

Colorado Probation Research in Brief

Expeditious Disclosure of Sexual History via Polygraph Testing: Treatment Outcome and Sex Offender Recidivism

Konopasek, J. (2015). "Expeditious Disclosure of Sexual History via Polygraph Testing: Treatment Outcome and Sex Offense Recidivism." *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation* 54(3): 194-211.

Key Words: Sex offender, rehabilitation, recidivism, community supervision

Summary/Conclusions

Utilizing a sample of 192 sexual offenders on probation or parole, the study analyzed how quickly a full sexual history disclosure was obtained, and if a timely disclosure had any impact on recidivism or treatment outcome. Recidivism and treatment success of expeditious/quick disclosure clients were compared against non-expeditious disclosure clients. While timely disclosure was not significant for sexual recidivism, it was positively correlated with treatment completion.

Limitations of Information

The study utilized a small convenience population in Washington and Oregon that was largely male and Caucasian. The finding may not apply to populations within Colorado probation. It is unclear if speedy disclosures had any effect on the outcomes of non-sexual offense recidivists. The study doesn't account for how many different polygraphers were involved in the polygraph testing process. Finally, the study does not differentiate between supervision agencies or locations with respect to treatment outcome or recidivism data.

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.

Encouraging Expeditious Disclosure

The current study examined if an expeditious full sexual history disclosure has any effects with outcomes in sex offenders on probation or parole. The study examined treatment records of 192 offenders from two treatment providers in suburban Washington and Oregon.

The 192 offenders were divided into two groups, non-expeditious disclosures or expeditious disclosures. The expeditious disclosures received a no significant reaction on a polygraph test on the offender's full sexual history disclosure within 12 months from the intake of treatment. In order to examine outcomes, the study used 5 years of recidivism data as well as treatment records to determine if there were any new crimes or if treatment was completed. The study included low-risk (27.1%), moderate low-risk (41.7%), moderate high-risk (20.3%), and high-risk (5.7%) offenders. The study included offenders that committed a variety of sex offenses (e.g. child molesters, rape, exhibitionists).

The study discovered that while expeditious sexual history disclosure was not significantly associated with recidivism, it was a significant predictor of treatment success. In the study, 69.3% of participants completed a full sexual history disclosure polygraph. Interestingly, while not significant, of the 192 study participants, 12 committed a new sex crime, 14 committed a new sexual status offense (e.g. failure to register), and another 14 were general crime recidivists. The non-significant finding in re-

cidivism was due to a lack of sexual recidivists. Of the 12 sexual crime recidivists in the sample, 66.7% did not achieve an expeditious disclosure.

Practical Applications

- ✓ When working with sex offenders, be sure to address both sexual and general (LSI) risks and needs. In the study, the majority of new crimes committed by this population were non-sexual in nature.
- ✓ Discuss with the probationer the expectations and purpose of the full sexual history disclosure process.
- ✓ Practice walking through the sexual history disclosure process. This may help alleviate fear or stress before the polygraph test.
- ✓ Encourage probationers to be open and honest about their sexual history, this may help expedite the disclosure process.
- ✓ Point out the potential benefits (e.g. treatment progress, safety plan, options) of completing a full sexual history disclosure polygraph successfully.
- ✓ Take into account the time it takes for a probationer to disclose, as this may signal anti-social tendencies or cognitive distortions.
- ✓ Focus supervision and treatment efforts on probationers that are high risk with high levels of deviance.
- ✓ Take the time to learn about the polygraph process.
- ✓ Review treatment progress and goals with probationers regularly.

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Aug. 2015