

# Colorado Probation Research in Brief

## *Matching Court–Ordered Services with Treatment Needs: Predicting Treatment Success with Young Offenders*

Vieira, T., T. Skilling, et al. (2009). "Matching Court - Ordered Services with Treatment Needs: Predicting Treatment Success with Young Offenders." *Criminal Justice and Behavior* 36: 18.

**Key Words:** Risk, Need, Responsivity, Treatment, Assessments, CYO-LSI, Recidivism, Case Management

### Summary/Conclusions

Researchers examined the correlation between matching juvenile treatment with the RNR (risk, need, and responsivity) principles and the effects on recidivism. A sample of 122 juveniles were tracked until the juvenile's new offense or a cutoff date of 7/1/06. While risk played a factor in recidivism, the study found that youth who had less than a quarter of their needs being addressed in treatment were 18 times more likely to recidivate than those whose needs were better matched. Recidivism decreased slightly with the utilization of the responsivity principle; however, due to responsivity and need overlap, the results of only matching treatment to client responsivity did not rise above a level of statistical significance.

### Limitations of Information

This article analyzed data from a single Canadian mental health facility, which may not be representative of Colorado. The study sample consisted of only juveniles with court ordered evaluations. Information was provided by many different agencies; consistency and integrity of data may be a concern. The time at risk for recidivism was not consistent across all clients.

**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.

### Matching Treatment for Success

Researchers followed 122 court ordered youths (ages 12 to 18) in Ontario for a period between 14 and 65 months. This study evaluated juveniles for recidivism based upon tailoring treatment to risk, need, and responsivity. Juveniles were evaluated using YLS-CMI assessments, probation records, clinical records, and collateral information. Records were coded for risk level, criminogenic needs, and client responsivity.

Criminogenic need matching showed significant results in reducing recidivism. The study found when less than 25% of the youth's criminogenic needs were addressed, a juvenile was 18 times more likely to reoffend, and this group was at risk to reoffend earlier than their moderate and high match counterparts. If more than 50% of the juvenile's criminogenic needs were met, the youth was just over 3.5 times more likely to recidivate. In fact 50% of youth in the high (75% to 100%) needs match group never reoffended in a 4.7 year follow up period.

This study evaluated responsivity matching by determining whether treatment was tailored to mental health functioning, medication needs, cognitive functioning, cultural and/or language issues, and treatment staff characteristics (i.e. a prior therapeutic alliance). While treatment matching based on responsivity showed a slight reduction in recidivism, after adjusting for risk score and criminogenic need, the results were not shown to be significant. One possi-

ble explanation is that responsivity needs were indirectly met through the matching of criminogenic needs.

There were two findings from the study that are noteworthy. Fifty-seven percent of juveniles in the study were diagnosed with conduct disorder and the least commonly identified criminogenic need in the study was antisocial attitudes at 21%.

### Practical Applications

- ✓ Prioritize assessments and reassessments. Accurate assessment information is needed before targeting the correct criminogenic needs.
- ✓ Probation officers should try to target the top 4 Criminogenic Needs: Antisocial attitudes, Antisocial behaviors (impulsivity), Antisocial personality, and Antisocial peers. Impacting these needs will likely result in positive behavior change.
- ✓ Make every effort to "match" treatment with client specific attributes (learning disabilities, medication needs, cultural considerations, and physical needs).
- ✓ Capitalize on collaborative relationships with schools, therapists, parents, and family members to better serve the probationer.
- ✓ Establish a good working rapport with clients. Probationers that feel judged may be less likely to disclose struggles.
- ✓ Focus on the client's criminogenic needs early in supervision, as this has the best results in reducing reoffense.

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