

# Colorado Probation Research in Brief

## *Responding to probation and parole violations: Are jail sanctions more effective than community-based graduated sanctions?*

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**Key Words:** Violation responses, sanctions, jail, ISP, success, swift, certain, proportional

### Summary/Conclusions

Prior research identified that responding to violations with certainty, swiftly, and proportionally is effective, there are still many questions about the effectiveness of different types of violation responses. The current study examines the effectiveness of community-based violation responses and jail-based responses from 283 randomly selected Intensive Supervision Program (ISP) participants in Wyoming. The study uncovered that jail was no more effective in influencing the frequency of violation behaviors, the number of violations, and the likelihood of completing ISP.

### Limitations of Information

The study was completed in Wyoming and may not be representative of Colorado or other national community supervision populations. Researchers noted that diversity in the study was a concern as 80% of the study participants were Caucasian. Differences in jails (e.g. design, population, density, staff) may also have an impact on offender attitude of sanction severity. The study did not state if composite risk scores influenced any of the results from the study.

**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.

### Find Meaningful Responses to Violations

A growing body of research has demonstrated positive outcomes when response to violation behaviors are swift, certain, and proportional. The current study seeks to build upon this research by identifying whether jail-based responses are more effective than community-based responses.

The study utilized a sample of 283 offenders participating in ISP in Wyoming. The program includes high risk and/or needs felony offenders. Participants were on probation or parole. To ensure there were enough females and parolees, both groups were oversampled in the study. The study offender files to collect data. The researchers used statistical modeling to determine if jail or community-based violation response had an effect on the time until the next violation, if a jail or community-based response influenced the number of subsequent violations, and if a jail or community-based response influenced the likelihood of successfully completing supervision.

The results from the study discovered that jail responses do not outperform community-based responses. A jail-based violation response did not significantly increase or decrease the number of days until an offender's next violation. It also did not increase or decrease the number of future violations. Jail or community-based responses also did not influence whether the offender successfully completed ISP. Researcher theorize that the results are linked to a previous study that uncovered offenders of-

ten view community-based responses as more punitive than jail-based responses (See June 2011 RIB).

### Practical Applications

- ✓ Be transparent about expectations. They should be aware of what actions may lead to violation responses from officers.
- ✓ Respond to all violation behaviors. This ensures that the client is certain that violation behaviors will be addressed.
- ✓ Respond to positive and negative behaviors as swiftly as possible.
- ✓ Tailor your responses to the individual. Ask probationers what meaningful incentives and responses look like to them.
- ✓ Risk level and severity of the violation should always be taken into account when giving a sanction to ensure the sanction is proportionate and the least restrictive possible for the risk level of the probationer you are working with.
- ✓ Be sure to document your response to behaviors along with your strategy for addressing both positive and negative behaviors.
- ✓ Involve and educate your stakeholders in the supervision process. Let victims, community members, treatment providers, court staff, etc. know that research shows jail sentences are no more effective than community-based sentences, particularly with high-risk offenders.

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