JS3
The Jersey Supervision Skills Study: outcomes and reconvictions

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This report follows up the sample of offenders interviewed in the Jersey Supervision Skills Study (JS3) and relates the skills used in interviews to assessed risk levels and reconviction. We are grateful to Anthony Charles, Brenda Coster, Paula Harry and Helen Miles for their contributions to the work reported here.

Summary

This report covers the follow-up stage of the Jersey Supervision Skills Study (JS3) which analysed the use of core practice skills by probation staff in a sample of 95 videotaped interviews, and has now compared these with the outcomes of supervision for the interviewees. Although numbers available for analysis were reduced by data-cleaning to avoid double-counting, analysis of available information on risk assessments and reconvictions shows:

- Interviews in which a wider range of skills was used were followed by greater reductions in assessed risk than those in which fewer skills were used.

- Offenders involved in interviews which were assessed as showing above-average skills were less likely to be reconvicted within twelve months.

- There was a statistically significant correlation between the level of skills used in interviews and avoidance of reconviction. In other words, there is a strong indication that skilled interviewing is an important factor in promoting desistance from crime among people supervised by probation services.

- All nine categories of skills which were assessed in the analysis of the interviews were positively correlated with desistance, reaching statistical significance in three cases in spite of the relatively small size of the sample.

- Overall these findings, added to earlier evidence of variation in the skills used by staff, tend to confirm the importance of personal skills in probation work, and lend support to policies of staff development which focus on the development of skills – for example, live or recorded practice observation; the use of checklists to assist in observation and feedback, and supervision of practice by peers or senior practitioners.

Introduction

The Jersey Supervision Skills Study (JS3) forms part of a long-term research partnership between criminologists in Swansea University and the Jersey Probation and After-Care Service (JPACS). In essence the study, under way since 2007, has involved video-recording of interviews by probation staff with people under probation supervision; the analysis of the interviews by researchers using a specially developed checklist (the Jersey Supervision Interview Checklist version 7C [Raynor, Ugwudike and Vanstone 2009]); analysis of changes in risk levels in the caseloads of staff who provided interviews showing various levels of skills; and follow-up of the interviewees in the assessed interviews, including changes in risk levels and a reconviction study. Previous publications have reported on the development of the checklist, its relationship to international literature on social work skills and 'core correctional practices', and analysis of the interviews (Raynor, Ugwudike and Vanstone 2010), and on changes in assessed risk in the caseloads of staff using a greater or lesser range of skills in interviews (Raynor 2011, Raynor et al. 2012).

Briefly, the earlier reports showed that the ten officers who provided five or more interviews for analysis varied considerably in the average level of skills assessed in their interviews (ranging from a mean rating of 58.6 out of a possible maximum of 63 to a mean rating of 35.5). Most staff were also fairly consistent in their scoring, particularly at the higher end of the scale: for example, the staff member providing the highest-rated interviews was also the most consistent, with a range from 56-60, and the next highest rated was also the second most consistent, with a mean rating of 54.2 and a range of 49-61. When the categories of skills assessed were divided into 'relationship' skills (used primarily to establish a helpful relationship) and 'structuring' skills (used to promote change), the differences between officers were greatest in the use of the 'structuring' skills.

Analysis of risk scores was based on assessments and reassessments made using the Level of Service Inventory – Revised (LSI-R; Andrews and Bonta 1995), which is known to be a good predictor of reconviction in Jersey (Raynor 2007; Raynor and Miles 2007) and is routinely used to assess the offending-related needs of people under supervision. Not all officers in the study had caseloads containing re-assessed supervisees (for example, Community Service Orders are not reassessed) but it was possible to include recent caseloads of 11 officers, amounting to 384 supervisees. All caseloads showed, on average, some reduction in risk

scores between initial assessments and reassessments, but these reductions were larger in the caseloads of officers who had interview checklist scores above the mean: their caseloads showed average reductions of 2.37 points, compared to 1.3 in the caseloads of officers with below-average checklist scores.

The current report is based on a more detailed analysis of outcomes for the actual interviewees in the assessed interviews, since the quality of these interviews is known, whereas the quality of interviews experienced by whole caseloads has to be inferred from a sample which may not be completely representative. It should be noted that all the interviews were rated by at least one of the three Swansea-based researchers, after initial joint rating of seven interviews to establish common standards; the LSI-R assessments were carried out by a number of different officers, not necessarily those who did the interviews, and all were carried out before staff knew their own (or any) interview ratings.

The outcomes for interviewees in the study

Among the 95 interviews, some interviewees occur more than once, and in order to avoid double-counting all repeat appearances have been removed from the analysis, leaving in each case only the first appearance in the interview database. This leaves 76 individuals for whom we have data on interviews and post-interview reconviction within 12 months of the start of the Order of which the interview forms a part, or 12 months of the interview date itself if this precedes the making of the Order. The average checklist score in these 76 interviews is 43.98. Of the 76, 54 have both initial and follow-up LSI-R assessments, and mean LSI-R scores in the Table 1 below are based on these numbers. The table summarizes the follow-up data on the 76 interviewees, comparing outcomes for above- and below-average interview scores:

Table 1: Reconvictions and LSI-R scores of 76 interviewees

Interview rating	Reconvicted	Not reconvicted	Initial LSI-R	Follow-up LSI-R
Above average (N=41)	8 (20%)	33	21.2	18.2 (N=31)
Below average (N=35)	12 (34%)	23	19.8	17.6 (N=23)

As table 1 shows, positive change in LSI-R scores was greater among those who figured in the higher-rated interviews, and reconvictions were some 14 percentage points lower in this group, even though their initial LSI-R scores were higher. The raw reconviction result falls just short of statistical significance (p=0.116); however, dividing the interviews into just two groups does not allow differences between near-average and very high or very low scores to have their full effect on the calculation. If a correlation procedure is used, which takes into account the full range of scores, the correlation between interview scores and avoidance of reconviction gives a co-efficient (r) of .234 and a one-tailed significance of p=0.021, which is significant at the 5% level.

Differences between the amount of change in LSI-R scores are greater than in the previous study. Both groups improve, but the amount of change in the above-average group is statistically significant (T-test: p=0.005), whilst that in the below-average group is not.

Taken together, these encouraging results tend to confirm the relationship between skilled supervision and good outcomes for supervisees which is predicted by the wider literature on 'core correctional practices' (see, for example, Dowden and Andrews 2004). They also tend to support both the robustness of the procedures used in this study, and the priority given to staff skills in in-service training in Jersey.

Checklist design, skills and outcomes

The data collected for this outcome study also allow analysis of relationships between outcomes and different sections of the interview assessment checklist. The checklist was constructed on the basis of theory, experience and past research, and could have turned out to include assessment of skills which were irrelevant to outcomes, or even associated with worse outcomes. In order to test this, all of the nine skills clusters assessed in the checklist have been separately correlated with the reconviction data, and the results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Correlations between checklist section scores and avoidance of reconviction

Skill cluster	Correlation (r)	Significance (p) one-tailed
Interview set-up	.022	.424
Non-verbal communication	.096	.204
Verbal communication	.168	.073
Use of authority	.151	.097
Motivational interviewing	.122	.146
Pro-social modelling	.201	.041*
Problem-solving	.212	.033*
Cognitive restructuring	.222	.027*
Overall interview structure	.145	.106
(Overall total score	.234	.021*)

These figures suggest that all the skill clusters measured by the checklist are positively correlated with desistance to some extent, but only a minority (the starred items) to a statistically significant level. Some others are close. It is interesting that the skills which seem to have made most difference are in the 'structuring' category; however, it is likely that in order to be effective, structuring skills need to be used in the context of a positive relationship, so the other skills may be necessary but not always sufficient. The Jersey staff tended to score high on 'relationship skills', perhaps reflecting the social work training which most of them had received, but which is no longer the training for probation officers in England and Wales. This kind of analysis might show different results if relationship skills were weaker. However, the current figures do not suggest wholesale modification of the checklist, and more feedback from users will be needed to inform any redesign.

The impact of individual practitioners

So far, this report has reviewed the data mainly from the point of view of the individual interviewee. It is also possible to look at individual practitioners and their impact, as revealed in the interviews they submitted for analysis. Here we see the same relationship between the range of skills used and desistance: for example, if all 15 practitioners in the study are ranked on the basis of their average checklist scores, the correlation between rank order and avoidance of reconviction yields a coefficient (Spearman) of 0.169, and a significance level of 0.073, just outside the 5% limit. This is slightly weaker than the correlation based on individual interviews, and probably reflects the fact that although the higher-scoring practitioners tend to be consistent, those with lower average scores often produced quite a wide range of scores. This also suggests that the impact of lower average scoring practitioners could be improved if more of their interviews scored as highly as the higher end of their current range: often what is needed is not *new* skills so much as more consistent use of skills which are already used in some interviews.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, skills are important: people supervised by officers who show a wider range of skills in their interviews tend to do better and to re-offend less. This is good news, partly in itself, and partly because it shows that our understanding of skills, and of which skills make a difference, is improving. One other distinctive feature of this study is that the interview assessment checklist was designed from the start to be useable by practitioners as well as by researchers, in the hope that it would be used in staff development. It is very encouraging that this is now beginning to happen. For staff development purposes, it is important that the process of assessing skills is not seen as a management tool, but instead as something owned by practitioners: it is more likely to be effective if practitioners see it as a way of improving their own and each other's practice, and as something which can help them to achieve the results which they want to achieve in line with their professional value-base. Promising approaches can be based on assessment and discussion of video-recorded or directly observed material, in the context of peer supervision and/or professional supervision by senior practitioners. A manual has now been produced to assist users of the checklist (Vanstone and

6

Raynor 2012). Further improvements of the checklist and further research will be possible if it is used more widely and the resulting data are shared. In the meantime, any enquiries about the research should be directed to p.raynor@swansea.ac.uk , and any enquiries about use of the checklist and/or the manual to Brian Heath, Chief Probation Officer of Jersey, b.heath@gov.je .

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