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

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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

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