



# Process evaluation Training Aggression Control

## Summary TACt Regulier

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## Introduction

The Training Aggression Control (TACt) is an individual behavioural intervention that can be imposed on young offenders as a so called learning penalty, a penal sanction within a framework of criminal law. In addition to the regular variant (in Dutch: TACt Regulier), there is also a variant for young offenders with a mild intellectual disability (MID), TACt Plus. TACt Regulier was developed by PI Research in 2010 at the request of the Child Care and Protection Board (in Dutch: RvdK) on the basis of the experiences with a group training for aggression control.

TACt Regulier was accredited by the former Ministry of Justice Accreditation Committee for Behavioural interventions in April 2014. This means that the intervention meets all the quality criteria for behavioural interventions drawn up by the Ministry of Justice and Security (in Dutch: JenV). For the reassessment of the intervention by the accreditation committee, a process evaluation is needed.

DSP-groep conducted a process evaluation on TACt Regulier on behalf of the Scientific Research and Documentation Centre (in Dutch: WODC) of the Ministry of Justice and Security between 1 July 2017 and 1 May 2018. The results of the process evaluation are summarised here. In parallel to this process evaluation, a process evaluation of TACt Plus has also been carried out. The results are presented in a separate summary.

## The organisation of TACt Regulier

The RvdK owns the intervention and contracts out the intervention every two years (with the possibility of an extension of two years). TACt Regulier has been carried out since 2015 by the certified trainers of Top Groep - a care provider specialised in carrying out training and coaching programmes for young people and adults. PI Research provides the training and certification of the TACt-trainers. Top Groep has a partnership with PI Research for quality assurance. PI Research carries out the supervision.

If a young person is suspected of a criminal offence and the police have established a medium or high general recidivism risk on the basis of the section of The National Set of Instruments Juvenile Justice System (in Dutch: LIJ) for the police (Preselect Recidivism), then in principle an investigation will always be carried out by the RvdK. Within the framework of the investigation, the RvdK investigator gathers information that is entered in a structured manner in the section of the LIJ that is intended for the RvdK. On the basis of the indicative criteria for the various interventions included in the LIJ system, the LIJ provides suggestions for one or more interventions. In a Multi-Disciplinary Consultation (in Dutch: MDO), the RvdK investigator then assesses whether there are any contra-indications that stand in the way of possible implementation of the suggested interventions, and which intervention best suits the problems of the young offender. The RvdK investigator advises the Public Prosecution Service or the court. They may or may not accept the advice. The learning penalty can be imposed by the public prosecutor or the judge. Young offenders who are sentenced to a learning penalty are then registered with the RvdK. The community service coordinators set

out the learning penalties with Top Groep, which assigns a trainer to the young offender. The community service coordinators monitor the criminal proceedings and call the young offenders to account in case of non-compliance with rules and agreements. They perform the case control over the learning penalty and follow the process of TACt Regulier.

## The intervention TACt Regulier

TACt Regulier is intended for young offenders who have committed one or more offences and have shortcomings in social skills and anger control and have an antisocial attitude and misconceptions. The intervention aims to reduce the risk of aggressive and antisocial behaviour by training social skills, learning to control anger, changing cognitive distortions (misconceptions) and increasing the level of moral reasoning. TACt Regulier consists of three components: Social Skills (in Dutch: SOVA), Anger Control (in Dutch: BCT) and Moral Reasoning (in Dutch: MR). Each component consists of eight one-hour meetings. Two meetings are held each week. In a meeting, the social skills and anger control components are given in succession. Moral Reasoning is given in a separate meeting. At each meeting, the young offenders are given homework assignments. It is the intention that between the meetings they practice the skills they have learned in everyday situations.

## Purpose of the process evaluation

The purpose of this research is to determine whether the intervention programme is carried out with integrity. The intervention is performed with integrity when:

- ① the target group as realised meets the criteria for the intended target group;
- ② the intervention is carried out as described in the manuals approved by the Accreditation Committee for Behavioural interventions, and
- ③ the professionals and organisations involved in the implementation of the intervention meet the requirements of the manual.

In addition, the process evaluation identifies bottlenecks and facilitating factors in the implementation, and it also looked into whether or not the conditions for a study to investigate change are met.

## Research Methods

Various research methods have been used to answer the research questions and various sources have been consulted. An assessment framework has been drawn up, based on a documents analysis of the TACt Regulier manuals. In order to gain insight into the inflow, through-flow and out-flow and the characteristics of the target group as realised, extracts were requested from the RvdK's registers from the period from 1 April 2015 to 1 January 2018. In addition, a dossier study was carried out of 100 records at the RvdK<sup>1</sup>. In order to gain insight into the process of indication, a RvdK researcher or behavioural scientist was interviewed in eight of the ten regions (8 respondents), plus five public prosecutors and two judges.

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<sup>1</sup> A random sample of 50 dossiers of young offenders who had TACt Regulier imposed, and 50 cases who had TACt Plus imposed has been selected. In the dossier study into the characteristics of the target group, the dossiers have been combined because the inclusion criteria and contra-indications are the same, with the exception of the MID criterion.

In order to map out the implementation of the intervention, the registrations of the Top Groep of completed training courses between 1 January 2015 and 1 January 2018 were analysed. In addition, file research was carried out on 50 Top Groep files. Ten community service coordinators were interviewed. At the start of the study, an interview was held with the head of quality control at PI Research and the management of the Top Groep, and a group interview was held with trainers (5 respondents). The video recordings of nine training meetings were analysed and a training course has been observed. Only in one case has it been possible to secure an interview with a young offender. There were no other young offenders at the time of the fieldwork who wanted to participate in the research and/or young offenders whose trainers considered it appropriate to approach them for the research. In order to send the findings back to the trainers as a means of feedback, a questionnaire with statements was drawn up among all trainers who were actively involved in TACT in January 2018 as trainers. Eleven trainers (61% response) completed the questionnaire. Additional telephone interviews were held with three trainers. The assessment reports of ten trainers (within the framework of licence assessment) have been analysed. Finally, a feedback interview took place with the head of quality control at PI Research and the management of Top Groep.

## Programme Integrity Assessment

In order to assess the programme integrity, core elements for the implementation of TACT Regulier have been formulated and rationalised on the basis of the manuals. In the manuals themselves, the core elements are not named as such. In consultation with the Quality Assurance Managers, seven core elements have been identified which are given the most weight (see Table 1). For the assessment of the criteria for the target group and context and the implementation of the core elements, we have based our findings on Durlak and Dupré (2008). They conclude that positive results can be expected when there is a minimum programme integrity of 60%. However, in a recent meta-analysis by Goense et al. (2016)<sup>2</sup> on the impact of interventions for young offenders on antisocial behaviour, it appears that only interventions with a high level of programme integrity have a positive effect.

As there was no validated and reliable system in place to assess the programme integrity of TACT Regulier, and as there were even problems with objectively establishing programme integrity based on different sources, robust statements on the degree of programme integrity of TACT Regulier are not possible. On the basis of the quantitative and qualitative data, we assessed per criterion whether the criterion applies to less than 60% of the training/trainers (= insufficient), to 60 to 80% of the training/trainers (= room for improvement) or to more than 80% of the training/trainers (= good). If there was insufficient information to make an assessment, we have assessed the criterion as unknown. The assessment framework describes how the assessment is based on quantitative and qualitative data. A limitation of the research is that the assessment is largely based on self-reporting rather than objective materials.

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<sup>2</sup> Goense, P.B., Ansink, M., Stams, G-J., Boendermaker, L. & Hoeve, M. (2016). Making “what works” work: A meta-analytic study of the effect of treatment integrity on the outcome of evidence based-interventions for juveniles with anti-social behaviour. *Aggression and Violation*, 31, 106-115. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2016.08.003>,

The overall programme integrity can be improved. There are too many parts where there is a lack of clarity about the programme integrity and where objective sources are missing. Based on the available sources, the implementation of two elements is assessed as good. The other core elements are considered to be subject to improvement. None of the core elements and criteria have been assessed as insufficient. The assessment of the core elements is summarised in Table 1. The uncertainties and ambiguities have been identified in the process evaluation, which provides a nuanced picture of the implementation of TACT.

**Table 1. Assessment of programme integrity (target group, core elements and context)**

Criterion	
Target group	The target group as realised meets the criteria for the intended target group
Core elements	Custom duration and phasing (8 SOVA, 8 BCT and 8 MR)
	Responsiveness (exercises are adapted to the individual situation of the young offender)
	Social skills are practiced (SOVA)
	Anger control chain is applied (BCT)
	Moral dilemmas are dealt with in three phases (MR)
	Homework is given, completed and discussed
	Parents are involved in the prescribed manner
Context (implementers and organisation)	The trainers meet the requirements for training, certification
	Supervisors and trainers meet the requirements for training, certification and supervision
	The programme integrity is monitored in accordance with the manual
	The cooperation with the chain partners is going well

Good	Room for improvement	Insufficient	Unknown
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**Does the target group as realised meet the criteria for the intended target group?**

Between 1 April 2015 and 1 January 2018, 370 young offenders were imposed a TACT Regulier intervention. On 1 January 2018, 14 of these 370 young offenders are still in training and 33 did not commence the training. Of the 323 young offenders who started the training, 89% fully completed it and 11% dropped out before completing.

In the dossier study at the RvdK, a minority of the target group as realised meets all the criteria of the intended target group that are formulated in the manual: approximately 45%. This means that most of them do *not* meet one or some of the criteria in the manual. At least 84% of the young offenders meets one criteria or more. 80% of the young offenders suffer from deficits in anger control and social skills. For the Quality Control Managers of PI Research, these are the most important criteria for TACT. 20% of the participants do not meet these two criteria either. TACT Regulier is intended for young offenders with a high

or medium risk of recidivism. Recidivism risk is low for 16% of the participants. In addition, contra-indications apply. This is difficult to determine on the basis of the dossier study. The MSY determines whether the contra-indications are an obstacle to the training. It is not possible to determine on the basis of the dossier study whether the contra-indications in the file stand in the way of the training and whether this has been discussed in the MSY. Furthermore, it happens that in some cases TACt Regulier is imposed on young offenders with a mild intellectual disability.

Based on the registration data and the dossier research, it is not possible to get a clear picture of all the criteria. For example, willingness to cooperate is not recorded by default, the existence of an MID was not (yet) properly registered during the research period, and no instrument is used to objectively measure the motivation of young offenders. On the basis of the dossier study, it is also difficult to determine whether the problems referred to stand in the way of the training or not. Finally, there is a lack of clarity about the weight to be given to the different inclusion criteria. This has not been mentioned in the manual, but in practice more weight is given to deficiencies in anger control and social skills.

### **Are the core elements of the intervention carried out as intended?**

Of the seven core elements, based on the sources consulted, the implementation of two is assessed as good: practicing social skills and the application of the anger control chain.

The implementation of the other core elements could be improved. For example, the execution of the Moral Reasoning part is a point of attention within duration and phrasing. Not all trainers find this module and its scope appropriate for young offenders. The implementation of this module is also experienced as difficult. Adapting exercises to the individual situation of the young offender is also a point of attention for several trainers (responsiveness). TACt Regulier is a training with standard modules, but individual accents are placed in the exercises in order to fit the needs of the young offenders. The core elements related to network and generalisation (homework, parental involvement, contact with community service coordinators and involvement of other social workers) are also considered to be in need of improvement. These core elements are not implemented unambiguously and reasons for deviating from the programme integrity are not properly recorded. It is not clear whether the homework was not done or whether the form was not completed. It is not clear why parents are not involved and whether parental involvement consists only of the presence of parents at the prescribed meetings or whether parents also support the young offenders with their homework and practicing their skills. The purpose of parental involvement is to support the generalisation of the skills learned.

The contact between trainers and community service coordinators is assessed as good by trainers and coordinators. However, the registration figures show that the community service coordinators are not always present at the evaluations, and it is also not clear how and to what extent the trainers keep the coordinators informed in the meantime. This seems to depend on the individual, both on the trainer and the community service coordinator.

### **Do trainers and organisations meet the requirements?**

The trainers and the organisations meet the requirements of the manual. The quality is supervised and monitored in accordance with the manual. However, according to the researchers, this model does not lead to an objective assessment of the programme integrity. Trainers can choose which meetings they record and submit for review. Also, the assessment of the video recordings is not done with a validated objective measuring instrument.

### **What is needed to improve programme integrity?**

As stated above, it is advisable to pursue a high programme integrity because only in the event of high programme integrity can the intended effects be expected. In order to promote programme integrity, it is necessary to address some of the implementation bottlenecks. Firstly, it is important that the target group meets all the criteria. This requires clarity on the weighting of the inclusion criteria. It is now unclear whether the criteria on skill deficits in anger control outweigh other criteria and whether young offenders should meet all the criteria. The manual must be clear in this respect. Next, it is necessary that the young offenders who are imposed a learning penalty meet the criteria. Secondly, the implementation of the module Moral Reasoning is a point for attention. Moral reasoning is one of the core elements of the intervention. More attention can be paid to this in the manual, training and supervision. Thirdly, it is important that the core elements of the intervention are clearly defined and that they are registered. This applies in particular to the core elements of network and generalisation. Fourthly, it is necessary to record any deviations from core elements and it is important to record the reasons for such deviations so that it can be determined whether they are justified. Finally, it is advisable to use an objective criterion when monitoring programme integrity.

### **Is a study to investigate change feasible?**

At the start and end of the TACt learning penalty, questionnaires are sent to the young offenders and parents. Most of the young offenders - and the parents involved - fill in these questionnaires. A bottleneck, however, is that not all programme objectives are covered by the questionnaires and that, according to the researchers, the questionnaires are not always in line with the programme objective. Shortcomings in the skills of anger control are not measured, and instead of the change in moral reasoning, errors of thought are measured. It is necessary to use validated instruments to measure the three programme objectives. When the programme integrity is good, a study to investigate change can be carried out. Based on the current inflow, it is expected that it will take at least a year before sufficient data are collected to make reliable statements about the change.

### **Discussion**

Based on the results of the process evaluation of TACt Regulier and TACt Plus, bottlenecks and contextual factors are discussed that can hinder high programme integrity, as well as the consequences of not applying the intervention with programme integrity. We will discuss the following points.

- ③ The way in which young offenders are indicated for TACt in the juvenile criminal justice chain has consequences for imposing this on young offenders who meet the criteria. Unclearness in the manuals contributes to this.
- ③ The penal framework within which the learning penalty is imposed and the consequences of this for the implementation of TACt with programme integrity.
- ③ The distinguishing feature of TACt in relation to other interventions and what it means when components are not implemented with programme integrity.
- ③ The distinction between TACt Regular and TACt Plus and the consequences of not realising the right target group.
- ③ The consequences of the absence of an objective criterion for monitoring programme integrity.
- ③ The consequences of the lack of objective instruments for measuring change on the programme objectives.

On the basis of the discussion, opportunities for further research and further development are identified.

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#### **Dienstverlening**

Onze inzet is vooral gericht op het ondersteunen van opdrachtgevers bij het aanpakken van complexe beleidsvraagstukken binnen de samenleving. We richten ons daarbij met name op de sociale, ruimtelijke of bestuurlijke kanten van zo'n vraagstuk. In dit kader kunnen we bijvoorbeeld een onderzoek doen, een registratie- of monitorsysteem ontwikkelen, een advies uitbrengen, een beleidsvisie voorbereiden, een plan toetsen of (tijdelijk) het management van een project of organisatie voeren.

#### **Expertise**

Onze focus richt zich met name op de sociale, ruimtelijke of bestuurlijke kanten van een vraagstuk. Wij hebben o.a. expertise op het gebied van transitie in het sociaal domein, kwetsbare groepen in de samenleving, openbare orde & veiligheid, wonen, jeugd, sport & cultuur.

#### **Meer weten?**

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