

# Colorado Probation Research in Brief

## *Linking Positive Psychology to Offender Supervision Outcomes: The Mediating Role of Psychological Flexibility, General Self-Efficacy, Optimism, and Hope*

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**Key Words:** Psychological flexibility, self-efficacy, optimism, hope, offender, supervision, resiliency

### Summary/Conclusions

The current study examined the effects of positive psychology to offender supervision outcomes. Researchers surveyed offenders on psychological flexibility, general self-efficacy, optimism, and hope. Researchers utilized agency records and risk-need assessments to determine if there were any correlations between positive psychology states and supervision outcomes. The study confirmed offenders who were psychologically flexible, optimistic, hopeful, and had higher self-efficacy were more likely to possess fewer criminogenic risk factors and therefore, more likely to complete supervision successfully.

### Limitations of Information

The study's population consisted of individuals on probation and parole in Australia, which may not be representative of individuals on probation in Colorado. The study used a small (n=287) sample size. The study gathered data from self-report surveys, which may contain some bias from participants. Finally, probation success is not an isolated variable and can be impacted by many things including internal and external influences.

**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.

### Positioning Probationers Positively

Over the years, there have been various schools of thought regarding what impacts success for those involved in the criminal justice system. In this study, researchers were interested if positive psychology principles that build resiliency would have any influence on supervision outcomes. The current study sought to examine the impact of positive psychological states on supervision outcomes.

The study, consists of 287 adult probationers and parolees who were randomly invited to participate. Offenders completed surveys on psychological flexibility, self-efficacy, optimism, and hope. Another survey called the Social Desirability Scale was also utilized to control for individuals who potentially answer questions with the bias to align with societal expectations. Researchers then utilized supervision records to obtain assessment information, outcome, and recidivism data. Recidivism in the study included technical violations, new criminal charges, reconviction, or imprisonment. The study included a post 12-month follow-up period to analyze recidivism. After concluding data collections, the researchers ran the data through a series of data analysis models and techniques to determine if there were any associations.

The study discovered that positive psychological states commonly connected to resiliency were statistically significant for all outcome variables. The higher the offenders scored on psychological flexi-

bility, optimism, hope, and self-efficacy, the more likely the offender was to have fewer criminogenic risk factors and fewer instances of recidivism. Spending time increasing attributes such as hope, optimism, psychological flexibility, and self-efficacy along with addressing criminogenic needs may increase the likelihood of positive outcomes.

### Practical Applications

- ✓ Let probationers know that you believe they can be successful on probation. This may help model optimism and demonstrate a path to success.
- ✓ Consider referring medium and high-risk offenders to cognitive groups where they can learn skills to support problem solving, emotional regulation, and good decision making.
- ✓ Ask probationers about their levels of hope, optimism, and self-efficacy with probation or case plan goals.
- ✓ Inquire about probationer's values and whether or not they align to completing probation successfully, this may help identify interventions that will increase the likelihood of success.
- ✓ If a probationer identifies a lot of barriers to completing a case plan goal or probation, there might be diminished belief he or she can be successful.
- ✓ Help probationers build resiliency and positive support systems.
- ✓ Recognize and affirm effort, prosocial behavior, and good decision making to boost positive psychological states.

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