



What Works (and doesn't work) with Women Offenders?

Probation/Parole Officer Relationship Style and Communication Patterns as Influences on Outcomes for Women Offenders

International Community Corrections Association

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New Research Findings

Communication theory

Theory of dual role relationships

CJ knowledge about women offenders

Welcome questions, feedback, insights.

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Audience introductions and interests



Contact Information

<http://cj.msu.edu/programs/improving-supervision-women-offenders/>

Tabs at the bottom take you to all reports, papers, etc.

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- The women who participated in the study.



Building Blocks

- Focus on women's needs (WRNA, RNR)
- Special concerns about high risk offenders (RNR)
- Responsivity (RNR, working alliance, motivational interviewing, **relationship, communication**)
- Responsive to women (crosscutting)

New Insights Re: Women

- Effective ways for probation/parole officers to communicate to women offenders. (**responsivity, relationships**)
- Effective ways to relate (the working alliance PLUS) (**responsivity, relationships**)
- Unique findings for high and low risk women (**risk level**)
- Previously **unrecognized needs**
Transportation, neighborhood conditions, social welfare policy



The Study – MI Woman Specialized Felony Caseloads

- Surveys of 73 officers at two times
- Interviews with 402 women at 3 times
- Official records of violations and recidivism for 18 months
- 16 Michigan counties
- Quantitative and qualitative data
- The research continues.....

Study participants

305 (75.87%) = probation

93 (23.13%) = parole

4 = both

- Race/Ethnicity

49% white, 36.6% black; 11% multiple racial group memberships. Many reported being Hispanic

- Urban , suburban, rural mix



Focus of Presentation

- Memorable messages from **probation/parole officers**
- **Officers' styles of relating** to women on probation and parole
- **Probation/parole officer** styles of communicating with women



I. Memorable Messages



Memorable Messages

- Verbal messages remembered for extremely long periods of time and which people perceive as a major influence on the course of their lives
- Precisely recall message word-for-word
- Memorable messages are one key in the self-assessment of personal behavior that exceeds or falls below personal standards, and therefore they can stimulate behavior change



My memorable message, your memorable message, a client's memorable message

This message comes to mind when:

She does something of which she is proud

She avoids doing something she would later regret

She does something of which she is not proud

?



Memorable Message Examples from the Officer

- You control your life, it don't control you.
- If you stay around productive and positive people, they will support you down the road.
- If it come too easy, it ain't right.
- Take time to get adjusted to your new situation (out of prison).
- Have confidence in yourself. Don't let anybody get you down.
- No matter how bad you got it, somebody has it worse than you.

Results

- 162 (40.3%) women reported at least one memorable message from their probation or parole officer
- Greater proportion of women on parole (52%) recalled message than women on probation (37%)
 - Leaner social networks?



Topics of Memorable Messages

- Behavioral Advice (34.6%)
“Keep my nose clean”
- Motivation (14.8%)
“As long as I put my mind to it, I can do it”
- Personal compliment/praise (14.2%)
“I don’t fit in with the criminals”



Reactions to Memorable Messages

- Behavioral advice → proud for not giving into urges. “Stay out of trouble and not get high”
- Motivational messages → stop a suicide attempt, don't do things that prevent attaining goals.
- Negative messages → prosocial behavior. [exceptions]



Reactions to Memorable Messages that are Praise and Compliments

- What is the message?
- How did she react to the message?
- Motivational interviewing? Other training in communication?

[Handout 1] Cases 1110, 1180, 416, 505



Next Steps

- What types of impactful messages do probation/parole agents try to send?
- Are some women offenders more amenable to receiving and using these messages?
- Is type of communication and relationship between women and their supervising officers connected to “hearing” and using impactful messages?



**2. Styles of Officer-Offender
Relationship**

**3. Styles of Officer-Offender
Communication**



2. Types of Relationships and Communication with Probation and Parole Clients

- Punitive vs. supportive and trusting
 - Conformity vs. conversational communication? [Family examples.]
-

[Handout 2]



Connection of Relationship and Communication Styles

- Conformity style of communication & a punitive relationship.
- Conversational style of communication and a supportive/trusting relationship.



Effects of Communication and Relationship Styles

Short term effects: self-efficacy to avoid criminal lifestyles, reactance, anxiety

Long term effects: substance use, arrests, convictions, successful completion of supervision.

What works for which women?



Which Type of Relationship and Communication?

Q: So what did she say about criminal thinking?

A: Mainly that I would have to change my thinking on that and that I needed to go to NA, support groups, if I needed ... if I felt like I needed to go back into treatment, tell her and she would see that I got it. Anything ... she really wanted to help me. And at first I didn't really want it. The last time I spoke with her here, she told me that she stayed after me because she knew I wanted the help, and I just didn't know how to ask for it.

How will she react?



Reaction

Q: Did talking to her make things better or worse for you?

A: Getting into the 30 day program, and getting into this longer program, my life has changed. I don't even, I couldn't even tell you how much in this past year.



Which Type?

It's she sort of like shut us down, you know what I'm saying? And it's all about her, we can't talk, we have to listen to her and her word is what it is, you know? So pretty much I don't feel like I'm ... I can express what I feel with her, you know, if I did want to get in trouble or if I did feel like I want to relapse, I can't come to my parole agent and say, "Well, Ms. P, well, I'm not feeling good and I have the urge to want to use drugs. I think I need treatment." I can't go to her to get that kind of support.



Which Type of Relationship and Communication?

Interviewer: So, what did your PO have to say....

Participant: She says that basically she'll lock me up. They do have a place in the state prison. I told her I'd never been there. She said "Well, keep it up, you'll go." Basically because she said, you know, "Using is against the law. You're breaking the law when you use ... buy crack, smoke crack. And if you keep dropping dirty, you go on to prison. If you abscond, if you don't come in, I'm sending you to prison."

How will she react?

Reaction = Reactance

Talking about the supervising officer in the prior slide:

Interviewer: Okay, so did it make things better for you, talking to your probation officer?

Participant: I left and got high.

Reactance

- Suggestions and advice from my PO often make me do the opposite.
- When my PO pushes me to do something I often tell myself, “For sure I won’t do it.”
- I get annoyed/irritated/angry when my PO tells me what I must or must not do.

Rated from 1 (very strongly disagree) to 7 (very strongly agree)



Feelings that Freedoms/Choices are being **Further** Limited → Reactance

Women with highest reactance

Supervision lengthened due to fees.

Told to get GED when \$25 fee needed for fines.

“She demands me to do something like it’s her way or no way.”

Illness a problem in mornings, must report early.

Well, the fact that I have epilepsy and he doesn’t understand that I ... it’s hard for me to ride a bus down there by myself. I don’t have any money.



Continuation of Causes of Reactance

When she wants me to go to a program and she know that I work full time and I'm not able to do that. So that puts me in a hard place, such as going there for 12 weeks, that's obscene; I cannot go there for 12 weeks and not work full time, five days a week. And there's no weekends for this, you know, this class.



Self-efficacy to Avoid a Criminal Lifestyle

Talking with my PO makes me more certain that I can avoid people and situations that trigger my drug or heavy alcohol use.

confident that I can work through problems without turning to people who break the law.

Rated from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much).



What Happens When Probation/ Parole Officers are more Punitive or Supportive?

High risk women (antisocial attitudes, anti-social friends, angry/hostile, substance history, depressed/anxious)

Effects of punitive style?

Effects of supportive/trust oriented style?

Low risk women

Punitive style? Supportive/trust style?



Effects of Communication Style

Conversation → Low Reactance, High Self-Efficacy to Avoid Crime

Conformity → High Reactance, Low Self-Efficacy to Avoid Crime

Reactance → High Restoration and Self-Reported Substance Use

High Self Efficacy to Avoid Crime → Low Restoration



Next Steps

There are connections of communication and relationship style with various measures of recidivism.

Improving the recidivism measures.

Figuring out which women most positively and negatively affected by relationship and communication style.

Determining why probation and parole officers who use different styles.



Comments and Questions?

- Consistent with your experiences?
- Implications for practice?
- Implications for training probation/parole officers, clients?



Additional Points

New needs identified by our research

- Problems created by high-crime neighborhoods
- Transportation problems
- “Safety net” cutback policies at odds with efforts to prevent women’s recidivism.



A NEED: High Crime Neighborhoods

Strategies

Avoid criminal people, including family
members (18%)

Stay at home (14%)

Avoid everyone (11%)

Be with prosocial people (10%)



Strategies & Neighborhoods, Crime Levels & Housing Discrimination

- I listen to the radio, I like a DVD or look at the TV and sit there and eat all day.
- I just don't talk to anybody, I don't go anywhere, I don't do nothing. I stay away from people period, because you never can trust anybody.
- I hang out with totally different people now so I'm usually with someone who is safe.



A NEED: Transportation

Cannot just ask “do you have reliable transportation?”

Problems with your accessible transportation?

Is it legal?

[Readout] [Handout]



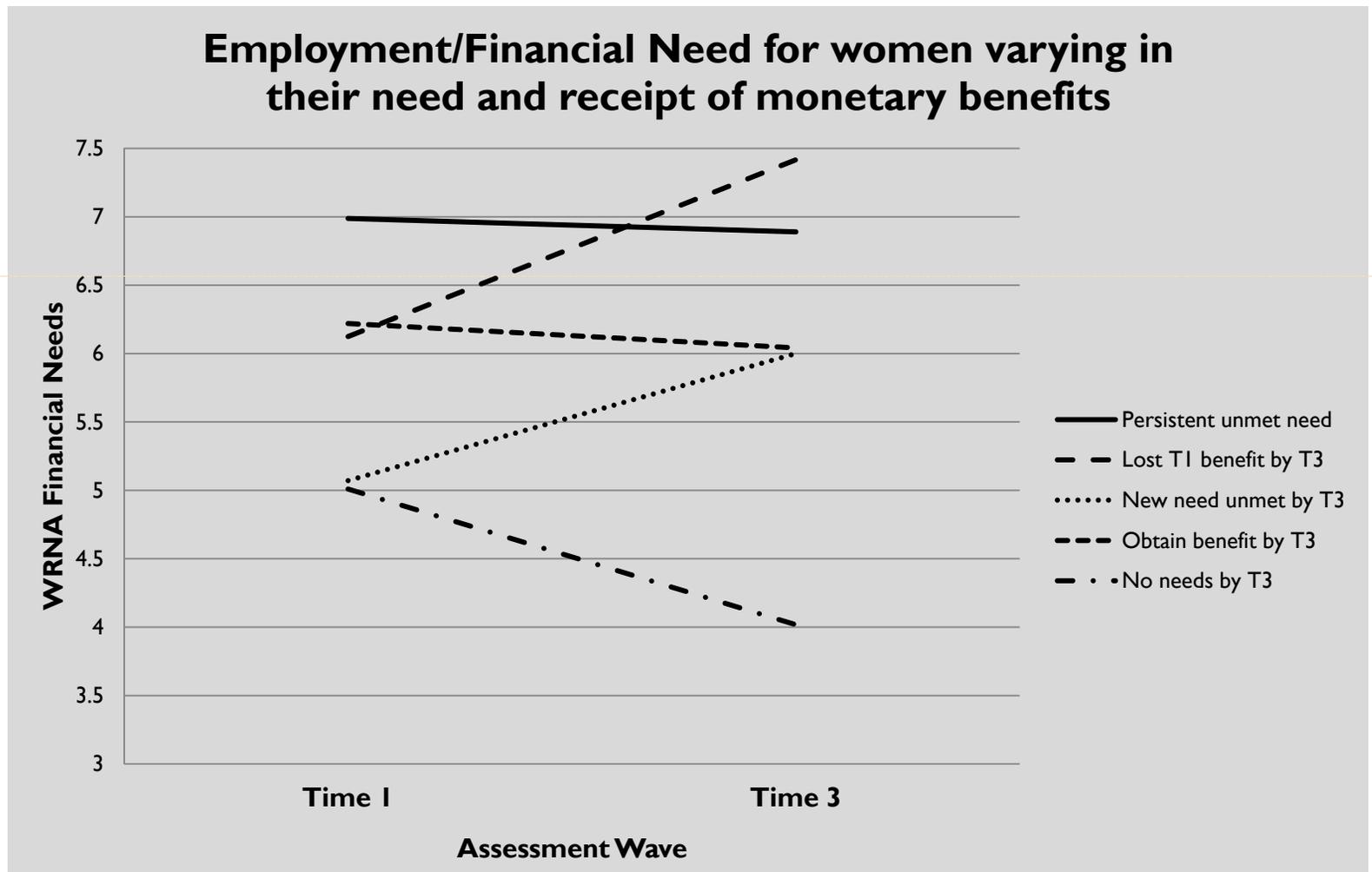
A NEED: Financial/Unemployment Need

- Barriers to employment and an adequate wage – available jobs, disability
- Barriers to obtaining monetary public benefits

Bans affecting felons

Shrinking safety net

Changes in access to monetary benefits and recidivism risk





Inaccessible Public Benefits -- Reasons and Consequences

Lack of timely, adequate medical diagnosis to obtain disability.

Cutbacks in welfare and unemployment, severe housing shortage.

Bans on public housing eligibility.

Unresponsive systems.

Financial risk for recidivism; feelings of marginalization and stigmatization.