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# A Quasi-Experimental Evaluation of a Model of Community Supervision

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**PRESENTLY, THERE ARE** approximately five million criminal offenders under some form of community supervision in the United States (Maruschak & Bonczar, 2013). From a policy evaluation standpoint, it is imperative to determine whether the correctional strategies used with these offenders are capable of achieving the goal of reducing crime. Unfortunately, two recent evaluations have cast some serious doubts on the abilities of traditional probation and parole agencies in meeting this objective (Bonta, Rugge, Scott, Bourgon, & Yessine, 2008; Solomon, 2006). To illustrate, Bonta et al. (2008) conducted a meta-analysis of 15 studies and reported that probation was associated with only a 2 percent reduction in general recidivism, and had no impact on violent recidivism. Similarly, Solomon (2006) found prisoners released without parole performed about as well as those released with mandatory or discretionary parole requirements. A potential reason for these pessimistic results may be that many community supervision agencies have remained focused on compliance monitoring and other law enforcement aspects of offender supervision (Taxman, 2002), despite the fact that it has been well documented that sanctions (e.g., intensive supervision, electronic monitoring) are not effective in reducing crime (MacKenzie, 2006; Petersilia & Turner, 1993; Sherman, Gottfredson, MacKenzie, Eck, Reuter, & Bushway, 1997).

In response to these findings, there has been a growing effort for correctional agencies

to use evidence-based practices (Burrell, 2012), and more specifically to expand the focus of probation and parole from compliance monitoring to include treatment services (Bourgon, Gutierrez, & Ashton, 2012). In order to facilitate this transformation, several initiatives have been undertaken to apply the principles of effective intervention (for a review see Andrews & Bonta, 2010) into these community supervision settings (Bonta, Bourgon, Rugge, Scott, Yessine, Gutierrez, & Li, 2011; Robinson, Lowenkamp, Holsinger, VanBenschoten, Alexander, & Oleson, 2012; Smith, Schweitzer, Labrecque, & Latessa, 2012). These new models include, but are not limited to, the Strategic Training Initiative in Community Supervision (STICS) model, which was developed by the Canadian Department of Public Safety (Bonta et al., 2011); the Effective Practices in Community Supervision (EPICS) model, which was developed at the University of Cincinnati (Smith et al., 2012); and the Staff Training Aimed at Reducing Rearrest (STARR), which was developed by the U.S. Federal Probation and Pretrial Services System (Robinson et al., 2012).<sup>1</sup> Each of these new supervision strategies (e.g., STICS, EPICS, STARR) seeks to teach probation and parole officers how to apply

<sup>1</sup> Other models include Taxman's (2008) Proactive Community Supervision; Trotter's (1996) supervision practices in Australia; Pearson, McDougall, Kanaan, Bowles, and Torgerson's (2011) evidence-based supervision process in the United Kingdom; and Raynor, Ugwu-dike, and Vanstone's (2014) Jersey supervision study.

the principles of risk, need, and responsivity (RNR) within the context of the individual case management meetings with offenders. More specifically, these models emphasize the importance of using a cognitive-behavioral approach (general responsivity principle) to target the criminogenic needs (need principle) of the highest-risk offenders (risk principle) in a manner that is conducive to the individual learning style, motivation, abilities, and strengths of the offender (specific responsivity principle; Andrews & Bonta, 2010).

These new initiatives also seek to improve officers' use of core correctional skills (Andrews & Kiessling, 1980). These intervention skills, otherwise known as core correctional practices (CCPs), are a result of an evolution of ongoing meta-analytic investigations (Andrews, & Carvell, 1998; Dowden & Andrews, 2004). There are currently eight CCPs that have been shown to increase the therapeutic potential of correctional programs: anticriminal modeling, effective reinforcement, effective disapproval, effective use of authority, structured learning, problem solving, cognitive restructuring, and relationship skills (for a thorough review, please see Gendreau, Andrews, & Theriault, 2010). Inherent in all of these initiatives is the idea that training on the CCPs will influence the skills used by officers during their routine contact sessions with offenders (Taxman, 2008).

The goal of this study is to determine whether or not, and under what conditions, these new models of supervision reduce recidivism. The evaluations of these initiatives to

date—which come from several jurisdictions in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia—indicate a wide range of positive outcomes (for a recent review of the empirical literature, see Trotter, 2013). To summarize, collectively, these models have been found to increase the number of criminogenic needs addressed (Bonta et al., 2011; Bourgon, Bonta, Rugge, & Gutierrez, 2010; Bourgon, Bonta, Rugge, Scott, & Yessine, 2010; Smith et al., 2012); increase officer use of CCPs (Bonta et al., 2011; Bourgon et al., 2010; Bourgon & Gutierrez, 2012; Labrecque, Schweitzer, & Smith, 2013; 2014; Latessa, Smith, Schweitzer, & Labrecque, 2012; Lowenkamp, Holsinger, Robinson, & Alexander, 2014; Lowenkamp, Robinson, VanBenschoten, & Alexander, 2011; Robinson et al., 2012; Robinson, VanBenschoten, Alexander, & Lowenkamp, 2011; Smith et al., 2012), decrease offender antisocial attitudes (Labrecque, Smith, Schweitzer, & Thompson, 2013), and reduce recidivism (Bonta et al., 2011; Bourgon et al., 2010; Bourgon & Gutierrez, 2012; Latessa et al., 2012; Lowenkamp, Holsinger, et al., 2014; Lowenkamp, Robinson, et al., 2011; Robinson, Lowenkamp, et al., 2012; Robinson, VanBenschoten, et al., 2011).

It has also become increasingly more common for probation and parole agencies to train officers in motivational interviewing (MI). Motivational interviewing is a person-centered counseling style that is designed to strengthen an individual's motivation for and movement toward a specific goal by eliciting and exploring the person's own reasons for change within an atmosphere of acceptance and compassion (Miller & Rollnick, 2012). Studies on MI indicate that the practice can be used to improve offender retention in treatment, enhance motivation to change, and reduce criminal offending (McMurrin, 2009).

Motivational interviewing was developed to be a brief intervention that would help people resolve ambivalence and move toward change. However, MI is not meant to be a stand-alone treatment (Miller & Rollnick, 2009). For some individuals, once a decision is made to change, they make progress with little to no help from practitioners (Miller & Rollnick, 2012). However, for other individuals with limited problem solving, decision-making, and social skills, a combination of MI techniques and CBT interventions (e.g., cognitive restructuring, cost benefit analysis) is likely to produce the most effective results (Tafra & Luther, 2014).

There is tentative evidence to suggest that officer training in these new supervision models, coupled with training in MI, may provide an even more pronounced effect on recidivism (see Lowenkamp et al., 2014). However, the effectiveness of this combination of services has yet to be adequately empirically tested.

## Current Study

The objective of this study is to provide preliminary quasi-experimental evaluation of a model of community supervision to assess how CBT and MI converge to influence recidivism. Many of the evaluations conducted to date in this area have unfortunately been limited to examinations of offender outcomes between trained and untrained groups of officers (e.g., Lowenkamp et al., 2014; Robinson et al., 2012). Such a research design does little to inform whether or not skill usage, or what level of skill proficiency, is needed to effectively reduce recidivism. From both a theoretical and practical standpoint, this is a much more important question. Therefore, this study uses standardized evaluation instruments to measure officer use of CBT skills and MI techniques in order to determine if skill competency has an effect on recidivism. Policy implications and recommendations for future research will also be discussed.

## Method

### Participants

The participants in this study were 10 randomly selected officers from an adult probation department in a Midwestern state. All of the officers were white and seven were female. These officers had approximately nine years of experience in the field of corrections (range = 5 to 17 years) and all had previously attended a MI workshop training. Officers participated in a three-day training on the EPICS model, which was facilitated by staff from the University of Cincinnati Corrections Institute (UCCI). Following the training, officers also engaged in monthly coaching sessions with the UCCI staff for two years. During this time, officers were instructed to enlist moderate- and high-risk offenders from their caseloads into the study and to begin using EPICS skills with them during contact sessions. There were a total of 102 probationers enrolled in the study, with an average of 10 offenders per officer (range = 8 to 12 offenders). The probationers were predominately male (87%) and non-white (63%), with a mean age of 32 years old (sd = 9.5 years). Fifty-two percent of the offenders

were rated as high-risk and 48% were rated as moderate-risk, according to the Ohio Risk Assessment System-Community Supervision Tool (ORAS-CST; Latessa, Lemke, Makarios, Smith, & Lowenkamp, 2010).

### Officer Skill Profile

As a part of this project, officers were required to record and submit at least one audiotape of the interactions with an offender per month. There were a total of 214 audiotapes received, with an average of 2.1 audiotapes submitted per offender (range = 1 to 3 audiotapes per offender). The average length of the audio recordings was 24 minutes (sd = 11 minutes). In order to measure officer skill competency in the areas of CBT and MI, UCCI staff evaluated these audio-recordings using two standardized evaluation forms: the EPICS Officer Rating Form (Smith et al., 2012) and the Motivational Interviewing Treatment Integrity (MITI) 3.1 instrument (Moyers, Martin, Manuel, Miller, & Ernst, 2010).

### CBT Fidelity

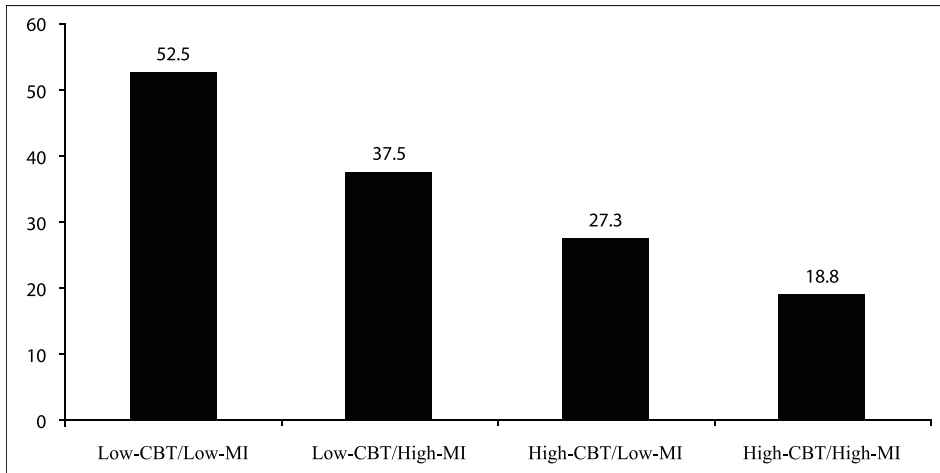
The EPICS Officer Rating Form was used to quantify officer fidelity to the CBT model. The EPICS rating form consists of 33 items that measure eight CCP areas, including anticriminal modeling, effective reinforcement, effective disapproval, problem solving, structured learning, effective use of authority, cognitive restructuring, and relationship skills. Only the items where there was an opportunity for the officer to use the skill in the session were used in the calculation of the adherence score. Specifically, items were scored as 0.0 = if the officer had the opportunity to use skill, but did not, 0.5 = if the officer used skill, but missed some major steps, and 1.0 = if the officer proficiently used the skill. Yes or no items were scored as 0 = no and 1 = yes. The scores were then standardized by dividing the total score by the number of included items, which produced a range of potential values from 0% to 100%. In order to obtain one overall score for each officer, all of the scores derived from each officer were summed and divided by the total number of tapes he/she submitted. This score was used to classify officers into one of two categories: the high-fidelity CBT group (overall scores  $\geq$  63%) and the low-fidelity CBT group (overall scores < 63%). The mean CBT score for the 10 officers was 66 percent, with a standard deviation of 8 percent. According to the cut-off scores described here, five officers were

**TABLE 1.**  
*Offender Recidivism by Officer Fidelity Category (N = 102)*

	Low-MI		High-MI	
	%	n	%	n
Low-CBT	52.5	21	37.5	3
High-CBT	27.3	6	18.8	6

Note:  $\chi^2 = 9.66$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p = .022$

**FIGURE 1.**  
*Percent Offender Recidivism by Officer Fidelity Category (N = 102)*



classified as high fidelity (High-CBT) and five were classified as low fidelity (Low-CBT).

*MI Fidelity*

The MITI 3.1 was used to quantify how well the probation officers used the MI techniques in the interactions with offenders. The MITI consists of 25 items that measure five global dimensions, including evocation, collaboration, autonomy/support, direction, and empathy. All of the MITI items are rated on a Likert-scale ranging from 1 (lowest value) to 5 (highest value). These items were then summed and multiplied by four, which produced a range of values from 0 percent to 100 percent. For this measure, three audiotapes were randomly selected for each officer to be scored. In order to produce one overall score for each officer, the scores for each officer were summed and divided by three. This score was used to classify officers into one of two categories: the high-fidelity MI group (overall scores  $\geq 80$  percent) and the low-fidelity MI group (overall scores  $< 80$  percent). The mean MITI score for the 10 officers was 69 percent, with a standard deviation of 16 percent. According to the cut-off scores described here, five officers were classified as high fidelity (High-MI) and five were classified as low-fidelity (Low-MI).

*Recidivism*

The dependent variable of interest in this study is offender recidivism. This variable was operationalized as any arrest for a new crime (0 = no and 1 = yes) that occurred between the offender’s enrollment date and one year after the completion of the officer coaching sessions. This measure excluded arrests for probation violations. The mean length of follow-up was 379 days, with a standard deviation of 141 days. Thirty-six of the offenders in this study were arrested during the follow-up time period ( $\approx 35\%$  of the sample).

**Results**

We anticipated that officers would be more likely to either be rated as high fidelity or low fidelity in both CBT and MI, rather than be rated as high fidelity in one area and low-fidelity in the other. This hypothesis was confirmed. According to the skill competency classification scheme described here, there were four officers in the low-CBT/low-MI group, one in the low-CBT/High-MI group, two in the High-CBT/Low-MI group, and three in the High-CBT/High-MI group. Further, the magnitude of the correlation between the CBT and MITI fidelity scores was large ( $r = .58$ ,  $p = .078$ ), according to Cohen’s (1988) guidelines.

Table 1 presents the frequency and percentage of offender recidivists separated by their supervising officers’ fidelity category placement (i.e., low-CBT/low-MI, low-CBT/high-MI, high-CBT/low-MI, high-CBT/high-MI). Figure 1 also graphically displays the percentage of recidivists per officer category.

Offenders supervised by officers who were rated as low fidelity in both areas were the most likely to recidivate during follow-up (52.5 percent) and offenders supervised by officers who were rated as high fidelity were the least likely (18.8 percent). Offenders supervised by officers who were rated as high fidelity in CBT and low fidelity in MI were more than 10 percent less likely to recidivate during follow-up (27.3 percent) compared to the offenders supervised by officers who were rated as low fidelity in CBT and high fidelity in MI (37.5 percent). The differences in offender recidivism between officer group categories were significant ( $p < .05$ ).

Table 2 presents the frequency and percentage of offender recidivists separated by their supervising officers’ fidelity category placement for just the high-risk offenders (N = 53). Figure 2 also graphically displays the percentage of high-risk recidivists per officer category.

High-risk offenders supervised by officers who were rated as low fidelity in both areas were the most likely to recidivate during follow-up (55.6 percent) and high-risk offenders supervised by officers who were rated as high fidelity were the least likely (14.3 percent). High-risk offenders supervised by officers who were rated as high fidelity in CBT and low fidelity in MI were 20 percent less likely to recidivate during follow-up (30.0 percent) compared to the high-risk offenders supervised by officers who were rated as low fidelity in CBT and high fidelity in MI (50.0 percent). The differences in high-risk offender recidivism between officer group categories were significant ( $p < .10$ ).

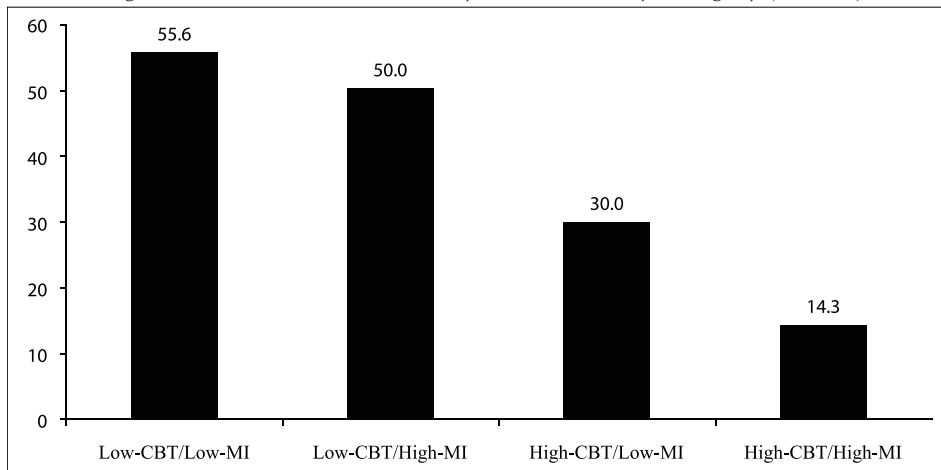
Table 3 presents the frequency and percentage of offender recidivists separated by their supervising officers’ fidelity category placement for just the moderate-risk offenders (N = 49). Figure 3 also graphically displays the percentage of moderate-risk recidivists per officer category.

Moderate-risk offenders supervised by officers who were rated as low fidelity in both areas were the most likely to recidivate during follow-up (46.2 percent) and moderate-risk offenders supervised by officers who were rated as high fidelity were the least likely (22.2 percent). Moderate-risk offenders supervised



**TABLE 2.***High-Risk Offender Recidivism by Officer Fidelity Category (N = 53)*

	Low-MI		High-MI	
	%	n	%	n
Low-CBT	55.6	15	50.0	1
High-CBT	30.0	3	14.3	2

Note:  $\chi^2 = 7.01$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p = .069$ **FIGURE 2.***Percent High-Risk Offender Recidivism by Officer Fidelity Category (N = 53)*

by officers who were rated as high fidelity in CBT and low fidelity in MI were more than 8 percent less likely to recidivate during follow-up (25.0 percent) compared to the moderate-risk offenders supervised by officers who were rated as low fidelity in CBT and high fidelity in MI (33.3 percent). Although the differences in moderate-risk offender recidivism between officer group categories were not significant ( $p > .10$ ), the results are in the same direction as the high-risk group.

## Discussion

There have been several initiatives undertaken recently that have sought to better incorporate the principles of effective intervention into community supervision settings (e.g., STICS, EPICS, STARR). This study adds to the growing number of evaluations that find this new style of supervision effective at reducing recidivism (Trotter, 2013). In particular, it finds support for the EPICS model, especially when officers use skills with high fidelity. This study also adds to the growing body of works indicating that MI is effective with criminal offenders (Tafate & Luther, 2014). This study is most important, however, because it is the first empirical recidivism evaluation to quantify officer fidelity to a CBT model and use of MI techniques. The implications of this work will now be discussed.

### *The Advantages of Quantifying Skills*

Prior research has demonstrated that when EPICS is delivered with fidelity it produces reductions in recidivism (Latessa et al., 2012). This study affirms that conclusion. However, for correctional agencies to make use of this information, they must first be able to measure fidelity. One way that this is possible is to examine the recorded interactions between officers and offenders. Recall that as a part of the EPICS training process, the UCCI requires participating officers to submit audio recordings of their interactions with offenders. Other community supervision models have similar procedures (e.g., STICS, STARR). In the United Kingdom, officers involved in the Jersey Study were even required to submit videotaped interactions with offenders (Ugwudike, Raynor, & Vanstone, 2014). It is also common for these new supervision strategies to use coding forms to identify if specific skills/concepts were used. However, to date the extent to which this information has been used has primarily been limited to individual and group coaching purposes, rather than to serve as a mechanism for establishing benchmarks for success.

Latessa et al. (2012) and Labrecque et al. (2013) showed that the EPICS coding form could be quantified to identify how adherent an officer was to the fidelity of the model (0

percent to 100 percent). Further, the current study revealed that the officer use of both CBT skills and MI techniques could effectively be quantified. This is potentially useful for at least two very important reasons. First, this information could be used to determine the minimum level of proficiency needed in these areas to effectively reduce recidivism. This study found that the best results were achieved from officers who scored at least 63 percent on the EPICS Officer Rating Form and at least 80 percent on the MITI. Second, Labrecque and Smith (forthcoming) found that training in monthly coaching in EPICS was an effective means to increase officer use of CCP skills. Therefore, officers could undergo training and coaching to refine their use of skills until they were able to effectively demonstrate high fidelity in both areas.

### *The Role of Motivational Interviewing in Community Models of Supervision*

The findings of this study also underscore the importance of both CBT and MI as important CCPs, especially when delivered with high fidelity together. It is important to emphasize that offenders supervised by officers who were rated as low fidelity in CBT and MI in this study were 33.7 percent more likely to recidivate compared to those supervised by officers who were rated as high fidelity in these two areas. This finding was even more pronounced when only the high-risk cases were examined, where offenders supervised by the low fidelity officers were 41.3 percent more likely to recidivate compared to those supervised by high fidelity officers. Such reductions in recidivism are certainly cause for optimism about the role that probation officers can play as agents of change when these strategies are used effectively.

This work suggests that models of community supervision may benefit from the inclusion of MI techniques (and vice versa). It is important to note that a revised version of EPICS is now available that more directly integrates MI techniques around the relationship skills cited in the CCPs. It is expected that the results forthcoming from the revised model will produce even better effects (e.g., reduced recidivism).

## Conclusion

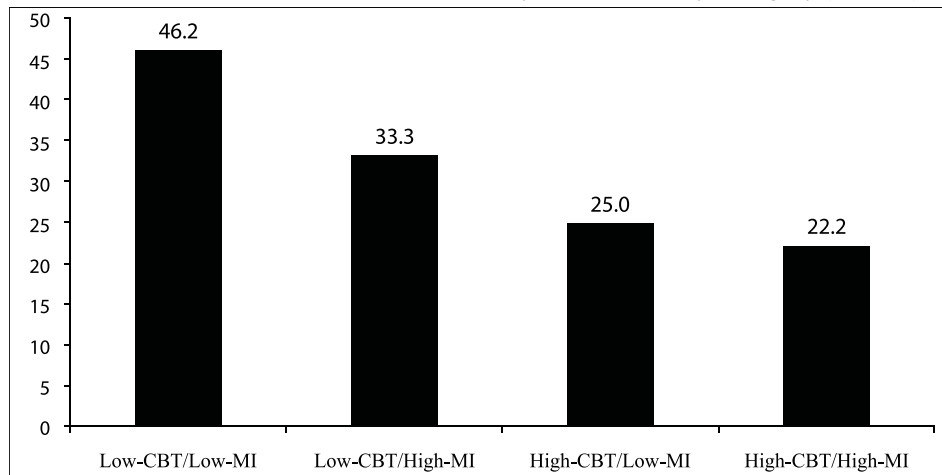
This study represents part of a broader movement to encourage correctional officials to base policy decisions on the results of well-informed scientific evidence (Latessa, Cullen, & Gendreau, 2002). Accordingly, we suggest here that agencies implementing EPICS and

**TABLE 3.**  
Moderate-Risk Offender Recidivism by Officer Fidelity Category (N = 49)

	Low-MI		High-MI	
	%	n	%	n
Low-CBT	46.2	6	33.3	2
High-CBT	25.0	3	22.2	4

Note:  $\chi^2 = 2.27$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p = .518$

**FIGURE 3.**  
Percent Moderate-Risk Offender Recidivism by Officer Fidelity Category (N = 49)



other like models of community supervision should take the time to record and code officer use of skills on an ongoing basis. Agencies should also use this information to identify low-skilled officers and give them the opportunity to improve their skills through training and coaching. Such a process is likely to both increase officer use of skills and decrease offender recidivism.

Finally, this work is important not only for its findings, but also for how it may help lead to improvements in the type and quality of studies that are conducted in this area in the future. Future research in this area should continue to examine the influence of fidelity to CCPs rather than focusing on training alone. Research should continue to assess for the moderating effect of offender risk level and other responsivity considerations (e.g., gender, age, education). Such research is bound to be fruitful and may lead to the development of more informed policies and practices.

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