

Evidence of the Impact of Nutrition on Offending Behaviour – An Initial Review

Dr Gemma Harper
Research, Development and Statistics – National
Offender Management Service
Ministry of Justice

Nutrition and offending behaviour – Rutter, Giller and Hagell 1998

- Four key aspects of toxins and nutrition are hypothesised to have links to antisocial behaviour - alcohol exposure in utero; lead ingestion; food additives and allergens; and vitamins.
- Concluded that whilst dietary elements can have some effect on children's behaviour "that the claims regarding supposed effects of toxins and nutrients on antisocial behaviour go far beyond the evidence."
- Considered toxins and nutrients to be likely to have a minor role in the overall liability to antisocial behaviour.
- Review was conducted in 1998 and does not include more recent research, including by Gesch *et al.*, in HMYOI Aylesbury.

Trial of nutritional supplements at HMYOI Aylesbury – Gesch *et al.*, 2002

- Randomised control trial of dietary supplements with young adult prisoners. Participants received either active or placebo supplements.
- Number of adjudications for the group of 82 young adult prisoners taking active supplements for a minimum of two weeks reduced by 35% and was statistically significant.
- The published account of the trial does not include a cost/benefit analysis or indicate the impact of the reduction of adjudications on the management of the YOI.
- This study related to adjudications in prison and we cannot generalise the findings to other behaviours or environments.

Trial of vitamin-mineral supplements for incarcerated juvenile offenders – Schoenthaler 1997

- Randomised control trial of vitamin-mineral supplements in a psychiatric-orientated facility housing 'chronic' juvenile offenders.
- Total number of rule infractions for 32 young people on active supplements reduced by 83%.
- Total number of rule infractions for 30 young people on placebo supplements reduced by 55%.
- As some young people (both taking active and placebo supplements) received dietary counselling the overall findings cannot be attributed solely to the supplements.
- Findings relate to rule infractions in a secure institution and we cannot generalise them to other behaviours or environments.

Meta-analysis – French and Gendreau 2006

- Meta analysis to investigate the impact of correctional treatments in reducing misconduct within correctional settings.
- Included 68 studies which involved 21,467 offenders.
- Diet interventions were categorised within the group of institutional strategies that had provided very tentative evidence of utility but were “in dire need of replication”.
- In 5% of the 104 observed effect sizes, effects were attributed to diet interventions.
- The results showed substantially higher effect sizes for behavioural programmes compared to non-behavioural (e.g. non-directive therapy and diet) and educational/ vocational interventions.

Processes for commissioning research in RDS NOMS

- RDS NOMS commissions and conducts research in the following areas:
 - Public protection and sentencing;
 - Interventions and offender management;
 - Community integration;
 - Public engagement and substance misuse.
- Business plan of work is agreed with Ministry of Justice ministers each year.
- Consult with members of Strategic Analysis Board to prioritise research requirements. This includes Directors from the NOMS and representatives from the Prison Service and Youth Justice Board.