Analysing of supervision skills of juvenile justice workers

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SUMMARY

There is evidence that the style of supervision by juvenile justice workers can make a difference to the likelihood that young people under supervision will re-offend. This study aimed to examine the style of supervision offered by juvenile justice workers and how this relates to re-offending patterns by clients. It provides information about what goes on in worker/client interviews and what works best in fostering reduced recidivism.

More specifically the aim was to gather information about the nature of micro-skills which are used by youth justice workers in the supervision of offenders on probation parole and other community based orders, how clients respond to the use of those micro-skills and how the use of the skills relates to client outcomes such as recidivism.

The research was conducted in collaboration with the Department of Juvenile Justice in NSW. Forty-seven workers participated in the study. The next 5 clients allocated to the workers from the time of volunteering from the study were then selected for each of the workers. The workers were then asked to invite the research officers who were working on the project to observe the next interview they conducted with any one of the five clients who were allocated to them. Eighty-nine interviews were observed however an additional 39 were also observed as part of the pilot study for this project. They are included in the analysis and results reported on in this paper. In total 128 interviews were observed. Eighty interviews were also conducted with clients following the observation and 78 interviews were conducted with workers following the observations and interviews with the clients.

Two year recidivism data is available for 117of the observations. Eleven of the interviews were conducted in remote areas of NSW during 2011 and the recidivism data for those interviews is not yet available.

INTRODUCTION

Despite the prevalence of probation, little is known about what occurs in supervision. Bonta et al. (2004) refer to this lack of knowledge as the 'black box' of community supervision. However, knowledge about what goes on in supervision is important for several reasons. It is one of the most used dispositions for criminal offences in western countries, and most persistent offenders experience probation or other community based orders at some stage in their lives. According to the US Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) as many as 5 million people were on probation or parole at the end of 2009 – about 3 percent of adults in the US population. In Australia during 2008–09, an average of 56,972 offenders, were serving community corrections orders on any given day. This is a rate of 338 per 100,000 adults (562 per 100,000 adult males and 121 per 100,000 adult females) (AIC, 2010).

Probation represents the primary form of intervention with young offenders in Australia (AIHW, 2011). Around 7200 young people were under juvenile justice supervision on any given day in 2008-09. Most (90 percent) were under community based supervision with the remainder in detention. In NSW during 2009-10, 4521 young offenders were under the supervision of the NSW Department of Juvenile Justice on community based orders (NSW Government, 2010).Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people continue to be overrepresented in community supervision as well as in detention (AIHW, 2011).

Knowledge about what occurs probation supervision is likely to be of interest to judges and magistrates who sentence offenders and to legal representatives who recommend sentences. It is also of particular interest to those who work in and with probation services particularly given the evidence discussed later in this paper that suggests that probation supervision can lead to reduced re-offending and in some circumstances can even lead to increased re-offending depending on the nature of the supervision. Failure on

supervision, particularly parole supervision, may also lead to imprisonment with a subsequent impact on imprisonment rates.

Knowledge about what goes on in supervision is of particular relevance to those who offer education, training and supervision to potential and practicing probation officers. If some effective practice skills are consistently neglected or misused, for example, then this can be addressed through training and supervision. Information from this study and others like it can therefore help to inform the nature of training and supervision for probation officers .

A concise understanding about what goes on in probation supervision can also help to develop knowledge about the nature of the skills used. For example, there is evidence from the child protection field that the practice of problem solving might be different in practice to the way it is set out in text books (Trotter, 2004). Evidence about how skills are delivered in practice can help to refine our understanding of the nature of those skills. This has advantages for developing knowledge about the nature of effective supervision practices and in turn for education, training, and supervision.

Of particular interest is the nature of the supervision of young people where caseloads are generally lower than in adult probation and there are opportunities for higher levels of supervision and therefore for higher levels of impact. Juvenile probation is the focus of the study reported on in this article.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1)   Effective Practice Skills

There is considerable evidence that the nature of correctional interventions can make a difference to the re-offending rates of those who receive them (e.g. Bonta and Andrews, 2010; Farrington and Welsh, 2005; McIvor, 2005; McNeill et al, 2005; Raynor, 2003; Trotter, 2006). The argument presented in the literature is not that correctional interventions always work, but that appropriate forms of intervention can be effective. In a review of meta-analysis

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of treatment effectiveness, Andrews and Bonta (2006: 329) argue that appropriate treatment led to reductions in recidivism of 'a little more than 50 percent from that found in comparison conditions'.

Much of the research on the effectiveness of correctional interventions has been undertaken on specific interventions, for example, cognitive behavioural programs or drug treatment programs. Less attention has been paid to the routine supervision of offenders on probation, parole or other community based orders. Nevertheless the research which has been undertaken suggests that certain practices are effective in the supervision of offenders on adult and youth probation.

i)   *Role Clarification*

Work with offenders involves what Ronald Rooney (1992) and Jones and Alcabes (1993) refer to as client socialisation or what others have referred to as role clarification (Trotter, 2006). One aspect of role clarification involves helping the client to accept that the worker can help with the client's problems even though the worker has a social control role. Other aspects of role clarification involve exploring the client's expectations, helping the client to understand what is negotiable, the limits of confidentiality and the nature of the worker's authority. Some research has been undertaken on this issue in mental health (Videka-Sherman, 1988) and in child protection (Shulman, 1991; Trotter, 2004). Less work has been done in corrections settings although Trotter (1996) found that role clarification skills were part of a group of skills which related to reduced re-offending by probationers. Dowden and Andrews (2004) also found support in their meta-analysis for the appropriate use of authority – an approach which is 'firm but fair', although the skill was not used often in the studies reviewed and the effect size of .17 was relatively low.

ii) Pro-social Modelling and Re-inforcement

Pro-social modelling and re-inforcement have been shown to be effective in a

number of studies (e.g. Andrews and Bonta, 2006; Gendreau, 1996; Raynor, 2003; Trotter, 2006) including studies focused on community supervision in adult and juvenile settings (Andrews et al., 1979; Bourgeon et al., 2010; Trotter 1991, 1996). It is included as one of the core components of effective probation supervision in a meta-analysis of studies on probation supervision by Dowden and Andrews (2004). There is support for probation officers modelling pro-social behaviours, for positively re-inforcing clients' pro-social behaviours and for challenging clients' pro-criminal behaviours. The use of pro-social modelling and re-inforcement was strongly related to recidivism in two studies by Trotter (1990, 1996) both suggesting that when workers used these skills the clients of those workers had levels of recidivism which were between 30 and 50 percent lower than when the skills were not used. Similarly the meta-analysis by Dowden and Andrews (2004) found a correlation with effect size of .34 with effective modelling .24 with effective re-inforcement and .17 with effective disapproval.

iii) Problem Solving

Effective interventions in corrections address the issues which have led offenders to become offenders, often referred to as criminogenic needs (Andrews and Bonta, 2006). Criminogenic needs may include employment, family relationships, drug use, peer group associations, housing, finances or pro-criminal attitudes. A number of studies also suggest that working collaboratively with offenders and focusing on the issues or problems which the offenders themselves identify as problematic leads to lower recidivism (McNeill and Whyte 2007; Trotter, 1996, 2006). There is also support for problem solving approaches whereby workers canvass a wide range of client issues, reach agreement on problems to be addressed, set goals and develop strategies to achieve those goals (Andrews and Bonta 2006; Dowden and Andrews, 2004; Trotter, 1996). Trotter (1996) found that problem solving was related to a 50 percent reduction in conditions related breaches of probation but not to offence related breaches. Dowden and Andrews point to a correlation with effect size of .29 for problem solving in their meta-analysis of core correctional practice.

iv) Relationship and Desistance

Dowden and Andrews (2004) also identified the client worker relationship as one of the elements of core correctional practice in their meta-analysis. Relationship skills are also referred to in other reviews (e.g. Bonta et al., 2008, Bourgeon et al., 2010; Gendreau, 1996; Trotter, 2006). It is argued that probation officers should have relationships with clients that are characterised by empathy, openness, warmth, humour, enthusiasm, appropriate self disclosure and a positive view about the clients' capacity to change. Dowden and Andrews (2004) in their meta-analysis indicate a correlation with effect size of .25 for relationship factors.

v) Focus on high risk and cognitive behavioural techniques

The work of Andrews and Bonta (2006) in particular has highlighted the Risk/Need/Responsivity model. They point to the need to focus on medium to high risk offenders. They refer to four studies which found recidivism rates which were as much as 50 percent lower when high risk offenders received intensive treatment and up to 50 percent higher when low risk offenders were offered intensive treatment. They also refer to the value of cognitive behavioural interventions. Cognitive behavioural interventions, which help offenders address thinking patterns which relate to crime, are often targeted towards groups of offenders, rather than individuals, nevertheless these interventions may also be used in one to one supervision in probation. The Dowden and Andrews (2004) meta-analysis of core practices indicates an effect size of .37 for structured learning which involves cognitive behavioural interventions, the highest effect size of any of the variables.

vi) Other factors

There is also support for relapse prevention techniques, which involve the worker helping offenders to identify and avoid precursors to offending (Dowden et al., 2003); for 'multi-modal' approaches, which rely on a range of

intervention methods (Andrews and Bonta, 2006); for working with families of young offenders (Lipsey et al., 2010); and for matching workers and clients according to learning style and personality (Gendreau et al., 1998, Wing Hong Chui and Nellis, 2003).

2) What works – differing perspectives

While there seems to be considerable agreement in the research that the approaches referred to above are related to reduced recidivism there is less agreement about the relative importance of the different factors, with some emphasising relationship and strengths based factors and others emphasising risk assessment and cognitive behavioural factors.

The 'Good Lives Model' (Ward, 2010) for example focuses on client strengths, on enhancing opportunities to achieve the goals of a good life such as employment and social relationships, and on developing holistic plans for change. It is critical of the focus on risk factors in the RNR model and it emphasises the importance of therapeutic alliance and on enhancing opportunities for offenders to achieve goals associated with a good life such as employment and social relationships.

The Good Lives Model has much in common with the desistance paradigm in correctional practice (Maruna and LeBel, 2010). The desistance paradigm involves focusing on offenders' pro-social networks and attitudes and allowing offenders to guide interventions themselves. Rather than focusing on risk related issues it focuses on issues that might make offenders' lives meaningful and on fostering and supporting the changes that offenders make for themselves as they mature.

While it is a broader concept, the desistance paradigm is consistent with the principles of pro-social modelling and re-inforcement referred to earlier. In addition to its pro-social and strengths focus, it emphasises – like the Good Lives Model – the importance of the therapeutic relationship. The desistance paradigm draws support from the general counselling field for the importance

of the therapeutic relationship. McNeill et al. (2005) for example in a report on effective practice refer to earlier work by Assay and Lambert (1999) which argues that therapeutic relationship factors represent 30 percent of the impact on client outcomes in therapy, compared to specific techniques such as problem solving which account for 15 percent, expectancy and placebo effects (15 percent) and extra-therapeutic factors (40 percent).

Generally the research, in particular the meta-analysis, has focused on general groups of offenders and less on the specifics of what works best for particular groups such as young, cognitively impaired or Indigenous offenders. Nevertheless the appropriateness of the RNR model and cognitive behavioural approaches with women have been challenged. It has been argued that women in particular may respond better to relationship based interventions (Gelsthorpe, 2004). It is argued that cognitive behavioural interventions attribute offending to thinking processes rather than to structural inequalities relating to education or poverty for example and that this disadvantages women in particular (Hannah-Moffat, 2001).

3) Implementation of 'what works' principles

While publications on 'what works' date back many years (e.g. Andrews et al., 1990) and many corrections organisations offer training to staff in these principles, there is little known about how or the extent to which they are actually used in practice. Some evidence suggests that correctional interventions in general make little use of 'what works' principles (Andrews and Dowden, 2005). Andrews and Dowden (2005) refer to the concept of therapeutic integrity which can be understood as the extent to which programs or interventions are delivered in the way they were intended. They undertook a meta-analysis of therapeutic integrity in correctional treatment. The results from 273 studies suggest that often interventions were not implemented as planned and that treatment effectiveness was subsequently compromised.

Another meta-analysis by Dowden and Andrews (2004) focused on the use of core staff practices in human service corrections programs. The programs

selected exclude punishment programs and although the nature of the programs is not defined, it appears to include probation and parole programs as well as other human service interventions offered in the community. They found very low adherence to the core principles. Relationship factors were found in only 5 percent of the studies examined; problem solving in only 16 percent; effective modelling in 16 percent; and effective re-inforcement and disapproval in only 5 and 3 percent respectively.

Bonta et al. (2008) undertook an examination of audio taped interviews between 62 probation officers and their clients. They found that probation officers did not generally focus on the principles of effective practice but more on complying with probation conditions.

'For the most part, probation officers spent too much time on the enforcement aspect of supervision (i.e., complying with the conditions of probation) and not enough time on the service delivery role of supervision. Major criminogenic needs such as antisocial attitudes and social supports for crime were largely ignored and probation officers evidenced few of the skills (e.g., prosocial modeling, differential re-inforcement) that could influence behavioral change in their clients.' (Bonta et al., 2010: 248)

A different picture is presented, however, in a small study by Raynor et al. (2010) undertaken in adult and youth probation services in the Channel Island of Jersey. They examined video-tapes of interviews, unlike Bonta et al., (2004) who used audio-tapes. They used a coding manual based on measures of effective use of authority, pro-social modelling skills, problem solving techniques and effective communication skills (Raynor et al., 2010: 116). They used three researchers to rate each interview but had only rated six interviews at the time of publication. Nevertheless they found a much higher use of the skills than in the studies referred to earlier. They comment that:
'most officers routinely meet most or all of the criteria for use of some types of skill particularly in the set up of interviews, quality of communication, use of authority (mostly relationship skills) and in pro-social modelling (in which they

have been trained) but with larger differences evident in other structuring skills – motivational interviewing, problem solving and cognitive re-structuring' (Raynor et al., 2010: 125).

Another study undertaken in adult probation in Canada (Bourgeon et al., 2010) also examined tapes of interviews between probation officers and their clients using a similar scoring manual to that used in the Jersey study. Their sample included 143 clients supervised either by one of 33 probation officers who had undertaken specific training in effective practice skills or by one of 19 probation officers who had not undertaken such training. Each of the probation officers volunteered to be involved in the project and was randomly assigned to either the experimental or control group. They measured the use of the skills on a seven-point scale and found that those who had undertaken training were given mean scores of 5.59 on structuring skills compared to 3.69 for those who had not done the training, 2.64 and 2.21 respectively for relationship skills, 3.02 and 2.54 for behavioural techniques, and 2.21 and .01 for cognitive techniques. Each of the differences was statistically significant at the .05 level with the exception of behavioural techniques which was within the .10 level. In other words, the probation officers generally provided structure to the session, made some use of relationship skills, made some use of behavioural techniques but particularly for those without training made very little use of cognitive techniques.

The Bourgeon et al. study (2010) also found, like a number of other studies, that training not only improved the likelihood that probation officers would use effective practice skills but also that those under the supervision of the trained officers had lower rates of recidivism. This was also evident in a study done in Australia (Trotter, 1996) which found that the clients of officers trained in the skills of role clarification, pro-social modelling, problem solving and relationship had up to 50 percent lower recidivism after one year and after four years, depending on the recidivism measure used. A recent study by Robinson et al. (forthcoming) also found improved outcomes for pre-trial and post-conviction clients for those supervised by officers trained in effective practice skills. Again the re-offence rates were up to 50 percent lower

depending on the measures used. They also found increased compliance with pre-trial conditions.

While it is increasingly evident therefore that the use of particular skills by probation officers leads to improved outcomes for clients, there is doubt about the extent to which effective practice skills are used routinely in probation. Most of the research, at least the research undertaken with large samples, suggests that the skills are used only minimally in practice unless probation officers are involved in specific training in the skills and even then only some of the skills are used. Little work has been undertaken in Australia examining the extent to which skills are used by probation officers in supervision and little work has been undertaken at all examining the nature of skills used by probation officers in juvenile justice settings. Most of the work reported on in the preceding sections of this paper has been undertaken with adult rather than juvenile offenders and at this stage there seems to have been insufficient research to distinguish the relative effectiveness of skills used with adults and young people. Further, the work done to date examining the content of probation interviews has gathered data through analysing audiotapes or video tapes of interviews. None have used personal observation by researchers, a method which might give a more complete picture of the nature of the complex interaction between workers and probationers.

METHODOLOGY

1) Aim of the study

This study aimed to (1) identify the extent to which the effective practice skills referred to in the literature review were used in interviews between juvenile justice officers and their clients working in juvenile justice in New South Wales, Australia. (2) examine the relationship between the use of the skills in interviews and recidivism and responsiveness of those under supervision and (3) examine which aspects of supervision relate most strongly to positive and negative client outcomes.

2) Sample

One hundred and seventeen worker/client interviews were personally observed by one of three research officers between 2006 and 2010. Forty-six staff members participated in the interviews. A further 11 observations of interviews were conducted in 2011 in Broken Hill and surrounding areas as it was felt that the study lacked the perspective of remote Aboriginal communities. These interviews have not however been included in this report because of there has been insufficient follow up period.

It was initially intended to observe five interviews per worker, however, the practicalities of accessing interviews meant that in some cases only one or two interviews were observed per worker. Fifteen juvenile justice counsellors undertook thirty-three of the interviews and 31 juvenile justice officers conducted the remaining 86 interviews. Juvenile justice counsellors and juvenile justice workers each provide direct supervision to young offenders on probation, parole or other community based supervision orders. Juvenile justice counsellors have relevant tertiary qualifications and have a counselling or problem solving role, whereas juvenile justice workers are not required to have tertiary qualifications and are generally expected to focus more on compliance and practical issues. The workers were most often aged between 35 and 44, and the average years of experience working in juvenile justice was 10. Sixty-four of the interviews were conducted by female officers and 55 by male officers.

NSW Juvenile Justice provides regular training in effective practice skills. Training in the four key skills of role clarification, pro-social modelling, problem solving and relationship has been conducted throughout the agency over the past five years along with the introduction of and training in a cognitive behavioural method known as TARGETS or CHARTS, which involves structured methods of addressing client issues through the use of worksheets.

Consistent with Monash University ethics approvals, the project was dependent on workers and clients volunteering and on workers facilitating the

observations for the research officers. Initially more than 90 staff members offered to be involved however ultimately only 46 of those were observed. Staff promotion and relocation accounted for a proportion of those workers who ultimately did not participate however staff were often apprehensive about being observed, and this limited the numbers who were ultimately involved.

The 117 young people had an average age of 15.82 years with the youngest being 12 and the oldest 18. Eighty-two percent (98/119) were male, 43 were on supervised bonds, 32 on probation, 19 on suspended sentences, 15 on parole and the remainder on other forms of supervision (e.g. bail supervision). They had an average of 1.46 prior convictions. The most common offences for which they received their current order included assaults (33), break and enter (23), robbery (12), theft (11) and property damage (11).

3) Observations

Observations of supervision sessions were undertaken in the first three months of the young person receiving their new community supervision order. While there would have been advantages in also observing interviews at later stages in the order, it was decided to limit the observations to the early stages because some orders, particularly parole orders, are short and the researchers were concerned about excluding those on short orders. Also it was anticipated that a number of young people would breach orders through further offences and the longer the time to the observation the more likely that higher risk young people would not have been included in the sample. Further, intensive work was conducted for the most part in the early stages of the order when it was anticipated that reporting would be more frequent.

The interviews took place at a number of venues. Thirty-one percent were undertaken in juvenile justice offices, 28 percent in clients' homes and 40 percent in another community setting. The project was conducted in two stages. The first phase funded through a grant from Monash University (2007-08) and the second phase funded through the Australian Criminology

Research Council (2008-11). In the first phase of the project the interviews were manually recorded with as much detail as possible. Permission was then sought from University and Juvenile Justice ethics committees to audio-tape the interviews and subsequent interviews were audio-taped.

An Aboriginal research officer undertook 16 of the observations. A high proportion of the clients in Juvenile Justice in NSW are Aboriginal (23 percent of the sample) and it was felt that an Aboriginal worker may identify particular practices or interactions which might help to identify culturally appropriate approaches to supervision.

It is acknowledged that workers and clients may behave differently when they are observed. The observers therefore attempted to be as unobtrusive as possible. They also emphasised that the purpose of the observation was to view the interview as it would normally occur and that no-one could be identified in any reporting of the study.

4) Coding of observations

A coding manual was developed in consultation with investigators on similar projects conducted by Peter Raynor and colleagues in Jersey (UK) and by James Bonta, Gur Bourgeon and others in Canada. The manual aimed to define the skills and assist in the accuracy and reliability of the estimates of the extent to which the skills were used in interviews. It was divided into 15 sections including: set up of the interview; structure of the interview; role clarification; needs analysis; problem solving; developing strategies; relapse prevention/cognitive behavioural techniques; pro-social modeling and re-inforcement; nature of the relationship; empathy; confrontation; termination; use of referral/community resources; non-verbal cues; and incidental conversations. Each of the 15 sections contained a number of items which could be rated on a five-point scale. For example the problem solving section included: problem survey; problem ranking; problem exploration; setting goals; timeframe; review; developing a contract; developing strategies; ongoing monitoring; and time spent conducting problem solving.

The observer rated the extent to which workers used the skills during the interview. This was rated on a five-point scale dependent on whether the skill was:

1.   Not present at all;

2.   Infrequently present (at least one example present through entire duration of the interview);

3.   Sometimes present (several examples are present during the interview);

4.   Often present (numerous examples of this being present during the interview;

5.   Present (worker is clearly using this skill deliberately with the client throughout the entire interview).

For the skill to be rated highly it needed to be implemented in a way which was consistent with the research about good practice referred to in the literature review. For example problem solving would be rated high if the worker frequently helped clients to identify their own problems and goals and helped clients to identify strategies themselves to address them. It would be rated low if the worker identified problems with minimal input from the client and then set goals and strategies for the client.

5) Inter-Rater Reliability

A total of three research officers conducted field observations. Ninety-seven observations were completed by the first research officer, who was employed continuously on the project for a period of four years. Sixteen observations were completed by an Aboriginal research officer and 3 were completed by another research officer.

The coding was undertaken by three research officers. As mentioned above the second and third research officers did not observe the interviews but coded from the tapes and the non verbal cues checklist. Each of the research officers was trained in using the coding manual and cross coded a number of

interviews using the audio-tapes of the interviews prior to doing the final coding of the interviews. Detailed discussions were undertaken ensuring that each of the coders had consistent interpretations of the wording in the coding manual.

Twenty of the interviews were coded by the research officer who observed the interview and subsequently cross coded by another research officer from the audio-tapes and non verbal check list. There was a high degree of consistency in the ratings. For example the correlation on the global score between first and second coders was .741 (sig .000) on time spent discussing role clarification was .548 (sig .006), on time spent on problem solving was .626 (sig .002) and on pro-social modelling .561 (sig.005).

Levels of Statistical Significance

The conventional level of significance of .05 using a one tailed test (acceptable when the direction of the result is predicted. It can also be argued that a level of .10 might be used when samples are small and the direction of the results is supported by previous literature (Weinback and Grinnell 1995). Levels of significance within the .10 range are therefore reported in this study.

RESULTS – WHAT DO JUVENILE JUSTICE WORKERS DO?

The average time for an interview was 30.48 minutes, however there was considerable variation in the length of interviews with the shortest being five minutes and the longest 102 minutes. Female staff had longer interviews than male staff with female staff averaging 33.20 minutes and male staff averaging 27.43 minutes. The gender of the client was not however associated with the duration of interviews. High risk young people (those who rated above the mean on the Youth Level of Service Inventory, the standard risk assessment tool used in the department) had longer interviews (33 minutes for higher risk

and 26 minutes for lower risk). They also had more frequent interviews consistent with departmental policy. The mean number of contacts with high risk young people was one per week whereas the mean number of contacts with low risk young people was one every two weeks.

In the interviews, the workers and clients talked about issues such as the conditions of the order, expectations of clients and the purpose of supervision. As pointed out below they talked a lot about criminogenic needs such as employment or education, family, drug use, and recreational activities and friends. They also talked sometimes about incidental issues such as sport or TV shows. As mentioned earlier, however, the aim of this study was to examine the extent to which workers used effective practice skills rather than to measure the subject of discussions.

1) Role Clarification

As shown in Table 1, the mean time spent appropriately using role clarification skills was rated at 2.35. In other words, appropriate use of role clarification (helping the client to understand roles rather than telling the client) was rated most often as 'infrequently present' (with at least one example present through the entire duration of the interview); or 'sometimes present' (several examples are present during the interview). In 16 percent of the interviews, the coder found that the worker made no use of the skill of role clarification issues and in 5 percent of interviews the coder found that the worker was 'clearly using this skill deliberately with the client throughout the entire interview'.

Table 1 Worker use of role clarification skills (1 not discussed, 5 discussed a lot)

Time spent discussing role clarification	2.35

Purpose of the worker's interventions	2.37
Spoke about conditions of order	2.36
How the worker can help	2.31
Nature/authority of worker	1.70
Time worker has for client	1.64
Dual role helper/investigator	1.59
Negotiable/non-negotiable areas	1.45
Confidentiality	1.31
Restrictions of organisation	1.20

The workers infrequently (at least one example in the interview) helped the client to understand the worker's purpose, the conditions of the order, or how the worker could help the client (for example by making referrals to other agencies or counselling the client). There were fewer examples in the interviews of helping the client to understand the nature of the worker's authority (for example what happens if a client misses an appointment), the worker's dual role as a helper and investigator (for example the worker explaining the difference between being a helper/counsellor and their authority as a juvenile justice worker), the negotiable and non-negotiable areas of probation (for example the time and day of the appointment may be negotiable whereas the frequency of supervision may not be negotiable) and the time the worker had for the client. There were little if any references to the other role clarification skills of helping the client to understand the extent to which the interviews were confidential, or the role of the worker in relation to their organisation.

2) Problem Solving

Table 2 suggests that workers used problem solving skills more often than role clarification with the average rating of 3 (several examples are present during the interview). In only 6 percent of the 117 interviews, however, did the coders indicate that the worker 'is clearly using this skill deliberately with the client throughout the entire interview' and in 17 percent of the interviews the skill was not used at all. When workers used problem solving techniques to address client issues they focused sometimes on exploring problems with clients. They infrequently focused on problem survey, whereby the worker and the young person talked about a range of problems the young person might be facing from the young person's perspective. They also infrequently focused on developing strategies or courses of action that may be taken, and evaluating which steps would be the most likely to succeed. They made little use of goals and contracts or problem ranking (deciding with the client which problems are most appropriate to work on).

Table 2 Worker's use of problem solving skills

Time spent conducting problem solving	2.69
Problem Exploration	3.08
Developing strategies	2.32
Problem survey	2.29
Problem ranking	1.74
Setting goals	1.74
Developing contract	1.26

This is not to say that the workers did not talk about offence related problems. On the contrary, an average of 2.17 problems or criminogenic needs were discussed in each interview. The workers often however, discussed these issues from their perspective rather than from the client's. In other words the

workers would identify the needs of the clients rather than the clients doing so for themselves. There was also considerable variation in the numbers of needs discussed: in 30 percent of the interviews no needs were discussed and in 21 percent of the interviews four or more needs were discussed. The most commonly discussed criminogenic needs were employment and education issues, and the next most commonly discussed were family and relationships. Other issues which were discussed less frequently (but at least once on average per interview) included drug use, peers, anger, and offences. There were fewer discussions around issues which might be defined as non-criminogenic needs such as emotional health or recreation (Andrews and Bonta, 2006).

Table 3 Criminogenic needs discussed during interviews (5 - discussed a lot; 1 - not discussed at all)

Employment/education	3.23
Anger management	2.81
Family relationships	2.42
Substance abuse	2.37
Offences	2.23
Anti-social peers	2.22
Attitude	1.90
Accommodation	1.89
Social/recreation	1.78
Financial	1.61
Emotional stability	1.46
Health	1.23

3) Pro-social modelling and re-inforcement

All but one of the workers used at least some pro-social modelling and re-inforcement with 19 percent 'clearly using this skill deliberately with the client throughout the entire interview'. There were often examples of identifying pro-social actions and comments by clients and sometimes examples of the worker providing rewards through praise or other methods for pro-social actions and comments. There were fewer examples of pro-social modelling, for example expressing views about the value of pro-social pursuits, and few examples of challenging clients' pro-social actions or comments.

Table 4 Pro-social skills used in interviews

Time spent using pro-social modelling	3.26
Identifying pro-social actions	3.53
Rewarding pro-social actions	3.24
Modelling desirable behaviours	2.30
Challenging pro-criminal actions	2.28

4) Relationship

As shown in Table 5 the workers were in the judgement of the coders open and honest, non-blaming, enthusiastic, and friendly. They also were often engaging. They made less use of skills of challenging rationalisations, reflection of feelings, paraphrasing of client comments, and use of humour. They rarely if ever used aggressive or judgemental confrontations.

Table 5 Use of relationship skills by workers

Open and honest	4.03
Friendly	3.96
Enthusiastic	3.70
Engaging	3.62
Non-blaming	3.50
Paraphrasing	3.10
Reflection of feelings	3.06
Challenge rationalisations	2.60
Humor	2.44
Self disclosure	1.78
Judgmental confrontation	1.20
Aggressive Judgmental confrontation	1.06

5) Cognitive Behavioural skills

As shown in Table 5 workers generally made infrequent use of cognitive behavioural skills. They most often used skills relating to risk factors (identifying the patterns of thinking or behaviours that have led the young person to committing criminal acts in the past) and physical coping skills (the worker assists the young person to identify available physical resources to

assist them to deal with a high risk situation). They made little use of cognitive coping skills (the worker assisting or educating the young person about cognitive coping skills available to assist them deal with a high risk situation) or managing relapses (the worker goes through a specific high risk situation with the young person identifying possible strategies that could be employed to minimize the risk of re-offending).

Table 6 Use of Cognitive Behavioural Skills

Risk factors	2.41
Physical coping skills	2.20
High risk situations	2.15
Cognitive coping skills	1.89
Managing lapses	1.39

6) Variability in use of the skills

There was considerable variability in the use of the skills by the workers with between 20 and 24 percent of the scores falling at one or five for the key skills of pro-social modelling, problem solving, and role clarification. In other words a total of 20 to 24 percent (distributed over two ends of the scale) of the workers either used none of the skills in the interview or used them deliberately throughout the entire interview. There were also strong correlations between the ratings of the use of the skills by the same workers. In other words if a worker used one of the skills, they were likely to use all of the skills. The correlations between the ratings of each of the key skills of role clarification, pro-social modelling, and problem solving for example were each between .286 and .489 and statistically significant at the .01 level.

7) Why did the workers use different skills?

There was a relationship between use of some of the skills and the characteristics of the workers. There was a significant correlation (<.05) between the age of the workers and the use of the skills with younger and less experienced workers making more use of each of the key skills, perhaps because they had more recent educational experiences where they may have learnt the skills. Juvenile justice counsellors who are required to have a relevant degree, and who were younger, also made more use of the skills (problem solving and pro-social modelling p <.05 and role clarification p<.10). The gender of the staff or the risk levels of the clients was not associated with use of the skills.

RESULTS – HOW DO WORKER SKILLS RELATE TO CLIENT RECIDIVISM

It was anticipated that the overall global score given at the conclusion of each interview which was observed would be related to the re-offending rates of the clients. The overall global score was the estimation by the coder of the extent to which the worker used the skills as set out in the coding manual. A score of 10 would reflect very high use of the skills and a score of 1 very low use of the skills.

1.   The worker did not utilise any of the effective practice principles;

3   The worker used minimal effective practice skills, almost unintentionally;

5   The interview showed some use of the effective practice principals;

7   The worker used several of the effective practice principles in a deliberate manner;

10   The worker deliberately the effective practice principles in an efficient and successful manner.

Table 7 shows that the workers with high global scores (6 or above) had clients with lower rates of re-offending after 2 years compared to those with low global scores. The differences are however not within conventional levels of significance. A similar result is seen if a regression analysis is usilised

including the YLSI. The YLSI (Youth Level Service Inventory) is the risk of re-offending measures administered on all clients of NSW juvenile justice.

Table 7

Overall use of skills by workers (scored 6 or more and 5 or less) by any further offence in 24 months by clients
_____

$\qquad\qquad\qquad$ Re-offended in 2 years

Skills score 5 or less $\qquad$ 74% (39/53)

Skills score 6 or more $\qquad$ 62.5% (40/64)

_____

There is however a statistically significant association between the recidivism rates of clients of supervisors who have low global scores when compared to the other clients. If the probation officers were allocated a score of less than 5 their clients offended more often than the clients of other probation officers as shown in table 8. In fact the clients of those with good skills reached two years without re-offending at almost twice the rate of those who displayed fewer skills.

Table 8

Overall use of skills by workers (scored 5 or more and 4 or less) by any further offence in 24 months by young people
_____

$\qquad\qquad\qquad$ Re-offended in 2 years

Skills score 4 or less $\qquad$ 81% (26/32)

Skills score 5 or more $\qquad$ 62% (52/85)

One tailed Fischer's exact test p= <.04
_____

This significant difference is also evident when a regression analysis is undertaken in SPSS taking account of the risk assessment measure. In other words the differences cannot be explained by the risk levels of the clients.

Table 9

Logistic Regression analysis of overall use of skills by workers (scored 5 or more and 4 or less) by any further offence in 24 months by clients including client risk levels

_____

Variables in the Equation

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1[a] Skill Score	-1.088	.553	3.869	1	.049	.337
YLSI	.116	.029	15.690	1	.000	1.123
Constant	.642	1.056	.370	1	.543	1.901

a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: gs4, FR.YLSI_score.

The clients of those workers who scored six or above on the global score were also less likely to receive a sentence of imprisonment or youth detention – 17 percent (11/64) for the clients of those works who scored 6 or more and 26 percent (14/53) for those 5 or less. Similarly if the cut off point of 4 and below is used rather 5, 20 percent (17/85) for those coded at 5 or more were given custodial sentences compared to 25 percent (8/32) for those rating 4 or less. Again however these were outside conventional levels of statistical significance.

Staff Role and Qualifications

Juvenile Justice staff may be employed as Juvenile Justice Counsellors or as Juvenile Justice Workers. Counsellors are appointed by the organisation to undertake a more active counselling role than other staff and are required to

be qualified either as a social worker or psychologist. Thirty two of the interviews which were observed were conducted by counsellors with the remainder conducted by workers. The counsellors made more use of the effective practice skills. In fact they were twice as likely to be rated above 5 on the global score (45 percent 38/84 for workers and 80 percent 26/33 for counsellors p <.01)

They also had clients with lower recidivism (54.5 percent 18/33 for counsellors compared to 73 percent 61/84 for workers. They also supervised clients who were higher risk in other words scored higher on the LSIR. These differences were statistically significant at the .01 level after taking risk levels into account through the regression analysis as shown in Table 10

Table 10

Regression analysis of staff position (JJ Officer or JJ Counsellor) client risk level and any further offence in two years

Variables in the Equation

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1[a]	FR.YLSI_score	.126	.030	17.354	1	.000	1.134
	Staff_position	-1.269	.501	6.403	1	.011	.281
	Constant	.205	.726	.080	1	.778	1.227

a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: FR.YLSI_score, Staff_position.

.Aboriginal Workers

The Department of Juvenile Justice employs aboriginal workers where possible because of the large number of aboriginal clients. However only 4 aboriginal workers participated in the study and only 7 interviews by aboriginal workers were observed. It is difficult therefore to reach any conclusions about the use of skills by aboriginal workers. All of the workers involved in the

project among who identified as being aboriginal were employed as juvenile justice workers rather than juvenile justice counsellors.

When the larger sample was considered (recidivism and other data was collected on 10 clients for each worker) it was apparent that aboriginal workers like other juvenile justice workers tended to be given lower risk clients even though they were twice as likely to supervise aboriginal offenders (who were generally high risk). More than half the caseloads of aboriginal workers were made up of aboriginal offenders even though this was less than 20 percent of the total number of aboriginal offenders in the sample. In other words aboriginal workers tended to be given aboriginal clients but because of the large numbers of aboriginal clients (28% of the larger sample) they only supervised 19 percent of the aboriginal clients.

The aboriginal workers generally had clients with similar recidivism to the clients of other workers however when aboriginal clients were allocated to aboriginal workers they had better outcomes as shown in Tables 11 and 12. The clients supervised by aboriginal workers had lower re-offence rates and were admitted to custody less frequently. The differences in the admission rates to custody are close to the .05 level of statistical significance although when risk levels are taken into account through a regression analysis the results are not statistically significant even though they continue to favour the aboriginal supervisors.

Table 11 Does staff member identify as Aboriginal by Aboriginal Client reoffended within 24 months

			Reoffended within 24 months total		
			No	Yes	Total
Does staff member identify as Aboriginal	No	Count	20	75	95
		% within Does staff member identify as Aboriginal	21.1%	78.9%	100.0%
	Yes	Count	6	16	22
		% within Does staff member identify as Aboriginal	27.3%	72.7%	100.0%
Total		Count	26	91	117
		% within Does staff member identify as Aboriginal	22.2%	77.8%	100.0%

Table 12 Does staff member identify as Aboriginal *Aboriginal client re-offended within 24 months and entered custody

			Re-offended within 24 months and entered custody total		
			No	Yes	Total
Does staff member identify as Aboriginal	No	Count	69	26	95
		% within Does staff member identify as Aboriginal	72.6%	27.4%	100.0%
	Yes	Count	20	2	22
		% within Does staff member identify as Aboriginal	90.9%	9.1%	100.0%
Total		Count	89	28	117
		% within Does staff member identify as Aboriginal	76.1%	23.9%	100.0%

P=.056

It seems therefore that while aboriginal workers are less likely to be juvenile justice counsellors and may like other juvenile justice workers be less likely to have high skills scores, they were more effective with aboriginal offenders. While these results are outside conventional levels of statistical significance they suggest that the policy of employing aboriginal workers to supervise aboriginal clients may be a valuable one. This is an area for further research.

The use of other skills and client recidivism

Most of the skills which were coded during the observations were related to lower re-offending by clients. In most cases however this did not reach statistically significant levels. For example the more time workers were involved with clients undertaking problem solving the lower the recidivism rates of the clients. When strategies were developed in the sessions to address problems, this was related to reduced offending particularly where the young people developed the strategies rather than the worker. In each instance when the workers used cognitive behavioural skills and relapse prevention skills the clients had lower rates of recidivism. Workers who used pro-social modelling and relationship skills also had clients with lower reoffending. Workers who scored as open and honest, non-blaming, optimistic, enthusiastic, used appropriate self disclosure, and who were friendly all had clients with lower re-offending.

None of these measures, however, reached conventional levels of statistical significance. Only two worker skills were significantly related to the any further offence measure. There was a significant relationship between the use of rewards by the worker and lower reoffending. Fifty-five percent (27/49) re-offended when use of rewards was scored 3 or more on the 5 point scale compared to 76 percent (52/68) when use of rewards was scored 2 or less. This was significant at the .05 level on a chi square analysis but was just outside the .10 level when the YLSI was included in a regression analysis. There was also a relationship between the extent to which workers were scored as non-blaming and re-offending. Those who scored above two on this measure had a recidivism rate of 61 percent (40/66) compared to those who

scored two or below who had a recidivism rate of 76.5 percent (39/51). The level of significance was .052 and .056 when the YLSI was included in a regression analysis.

7) Client and Worker Interviews

Following the observation of each interview an interview was conducted with the young person to discuss what they found helpful or unhelpful about the interview. Some of the data collected from these interviews was in quantitative form and some in qualitative form.

Little of the quantitative data however related to the re-offending measure whether it was collected from the clients or the workers. The qualitative data is currently being analysed in order to examine what it can tell us about effective methods of working with young people. Further information will be available in later publications.

8) Limitations

The results must be considered in light of the limitations of the study. First, each of the interviews observed followed an expression of interest by a worker in being involved in the project. Those who volunteered represent only a small proportion of the total number of juvenile justice workers in NSW Juvenile Justice (approximately 330) and may not be representative of the skills and practice of all workers in the system. Second, coding the transcripts is an imperfect science. While there was a high degree of consistency in the coding, and the coding manual was developed in collaboration with others doing similar work, there is nevertheless a degree of subjectivity in the definitions of the skills and in the interpretation of the coding manual.

The limitations of the study are acknowledged, nevertheless the results do provide valuable insights into the way in which a sample of probation officers

in NSW Juvenile Justice carry out their work.

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to do two things, first to examine the use of skills by workers in their content of supervision sessions with clients and second to examine the relationship between the use of skills and the client outcomes. The results from the observations suggest that the workers are strong on relationship skills. They are friendly, open, honest, engaging, and enthusiastic. The observations suggest that the workers were also strong on at least some pro-social modelling and relationship skills. They often rewarded pro-social comments and actions, and praised clients for saying and doing 'good or positive things'.

These findings, in relation to the use of relationship and pro-social modelling skills, are consistent with the other studies focused on examining probation interviews referred to earlier in this paper. This includes the Bonta et al. (2008) study which examined audiotapes of adult and youth probation interviews in Canada; the Raynor et al. (2010) study which used video-tapes in a small study in Jersey UK with adult probationers; and the Bourgeon et al. (2010) study which examined audio-tapes of adult probation interviews in Canada.

The findings of this study suggest that the workers were not as strong on role clarification skills as they were on relationship skills particularly in relation to discussing issues such as the dual role, confidentiality, and negotiable and non-negotiable areas. While a considerable amount of discussion in the interviews was taken up with needs analysis there was less focus on setting goals, developing solutions and the use of cognitive behavioural techniques. Similar findings were found in the other studies in relation to problem solving and the use of cognitive behavioural techniques although the other studies paid less attention to role clarification issues. These findings are similar in different countries and with different probation populations and with different

methods of gathering data (audio-tapes, video-tapes, observations and client interviews).

While the research suggests that the clients of probation officers with particular skills have good outcomes, there is no research that can tell us exactly how often the various skills should be used in each interview. There is also an argument, consistent with the desistance paradigm, that a good worker client relationship combined with a strengths focus is likely to be effective regardless of the other skills used. Nevertheless the research discussed earlier suggests that probation supervision that includes problem solving provides for better outcomes. This includes setting goals with clients, helping the client develop solutions and using cognitive behavioural techniques. This study suggests that 64 percent (76/119) did not discuss goals at all, and 45 percent did not discuss solutions at all (53/119) in the interviews which were observed. A picture is painted by this study and those before it of excellent work done by probation staff in developing relationships and re-inforcing client pro-social activities but not taking the next step in addressing criminogenic needs through problem solving and cognitive behavioural strategies.

The second aim of the study was to consider the relationship between the use of skills and client re-offending. It was evident from the results that when the observers rated the workers highly on the use of skills their clients offended less in the two year follow up period. While this was statistically significant only when the workers with very few skills were compared to the other workers the findings are consistent with three previous studies which have examined the use of supervision skills in work with offenders albeit with adult offenders. The study also found that juvenile justice counsellors demonstrated more skills than other workers and had offenders with lower re-offending rates. This is consistent with earlier research which found that social workers and welfare trained staff had lower re-offending rates among adult offenders (Trotter 2001) than other workers.

The study found that most of the individual skills used by the workers were related to lower re-offending however these were for the most part not at statistically significant levels. A small number of the skills were however significantly related to re-offending. It is acknowledged that fishing for significant associations among more than 100 variables has the potential to lead to associations which while significant may be so simply because by definition 5 out of every 100 variables are likely to show associations by chance if a .5 level of significance is achieved. It is important therefore that significant associations are consistent with a hypothesis which has support ion previous research. This was the case with each of the significant associations.

When the workers worked engaged in discussions about emotional stability and mental health, for example matters of mood and negative emotions such as anger, hostility, depression, fears, anxiety and stress, the re-offence rates were higher. Andrews and Bonta (2008) have argued for a long time that supervision and other correctional interventions should focus on criminogenic needs and non criminogenic needs such as emotional stability should not be the focus of the intervention. They define emotional issues as non criminogenic needs and the findings of this study support the view that supervisors should focus on practical issues which directly relate to offending.

Clients also had lower re-offending in the 30 instances when their workers developed strategies to address family issues even though they did not do this very often. The clients had even lower re-offending if the clients responded to these discussions. Family issues are identified as criminogenic needs by Andrews and Bonta (2008) and the importance of working with families and family issues has been identified and discussed in a number of my publications (Trotter 2002, 2006,2010. Family was identified for example as the most common criminogenic needs in a study by Bonta et al (2008) which examined assessments undertaken by probation officers in Canada. It does seem on the basis of this study and the earlier research that there are likely to be benefits for supervisors if they pay attention to family issues.

The use of rewards by workers was also related to reduced re-offending although when the regression analysis this was outside conventional levels of significance. This was defined in the coding manual as – 'Rewarding and encouraging: Score this item as present [5] if the worker moves beyond identifying the young person's pro-social beliefs/values and provides positive reinforcement for these actions/beliefs displayed by the young person.'

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This research has examined the nature and effectiveness of different styles of community based supervision of offenders. It is the first study of its kind to observe community based supervision sessions between adolescent probationers and their supervisors. It provides further evidence that the use of key skills by supervisors leads to reduced re-offending. It provides support for the importance of the rehabilitative efforts of supervising staff and for the use of skills which have been shown in earlier research to be related to reduced re-offending rates by clients. It seems that supervision skills make a difference whether they are used with adults or young people with probationers or parolees or with women or men. Further publications may shed more light on the precise nature of these skills as the interview transcripts from this study are further analysed.

These findings have implications for youth justice organisations. A rigorous approach to training and supervision including observations of interviews is likely to lead to lower client recidivism and in turn a safer community.

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