

Colorado Probation Research in Brief

Home Nodes, Criminogenic Places, and Parolee Failure: Testing an Environmental Model of Offender Risk

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Key Words: Accommodations, risk, parolee, environmental risk

Summary/Conclusions

This study sought to examine the impact of parolees' neighborhood environments on their success. Researchers utilized neighborhood information in Newark, New Jersey and the records of 1,632 parolees. Utilizing the collected information, the researchers built models to analyze what, if any, environmental risk factors near the parolees' homes influenced parole failure. The models did not provide any conclusive findings that living in risk filled neighborhood environments had an impact on parole success.

Limitations of Information

The study was conducted using data from New Jersey parolees. It is not clear what study outcomes would be produced by other environments or populations. Most of the study population (93%) was assessed as moderate risk-level (24-33) and lower on the LSI-R. It is not clear how higher risk offenders would be influenced by environmental risk factors. Finally, the study could not account for time spent outside of a parolee's neighborhood.

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.

How Neighborhoods May Influence Success

Neighborhoods can be an important factor in an individual's life; however, much is still yet to be discovered regarding the role environmental risk factors play in impacting the success or failure of those involved in the criminal justice system. Researchers were curious if environmental risk factors contained in neighborhoods had an impact on newly released parolees living in various neighborhoods. Researchers examined an area of 1,240 feet surrounding a parolee's home. The neighborhood was examined for potential environmental risk factors like parks, drug stores, gang houses, public transport hubs, restaurants, liquor stores, bars, schools, drug-dealing hotspots, bus stops, and light rail stops.

The study included 1,632 new parolees living in Newark, New Jersey from 2007 to 2009. The various models utilized in the study accounted for differences in risk, demographics, and environmental risk factors. The data was put through a series of models to determine how the factors influenced the success or failure of the parolees.

The results of study turned out to be null, meaning that there was no significant impact from the environmental risk factors near parolees' homes. One interesting result was that living near a park initially had a negative effect, but over time was a positive impact on success. The researchers theorize that environmental risk factors are much more complex than merely analyzing an area

around an individual's home. Parolees may spend more time commuting, at friend's houses, and at places of employment than at their own homes.

Practical Applications

- ✓ Instead of assuming a probationer's neighborhood is high or low risk, try asking where probationers spend their time. Anti-social friends or peers may have a larger impact on a probationer than the time they spend at home.
- ✓ Consider asking probationers about where and how they spend their time. This may provide opportunities for interventions (e.g. role play, Carey Guides, thinking reports) to prevent poor decision making triggered by environmental opportunities.
- ✓ Role play social skills, like "saying no" in high pressure situations, or refer probationers to cog groups where they can work on developing social skills.
- ✓ When working with probationers, identify pro-social social supports (e.g. outreach programs, recreation centers, self-support groups, treatment agencies) in close proximity to where they live and/or work so they have someone to call on or somewhere positive to go when needed.
- ✓ Talk to probationers about where they have made poor decisions in the past. Map those locations and "trigger" areas and brainstorm alternative routes to avoid those high-risk areas.

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