emphasis in practice and resourcing issues.

The present study is an exploratory one, with responses elicited from a sample of recidivist driver offenders and the people they identify as their key support people. Semi-structured individual, face-to-face interviews are instrumental in this process. The research project explores the concepts and themes that emerge, which are based on the perceptions of both groups of people. Commentary and research findings on the issues facing the target client group are also examined and the connections between this material and the perceptions of the research participants and their support people are investigated. Two major findings of the study lend support firstly, to the critical part that external factors play in the process of behaviour change when treatment is provided for disqualified drivers who are sufficiently motivated to stop driving. Secondly, findings support the effectiveness of a cognitive-behavioural model which combines elements of the principles of constructivism and plays a vital role in the intervention of high-risk offenders. It is found that it is this combination of factors which directs the effective management of the decision to stop driving while disqualified. It is hoped that the outcomes of this inquiry will have positive implications for professional practice and social policy for rehabilitation programmes in the Corrections arena.

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