

Colorado Probation Research in Brief

An Experimental Demonstration of Training Probation Officers in Evidence-Based Community Supervision

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Continued Training in Target Interventions

Summary/Conclusions

In the ongoing evaluation of the Strategic Training in Community Supervision (STICS) project, the researchers designed this study to explore the longer term effects of the training, as well as the recidivism rates of clients, who worked with probation officers trained in STICS. The STICS training involved a three-day class, monthly meetings with feedback, and a refresher course. The study found that probation officers, who complied with all three elements of the STICS training, had better outcomes than those who did not regularly receive feedback via the meetings and/or refresher course. Specifically, they focused more on criminogenic needs in sessions and had lower recidivism rates.

Limitations of Information

Statistical controls were used to minimize the effects of several limitations. The sample was comprised of officers and clients from three Canadian jurisdictions, all with different risk assessments. The sample size was small and the probation officers volunteered to participate. The experimental and control groups were well-matched; but, there was one significant difference, in which "other" (Asian, Indo-Pakistani) was larger in the control group's racial composition.

Caveat: The information presented here is intended to summarize and inform readers of research and information relevant to probation work. It can provide a framework for carrying out the business of probation as well as suggestions for practical application of the material. While it may, in some instances, lead to further exploration and result in *future* decisions, it is not intended to prescribe policy and is not necessarily conclusive in its findings. Some of its limitations are described above.

This study, conducted by the developers of the Strategic Training in Community Supervision (STICS) project, was designed to evaluate the effectiveness of the STICS training in two ways: 1. Did the training improve the skills of the probation officers (PO), and 2. Did the improved skills translate to reduced recidivism rates?

The sample included 19 PO's, who were randomly assigned to the control group, and 33 PO's, who were randomly assigned to the experimental group. The control group was offered no training, while the experimental group was provided a three-day class on STICS, monthly meetings with homework and feedback, and a refresher course. The STICS training emphasized addressing the clients' criminogenic needs, particularly anti-social attitudes and cognitions.

PO's in the experimental and control groups were asked to recruit six clients to participate. During the study, the PO's provided audio tapes of their sessions with these clients at follow-up periods of 30 days, 90 days, and 180 days. The researchers found that the experimental group had higher post-training scores on four of five skill measures. They also found significantly more of the STICS-trained PO's discussed clients' attitudes (75.8% experimental group v. 10.5% of control group) and used cognitive techniques (69.7% experimental and 5.3% of the control). Additionally, the researchers found that the "trained officers spent proportionately more of their supervision sessions (discussing the criminogenic needs of their client and less of their sessions on noncriminogenic needs and probation conditions."

Regarding effects on recidivism, for clients supervised by PO's in the experimental group, the 2-year recidivism rate was 46.7% prior to the training and 25.3% after the training. There was little change in the recidivism rates for clients supervised by the control group officers, whose clients' 2-year recidivism rates were 41.5% and 40.5%, respectively.

Practical Applications

- ✓ Ensure quality assessments to identify the client's criminogenic needs to target with interventions.
- ✓ Develop case plans that specifically address the client's individual needs, prioritizing the Big Four in higher risk clients.
- ✓ Minimize the amount of time that you discuss terms and conditions. Instead, use your time to focus on the client's criminogenic needs, particularly addressing anti-social attitudes and cognitions as soon as they arise.
- ✓ Attend Brain Train or Thinking for a Change classes to learn cognitive behavioral skills to practice with higher risk clients.
- ✓ Set aside time to address compliance issues, so that the bulk of the office visit can be used to build rapport, model skills, and practice CBT techniques.
- ✓ Consider using homework with your clients to address their criminogenic needs. The Carey Guides have a selection of exercises and tools that target the different criminogenic need areas. Additionally, there may be helpful exercises and tools available through a T4C facilitator in your department.