



Research Review

Do offenders lie? The impact of socially desirable responding on risk assessment

KEY WORDS: *self-report, offenders, socially desirable responding*

What it means

Offenders who may be most likely to be suspected of dishonest responding (e.g., antisocial, criminally oriented) were most likely to respond truthfully on self-report measures. Additionally, even when dishonesty was present, it did not significantly affect the accuracy of tools based on self-report. Therefore, within a forensic setting, the issue of socially desirable responding is not of great concern.

Much of the offender information gathered and used within the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC), such as intake assessments, risk assessments, and research data, is based at least in part on self-report. Research demonstrates that concerns regarding the impacts of such dishonesty are largely unfounded and supports CSC's continued use of this efficient method of information collection.

What we found

Several studies conducted with federal men offenders in Canada found that socially desirable responding does not affect the validity of self-report scales (Kroner, Mills, & Morgan, 2006; Mills & Kroner 2005, 2006; Mills, Loza, & Kroner, 2003). In other words, the predictive capacity of risk assessment measures, such as those used to predict success on release, was not significantly different for those who scored high on measures of socially desirable responding compared to those who scored low on such measures.

Offenders were no more likely to be dishonest on a self-report measure at intake compared to pre-release, or when told the results would be used for research compared to making decisions about their release into the community (Loza, Loza-Fanous, & Heseltine, 2007). The more criminally oriented or antisocial the offender, the less likely they were to employ impression management (e.g., the more honest they were) during self-report (Mills & Kroner, 2005, 2006).

What we looked at

Many risk assessment instruments rely at least in part on information provided by offenders, yet the accuracy of that information is often difficult to confirm. We examined research with federally-sentenced men offenders in Canada on the presence of socially desirable responding and its relationship to the validity of tools that are based on self-reported information.

References

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