

Colorado Probation Research in Brief

The Connection of Probation/ Parole Officer Actions to Women Offenders' Recidivism

Morash, M., Kasy, D, et al. (2016). "The Connection of Probation/Parole Officer Actions to Women Offenders' Recidivism". *Criminal Justice and Behavior*: 43(4)

Key Words: recidivism, women offenders, relationship style, criminogenic needs, supervision

Summary/Conclusions

This study looks at the direct effects of probation/parole officer relationship style, attention to criminogenic needs, and intensity of supervision on women offenders' arrests and convictions. The study found that officer's behavior did not have a direct effect on official recidivism, but the officer's relationship style did have an indirect effect on recidivism due to offender's negative responses to supervision interactions.

Limitations of Information

The researchers used arrests and convictions as measures of supervision outcomes. This may not be representative of the direct effects of PO behavior. The study also looked at women who may have been participating in multiple programs addressing mental health, substance abuse, and employment, making it difficult to isolate the effects of supervision. Last, the research examined discussions on criminogenic needs including finances, mental health, and neighborhood demographics. According to some research, these may actually be defined as stability factors.

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.

Being Supportive Makes a Difference

The present study, originating from Michigan, seeks to uncover the direct effect of probation/parole officer relationship style on recidivism, as well as indirect effects through reactance and anxiety introduced by PO-offender interactions. In order to accomplish this, researchers studied 226 women who were supervised by 55 probation/parole officers from 15 counties with a geographic concentration in Wayne County (Detroit). Research officers used trained interviewers to conduct 3 face-to-face interviews with offenders whom were consistently supervised by the same PO, online surveys to obtain a recount of the PO's interpersonal style with their female client, as well as data from official records. Official record data included prior arrests and convictions, frequency of PO-client contact, and arrests and convictions in the 24 months after supervision began. When each PO was recruited for the study, he or she conducted a survey that obtained demographic information, information regarding their past work with women offenders, as well as a measure of general style of relating to female parolees and probationers. The female offenders were first interviewed 2-3 months after the supervision start date, and then twice more at 3 month intervals.

Although researchers did not discover a direct significant correlation between recidivism and intensity of supervision, addressing criminogenic needs, and officer/offender relationship, the study did discover that officer/offender rela-

tionship yielded a significant indirect finding. This indirect effect suggests that when women feel supported by their officer, they report less anxiety and reactance and have fewer arrests and convictions 2 years after starting supervision. This is a key finding of the study, suggesting that officers should try to be more supportive, rather than punitive.

Practical Applications

- ✓ Options, options, options! Provide probationers with options to reiterate that they have autonomy and freedom to make their own choices.
- ✓ Ask probationers for feedback. Inquire about what you can do better to assist them in being successful.
- ✓ Think about your non-verbal communication. Try not to let unrelated thoughts or stressors influence your non-verbal communication with probationers as they may take messages personally.
- ✓ When building a relationship with your probationer, ask about personal interests to show that you would like to get to know them. This will help to create a more relaxed environment.
- ✓ Have conversations about probationer attributes or responsivity factors that may impact supervision or treatment and make referrals based on that information.
- ✓ Express empathy and try to connect real life to lessons learned in treatment and COG groups.

State Court Administrator's Office
Colorado Division of Probation Services, Evaluation Unit
720.625.5760; www.courts.state.co.us **Oct. 2016**