

# Study: Training programs for community supervision benefit probation officers and their clients

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Traditional forms of community supervision that focus on control and punishment have failed to improve client outcomes. In response, training programs for probation officers have been developed to better incorporate more rehabilitation-focused strategies into community corrections practices. In a new meta-analysis, researchers assessed the impact of these programs on various outcomes for probation officers and their clients. They found that these programs provide advantages for both groups, supporting their continued use.

Conducted by researchers at the University of Central Florida (UCF), the study appears in *Justice Quarterly*.

"Given the considerable amount of time and resources required to implement and sustain these [training](#) programs, a better understanding of their impact on [probation officers](#) and clients is critical for justifying their use," explains Ryan Labrecque, associate professor of criminal justice at UCF, who led the study.

Community supervision of individuals who are on probation and parole is the largest part of the U.S. corrections system. It was originally seen in terms of reform and prevention of recidivism. But because of an emphasis on surveillance as well as extensive conditions and requirements, it is now viewed by some as more punitive than incarceration, raising levels of imprisonment and increasing racial and

class disparities in the criminal justice system.

Efforts to reform the system to improve the effectiveness of supervision and limit negative effects on clients and society have led to programs focused on rehabilitative interventions, among other services. Among these are programs that provide training to probation officers, including models such as Strategic Training Initiative in Community Supervision (STICS), Effective Practices in Community Supervision (EPICS), and Staff Training Aimed at Reducing Re-arrest (STARR), which have been adopted across many jurisdictions in North America and abroad. The programs seek to teach officers how to better incorporate effective rehabilitative practices into their daily interactions with clients. "Given the rapid expansion of these programs, it is important to take a systematic look at their effectiveness" says Michael Caudy, associate professor of criminal justice at UCF who co-authored the study.

In this study, researchers assessed the impact of these training programs on the topics officers select to discuss and the intervention strategies they use during client contact sessions. They did so by systematically reviewing 25 studies on the programs—half of which were conducted in the United States, all of which featured males and females as participants, and most of which included only adults. They also examined the influence of probation officers' training and fidelity to program skills on clients' recidivism.

The study found that the programs:

- Transformed the nature and content of conversations in sessions between probation officers and their client, with trained officers more likely than untrained officers to talk about criminogenic needs,
- Increased officers' use of core correctional practice skills in sessions with clients, including skills on session structuring,

relationship skills, behavioral practices, and cognitive techniques, and

- Slightly reduced client rearrests (i.e., any new arrest) and reconvictions (i.e., any new criminal conviction), but had less of an effect on technical violations (i.e., probation revocations, terminations from probation, and positive drug tests).

In addition, probation officers who used the core correctional practice skills more consistently during sessions with their clients were more effective in reducing recidivism in their clients.

Because of the small size of many of the studies reviewed, the authors highlight the need for more rigorous research on the implementation and effectiveness of these training programs, and on studies that include larger numbers of participants. In addition, because many studies examined the effect of training programs on adult males on probation, more research is needed to determine how factors such as age, gender, race, risk level, and supervision type affect the relationship between the intervention and recidivism. Finally, because most of the studies reviewed have been done by the people who developed the training models, more independent evaluations are needed.

"Reforming the way probation officers do their job is no easy feat," notes Jill Viglione, associate professor of criminal justice at UCF, who coauthored the study. "Our findings support the continued use of officer [training programs](#), as well as the development of strategies to monitor and increase fidelity after training."

**More information:** Ryan M. Labrecque et al, The Impact of Community Supervision Officer Training Programs on Officer and Client Outcomes: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis, *Justice Quarterly* (2022). [DOI: 10.1080/07418825.2022.2120062](https://doi.org/10.1080/07418825.2022.2120062)

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