

The Effects of Probation and Parole Agent Relationship Style and Women Offenders' Risk for Recidivism on Offenders' Responses to Supervision Interactions

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Reasons for this Research

- Most people under correctional supervision are in the community on probation or parole, and as of 2012, women comprised approximately 11% of the parole population and 24% of the probation population in the U.S.
- The interpersonal style that probation and parole agents adopt during their supervision interactions has been found to play a role in the success of community supervision
- Probation and parole agents have what are called “dual role” relationships with the clients they supervise because they are expected to both *control* and *help* clients
- Women under community supervision have needs that are unique relative to men and it is essential to understand how those unique needs interact with agent styles to determine the most effective approaches to supervision.

In this study we examined whether:

- 1) Women whose probation and parole agents adopted a **tough and punitive relationship style**
 - a. were *more anxious* after supervision interactions
 - b. experienced *greater reactance* (that is, the feeling that one's freedom is being threatened and results and often results in efforts to restore that freedom) after supervision interactions
 - c. had *lower self-efficacy* to avoid a criminal lifestyle
- 2) Women whose probation and parole agents adopted a **supportive relationship style**
 - a. Were *less anxious* after supervision interactions
 - b. Experienced *lower reactance* after supervision interactions
 - c. Had *higher self-efficacy* to avoid a criminal lifestyle
- 3) The effects of the probation/parole agents' style differed for women who were at low and high risk for breaking the law again.

The Study

The Sample

- 330 women offenders who had been convicted of a felony and had a history of substance abuse/involvement were included in the sample – 251 on probation, 76 on parole
- These women were supervised by 69 probation or parole agents (66 women, 3 men)
- Ages ranged from 18-60 with an average of 33.8; 176 women were White, 124 were Black, remainder were Native American, Multiracial, or “Other”

Method

- Time 1 Interview: Three months after supervision began. Background information was collected at that interview.
- Time 2 Interview: Three months after the 1st interview. The client interview measured:
 - the client's perception of the agent's relationship style with her (how punitive versus supportive the client reported the agent to be)
 - the client's self-reported anxiety and psychological reactance during and after interactions with their agents.
 - the client's report of the extent to which interactions with agents affected her self-efficacy to avoid criminal people, behavior, and drug use. These measures were combined to create a measure of self-efficacy to avoid a criminal lifestyle.
- Time 2 Survey of Agents: During the same time frame as the Time 2 Interview we measured:
 - The Agent's perception of her/his relationship style with each of their clients (how punitive versus supportive the agent was with that client)

Results

- Women who experienced greater anxiety after supervision interactions tended to report greater reactance and lower self-efficacy to avoid a criminal lifestyle
- Women whose agents reported using a more supportive style had lower anxiety and reactance and women whose agents reported using a more punitive style reported higher anxiety after supervision interactions
- Women low in criminogenic vulnerabilities at the beginning of supervision (e.g., low depression, low anger, low antisocial attitudes, or with few antisocial friends) who had agents with a more punitive relationship style reported higher reactance after supervision interactions and they reported lower self-efficacy to avoid a criminal lifestyle.
- For women high in vulnerabilities (e.g., high antisocial attitudes and more antisocial friends), the agent's punitive style had little effect on self-efficacy.
- In contrast, higher agent supportiveness was associated with lower reactance, and women who were higher in vulnerabilities reported greater self-efficacy to avoid a criminal lifestyle when their agents had a more supportive style.

Summary of findings

- Women's responses to supervision depend on her agent's relationship style
 - More supportive agents elicit more positive outcomes
 - More punitive agents elicit more negative outcomes – especially in the areas of anxiety and crime avoidance self-efficacy
- A punitive style is especially ineffective and perhaps even counterproductive for women who are low in criminogenic needs or vulnerabilities
- A supportive style is especially effective (for crime-avoidance self-efficacy at least) for women who have high criminogenic needs or vulnerabilities.