

Colorado Probation Research in Brief

The Strategic Training Initiative in Community Supervision: Risk-Need-Responsivity in the Real World

Bonta, J., Bourgon, G., Rugge, T., Scott, T.-L., Yessine, A. K., Gutierrez, L., et al. (2010). *The Strategic Training Initiative in Community Supervision: Risk-Need-Responsivity in the Real World*. Public Safety Canada. Ottawa, Ontario.

Key Words: RNR model, Black Box, recidivism, EBP, STICS training, risk-need-responsivity, behavior change

STICS Outcomes, Follow-up to Black Box Study

Summary/Conclusions

Building on earlier results*, Bonta et al. studied the effects of training probation officers to address risk, need, and responsivity. They explored if the training changed the officer's behavior and effected the recidivism rate for their offenders. Officers received training, performance feedback, and a refresher course. The training stressed the importance of addressing criminogenic needs and provided them with cognitive intervention techniques. The findings encourage further use and exploration of the training model. Particularly, the two-year recidivism rate (defined as a new conviction) for trained officers was 25.3%, while the control group had a rate of 40.5%. *March 2010 RIB

Limitations of Information

There are a few limitations to this study. It was conducted with Canadian officers, who may receive different basic training than those in Colorado. The sample size was relatively small, which may have influenced the significance of the results. Also the probation officers in the trained and control groups were volunteers. Results may be different with officers who are not motivated to change their practice and may achieve limited benefit from the training.

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.

"In a review of 15 studies on the effectiveness of community supervision, Bonta and his colleagues (Bonta, Rugge, Scott, Bourgon, and Yessine, 2008) found an average decrease in recidivism of approximately two percentage points for offenders under community supervision." When Bonta et al. explored the reasons for this lack of effectiveness, they discovered poor adherence to the risk-need-responsivity (RNR) model. The researchers hypothesized "the training would change the behaviour of the probation officers with respect to greater adherence to RNR principles and that this, in turn, would decrease the recidivism in their clients."

The study was designed to compare the behavior and outcomes of probation officers, who volunteered to participate. About 60% of the officers who volunteered to participate were provided the Strategic Training Initiative in Community Supervision (STICS) training, while the rest (a control group) did not receive the training. Training included a three-day class, then ongoing support via monthly meetings with exercises, clinical feedback, and a refresher course offered approximately one year later. Data was collected through audio tapes. These tapes were submitted by officers and coded for discussion content and quality of techniques. Also, records were analyzed to determine recidivism rates for officer caseloads before the project and after, and were used to compare the trained and control group participants.

Contact sessions for both the trained and control groups averaged 26 minutes. The trained group used more of

their time addressing pro-criminal attitudes and a higher proportion of criminogenic needs than the control group. The control group spent more of their time focusing on non-criminogenic needs and the conditions of probation. Two recidivism measures were favorable: the trained group had a "pre-training" recidivism rate of 46.7%, which declined to 25.3% post-training; the trained groups' 25.3% rate was better than the 40.5% recidivism rate for the control group.

Practical Applications

- ✓ Ensure quality assessment to properly identify and prioritize criminogenic needs.
- ✓ Use detailed case plans to lay out the path to address the top criminogenic need areas, with goals, activities, and reasonable timelines.
- ✓ Take a few minutes to prep for client sessions. Remind yourself of the client's top criminogenic needs and the strategies listed in the case plan to address them. Focus the majority of the session on these items.
- ✓ Spend more time in contact sessions addressing pro-criminal attitudes and beliefs than "enforcing" probation conditions.
- ✓ Attend Brain Train to learn the most effective cognitive interventions that can be used in contact sessions.
- ✓ Address the client's thoughts and attitudes, when discussing probation violations. Utilize open-ended questions to determine the motivating attitude and challenge the client to identify an alternative to avoid a similar violation in the future.

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