



Research Summary



COGNITIVE-BEHAVIOURAL INTERVENTIONS IN COMMUNITY SUPERVISION

Question: How well do community supervision officers target procriminal attitudes/cognitions in one-on-one sessions with their clients?

Background: The research on ‘what works’ with offender interventions has demonstrated that some treatments can be effective in reducing future re-offending, especially if they follow the Risk-Need-Responsivity principles (see Research Summary, Vol. 12, No.6). Although the risk principle focuses on who receives services and the need principle focuses on what is targeted, it is the Responsivity principle that focuses on the ‘how’ of service delivery.

The Responsivity principle is concerned with the types of intervention that are best suited to the abilities and learning style of the client. The use of cognitive-behavioural techniques is considered to be a general Responsivity factor. Numerous reviews of the treatment literature have demonstrated that well-implemented cognitive-behavioural interventions in offender treatment produce the greatest reductions in recidivism.

As more community supervision agencies look to bring evidence-based practices into their organizations, it becomes more important to understand what happens during the face-to-face interactions during community supervision. The Responsivity principle provides clear guidance on what

those interactions should look like; at a minimum, the officer should employ cognitive-behavioural skills and intervention strategies that facilitate offender change. To date, no study has specifically assessed the use and impact of cognitive-behavioural strategies provided by the officers during their individual contact with clients. Given what is known about effective correctional interventions in general, and the limited examination of this ‘what works’ body of knowledge with community supervision, the present study attempted to build upon what is known about the practices and techniques that are applicable to community supervision.

Method: The prevalence rates of probation officers discussing procriminal attitudes/cognitions and their use of cognitive-behavioural intervention strategies during one-on-one supervision sessions with their clients was assessed, and the impact of these discussions and strategies on re-offending was examined. Audio-recorded supervision sessions from officers engaging in routine practice, as well as from officers who were trained in the Strategic Training Initiative in Community Supervision (STICS) model, were rated (see Research Summary, Vol.15, No.3).

Answer: The results indicated that without the STICS training, the probation officers infrequently discussed procriminal

attitudes/cognitions with their clients. Discussions of attitudes only occurred in approximately 5% of the recorded sessions and they only used cognitive-behavioural intervention skills/techniques with their clients in approximately 1% of sessions.

Officers who were STICS-trained showed significant improvement in talking about procriminal attitudes and using cognitive-behavioural intervention techniques. For these officers, discussions of procriminal attitudes took place in approximately 39% of sessions, and cognitive-behavioural interventions were used in 42% of sessions. In addition, the use of cognitive-behavioural intervention techniques was significantly related to lower rates of re-offending (13% for the experimental clients vs. 31% for clients of untrained officers). These findings support the general Responsivity principle within the context of one-on-one community supervision.

Policy Implications:

1. The demonstration of adherence to the general Responsivity principle by community supervision officers resulted in greater reductions in the re-offending of their clients compared to officers who did not employ these techniques.

A greater focus should be placed on ensuring that Responsivity-based policy and practice be implemented in order to enhance the effectiveness of community supervision.

2. Making use of methodologies, such as audio-recording one-on-one supervision sessions between officers and clients, would allow correctional agencies to monitor what takes place during supervision. This would facilitate high quality supervision practices in accordance with the Responsivity principle.
3. Without specific training, community supervision officers are unlikely to discuss or target procriminal attitudes/cognitions with their clients. Therefore, training that teaches and emphasizes the importance of the general Responsivity principle should be implemented with front-line workers/practitioners.

Source: Bourgon, G. & Gutierrez, L. (2012). The general responsivity principle in community supervision: the importance of probation officers using cognitive intervention techniques and its influence on recidivism. *Journal of Crime and Justice*, 35, 149-166.

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