

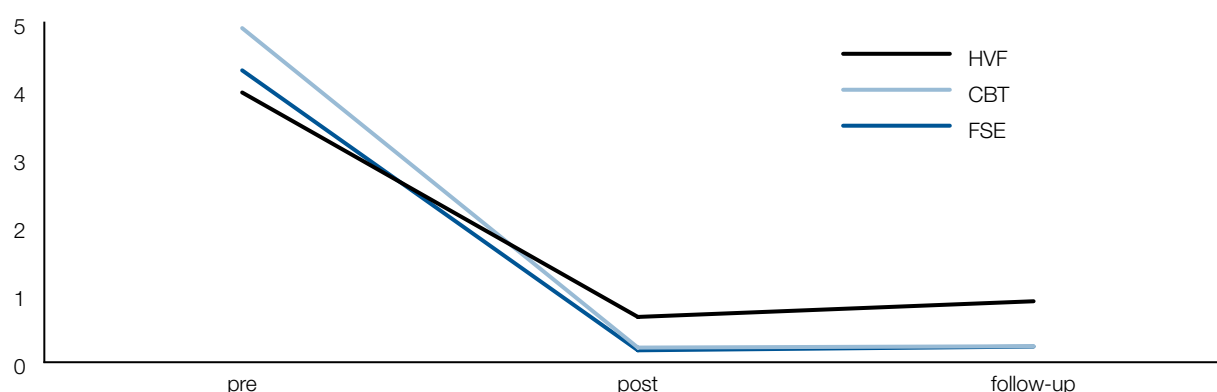
Comparison of the effectiveness of three community-based interventions targeting boys who set fires

There are programs in Australia and other countries aimed at reducing the fire-setting activities of young arsonists (Muller & Stebbins 2007). Evaluating the effectiveness of these programs is quite rare. However, research in the United States has evaluated fire-setting interventions up to a year after the intervention occurred (Kolko 2001).

Forty-six boys aged five to 13 years, who had set fires that had damaged property in the past three months, were assigned randomly to either a cognitive-behavioural treatment (CBT) or fire safety education (FSE) group, or selected for a brief home visit from a firefighter (HVF). The two outcomes of most interest were the number of fires set by the boys and the number of incidents of playing with matches (an average of each boy's and their parents' estimates) in three six-month intervals: immediately before intervention (pre), immediately after intervention (post) and six months after intervention (follow-up).

Figure 1 shows the number of fire-setting incidents for the three treatment conditions. There is a large decrease between pre and post measurements, from an average of 4.4 fires per boy per six months to less than 0.5 fires per boy per six months over the three treatments. These decreases are statistically significant at the 99 percent confidence level, indicating that all three interventions were effective in reducing the children's fire-setting activities. The longer-term effectiveness of the interventions is indicated by the continuing low numbers of fires set between six and 12 months after intervention during the follow-up period. This pattern of results is duplicated in the data of playing with matches. In summary, three interventions aimed at decreasing the fire-setting activities of children have been evaluated and shown to be effective.

Figure 1: Pre, post and follow-up numbers of fires set by type of intervention



Source: Kolko (2001)

References

Kolko DJ 2001. Efficacy of cognitive-behavioural treatment and fire safety education for children who set fires: initial and follow-up outcomes. *Journal of child psychology and psychiatry* 42(3): 359–369

Muller DA & Stebbins A 2007. Juvenile arson intervention programs in Australia. *Trends & issues in crime and criminal justice* no. 335. <http://www.aic.gov.au/publications/tandi2/tandi335.html>