

Supervision: A Crime Reduction Strategy

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With over 6 million adults on community supervision and failures from community supervision contributing to a growing incarcerations population, uncovering effective community supervision policy needs to be on the forefront of criminal justice research. Probation and parole are the backbone of corrections, yet little research has been conducted on effective tools of improving supervision outcomes. A researcher-practitioner collaboration resulted in the development, and study of the Maryland Proactive Community Supervision (PCS) model.



Maryland's PCS was designed to adapt the evolving evidence-based practices literature to supervision agencies. This involved four main dimensions:

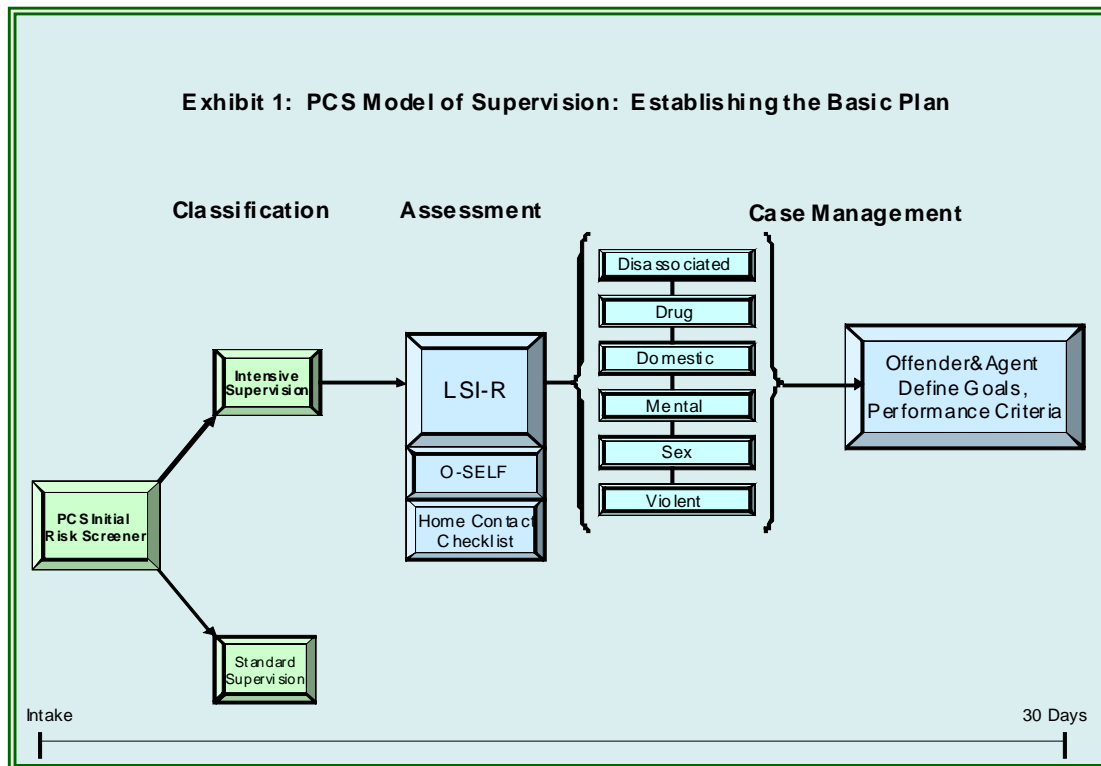
- 1) Use valid risk and assessment tools to identify criminogenic risks and needs
- 2) Develop case plans that are responsive to the criminogenic needs of high- and moderate- risk offenders
- 3) Provide appropriate services and controls, and ensure that the programs and services use social learning or cognitive-behavioral interventions
- 4) Provide an environment where the offender can learn prosocial behaviors and successfully complete supervision. The behavioral management strategy positions the probation/parole employee to use the evidence-based tools—risk/needs assessments, case plans, appropriate services, incentives and rewards—in a manner that is fair and consistent and to engage the offender in all phases of the supervision.

The Change Process

- 1) *Create a social learning environment in probation offices.* The goal was to convert the face-to-face contacts to information exchange sessions where the goals of supervision could be assessed, refined, and restated. Like in other education settings, assessment and other data collection exercises were shared with offenders to allow them to learn about their own behavior
- 2) *Train the supervision staff to have expertise in the use of communication strategies and applications of the risk-need responsivity model.* All of the staff participated in several staff development and booster sessions where the core components of the social learning environment were reinforced.
- 3) *Use performance measures for offenders, supervision staff, and PCS offices.* Each PCS office was asked to report performance measures such as employment of offenders, participation in treatment programs, and other relevant areas in addition to typical performance indicators (arrest, positive urine results, and warrants for technical violations).
- 4) *Create an organizational learning environment for the staff (like the social learning model for offenders).* This process involved training supervisors on supervising skills, discussing recent research findings in corrections and how to apply them to their organization, and forming agency wide book clubs, reading journal articles and other literature to encourage the staff to broaden their perspective

Major Findings

- ❖ **Rearrests** The offenders were monitored for rearrest after their placement on supervision. Participation in PCS reduced the likelihood of rearrest by 42% (PCS sample 30% was arrested vs. non-PCS sample 42%, $p < .05$)
- ❖ **Technical Violations** The results of the analysis of technical violations during a year of supervision revealed that 34.7% of the PCS group committed a technical violation as compared to 40.1% of the non-PCS group. Although approaching statistical significance ($p=.10$), receiving PCS seems to reduce the odds of technical violations. On average, PCS agents attempted to modify offender behavior for 268 days after the first technical violation before requesting an arrest warrant compared to non-PCS agents who waited only 210 days (t-statistic: -2.69, $p<=.05$).



Policy Implications

The new generation of community supervision focuses on improving the interaction between the offender and the supervision staff through a series of targeted activities: risk and need assessment, case management, and monitoring of the case plan. This model is a variation of intensive supervision but emphasizes behavioral management strategies (not enforcement) and involving the offender in the process of case management (as opposed to authoritarian models that dictate what the offender *should* do). Unlike prior models of intensive supervision, the behavioral management model arms the supervision staff with tools of motivational enhancement, social learning environments, and targeted emphasis on core criminogenic needs. Together, this represents an evolution of “accountability” to shared responsibility for the offender, including, obtaining needed services to ameliorate the risk of supervision.

The Proactive Community Supervision model provides a new generation of supervision practices that could shift the direction of outcomes from probation supervision. Replications have occurred in Travis County, Texas where they implemented a similar type of model and recently reported on similar positive findings. Improving the success of community supervision can also work toward reducing intakes to prison, since nearly a third or more of intakes to prison are from failures in community supervision. The lesson from this and other jurisdictions experimenting with new models in supervision is that there is much to learn, and it is a worthwhile pursuit to encourage supervision that focuses on engaging offenders in behavior change models. A national strategy to strengthen community supervision is needed to adopt behavioral management strategies. Supervision should not be the front door to prison.

Taxman, F. S. (2008). No illusions: offender and organizational change in Maryland's proactive community supervision efforts. *Criminology & Public Policy*, 7(2), 275-302.

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