

Authors

Christopher Blattman
The University of Chicago

Sebastian Chaskel
Program Director, Peace & Recovery

Julian Jamison
University of Exeter

Margaret Sheridan
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Cognitive behavior therapy reduces crime and violence over 10 years: Experimental evidence*

Christopher Blattman Sebastian Chaskel Julian C. Jamison
Margaret Sheridan[†]

August 31, 2022

Abstract

Several small, short-term, or non-experimental studies show that cognitive behavioral-informed trainings reduce antisocial behaviors for 1–2 years. But there is no large-scale, long-term research on persistence. We follow 999 high-risk men in Liberia 10 years after randomization into 8 weeks of low-cost therapy, \$200 cash, both, or a control group. A decade later, men receiving therapy or therapy with cash were about half as likely as the control group to engage in various antisocial behaviors, including robbery, drug-selling, and street fights—far exceeding expert predictions. Impacts are concentrated in the highest-risk men, and most robust from therapy with cash.

JEL codes: K42, O15, O17, D83

Keywords: Cognitive behavioral therapy, cash transfers, crime, violence, mental health, Africa, field experiments

*The Network for Engagement and Progressive Incentives (NEPI) and Global Connections implemented the program, and NEPI provided ongoing support. Innovations for Poverty Action coordinated all research activities. For research assistance in this field experiment, we thank U. Decker, D. Doku, Victor Gbureck, Sebastian Hernandez, Walter Higgins, Andrew Holmberg, Brian Antonio Magaña, Laura McCargo, Anna Muehlen, Albert Nyanang, and Steven Tan. We thank Sam Butler for comments. This round of the study was funded by the National Science Foundation (SES-1000000) and the Wellbeing Picturing Fund. The contents of this study are the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of their employers, funding agencies, or governments. The authors have no relevant or material financial interests that relate to the research described in this paper.

[†]Blattman (corresponding author): University of Chicago, blattman@uchicago.edu; Chaskel: Insights, sebastian.chaskel@insights.org; Jamison: University of Exeter and Global Practice Institute, j.jamison@exeter.ac.uk; Sheridan: University of North Carolina, msheridan@unc.edu

Cognitive Behavior Therapy Reduces Crime and Violence over 10 Years: Experimental Evidence

Several small, short-term, or non-experimental studies show that cognitive behavioral-informed trainings reduce antisocial behaviors for 1–2 years. But there is no large-scale, long-term research on persistence. We follow 999 high-risk men in Liberia 10 years after randomization into 8 weeks of low-cost therapy, \$200 cash, both, or a control group. A

decade later, men receiving therapy or therapy with cash were about half as likely as the control group to engage in various antisocial behaviors, including robbery, drug-selling, and street fights—far exceeding expert predictions. Impacts are concentrated in the highest-risk men, and most robust from therapy with cash.

August 02, 2022