A survey was administered to a non-probabilistic sample of 267 offenders at a large probation office in Texas to assess levels of client satisfaction. Also embedded in the survey, however, were questions to assess fidelity to the principles of evidence-based practices (EBP) for a department that has revamped its service delivery in that direction. The following issues are also addressed in the article: the absence of a sampling frame, the use of a “check-all-that-apply” checklist, and the related, unidimensional nature of certain binary variables. The findings regarding client satisfaction are comparable to a previous study, but the embedded instrument lends itself to an aspect of program evaluation.

INTRODUCTION

The use of offender surveys to rate staff compliance with departmental goals and objectives is often overlooked as a source of valid information. In 2007, the Maricopa County (AZ) Adult Probation Department administered a convenience survey to its probationers “to establish a baseline of satisfaction rate” (Cherkos, Ferguson, & Cook, 2008, p. 55). The results of that survey indicated a high level of satisfaction for a department that had been revamping its policies and procedures since 2004 in the direction of evidence-based practices (EBP). Along similar lines, a large probation department in Texas had also been working in the direction of EBP since 2005, and when the authors were asked to administer the same survey to their probationers, they saw an opportunity to engage in an aspect of program evaluation by modifying the original survey instrument. This study analyzes data from the survey to assess staff compliance with the principles of EBP.

The literature on EBP indicates that correctional programs should target higher-risk offenders and should address dynamic risk factors that affect recidivism. The authors embedded certain EBP indicators within the client satisfaction survey of Maricopa County and administered this modified instrument at probationer reporting sites. The research hypothesis was that a larger percentage of higher-risk offenders should have EBP issues addressed than that of their low-risk counterparts. The hypothesis is based upon some of the principles of EBP as well as the

Maricopa Revisited: Findings from a Probationary Offender Study

Floyd Berry
Texas A&M University-Central Texas

Gerald Piechocki
Texas A&M University-Central Texas

Abstract


Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Office of Applied Studies. (April 17, 2008). The NSDUH Report: State Estimates of Persons Aged 18 or Older Driving Under the Influence of Alcohol or Illicit Drugs. Rockville, MD available at oas.samhsa.gov/2k8/stateDUI/stateDUI.cfm
realities of limited time resources available to staff during monthly reports. The null hypothesis is that EBP topics would be discussed to offenders across the board, with equal percentages of low-risk and higher-risk offenders being exposed to EBP topics.

The source of the data is a sample of 267 offenders from a population of 12,500 offenders who were receiving direct supervision in late 2009. The embedded EBP questions elicited feedback from this sample regarding the topics addressed in monthly office visits. Of these topics, some can be identified as pertaining to specific risk factors associated with recidivism. These risk factors have been identified in the “what works” research literature that seeks to discover the principles of effective correctional programs, and the literature is part of a larger trend of the application of EBP in professional settings.

**Background of EBP**

When Martinson (2006) published his assessment of treatment interventions in 1974, the public had witnessed a decade of explosive crime rates, rioting in major cities, and even major disturbances in prisons. His report seemed to confirm the suspicions of some criminal justice professionals and policy makers that rehabilitation in any form did not work. One of the results of his publication was the turn in sentencing and correctional practices to the just deserts model of punishment. But the 1970s and 1980s were also times of conservative reaction not necessarily associated with the “nothing works” issue. Because of certain international political and economic events, American citizens felt threatened and found psychological solace in some type of “retreat” (Williams & McShane, 2004, pp. 235-236). Concurrent with these events, however, some researchers resolved to discover what did work and so began their quest to identify the principles of effective correctional intervention. This quest mirrored, to some extent, the articles, books, and seminars in business management along the lines of “best practices,” but the mission was more closely aligned with the EBP model being developed in medicine (Trinder, 2000b; Reynolds, 2000).

In the 1970s, Archie Cochrane had promoted the use of randomized controlled trials and meta-analyses in medical research, and, due largely to his efforts, the medical community began to move in the direction of EBP (Reynolds, 2000). By the mid 1980s, Carol Garrett was pioneering the use of meta-analysis in correctional studies, and within a few years this new statistical technique was being used by other researchers to discover what worked in correctional intervention. Yet fairly recently (and to some extent even today), some practitioners were not practicing their profession in accordance with research findings. For example, in the medical profession, it was difficult for doctors to keep up with the latest research once they graduated from medical school. Instead, they relied on anecdotal evidence, personal experiences, the opinions of experts, and advice from drug companies (Reynolds, 2000). And in correctional agencies, a large number of practitioners were ignoring scientific research, prompting some criminologists to charge them with practicing “correctional quackery” (Latessa, Cullen, & Gendreau, 2002; Flores, Russell, Latessa, & Travis, 2005).

By the end of the 20th century, the public trust in professionals had suffered. Data was more available through the use of computer technology. People were more educated and informed, and they were questioning professional judgments. There were concerns with managing risk, and critiques were being made of what it means to be a professional. Along these lines, the government was becoming more concerned with notions of accountability (Trinder, 2000; Davies, Nutley, & Smith, 2000). Over the past 20 years, the amount of EBP research has been voluminous. Notions of evidence pertain to findings that are scientifically derived and open to public inspection, but it could also pertain to non-ambiguity in interpretation, that there is a consensus of understanding of what the basic findings are. To become EBP, the findings must be put into practice, and EBP has emerged to bridge the gap between research and practice, the prime concern being to choose among several effective courses of action (Davies, Nutley, & Smith, 2000). EBP research not only guides programs, but evaluates them, its goal being to hold administrators and policy makers accountable for agency or professional results (MacKenzie, 2000). Thus a part of EBP is having regularly scheduled evaluations by specialized department staff to assess not only program goals but also the agency’s fidelity to program characteristics.

The key principles of EBP in corrections include the use of validated risk assessment instruments and the classification of offenders based upon risk. Higher-risk offenders should be targeted with more intensive services and interventions based upon EBP; conversely, research findings indicate that low-risk offenders require minimal or no services. The best treatment practices should incorporate cognitive-behavioral and social learning therapies, which may include modeling, reinforcement, problem-solving techniques, relationship practices, and motivational interviewing. The use of punishment and threats of punishment is generally not effective in reducing recidivism (Nutley & Davies, 2000; Dowden & Andrews, 2000; Andrews, 2006; Latessa, Cullen, & Gendreau, 2002; MacKenzie, 2000; Andrews & Dowden, 2007).

Meta-analyses have identified the major risk factors that contribute to crime and recidivism. For an attribute to be considered a risk factor, it must be connected in some way to antisocial behavior (Flores, Russell, Latessa, & Travis, 2005). The most important risk factors are referred to as the “Central Eight” (Andrews, Bonta, & Worthmth, 2006, pp. 10-11). Risk factors are of two types. **Static risk factors** are those which cannot change, such as past criminal history or past drug use; however **dynamic risk factors**, also known as criminogenic needs, are mutable. A primary principle of EBP is that intervention programs must target the criminogenic needs of higher-risk offenders in order to be effective in reducing recidivism (Andrews, 2006; Ferguson, 2004; Latessa, Cullen, & Gendreau, 2002; MacKenzie, 2000; Andrews & Dowden, 2007; Dowden & Andrews, 2000; Flores, Russell, Latessa, & Travis, 2005; Gendreau, Little, & Goggin, 1996; Andrews, Bonta, & Worthmth, 2006).

The best risk factor that predicts recidivism is one’s criminal history, yet this factor cannot be changed by intervention. The remaining risk factors in the Central Eight, which now become the “Central Seven,” are dynamic in nature and can be the focus of interventions. The Central Seven are as follows: antisocial personality pattern, antisocial cognition, antisocial associates, dysfunctional family issues, problems with employment, antisocial leisure activities, and substance abuse (Andrews, Bonta, & Worthmth, 2006, pp. 10-11; Andrews, 2000; Ferguson, 2004; Latessa, Cullen, & Gendreau, 2002; Dowden & Dowden, 2007; Flores, Russell, Latessa, & Travis, 2005). Historically, there had been some controversy over the utility of dynamic risk factors in explaining crime, although the disputes are somewhat dated and may not be a recurring theme today. For example, a number of researchers have identified an antisocial personality pattern as a major risk factor in explaining crime (e.g., Gendreau, Little, & Goggin, 1996; Listwan, Van Voorhis, & Ritchey, 2007), yet in the recent past, the importance of individual differences, such as personality styles, was dismissed by some theorists. In a popular text on criminology, for example, one could read that personality diagnosis was just a “fancy label” that did not contribute to a researcher’s understanding of the causes of crime (Vold, Bernard, & Snipes, 2002, p. 80).
the most recent edition of this text (Bernard, Snipes, & Gerould, 2010, p. 81), these remarks have been excised, perhaps due to the findings of meta-analyses in support of personality traits as a dynamic risk factor.

Motivational Interviewing (MI), as devised by Miller and Rollnick (2002) is a directive, client-centered intervention that seeks to elicit change from a client by increasing the perceived discrepancy between the status quo and the goals of a client and then resolving such discrepancy and ambivalence in the direction of positive change. MI was first used in connection with alcohol and chemical abuse therapy but is now used in a variety of treatment contexts and symptoms and is complimentary to other treatment methods. One in particular is its pairing with The Transtheoretical Model (TTM) of stages of change (DiClemente & Velasquez, 2002; Velasquez & Von Sternberg, 2008). Research findings support the efficacious nature of MI as an intervention, and it has been identified as an EBP (Burke, Arkowitz, & Dunn, 2002; Ginsburg, Mann, Rotgers, & Weekes, 2002; Latessa, Cullen, & Gendreau, 2002; Clark, 2005; Clark, Walters, Gingerich, & Meltzer, 2006; Rubak, Sandboek, Lauritzen, & Christensen, 2006).

Background of the Offender Survey

In late 2009, the authors worked with a team to administer the survey to offenders at the three main reporting sites. They assumed that the Central Seven (dynamic) risk factors for recidivism were being addressed by probation staff in some way with their probationers. It is true that some of the issues pertaining to personality and attitudes might best be addressed in clinical contexts; however, it is the task of probation officers to monitor the progress of their probationers as well as to apply EBP in their special relationships with them. Therefore, the issues of criminal personality patterns and cognition should appropriately be addressed by officers to some degree. An eighth item was appended to the Central Seven, viz., Motivational Interviewing (MI). The probation officers at this department had been trained in, and were directed to use, MI in their dealings with offenders as part of their mission to promote EBP.

If probation staff were, in fact, complying with the principles of EBP as expressed in the research literature, then these eight items should be addressed during monthly offender meetings. If the offenders reported that such topics were indeed being addressed or practiced, then this could indicate that the probation staff was in compliance with its new mission. The research also entailed an analysis of reports and documents from the department, personal interviews with certain key staff members, and attendance at annual staff meetings.

**METHOD**

This research assesses some aspects of program integrity to introduce EBP. EBP research is grounded in the positivist tradition of criminology and specifically finds empirical support in the social learning paradigm of Akers (Akers & Sellers, 2009; Andrews, Bonta, & Wormith, 2006) and self-control theory (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 2009; Miller, Schreck, & Tewksbury, 2008, pp. 160-165).

Toward the end of 2009, the survey team administered questionnaires to offenders at the three main reporting sites. In this jurisdiction, offenders are assigned by probation staff to specific reporting sites, and they are required to report at least once monthly to their officers if they are being supervised according to higher levels of risk. (Low-risk offenders report less often.) A large number of offenders report on Wednesdays. The survey team sampled three Wednesdays within a thirty-day period and administered the survey at one of the three locations on each of the three days. The team was aware of exit doors at each site, and these doors were monitored for the appearance of offenders (after their office visits) who were then approached by members of the team. The response rate was about 60%.

The instrument itself included 37 items, one of which was contingent (item 4b). In addition, three other items of information were recorded or identified by the survey team on each instrument. Thus a possibility of 40 variables is available from each instrument (see survey instrument in Appendix A), several of which are EBP indicators. Of these indicators, some are in the form of evaluations, wherein the offender makes judgments regarding certain statements presented, such as “My officer talks with me about what I think may have led to my past behavior and what I think puts me most at risk” (item 13a). The response categories include strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree (or a variation thereof). The remaining EBP indicators, and those of interest to the present study, are binary in response categories, entailing “yes” or “no” responses to a checklist of topics regularly discussed in office visits. These EBP items are found in Question Number 15 (see Appendix A). The items and related EBP concepts are displayed in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items (Indicators)</th>
<th>Concepts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friends I hang out with</td>
<td>Antisocial Associates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What I do in my free time</td>
<td>Antisocial Leisure Activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being responsible</td>
<td>Antisocial Personality Pattern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My beliefs and values</td>
<td>Antisocial Cognition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coping with problems</td>
<td>Antisocial Personality Pattern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What stage of change I am in</td>
<td>Motivational Interviewing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family issues</td>
<td>Dysfunctional Family Issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol/Drug Use</td>
<td>Substance Abuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>Problems with Employment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Also of significant importance is Question Number 2 that identifies the offender’s level of supervision, i.e., level of risk. Level of supervision constitutes the independent variable in the present study, prompting the probation officer to discuss certain topics (the dependent variables). If a probation officer interviews an offender who has been classified as higher risk for recidivism, then he will choose to discuss topics that conform to the principles of EBP. If the probation officer interviews a low-risk offender, however, then he is at greater liberty to discuss topics of a traditional nature. These elementary relationships are cross-tabulated for comparison. For each EBP variable, a larger percentage of higher-risk offenders should recall these topics being discussed than the percentage of low-risk offenders. In fact, the EBP literature points out that addressing EBP issues with low-risk offenders is a waste of resources and sometimes is counterproductive.

The authors took steps to counteract some of the threats to reliability. Survey team members were selected after they successfully completed the requirements for a course in research methods. The individual members then received training in several aspects of survey research. They were well familiar with the survey instrument and the meaning of each variable. They
underwent training in how to approach respondents, how to communicate, and how to present themselves, including dress and non-verbal communication. At least two Spanish-speaking team members were present during survey efforts, and at times team members were required to read the questions on the survey instrument (English as well as Spanish). The authors supervised team members while they administered the questionnaires and noted any problems that should be addressed in end-of-the-day debriefing sessions.

**FINDINGS**

The results are displayed in 2x2 tables (“no” responses are omitted) for comparison, with risk level identified as the independent variable in columns, and EBP topics identified as the dependent variables in rows. The differences in proportions, expressed in percentages, are exhibited in the final column, as HR-LR (see Table 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EBP Topics</th>
<th>Higher Risk (HR)*</th>
<th>Low Risk (LR)*</th>
<th>HR-LR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friends I hang out with</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>f</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What I do in my free time</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>48.8%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being responsible</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>59.1%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My beliefs and values</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>23.1%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coping with problems</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>41.3%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What state of change I am in</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>30.6%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family issues</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>44.2%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol/Drug Use</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>60.3%</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>60.7%</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Higher Risk, n = 242; Low Risk, n = 25

The difference in percentages between higher-risk and low-risk offenders having EBP topics discussed in monthly office visits varies from roughly 15%–20%, the differences favoring the higher-risk group and lending support to the research hypothesis. The smallest percentage difference was on the topic of “my beliefs and values,” an indicator of antisocial cognition, whereas the largest difference was on the topic of “what I do in my free time,” an indicator of antisocial leisure activities. The topics being addressed the most were “employment,” “alcohol/drug use,” and “being responsible,” indicators of problems with employment, substance abuse, and antisocial personality pattern.

**DISCUSSION**

This study explored the possibility of detecting causal connections between categorical or nominal variables using a non-probabilistic sample of offenders at a large probation department. This department, like a few others in the US, is undergoing sweeping organizational changes in order to incorporate evidence-based practices. Due to the nature of the target population and confidentiality or privacy concerns, a sampling frame was unavailable. Kalton would characterize the sample as a convenience sample, providing the apt example of “patients of a given doctor.” The problem with such non-random samples, of course, is the researcher’s inability to test for significance in differences and his reliance on subjective assessment (Kalton, 1983, p. 90). Without a random sample, the researcher has no inkling of the likelihood that a human subject will be selected from the larger population. Dillman et al. (2009, pp. 52, 353-380) offer guidelines on how to tailor surveys when no sampling frames are available, and these guidelines should be considered by researchers who wish to survey offender populations. The rationale for the present study lies in its ability to probe for possible correlations. Thus any conclusions reached regarding the data cannot be based upon tests of statistical significance. Fisher’s Exact Test, which makes no assumptions regarding size of groups, would have been ideal as a test for differences in categorical data, but it does assume a normal distribution of variables. Without a random sample, drawn from a sampling frame of all probationers, no estimations are possible regarding sampling error. Following Kalton (Kalton, 1983, p. 90), however, subjective assessments are possible. Thus the crosstabulation table lends support to the hypothesis that a group of higher-risk offenders would have EBP topics addressed to a larger extent than a group of low-risk offenders. If the authors were dealing with a probability sample, however, they could test, according to some degree of risk (e.g., p < .05), whether the differences in proportions were statistically significant, i.e., were probably a result of the risk classification and not a result of chance. This type of research, wherein offenders are surveyed to provide data regarding program evaluation, should be explored further, and efforts to work with a probability sample, based upon a random sample drawn from a sampling frame, should be pursued as well.

In regard to the data at hand, one might question why “yes” responses from the higher-risk group were not higher. Percentages of those reporting that EBP topics were addressed in meetings ranged roughly from 23% to 60%. If a probationer is assessed as a higher-risk offender, should not all of the “Central Eight” topics or practices be addressed at monthly meetings between an offender and his probation officer? Some reflection should indicate that the answer might possibly be appropriate for some offenders but not necessarily for others. In the diagnostic phase of working with an offender at the beginning of his probation or presentence term, the diagnostician develops an individualized supervision plan, based upon the specific risks of the individual offender. An offender may have a problem with anger control but not drug use, and therefore drug use would not typically be addressed at meetings. Overall, however, the higher-risk group should have dynamic risk factors identified in individualized supervision plans that must be addressed, according to the principles of EBP, and that is what one observes in the differences in proportions that result from crosstabulating risk groups with EBP topics. Whether these differences are statistically significant cannot be addressed in the present study.

In the present case, the administration of the probation department wished to replicate a “customer satisfaction survey” that was recently administered in another large probation department undergoing similar organizational innovations. In an examination of the official statistics of both departments, the authors were particularly impressed with the drop in recidivism rates since the inception of these organizational changes. An administrator would surely be interested in organizational effectiveness in regard to recidivism and other aspects of organizational work, as well as the favorable economical impact that such changes may have brought. Whether these drops in recidivism are due to EBP or some other factors cannot be explored by using the questionnaire of the present study. Yet the impressions of the “clients” or “customers” may be deemed of value or interest to probation administrators and staff. In the present case, questions were inserted or modified that might indicate compliance with EBP.
principles. The result was a questionnaire that was relatively long, lending itself to moderately high levels of non-response. The indicators were, with the exception of one variable, unidimensional, thus jeopardizing content validity and inviting measurement error. The checklist, conforming to a “check-all-that-apply” format (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2009, p.131) was not ideal and may have contributed to non-response as well. (The preferred format would be “forced-choice.”) These issues could be addressed in future research, along with the preferred use of sampling frames. Although not explored in the present study, several of the evaluation-type questions in the form of ordinal-level data tap into or indicate several dimensions of certain variables, promoting the notion of content validity. Although not derived from a probability sample, they may yield findings of some value, and these results will be explored in a future paper.

One should be aware of the unequal marginals between the two comparison groups. Out of 267 respondents who completed the survey, only 25 of them (9%) were classified as low-risk offenders. This problem may be irreconcilable except for much larger samples, although the problem of unequal proportions may still remain. Classification systems in Texas conform to a basic, three-tier system of low, medium, and high-risk offenders. Being based on validated risk assessment instruments, these levels could be modified to form “natural dichotomies” that have meaning for corrections practitioners. The EBP literature separates the efficacious supervision of offenders along two poles: low and high risk offenders. Thus the researcher in Texas (and possibly in other states) must collapse the high and medium risk offenders into a “higher risk” category, resulting in unequal marginals. Another contributing factor in convenience sampling is that low-risk offenders report less often than higher risk offenders, and thus a certain percentage of low-risk offenders are absent from sites of survey research. In the present case, for example, low-risk offenders visit their probation officers once every three months. This difference in reporting requirements impacts the number of questionnaires that can be completed by low-risk respondents.

Concluding comments focus on what is unique about the present study, and a comparison with the survey done in Maricopa County may be instructive. That survey reported an 82% response rate, compared to about 60% in the present study. Maricopa gathered 468 questionnaires to the 267 of the present study. The Maricopa team was members of the Planning and Research Unit which is associated with the Maricopa County Adult Probation Department, and they administered surveys to eight reporting sites, whereas the present team was composed of professors and students at a university who visited three reporting sites. The respondents in Maricopa County were shown a signed letter from the chief probation officer, whereas in the present study the chief probation officer was absent from the scene. There may be issues to consider regarding the independent nature of the present research effort and how it affects the reliability and validity of the responses. All offenders in this study were approached after they had reported to their probation officers and were outside the building. All members of the present survey team were dressed in marked T-shirts and adorned with name badges that identified them as representatives of a university, not the probation department. Due to the inherent power differentials between probation officers and offenders, independent surveys teams may be perceived as less threatening or compelling. What is intriguing are the comparable results from the “customer satisfaction” portion of the surveys in both jurisdictions. All of these scores, measured on ordinal scales, produced satisfaction levels in the 80th and 90th percentiles. But the main difference between the two studies pertains to how one measures aspects of EBP. In the Maricopa study, the impressive satisfaction levels from the survey were interpreted as evidence that the probation department was indeed participating in the EBP model, and this may, in fact, be the case. But the unique contribution of the present study may be the suggestion of a tighter, less tenuous, connection between survey results and the practice of EBP.

**APPENDIX A**

**Probation Department Client Services Survey**

Please take a few minutes to answer your questions. Your responses will help a research team to rate the quality of services at the probation office. Your participation is voluntary. If you choose to participate, then your responses will be strictly confidential. Please initial in the blank that you have decided: _____ TO _____ NOT TO participate in this study. Thanks for your help!

Please check or blacken the small circle for each question to indicate your answer.

1. What type of probation are you on?
   - Regular
   - Specialized (Gang, Youthful, Sex Offender, Mental Health – see PO multiple times each month, including regular home or work visits)

2. How often are you scheduled to report to your probation officer?
   - One or more times per month
   - Every three months

3. How long have you been on probation?
   - Less than 6 months
   - 6-12 months
   - 1-2 years
   - 2-3 years
   - More than 3 years

4a. Since being placed on probation, how many probation officers have been assigned to supervise you? (Do not count the “officer of the day” who sees you when your assigned PO is out that day.)
   - 1
   - 2
   - 3
   - 4
   - 5 or More
4b. If more than 1, were any of these changes difficult for you?
   o Yes
   o No

5. When visiting my probation officer, the wait time in the lobby is usually reasonable.
   o Strongly agree
   o Agree
   o Disagree
   o Strongly disagree

6. The receptionist greets me in a pleasant and professional manner.
   o Strongly agree
   o Agree
   o Disagree
   o Strongly disagree

7. I would prefer for my probation officer to spend:
   o More time with me during our visits
   o Less time with me during our visits
   o I’m satisfied with how much time I spend with my PO during our visits

8. My probation officer treats me with respect.
   o Strongly agree
   o Agree
   o Disagree
   o Strongly disagree

9. My probation officer listens to me.
   o Strongly agree
   o Agree
   o Disagree
   o Strongly disagree

10. My probation officer works with me to help me complete probation successfully.
    o Strongly agree
    o Agree
    o Disagree
    o Strongly disagree

11. My probation officer lets me know how I am doing on probation.
    o Strongly agree
    o Agree
    o Disagree
    o Strongly disagree

12. I feel my officer’s response was fair when I have been unable to complete conditions of probation, had positive UAs, or had other violations of the conditions of probation.
    o Strongly agree
    o Agree
    o Disagree
    o Strongly disagree

13a. My officer talks with me about what I think may have led to my past behavior and what I think puts me most at risk.
    o Strongly agree
    o Agree
    o Disagree
    o Strongly disagree

13b. My officer works with me to help me make better decisions.
    o Strongly agree
    o Agree
    o Disagree
    o Strongly disagree

14. I understand what is expected of me and the responsibilities of my officer if I do not follow my conditions.
    o Strongly agree
    o Agree
    o Disagree
    o Strongly disagree

15. Please check any subjects that your probation officer usually discusses with you during a typical visit. (check as many as apply)
    o Friends I hang out with
    o What I do in my free time
    o Being responsible
    o My beliefs and values
    o Coping with problems
o What stage of change I am in
o Family Issues
o What I do when I get angry
o Alcohol / Drug Use
o Drug Testing
o Treatment Attendance
o Employment
o Education
o Residence
o Mental Health
o Health
o Payments
o Community Restitution Hours
o Other: ________________________________

16. How else could your probation officer help you while on probation?
_______________________________________________________________________

17. Please give an overall rating of your experience with the adult probation department.
   o Very Satisfied
   o Satisfied
   o Dissatisfied
   o Very dissatisfied

*This questionnaire has been modified from the original instrument used in the recent offender survey in Maricopa County (Cherkos, Ferguson, & Cook, 2008).

REFERENCES


AUTHOR NOTE

This research was supported in part by a grant from Tarleton State University-Central Texas and from departmental funds, Texas A&M University-Central Texas. The authors wish to acknowledge the following persons for their support and clearance for this research: Dr. Geraldine Nagy, Dr. Carsten Andresen, Dawn Tannous, and Lynne Burns. The authors also acknowledge the efforts of colleagues and students who volunteered to administer the survey, including Tammy Molina-Moore, Linda Anderson, Richard Berrouet, Tammy Bracewell, JoAnn Cabrera, Ilyasah Charles, Tamara Gardner, Rena McDowell, Thomas Reynolds, Erika Rodriguez, Sara Stewart, and Dorothy Veracruz-Todd. This paper was presented at the Southwest Association of Criminal Justice Conference in Little Rock, Arkansas on October 8, 2010.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Floyd Berry or Gerald Piechocki, Department of Criminal Justice, Texas A&M University-Central Texas, 1901 S. Clear Creek Rd, Killeen, Texas 76549. E-mail: fberry@ct.tamus.edu; piechocki@ct.tamus.edu.

Does Missing the Maturity Gap Predict Drug Abstention Among Adolescents?: An Analysis of Moffitt’s Developmental Taxonomy

Valarie Mendez
University of Texas at San Antonio

Abstract

Moffitt’s developmental taxonomy (1993) has generated considerable empirical research over the past two decades, most of which has centered on life-course persistent and adolescence-limited offenders. In an effort to expand the literature, this study examined the taxonomy’s maturity gap hypothesis which links this developmental event to deviance and delinquency. Using this theoretical framework, I tested Moffitt’s hypothesis to determine if those who “miss” the maturity gap are more likely to abstain from the drug use. Using data drawn from the National Longitudinal Study for Adolescent Health (Add Health), and employing the Barnes and Beaver (2009) statistical model, this study assessed the likelihood of drug abstention among male and female adolescents. Utilizing logistic regression, this analysis examined the impact of the maturity gap on drug abstention while controlling for other known correlates of drug use (e.g., age, self-control). The findings partially supported the taxonomy, indicating that the maturity gap was significantly and negatively related to minor drug use abstention for males, but not for females. Implications for Moffitt’s theory and suggestions for future research are discussed.

Key Words: adolescent, delinquency, drug use, maturity gap

INTRODUCTION

There is perhaps no greater phenomenon in the field of criminological research than that of the curvilinear association between age and crime. Since the 1880s, countless scholars have sought to identify the underlying force that produces the curvilinear relationship between age and crime, where the rate of criminality drastically increases during the years of adolescence, peaks in early adulthood, and then falls thereafter (Stolzenberg and Alessio 2008; Barnes and Beaver, 2009). While numerous theories have been proffered to account for this relationship, Stolzenberg and Alessio (2008) assert that two predominant hypotheses have been distinguished in criminological research. The first theoretical argument suggests the importance of a single trait manifested in the individual that causes criminality. Within this theoretical framework, no other theory has been more cited than the self-control theory of Gottfredson and Hirshi (1990).