

# Colorado Probation Research in Brief

## Goal Setting and Self-Efficacy Among Delinquent, At-Risk, and Not At-Risk Adolescents

Carroll, A., Gordon, K., et al. (2012). "Goal Setting and Self-Efficacy Among Delinquent, At-Risk, and Not At-Risk Adolescents." *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 42: 431-443

**Key Words:** Adolescents, goal setting, self-efficacy, delinquency

### Summary/Conclusions

The current study examined how self-efficacy and goal setting differed between adolescent groups. The results of the study discovered that the delinquent group had a significantly lower number of goals, goals that were easier, and lower commitment to goals than the youth not at-risk. The type of goals were also significantly different between the two groups. Not at-risk youth were more likely to have high educational and interpersonal goals and low delinquency goals. Delinquent youth were more likely to have high delinquency goals and low education and interpersonal goals. Finally, the delinquent youth were more likely to have low self-efficacy with regard to academics and self-control.

### Limitations of Information

The study was conducted with Australian youth. There may be differences in population and culture from probationers in Colorado. The study population was largely male. Study contained a small sample size. All data used in the study was self-report data. The role between the adolescents and researchers may have been different from that of practitioners.

**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.

### Implications for Goals Setting

There is still much to discover regarding the underpinnings of goal setting. In this study, researchers were interested if there were differences in goals and self-efficacy between delinquent and pro-social youth. The study recruited youth not at-risk and at-risk from Australian high schools. Using an assessment checklist, researchers placed youth in either the at-risk or not at-risk groups. The study utilized youth in a correctional facility for the delinquent group. The total study population consisted of 280 adolescents (95 not at-risk, 97 at-risk, and 88 delinquent).

Youth from all three groups were asked to list and rank no more than 8 goals. Participants were then asked to complete a self-report questionnaire regarding commitment, goal difficulty, and feelings regarding self-efficacy. Researchers utilized statistical modeling on the data gathered to determine if there were any correlations within the results.

The researchers discovered that group membership can be predicted by goal type. Youth who are had high delinquency goals with low education and interpersonal goals were more likely to be from the delinquent group, while individuals with low delinquent goals and high education and interpersonal goals were from the not at-risk group. Not at-risk youth were more likely to have a higher level of goal commitment, higher number of goals, and goals that were more challenging than their delinquent counterparts. Finally, the delinquent group also had significantly lower aca-

demic and self-control self-efficacy. There were not any significant results for the at-risk group. This may be due to the group being transitional in nature.

### Practical Applications

- ✓ Delinquent youth set fewer goals and are less committed to their goals. It may be helpful to enlist the support of people the adolescent identifies as positive influences to encourage the development of challenging and meaningful goals.
- ✓ Discuss assessment results to help target need areas. Also looking at protective factors may be helpful in determining how to support probationers in accomplishing their goals (what internal supports/strengths can they pull from).
- ✓ Let probationers decide and set on their goals. While the delinquent group had the fewest self-set goals, they still averaged almost 3 goals each
- ✓ Before setting goals, have a discussion regarding self-efficacy with probationers. Depending on the subject the probationer may have higher or lower belief in their ability.
- ✓ Consider discussing goal commitment as probationers make progress with case plan goals and action steps.
- ✓ Help probationers identify goals that are structured and provide opportunities to connect with pro-social peers.
- ✓ Utilize positive reinforcement with probationers that complete case plan goals and action steps.