



**catalyst**  
CONSORTIUM

Australian Consortium for Research Excellence  
in Reducing Persistent Violence and  
Sexual Offending

## Understanding and Assessment Summary Report

# An analysis of the criminogenic needs of incarcerated serious violent offenders with an intellectual disability

- ✓ The study population has a very high number of criminogenic needs across the LSI-R:SV, LS/RNR and HCR-20<sup>v3</sup>.
- ✓ Presence of an antisocial peer group and lack of prosocial supports, substance use issues, lack of involvement in leisure/recreational activities, problems with stress or coping, and symptoms of major mental disorder were particularly common offence-related needs.
- ✓ Small sample size means that the findings should be considered preliminary.

March, 2022



Centre for Forensic  
Behavioural Science

# Background

Individuals with an intellectual disability (ID) are over-represented among prison populations when compared with the prevalence of ID in the general population. People in prison with an ID have also been found to have higher rates of reoffending than people in prison who do not have an ID, as well as a higher rate of return to prison. These findings highlight the need for effective treatment and management programs specifically designed to address the offence-related needs of people in prison with an ID. Identifying these criminogenic needs is, therefore, important as mainstream offending behaviour programs may not necessarily be a 'good fit' for people in prison with an ID.

# Aims of the analysis

This analysis adds to the limited body of knowledge on the criminogenic needs of people in prison with an ID. It examines the risk factor profile of a sample of serious violent offenders with an ID in Victoria, Australia on three commonly used risk assessment measures (LSI-R:SV, LS/RNR, and HCR-20<sup>v3</sup>). While there is a large evidence base about the criminogenic needs of the mainstream offender population, comparatively little research has examined the factors contributing to offending by people with an ID. Given potential differences between these groups, it is important that the criminogenic needs of offenders with an ID be clearly identified so that effective treatment and management programs can be implemented.

## Risk assessment measures

### Level of Service/Risk Need Responsivity (LS/RNR)

Assesses the rehabilitation needs of general offenders and their risk of reoffending (low, moderate or high).

### Level of Service Inventory-Revised: Screening Version (LSI-R:SV)

A condensed screening version of the LS/RNR that can be used when it is not feasible to complete the full version.

### Historical Clinical Risk 20 Version 3 (HCR-20<sup>v3</sup>)

A clinical guide for the structured assessment of a person's risk of violence risk comprising three subscales: Historical scale (H scale), Clinical scale (C scale), and Risk Management scale (R scale).

# Approach to the analysis

## Sample

The sample comprised 41 adults in prison with an ID who were sentenced in Victoria, Australia for a serious violent offence between 1 January 2015 and 31 December 2017 and who were assessed with the LSI-R:SV, LS/RNR and/or HCR-20<sup>v3</sup> during their period of imprisonment. ID was defined as formal registration with ID support services.



39 (95%) male; 2 (5%) female

30.9 yrs (average age at time of first risk assessment used for analysis)

14 (34%) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

This is a significantly higher proportion than the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Victoria's overall prison population.

## What is a serious violent offence?

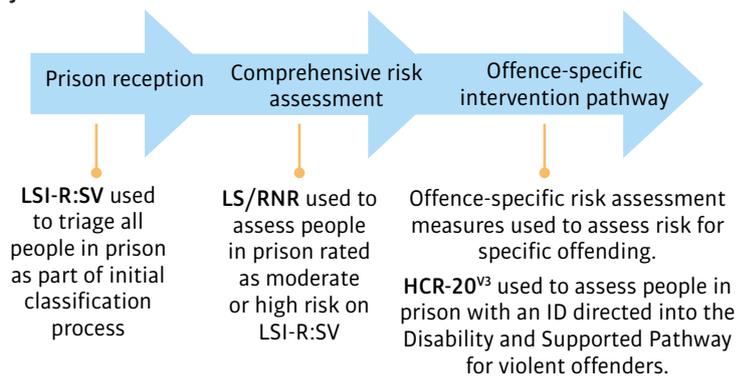


A serious violent offence is defined in section 3 of the Corrections Act 1986 (Vic). It includes murder, causing serious injury intentionally, aggravated burglary, making a threat to kill and false imprisonment.

## Procedure

Risk assessment data were extracted from Corrections Victoria's administrative databases. Where a participant had been assessed multiple times with the same measure, the last assessment completed during their period of imprisonment before release was used for the analysis or, if not available, the first assessment completed in the community post-release.

## Potential risk assessment pathway in Victoria's prison system for serious violent offenders with an ID



Some serious violent offenders with an ID may not follow this pathway and may bypass some/all of the assessment measures. Consequently, not all participants in the study had complete risk assessment data for all three assessment measures.

## Number of participants in each risk assessment measure subsample

LSI-R:SV — 41

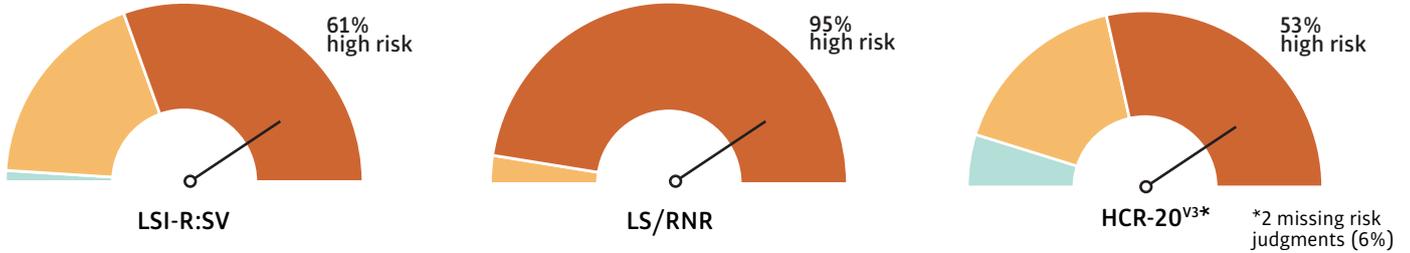
LS/RNR — 41

HCR-20<sup>v3</sup> — 32

# Results

## Level of risk

On each of the three risk assessment measures, the majority of participants were categorised as high risk, with 95% assessed as high risk on the LS/RNR. **Less than 10% of the sample received a low risk rating** on any of the measures, with none categorised as low risk on the LS/RNR. Of the 15 participants initially rated as moderate risk on the LSI-R:SV, all but one (93%) went on to be rated as high risk on the LS/RNR. The high risk nature of the cohort is consistent with the level of risk observed in a similar sample of men designated as serious violent offenders in prison in Victoria who do not have an ID.



## Criminogenic needs

The risk factor profile of participants across the three measures was one of high criminogenic need.

On both LS measures, the majority of participants were assessed as having treatment needs (at a high or very high need level on the LS/RNR) across all items.

On the HCR-20<sup>V3</sup>, more than two-thirds of participants were assessed as having all items on the H scale present, while more than half had treatment needs on each item of the R scale.

### High criminogenic need areas

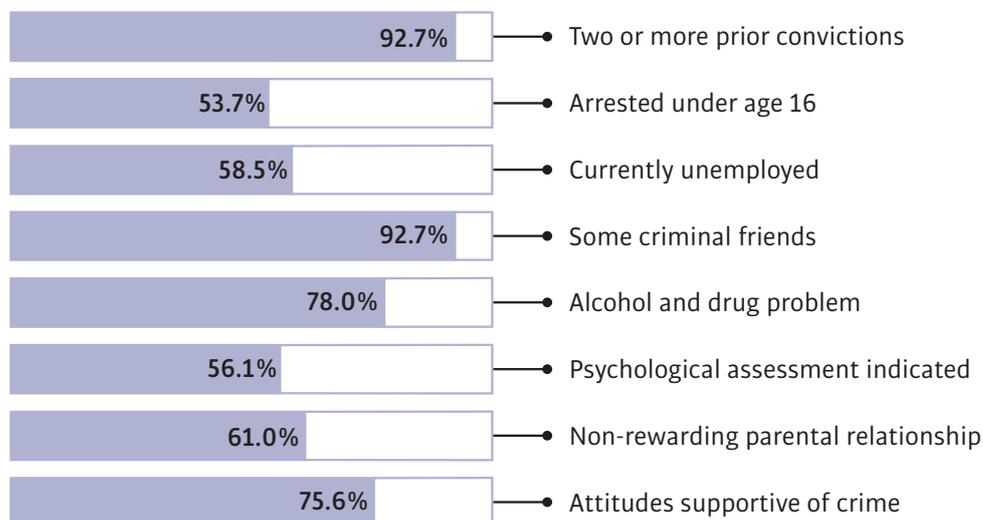
- Presence of an antisocial peer group and lack of prosocial supports emerged as a frequently identified offence-related need across the three measures, with the item assessed as present on the LSI-R:SV and HCR-20<sup>V3</sup>, and as a high/very high need on the LS/RNR, for more than 80% of participants.
- A lack of involvement in leisure/recreational activities was an identified need for more than 80% of participants on the LS/RNR.
- For historical risk factors, a history of offending or violence was a prevalent risk factor for participants across the three measures.
- Consistent with prior research on the criminogenic needs of offenders with an ID, substance use issues were identified as a need on each measure for more than three quarters of participants.
- More than 80% of participants were noted to be experiencing problems with stress or coping, personal support, and symptoms of major mental disorder on the HCR-20<sup>V3</sup> H scale. It is unclear if the high number of participants scored as having a major mental disorder reflected a comorbid mental health issue or coding of the person's ID.

### Low criminogenic need areas

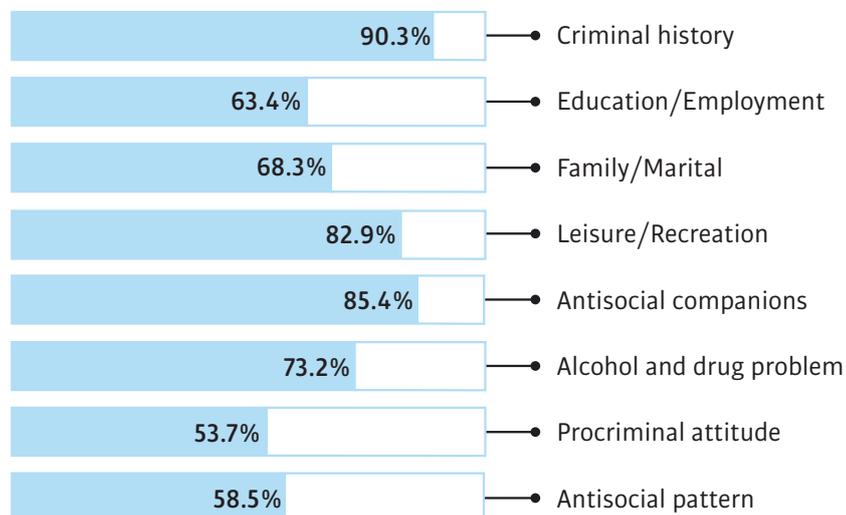
- Comparatively few participants were assessed on the HCR-20<sup>V3</sup> C scale as experiencing problems with violent ideation/intent, instability, or treatment/supervision response.  
Absence of violent ideation/intent may reflect that offending pathways for offenders with an ID can involve a tendency to become dysregulated rather than be driven by violent fantasies or planned behaviour. Difficulty eliciting these thoughts due to communication issues with participants may also have contributed to this finding. Poor treatment/supervision response may reflect the lifelong nature of ID (although scoring individuals with an ID as having a poor treatment response on this item may indicate a misunderstanding of the item scoring rules).
- Less than 1 in 5 participants (18.8%) were assessed on the HCR-20<sup>V3</sup> H scale as having been diagnosed with a personality disorder. This may indicate a reluctance to diagnose or uncertainty as to how personality disorder should be diagnosed in people with an ID.

## Criminogenic need profile for LS measures

### LSI-R:SV: Item present (N = 41)

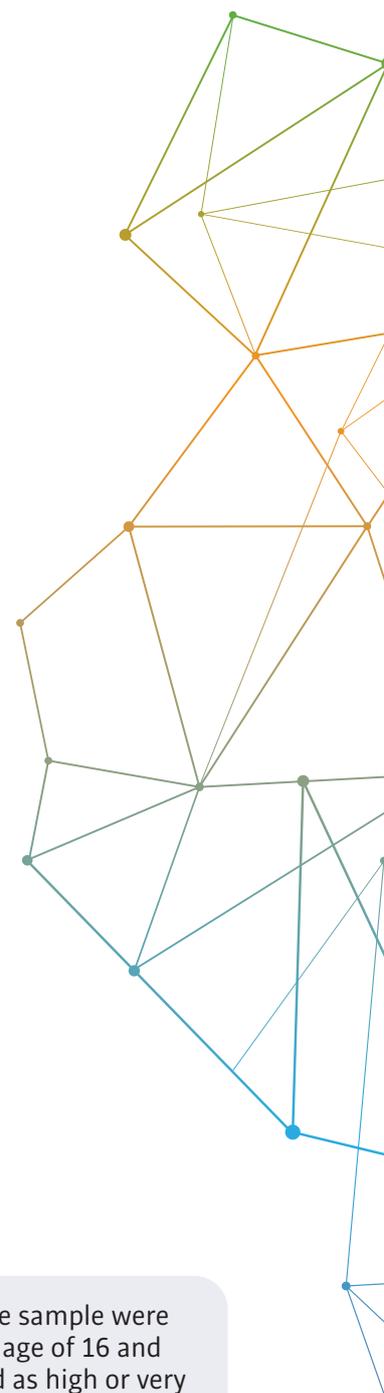


### LS/RNR: High or Very High Need Level (N = 41)



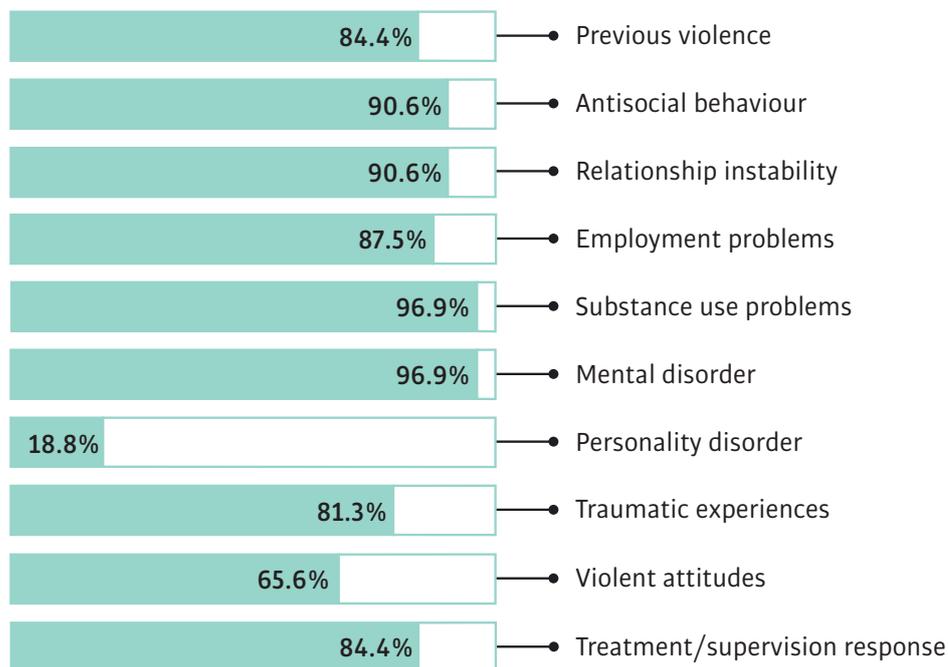
Just over half of the sample were arrested under the age of 16 and 90% were assessed as high or very high need for criminal history on the LS/RNR.

This suggest that, while many of the participants were not early-onset offenders, they did have a history of persistent offending.

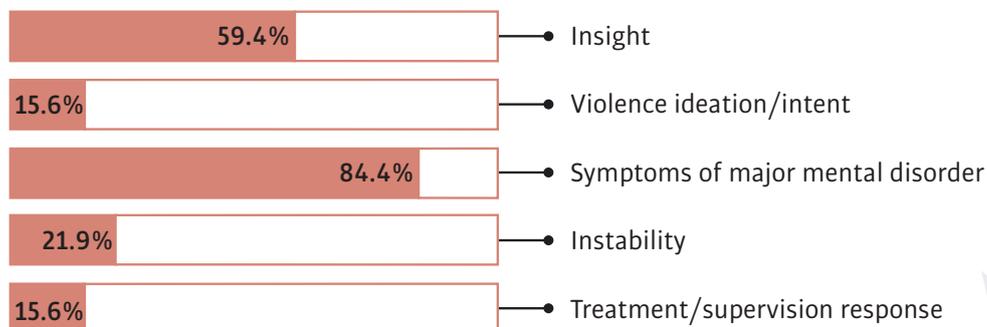


## Criminogenic need profile for HCR-20<sup>V3</sup>

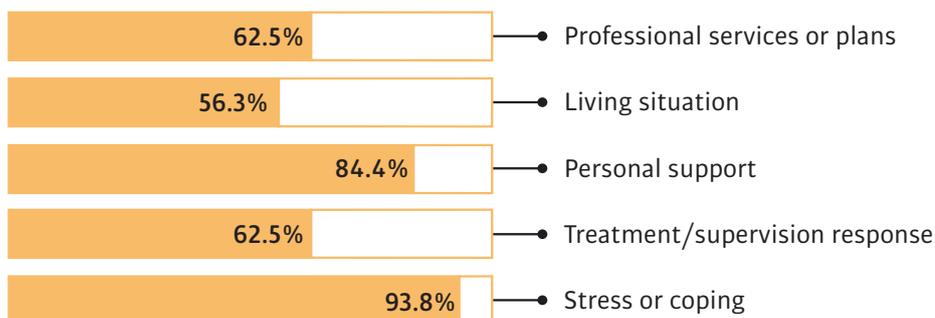
### HCR-20<sup>V3</sup> Historical Scale: Item present (N = 32)



### HCR-20<sup>V3</sup> Clinical Scale: Item present (N = 32)



### HCR-20<sup>V3</sup> Risk Management Scale: Item present (N = 32)



HCR-20<sup>V3</sup> risk factor profile suggests that participants' risk of reoffending is related to their stable/static factors on the H scale and difficulties with managing risk, as evidenced by the number of items rated as present on the R scale. It may also suggest that services are meeting participants' clinical needs, but that concern exists about participants' capacity to manage themselves in the future.

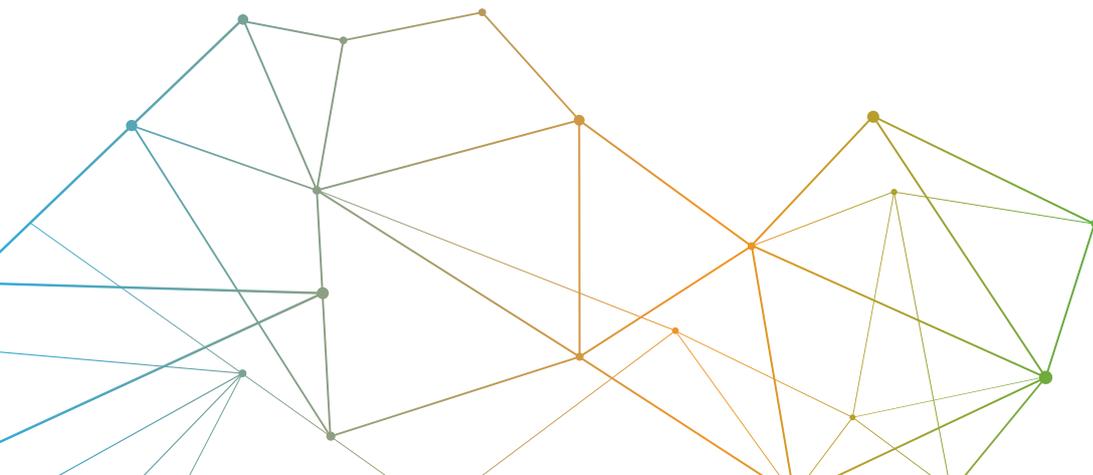
These findings may imply that the group lacks effective programs, services, accommodation, and/or coping strategies to appropriately manage their risk and provide support.

## Key implications

- ✓ The study population has a very high number of criminogenic needs across the LSI-R:SV, LS/RNR and HCR-20<sup>V3</sup>.
- ✓ Presence of an antisocial peer group and lack of prosocial supports, substance use issues, lack of involvement in leisure/recreational activities, problems with stress or coping, and symptoms of major mental disorder were particularly common offence-related needs.
- ✓ Participant's risk profile on the HCR-20<sup>V3</sup> suggests that risk of reoffending was related to stable/static factors and difficulties with managing risk, suggesting that the group lacks effective programs, services, accommodation, and/or coping strategies to appropriately manage risk.
- ✓ The small number of participants categorised as low risk on the LSI-R:SV and LS/RNR suggests that the Victoria's current assessment process could potentially be streamlined by eliminating the screening assessment for people in prison with an ID designated as serious violent offenders.
- ✓ The considerable proportion of participants classified as moderate risk on the LSI-R:SV who were later classified as high risk on the LS/RNR suggests that relying solely on the LSI-R:SV may underestimate risk in some high risk individuals.

## Key limitations

- ⚠ Small sample size means that the findings should be considered preliminary.
- ⚠ The sample is primarily comprised of males in prison with an ID so the findings may not reflect the criminogenic risk profile of females in prison with an ID.
- ⚠ Unique and complex sample that may not be generalisable to other jurisdictions.
- ⚠ Not all participants received the same risk assessment which meant that different samples were examined for each measure.
- ⚠ Small sample size meant that the predictive validity of the measures for reoffending could not be examined. Investigation of how well the LSI-R:SV, LS/RNR and HCR-20<sup>V3</sup> predict risk of violence and reoffending in offenders with an ID would be a useful next step in establishing the validity of the measures in this population.





Centre for Forensic Behavioural Science

Level 1, 582 Heidelberg Road

Alphington Victoria 3078

AUSTRALIA

E: [info-CFBS@swin.edu.au](mailto:info-CFBS@swin.edu.au)

T: +61 3 9214 3887

The Catalyst Consortium establishes a partnership between leading researchers, clinical leaders, corrective services, and forensic mental health partner organisations to systematically address persistent violence and sexual offending. This report was prepared as part of the Catalyst Consortium program of work which is funded by the Department of Justice and Regulation and the Victorian Institute of Forensic Mental Health (Forensicare). The views of the authors do not necessarily represent the views of Forensicare or the Government of Victoria.

Detailed study findings will be published in peer reviewed academic journals.



Centre for Forensic  
Behavioural Science



catalyst  
CONSORTIUM