

Colorado Probation Research in Brief

Changing Probation Officer Attitudes: Training Experience, Motivation, and Knowledge

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Summary/Conclusions

This study provides a comparison of overall knowledge and the individualized "working philosophy" of probation officers before and after completion of an Integrated Behavioral Intervention Strategies (IBIS) training. Survey analysis of participant's responses revealed that training not only advances knowledge of IBIS, but that it also improves outcomes particular to the five dimensions of effective correctional practice including: the effective use of authority, anti-criminal modeling, problem solving, use of community resources, and quality of relationships between staff and client.

Limitations of Information

The researchers did not incorporate a comparison group in this study. As such, the sample of individuals studied may differ from other groups of probation officers. Without a comparison group, it is difficult to know if other probation officers will respond similarly. The study did not use any demographic or professional experiential data. The use of demographic, professional experience, and other differences among the probation officers may produce different effects.

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.

PO training impacts more than skills

In order to highlight the importance of staff training on programs that adhere to the five dimensions of effective intervention, researchers of this study surveyed 300 officers in San Diego County who completed a three-day IBIS training session. IBIS training consists of two main components integrated into a comprehensive set of practices: motivational interviewing and EPICs-II. To measure the outcomes of the training, surveys were administered immediately before the first day of training, and again at its conclusion. The survey model was designed to effectively assess the participating officers' knowledge, views, and attitudes about their own training participation, criminogenic needs, and the potential for offender change. The survey also evaluated the officers' motivation to use the skills learned in training.

Results of the pre/post survey analysis indicate note-worthy positive attitudinal changes, and increased knowledge among probation officers in the following categories: officers' coercive supervision practices, training sentiments, influence over offenders through the officer-client interaction, behavioral change in the offender population, overall officer-client interaction, and motivation to us IBIS training as a whole.

Overall, this study found that after attending training, officers not only acquired new knowledge, but their attitudes associated with skills changed. For example, probation officers initially expressed the belief that motivation is

something individuals either have or do not. According to the post-training survey, results changed from an initial 37% disagreement with this statement to 85% reporting a significant change in officers' overall attitude about motivation.

Practical Applications

- ✓ Supervisors may consider having conversations regarding PO attitudes and motivation before and after staff attend training.
- ✓ Ask staff about their beliefs regarding probationer change.
- ✓ Consider identifying and mitigating personal bias about individuals and rehabilitation.
- ✓ Be open to new thoughts and ideas to promote positive changes in your supervision style.
- ✓ Remember that demonstrating an attitude to learn about, motivate, and help probationers will likely impact outcomes in a positive way.
- ✓ Set goals with your supervisor to incorporate new skills into your case work.
- ✓ Keep in mind that your actions have an influence on your clients maintaining positivity will encourage them to continue working hard towards their goals.
- ✓ Ask probationers about their process of change (e.g. motivation, barriers, and commitment) this may help you to understand what they are experiencing on probation.