

Colorado Probation Research in Brief

Implementation Matters: A Review of Research on the Influence on Program Outcomes and the Factors Affecting Implementation

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Summary/Conclusions

There has been an increased focus on implementation science as a growing number of agencies move towards evidence-based and promising programs. In the present study, researchers were interested in whether implementation has a direct effect on outcomes and if any factors impacted implementation. After analyzing the data from 623 studies, researchers determined that outcomes were 2 to 12 times greater when the quality of implementation was high. Researchers also found 11 common factors that improved implementation efforts.

Limitations of Information

The studies were conducted through various research methods and guidelines. Such an analysis makes it difficult to truly consolidate and compare data. The studies that evaluated which factors influenced implementation did not isolate each factor to determine which factors were needed in differing environments. All of the studies analyzed were of health promotion or prevention programs and may not be indicative of criminal justice outcomes.

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.

Increasing Outcomes Through Implementation

The present study sought to review the effect of implementation on outcomes and to identify which factors improve the implementation process. Researchers used databases, references, and citations to search for published and unpublished studies on implemented prevention and health promotion programs for children and adolescents. Two types of studies were included. One set of studies measured the outcomes of implemented programs. The other type of studies used observational and self report data to determine the factors that were vital to implementation processes.

To determine the effect implementation has on outcomes, 542 studies were analyzed. Most (483) of the studies were analyzed in five different meta-analyses. Two meta-analyses discovered implementation had a positive effect on outcomes two to three times that of poorly implemented programs. Another analysis discovered proper implementation improved results by 34%. The last meta-analysis included findings from 46 different sites. The original data analysis concluded the effect size was quite small; however, when researchers controlled for poor implementation across three variables the effect size was twelve times greater.

From 81 studies containing data on factors affecting implementation, researchers identified the importance of 11 factors in implementation. The factors were: funding, a positive work climate, shared-decision making, coordination

with other agencies, formulation of tasks, leadership, program champions, administrative support, providers' skill proficiency, training, and technical assistance. The study could not differentiate which factors were more important in the implementation process or which, if any, factors were beneficial in certain environments.

Practical Applications

- ✓ Create a safe climate to introduce new practices by engaging officers in shared decision-making.
- ✓ Have purposeful conversations about organizational culture and development. This may reduce barriers to successful implementation to new programs or practices.
- ✓ Attend training on new programs with a healthy curiosity, being attentive to any personal bias. This may help foster a positive work climate.
- ✓ Identify probation officers that have a passion for a skill or subject and demonstrate leadership skills; they are likely good candidates as champions to new initiatives.
- ✓ Engage in QA and CQI. This will help identify gaps in knowledge that can be addressed through training or technical assistance.
- ✓ Take an active role in learning about upcoming programs that are soon to be implemented in your district. Doing so will increase the time allotted to formulate great questions and become acquainted with change.

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