

Colorado Probation Research in Brief

The Parolee - Parole Officer Relationship as a Mediator of Criminal Justice Outcomes

Blasko, B., Friedman, P., et al. (2015). "The Parolee - Parole Officer Relationship as a Mediator of Criminal Justice Outcomes". *Criminal Justice and Behavior* 42: 19.

Key Words: Client-practitioner relationship, parole officer - parolee relationship

Summary/Conclusions

The current study examined if a positive working alliance between a parolee and parole officer had an influence on positive outcomes. Data was collected from parolees in intervention and control conditions. While self-reported drug use was not significantly different, the number of parole violations (beyond drug use) was significantly lower. The supervision as usual group had an average of 2.9 parole violations per 100 days versus 0.2 per 100 days for the intervention group. The study also found that a positive working alliance was significantly associated with a lower chance of crime regardless of study group, risk, and study location.

Limitations of Information

The study was focused on a positive parolee – parole officer relationship, a positive probationer – probation officer relationship may not produce similar results. The study did not consider parole officer characteristics, which could have positively or negatively influenced the relationship. The study utilized self-report data, which may not match the official record.

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.

Strengthen the Working Alliance

The present study explored if a positive parolee – parole officer relationship had an effect on positive outcomes. The study consisted of 480 parolees who were at least 18 years old, English speaking, have substance abuse issues, be mandated to complete substance abuse treatment, and be moderate to high risk for drug relapse and/or recidivism according to an assessment.

Participants were randomly assigned to an intervention group (n=227) or a control group (n=253). Parolees in the intervention group completed 12 sessions by a parole officer trained in motivational interviewing and behavioral management. In 6 of the 12 sessions a counselor was also present. The intervention was designed to align expectations between officers, parolees, and counselors. In addition to attending their sessions, parolees participated in structured interviews at enrollment, 3 months and 9 months after initial appointment.

Parolees in the intervention group rated the working relationship with their officers significantly higher. Risk was a significant predictor of the working alliance. Parolees that were high risk rated the relationship lower. Over the course of the 9 month follow-up those with higher rated positive relationships were significantly less likely to use drugs. The researchers also discovered that a better perceived relationship was associated with a significantly lower probability of crime, regardless of study condition, risk, or site location. Finally, those in the intervention condition had a lower aver-

age of parole violations at 0.2 per 100 days in the community versus 2.9 for the supervision as usual group.

Practical Applications

- ✓ Use motivational interviewing techniques, such as reflections, to actively listen to the probationer. This may help with the communication of expectations between all parties.
- ✓ Maintain consistency and neutrality to promote the development of a healthy rapport between PO and client. Once trained, utilizing SBC may assist in preserving a neutral and consistent approach with probationers.
- ✓ High risk clients may struggle to perceive their relationship with their PO in a positive light. Frontloading services, celebrate small successes, and allow probationers to take initiative in the development of their case plans may assist in bridging the relationship gap.
- ✓ Actively collaborate and communicate with treatment providers. This may help ensure everyone is on the same page.
- ✓ The client's perception of his/her relationship with the PO influences the likelihood of reoffending. The PO may want to have a conversation with the client about what type of support would be most beneficial to him/her.
- ✓ Elicit feedback on the working alliance from the probationer. Ask "what am I doing well?" and "what can I do to support you in successfully completing probation?"

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