

## **Exploring the perceptions of the offender-officer relationship in a community supervision setting**

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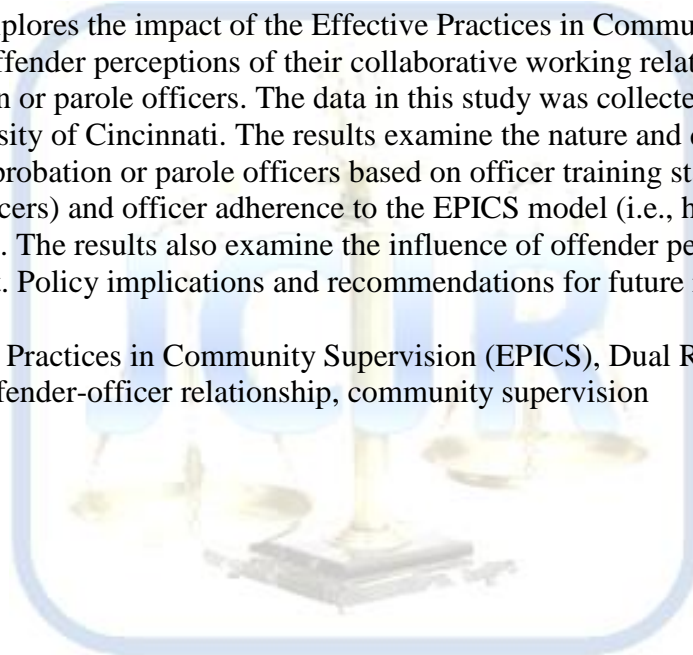
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### **ABSTRACT**

This study explores the impact of the Effective Practices in Community Supervision (EPICS) model on offender perceptions of their collaborative working relationships with supervising probation or parole officers. The data in this study was collected as part of an EPICS project at the University of Cincinnati. The results examine the nature and quality of offender perceptions of their probation or parole officers based on officer training status (i.e., trained versus untrained officers) and officer adherence to the EPICS model (i.e., high-fidelity versus low-fidelity officers). The results also examine the influence of offender perceptions on the likelihood of rearrest. Policy implications and recommendations for future research are outlined.

Keywords: Effective Practices in Community Supervision (EPICS), Dual Role Inventory-Revised (DRI-R), offender-officer relationship, community supervision



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## INTRODUCTION

In the past three decades, the principles of effective correctional intervention have emerged as the dominant paradigm for offender rehabilitation. Interestingly, this paradigm has only recently been incorporated into community supervision practices (Bonta, Rugge, Scott, Bourgon, & Yessine, 2008). Traditionally, community supervision practices have underscored the importance of monitoring compliance with court-ordered conditions and making referrals to service providers. Previous research suggests “traditional” probation and parole services may perform less than optimally in reducing recidivism (Bonta et al., 2008; Solomon, Kachnowski, & Bhait, 2005; Taxman, 2002). In an attempt to incorporate the “what works” knowledge into community supervision practices, recent initiatives have attempted to teach probation and parole officers how to structure their face-to-face interactions with offenders using evidence-based practices (Bourgon, Bonta, Rugge, Scott, & Yessine, 2010, Trotter, 1996, 2006). Preliminary results from several jurisdictions suggest the use of core correctional practices (CCPs) and adherence to the principles of effective intervention within the context of community supervision have been associated with meaningful reductions in offender recidivism (Bourgon et al., 2010).

This work affirms the role of probation and parole officers as agents of behavioral change and provides empirical support for the notion that community supervision can be effective. However, very little research has focused on the characteristics of community supervision officers as effective agents of change (Dowden & Andrews, 2004). Specifically, the characteristics that community supervision officers should display to ensure the effective delivery of services have only recently begun to be researched. For example, there have been some promising signs that the relationship between the probation or parole officer and the offender may be a core condition for changing the behavior and social circumstances associated with recidivism (Burnett & McNeill, 2005; Spiegler & Guevremont, 2003; Trotter, 1996, 2006). This work seeks to add to the under-researched area of offender-officer relationships. In particular, this study explores how integrating CCPs into a community supervision setting can affect offender perceptions of their collaborative working relationship with their supervising officer and investigates how those perceptions relate to recidivism.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### The Principles of Effective Intervention

Robert Martinson’s (1974, p. 25) review of the offender treatment literature proclaimed “with few and isolated exceptions, the rehabilitative efforts that have been reported so far have had no appreciable effect on recidivism”. His conclusion that “nothing works” dealt a devastating blow to the rehabilitative ideal (Cullen & Gilbert, 1982). However, since Martinson’s publication there has been a growing movement to investigate the effectiveness of correctional interventions (Cullen & Gendreau, 2000). Most notably, Canadian psychologists Paul Gendreau, Robert Ross, Don Andrews, and James Bonta have led this movement. The hallmark of their work has been to determine which characteristics are associated with effective versus ineffective treatment. As a result of their efforts, the correctional treatment literature now contains more than 40 published meta-analyses that consistently demonstrate “what works” (Smith, Gendreau, & Swartz, 2009). Collectively, these findings are referred to as “the principles of effective intervention” (Andrews & Bonta, 2010; Gendreau, 1996).

The principles of risk, need, and responsivity (RNR) are perhaps the most important principles and are the foundation upon which all other principles lay. The risk principle asserts that criminal behavior is predictable using actuarial assessments of static (e.g., criminal history) and dynamic risk factors (e.g., pro-criminal attitudes, peers, substance abuse). Furthermore, previous research has consistently indicated that the most intensive treatment should be delivered to higher risk offenders (Andrews & Bonta, 2010; Lowenkamp & Latessa, 2004; Lowenkamp, Latessa, & Holsinger, 2006). The need principle highlights the importance of targeting dynamic risk factors, or criminogenic needs, in order to reduce offenders' likelihood of future criminal behavior (Andrews, Bonta, & Hoge, 1990). In terms of community supervision, the risk and need principles suggest that probation and parole officers should measure offender risk and focus intervention efforts on the criminogenic needs of higher risk offenders. The responsivity principle states that the most effective modes of treatment are based on behavioral, cognitive, and social learning theories (Andrews, 1995). The responsivity principle also implies that interventions should be tailored to the learning style, motivation level, abilities, and strengths of the offender (Andrews & Bonta, 2010).

As previously noted, the importance of adhering to the RNR model has been demonstrated with remarkable consistency in the correctional treatment literature. Interestingly, the research also demonstrates a cumulative impact of adherence to the RNR principles. For example, Zinger, Hoge, Bonta, Gendreau, and Cullen (1990) found programs that applied appropriate correctional services produced 30% reductions in recidivism, while programs that focused only on criminal sanctioning increased recidivism by 7%. In a more recent review with 374 treatment effect sizes, Andrews and Bonta (2010) found programs that did not adhere to any of the principles were associated with increases in recidivism ( $r = -.02$ ), whereas interventions that adhered to one of the principles (i.e., risk, need, or responsivity) produced a slight decrease ( $r = .02$ ). Furthermore, interventions that adhered to two principles produced a larger decrease ( $r = .18$ ), and those that adhered to all three principles produced the most dramatic reductions ( $r = .26$ ) in offender recidivism.

### **Core Correctional Practices**

In 1980, Andrews and Kiessling introduced five dimensions of effective correctional practice that were designed to increase the therapeutic potential of correctional programs. These core correctional practices (CCPs) included effective use of authority, anticriminal modeling and reinforcement, problem solving, use of community resources, and the quality of the interpersonal relationships between officer and offender. The effective use of authority component is synonymous with a "firm but fair approach" (Andrews & Bonta, 2010; Andrews & Kiessling, 1980). This means corrections professionals should be clear about the expectations with offenders and enforce the rules in a manner that is clear and well defined (Dowden & Andrews, 2004). The anticriminal modeling and reinforcement CCP refers to the ability of the corrections professional to serve as an anticriminal model for offenders and as a source of reinforcement for offenders' prosocial expressions and behaviors (Andrews & Bonta, 2010). As outlined by Andrews and Kiessling (1980) and others since then (see Andrews & Bonta, 2010), an effective model (1) demonstrates behavior in concrete and vivid ways; (2) illustrates the behavior in concrete detail; (3) makes clear the rewards for exhibiting the behavior; (4) rewards the person for then exhibiting the modeled behavior; (5) is generally a source of reinforcement; (6) makes

evident the general similarities between oneself and the other person; and (7) follows a coping model instead of a mastery model.

The CCP of teaching problem-solving skills require corrections professionals to provide offenders with a means to solve problems that can influence future criminal conduct. Relatedly, the effective use of community resources CCP mandates corrections professionals actively engage the client in community based correctional services to target criminogenic needs. Finally, the quality of the interpersonal relationships between officer and offender is the CCP that refers to the ability of the corrections professional to exude the characteristics of warmth, openness, and enthusiastic communication to develop mutual respect and liking between themselves and the offender (Dowden & Andrews, 2004).

Despite being clearly articulated, evidence suggests CCPs are rarely incorporated into correctional programs. As made clear in the meta-analysis of 273 studies by Dowden and Andrews (2004), the most commonly used CCPs – problem solving and use of community resources – were found in only 16% of the studies. Despite this finding, programs that incorporated CCPs with the RNR model were associated with better treatment effects compared to programs that did not. Although there is a vast array of empirical support for the RNR approach and the use of CCPs, the integration of these ideas into community supervision settings is still a relatively new concept. Recently, however, several attempts to incorporate the RNR approach with CCPs into community supervision settings have been undertaken. A brief description of that work is now provided.

### **Application of RNR and CCPs to Community Supervision**

The extant literature finds “traditional” probation and parole services may have little to no impact on recidivism (Bonta, et al., 2008; Solomon et al., 2005; Taxman, 2002). To illustrate, Bonta et al. (2008) conducted a meta-analysis of 15 studies and 26 effect sizes and found probation was no more effective than other community-based sanctions, such as fines and community service. Similarly, Solomon et al. (2005) found prisoners released without parole performed about as well as those released with mandatory or discretionary parole requirements. Not surprisingly, previous research has also reported relatively few community supervision officers adhere to RNR practices in their individual sessions with offenders. For example, Bonta et al. (2008) evaluated audiotaped meetings in a community supervision setting with probation officers and both adult and juvenile offenders. They reported that probation officers did not discuss criminogenic needs in the majority of cases (the need principle) and used cognitive-behavioral interventions in less than 25% of the sessions (the responsivity principle). Moreover, officers based offenders’ case plans more on what had been mandated by the court and less on the results of offender risk assessments (the risk principle). Similarly, Raynor (2004, 2008) reported limited adherence to the RNR framework in community correctional settings in the United Kingdom.

In light of these grim findings, there is evidence that offender treatment programs adhering to the principles first outlined by Andrews et al. (1990) are more effective in reducing recidivism than programs that do not (Andrews & Bonta, 2010; Andrews, Zinger, et al., 1990). There have been several important studies conducted which evaluate the impact of RNR training initiatives for probation and parole officers (Trotter, 1996, 2006; Bonta, Rugge, Sedo, Coles, 2004; Bourgon et al., 2010). Chris Trotter (1996, 2006) described one of the earliest attempts to implement “what works” in community supervision. He found offenders supervised by officers

trained in relationship skills, prosocial modeling, effective use of reinforcement and punishment, and problem-solving recidivated at a lower rate (54%) over a four-year follow-up period compared to offenders supervised by untrained officers (64%).

More recently, Bonta, Bourgon and colleagues developed the Strategic Training Initiative in Community Supervision (STICS) model (Bonta, Bourgon, Rugge, Scott, Yessine, Gutierrez, & Li, 2010; Bourgon et al., 2010). The goal of STICS was to design a community supervision model consistent with the RNR model that could be carried out in everyday practice (Bourgon et al., 2010). The STICS model includes an initial three-day training, on-going clinical supervision of skill maintenance, and a one-day refresher workshop one year after the initial training. Bonta et al. (2010) assessed three audiotaped interactions between offenders and officers: one after the intake assessment, one after three months, and one after six months. The audiotapes were coded for the content of the discussions and the quality and use of the techniques of influence (structuring skills, relationship building skills, behavioral techniques, cognitive techniques, and effective correctional skills). The results (based on 295 audiotapes from 52 probation officers) found support for officer adherence to the RNR model. First, in supervision sessions, trained officers invested significantly more time focusing on criminogenic needs (61% of audiotapes) in comparison to the untrained officers (45% of audiotapes). Second, discussions about procriminal attitudes were almost six times more likely to occur among trained officers (39.1% of audiotapes) than with untrained officers (6.7% of audiotapes). Third, the trained officers spent significantly less time during supervision sessions discussing non-criminogenic needs and conditions of release (38%) compared to untrained officers (55%). Most important, the results indicated that offenders supervised by trained officers had lower rates of recidivism (25.3%) in comparison with offenders supervised by untrained officers (40.5%) over a two-year follow-up.

This research provided the impetus for the development of a new model by the University of Cincinnati Corrections Institute (UCCI), entitled Effective Practices in Community Supervision (EPICS). The purpose of the EPICS model is to teach community supervision officers how to translate the principles of effective intervention into practice and, more specifically, how to use CCPs in face-to-face interactions with offenders. EPICS teaches probation and parole officers to increase dosage to higher risk offenders, stay focused on criminogenic needs, and to use a social learning, cognitive-behavioral approach in their interactions with offenders. Furthermore, supervisors and peer coaches are systematically engaged in the process in order to develop the infrastructure to support continued use of the model. The EPICS pilot project was originally undertaken in a mid-Western probation department and included a total of 10 probation officers (see Smith, Schweitzer, Labrecque, & Latessa, 2012). The preliminary findings of this study indicated that officers trained in the EPICS model demonstrated a more consistent use of CCPs and affirmed the role of probation and parole officers as agents of behavioral change.

These results suggest that adherence to the RNR model and the use of CCPs within the context of community supervision is associated with meaningful reductions in offender recidivism (Bourgon et al., 2010). This work has revived the notion that community supervision can be effective in reducing recidivism.

### **A Closer Look at the Offender-Officer Relationship**

It has been argued that the relationship component of the CCPs is absolutely essential (Dowden & Andrews, 2004). Wolfe and Goldfried (1988, p. 449) go so far as to describe the

quality of this relationship as the “quintessential integrative variable”. Support for the therapeutic alliance between service providers and clients are not limited to interventions for criminal behavior. A substantial body of empirical research suggests the client-provider relationship factors also affect treatment adherence and other outcomes in psychotherapy (Ross, Polascheck, & Ward, 2008), psychiatric treatment (McCabe & Priebe, 2004), and substance abuse treatment (Connors, Carroll, DiClemente, Longabaugh, & Donovan, 1997, Miller & Rollnick, 2002). This work suggests the therapeutic alliance is an integral part of therapy and it may be a key component of the change process itself.

The challenge for community supervision officers is to develop a quality relationship with the offender while balancing the goals of protecting the safety of the community (i.e., control) and rehabilitating the offender (i.e., care) (Skeem & Manchak, 2008). It has been recognized that officers vary in their ability to possess the characteristics necessary to develop a strong therapeutic alliance. Skeem and Manchak (2008) suggest officers fall on a continuum ranging from a belief that “probation and parole is not casework” to a belief that “probation and parole is casework”. Acknowledging this continuum, researchers developed three models of community supervision based specifically on officers’ perceptions of themselves and their duties (Klockars, 1972; Paparozzi & Gendreau, 2005; Skeem & Manchak, 2008). The first two models represent each of the poles on this continuum, with the first representing the “law enforcement” or surveillance-orientated model and the second representing the “social casework” or treatment-orientated model. The third model is the “balanced model” otherwise known as the hybrid-orientated model because it combines both the surveillance and social casework models (Klockars, 1972; Paparozzi & Gendreau, 2005; Skeem & Manchak, 2008). Although the law enforcement model has long dominated community supervision (Cullen & Gendreau, 2000), and is consistent with the “traditional” community supervision approaches, there is evidence to suggest community supervision agencies are attempting to move towards a balanced approach (Taxman, Shepardson, & Byrne, 2004).

Consistent with the RNR model and CCPs, it is not surprising that the balanced approach to community supervision outperforms both its law enforcement and social casework counterparts in reducing probation violations and revocations (Andrews & Kiessling, 1908; Paparozzi & Gendreau, 2005; Skeem, Eno Loudon, Polaschek, & Camp, 2007). It has been argued that extremes in supervisory styles may actually produce increases in recidivism (Cullen, Eck, & Lowenkamp, 2002). For example, Paparozzi and Gendreau (2005) found parolees assigned to officers with a law enforcement orientation were significantly more likely to be violated for technical violations (42.5%), compared to officers with a balanced approach (12.7%) or a social casework approach (5.4%). In addition, parolees assigned to officers with a social casework orientation were significantly more likely to be convicted for a new offense (32.3%), compared to either a balanced approach (6.4%) or a law enforcement approach (16.2%).

Skeem et al. (2007) also examined the relationship quality between probation officers and offenders and found the quality of the offender-officer relationship predicted rule compliance (i.e., probation violations, probation revocation, and new arrest). This finding suggests that those officers who use a combination of caring, fairness, trust, and authoritativeness with offenders are the most likely to influence reductions in offender recidivism (Skeem et al., 2007). Similarly, Trotter (1996) found that while officer use of praise and rewards with offenders correlated with lower recidivism rates. One possible explanation for these findings is that only the balanced officer can both monitor offender behavior through surveillance techniques and help offenders change in the direction of more desirable behavior through treatment (Skeem & Manchak, 2008).

Thus, it is the balanced officer that incorporates the CCPs of effective use of authority, anticriminal modeling and reinforcement, problem solving, the use of community resources, and relationship skills into their supervision style. Therefore, the more balanced approach – one based on caring and fairness – is the more helpful supervision strategy (Andrews & Kiessling, 1980).

Although there is generally agreement that relationship factors are important, there are few studies that examine closely the relationship between the offender and officer. This study seeks to add to this gap in the literature. In particular, this study examines how implementing a RNR approach to community supervision affects offender perceptions of their collaborative working relationships with supervising probation officers and investigates how those perceptions relate to recidivism.

## **METHOD**

This section illustrates the research objectives for the study along with details regarding the methodological processes implemented. More specifically, it describes the sample, officer training process, data collection methods and assessments, and data analytic procedures.

### **Participants**

Research took place in four regional juvenile and adult community supervision departments in on large mid-western state. In order to best answer the research objectives of the study it examines data from two populations of interest (community supervision officers and the criminal offenders they supervise).

**Community Supervision Officers.** The first sample consists of probation and parole officers from each of the four sites. Officers were assigned to one of two groups by a site coordinator: a trained group (i.e., trained in the EPICS model) and an untrained group (i.e., untrained in the EPICS model).

**Probationers and Parolees.** The second sample consists of selected offenders supervised by the probation and parole officers in the study. Only probationers and parolees that met the following criteria were eligible to participate in the study: moderate- or high-risk for recidivism, age 14-65, and fluent in English. Sex offenders and individuals diagnosed with a severe mental illness were also excluded in the study due to their status as special populations.

### **Data Collection**

Data was collected on an on-going basis by UCCI staff (i.e., officer and offender demographics, officer performance, offender views and feedback, and other offender case information). Sites provided access to pertinent offender and officer information.

### **Measures**

**EPICS Officer Training.** All of the community supervision officers assigned to the trained group attended a three-day training on the EPICS model. University of Cincinnati Corrections Institute (UCCI) staff facilitated the training. The primary objective of the training was to provide officers with a sound understanding of the model and its implementation in

offender-officer contact sessions. The format of the training included visual presentations, demonstrations of skills, workbook and participation exercises, and several opportunities for officers to practice skills. Following the initial training, officers and supervisors participated in 24 coaching sessions (approximately one per month). Coaching sessions were led by UCCI staff and were designed to refresh officers on the EPICS model.

**Audio-Recordings.** In order to evaluate the impact of the training initiative and ongoing coaching feedback, officers were required to submit audio-recordings of interactions with offenders. Trained UCCI staff listened to each audiotape and evaluated the content according to the EPICS officer rating form<sup>1</sup>. Each audiotape was coded for the content of the discussions and the quality and use of the techniques of influence (e.g., structuring skills, relationship building skills, behavioral techniques, cognitive techniques, and effective correctional skills).

**Use of Core Correctional Practices.** Officer use of core correctional skills was measured in two ways: an EPICS adherence score and a dichotomous categorization in either a high-fidelity or a low-fidelity group based on the EPICS score.

**EPICS Adherence Score.** The scores on the officer rating form items were used to calculate a composite EPICS adherence score. Specifically, items were scored as 0 if the officer had the opportunity to use the skill, but did not, .5 if the officer used the skill, but missed some major steps, and 1 if the officer demonstrated proficient use of the skill. Yes or no items were scored as 0 = no and 1 = yes. Only items where the officer had an opportunity to use the skill in the session were included. The total score was divided by the total number of included items. This produced a range of potential overall scores from .00 to 1.00. In order to obtain one overall EPICS adherence score for each officer, all of the scores for each officer were added together and divided by the number of tapes submitted.

**Fidelity to the EPICS Model.** The EPICS adherence score was used to classify officers into one of two categories: the high-fidelity group (overall scores  $\geq .50$ ) and a low-fidelity group (overall scores  $< .50$ ).

**PO Questionnaire.** There is evidence to suggest that the effectiveness of interventions can be influenced by the quality of the offender-officer relationship (Klockars, 1972; Paparozzi & Gendreau, 2005; Skeem & Manchak, 2008). Specifically, a strong therapeutic alliance can positively impact treatment success, offender motivation and supervision compliance (Kennealy, Skeem, Manchak, & Eno Loudon, 2012; Skeem et al., 2007). The philosophy of EPICS is that the standard compliance monitoring approach to community supervision is less effective towards influencing behavioral change than a combined therapeutic and supervision approach. Likewise, this study uses the PO Questionnaire to measure the quality of officer-offender relationships.

The PO Questionnaire is an offender-completed instrument designed to measure the relationship quality with their supervising probation or parole officer. The PO Questionnaire comes from an earlier version of the Dual-Role Relationship Inventory-Revised (DRI-R; Skeem et al., 2007). Similar to the DRI-R, the PO Questionnaire groups items into three factors: Caring/Fairness, Trust, and Toughness. However, there are some notable differences between the PO Questionnaire and the DRI-R. On the whole, the items for the Fairness/Caring and Trust factor are consistent with those of the DRI-R, with some exceptions. Several items are negatively worded in the PO Questionnaire, whereas the items of the DRI-R all flow in the same direction. For example, item 26 on the PO Questionnaire is "I keep some important things to myself and don't tell my PO," where the equivalent question on the DRI-R is "I feel free to

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<sup>1</sup> The officer rating form was developed by the UCCI in conjunction with the EPICS model.



discuss the things that worry me with my PO". As such, the negatively worded items were reverse coded in order to compute the PO Questionnaire scale scores. The PO Questionnaire also words the Toughness factors slightly different than the DRI-R. For example, item 14 on the PO Questionnaire is "My PO scolds me and tells me off when I've done something wrong," whereas the equivalent question on the DRI-R is "I feel that he is looking to punish me". Four of the five Toughness items on the PO Questionnaire and the DRI-R match up in this way; however, one item would not match logically, so it was eliminated from the analyses.

There are 35 items on the PO Questionnaire. The responses of each item fall on a seven-point Likert scale, where 1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = occasionally, 4 = sometimes, 5 = often, 6 = very often, and 7 = always. The subscale of Fair/Care has 20 items, the subscale of Trust has five items, and the subscale of Toughness has four items. Items that were negatively worded and all of the Toughness items were reverse coded for scoring purposes. The PO Questionnaire total score is the sum of the Fair/Care, Trust, and Toughness subscales, where higher scores indicate a fairer, caring, trusting and less punitive relationship than lower scores. As part of the research design, community supervision officers had participating offenders complete a PO Questionnaire within the first three months of supervision.

Recidivism. This study uses the outcome variable of any arrest for a new crime during the follow-up period (0 = no and 1 = yes). The average time of follow-up was 329 days.

### Statistical Analyses

The data in this study was analyzed using SPSS 19.0. The analyses proceed in the following five steps. First, the quality of the offender perceptions of the relationship with their community supervision officers in the trained group is compared to the officers in the untrained group. Second, the use of RNR skills is compared between the trained and untrained officers. Third, the quality of the offender perceptions of the relationship with their community supervision officers in the high-fidelity group is compared to the officers in the low-fidelity group. Fourth, bivariate relationships between PO Questionnaire scales and arrest are examined. Finally, a multivariate logistic regression analysis was used to examine the effect of the offender perceptions of the offender-officer relationship on the odds of being arrested for new crime while controlling for the offender level characteristics of race, gender, and age.

## RESULTS

Table 1 shows the frequencies and percentages of the 36 participating officers by gender, race, and years of service (see Appendix). Generally speaking, the officers in the study were predominately white and approximately half were male (52.6% of the trained group and 41.2% of the untrained group). While the officers in the untrained group had slightly more years of service (11 years) compared to the trained officers (10 years), the difference was not significant. Table 1 also displays the frequencies and percentages of the 176 participating offenders by gender, race, age, and number of prior arrests (see Appendix). Slightly less than half of the sample is white and the offenders in both groups are approximately 31 years old with 11 prior arrests. The only significant difference between the two groups is that the trained officer group has significantly more male offenders ( $\chi^2 = 5.7, df = 1, p = .017$ ). However, despite this gender difference, the majority of both groups consist of male offenders (89.0% of the trained group and 75.3% of the untrained group).

Table 2 examines the effect of officer training in EPICS on offender perceptions of the relationship with their supervising officer (see Appendix). The PO Questionnaire is used to measure offender perceptions of offender-officer relationship quality. The PO Questionnaire is broken into four scales: Fair/Care, Trust, Tough, and Total score. Higher scale scores indicate the offender perceives the relationship with his/her supervising officer to be more fair/caring, trusting, and less punitive than lower scale scores. The table indicates there are no significant differences based on officer training status alone. However, it should be noted that while the differences are not significant, the mean values of the trained group are higher than those of the untrained group on all four scales of the questionnaire. This indicates offenders supervised by trained officers felt the relationship with their supervising officer possessed more traits of fairness, trust, and was less punitive than those offenders supervised by an untrained officer.

To examine the effect of officer training on their use of CCPs, the EPICS adherence scores of the trained officers were compared to the scores of the untrained officers. A total EPICS score is calculated by averaging the total number of tapes submitted for each officer, so that each officer has one overall score. Inspection of the two group means indicates the average EPICS score for untrained officers ( $M = .20$ ) is significantly lower than the score ( $M = .49$ ) for trained officers ( $t = -8.91, df = 25.9, p < .001$ ). The effect size Cohen's  $d$  is 3.1, which indicates a much larger than typical strength in the relationship (Cohen, 1988).

Table 3 examines the effect of officer fidelity to the EPICS model on offender perceptions of the relationship with their supervising officer (see Appendix). The table indicates offenders supervised by high-fidelity EPICS officers were significantly more likely to perceive the relationship with their supervising officer as possessing the characteristics of trust compared to offenders supervised by low-fidelity EPICS officers ( $p = .040$ ). The effect size Cohen's  $d$  is .32, which is considered smaller than typical for the behavioral sciences (Cohen, 1988). The remaining three scales were not statistically different, but the high-fidelity group scores were higher than the low-fidelity group scores.

Table 4 examines the Pearson product moment correlations – along with the 95% confidence intervals – between the PO Questionnaire scale scores and any new arrest (see Appendix). There is one significant relationship found between offender perception of a trusting relationship with their supervising officer and whether or not they were arrested for a new crime during the follow-up period ( $p < .05$ ). The effect size  $r$  is -.32, which is considered normal for the behavioral sciences (Cohen, 1988). The negative correlational value indicates increases in the trust subscale are correlated with decreases in risk for new arrest. While the other three scales are not significant, they are also negative. This suggests increases in the offender perception of more fair/caring, trusting, and non-punitive relationships with supervising officers are related to a reduced risk for reoffending.

Logistic regression was conducted to assess whether the six predictor variables, Fair/Care, Trust, Tough, offender race, gender and age, significantly predicted whether or not an offender was arrested for a new crime during the follow-up period. When all six variables are considered together, they significantly predict whether an offender was arrested or not,  $\chi^2 = 53.42, df = 6, p < .001$ . Table 5 presents the odds ratios and 95% confidence intervals, which suggest the odds of being arrested for a new offense are increasingly lower as the Trust subscale scores increases (see Appendix). The odds of arrest are also increasingly lower as offender age increases and are increasingly greater for non-white offenders compared to white offenders.

## DISCUSSION

As offenders are increasingly sentenced to community supervision, probation and parole agencies now face the challenge of having to cope with decreased budgets and large caseloads, while simultaneously trying to improve the effectiveness of supervision (Skeem & Manchak, 2008). RNR approaches to community supervision, such as STICS and EPICS are an effort to reintroduce rehabilitation to community supervision, while also aiming to improve the effectiveness of supervision. Within the RNR model, staff characteristics and training in the CCPs must be addressed to ensure the maximum therapeutic impact of correctional treatment (Dowden & Andrews, 2004). Unless offender-officer contacts are more than simply check-ins to monitor compliance with court-ordered conditions, this encounter may do little to reduce recidivism (Taxman, 2002). Moving beyond simply compliance monitoring, the recent initiatives to train community supervision officers to use core correctional competencies in their face-to-face interactions with offenders have demonstrated an impact on recidivism rates and intermediate variables associated with recidivism (Bonta et al., 2010; Bourgon et al., 2010; Smith et al., 2012; Trotter, 1996, 2006).

This study explored the impact of one recent training initiative, the EPICS model, on offender perceptions of their collaborative working relationships with supervising probation or parole officers. Three important findings are worth highlighting. The first is that officers who received training on the EPICS model were significantly more likely to adhere to the model and use the CCPs compared to those not trained on the model. This finding suggests that training is important and can enhance the officer role as an agent of change. Moreover, the officers who demonstrated high-fidelity to the model were significantly more likely to be perceived as trusting by the offenders on their caseload. This finding is commensurate with the literature on the specific CCP of building a strong collaborative relationship with offenders.

Finally, the results suggest a trusting collaborative relationship between the offender and officer is important to improving outcomes. As with others in the field, this study found the offender's perception of the relationship with the officer to be related to recidivism (Andrews & Kiessling, 1980; Papanozzi & Gendreau, 2005; Skeem et al., 2007). This finding is consistent with other promising signs that the relationship between the offender and their supervising probation or parole officer may be a core condition for changing the behavior and social circumstances associated with recidivism (Burnett & McNeill, 2005; Spiegler & Guevremont, 2003; Trotter, 1996, 2006).

It is important to note the limitations of this study. First, the study included a small sample size: 36 officers and 176 offenders. Second, officers were not randomly assigned to the training condition. Instead, departmental administrators selected which officers were trained in the EPICS model, and subsequently which officers would serve as comparisons. Third, the offenders in the study do not represent all of the offenders on the officers' caseload; rather, each officer in the study selected a subsample of participants from his or her caseload based on the offenders in the predefined criteria. Fourth, this study used the PO Questionnaire to assess the offender-officer relationship quality. There may be other assessments or techniques available that would better tap the dimensions of this relationship.

Despite these limitations, there are a few policy considerations that warrant careful consideration. First, community supervision agencies would benefit from carefully hiring staff based on values, skills, and characteristics that are supportive of the rehabilitative ideal and the establishment of a collaborative relationship with the offenders on their caseload. Second, it also

stands that training can improve officers understanding of their role as agents of change. Both initial and on-going training relevant to service delivery should be provided to community supervision officers. All new officers should be trained in the theory and practice of the RNR model and CCPs. On-going training topics might include effective interventions, assessment instruments, and specific cognitive-behavioral concepts and techniques. Finally, agencies should consider workload and caseload assignment to ensure officers have the capability to match the intensity and duration of supervision to the risk level of each offender. A challenge many agencies face in the implementation of a RNR supervision model is that of time. Contact sessions for higher risk offenders should be long enough to check in with the offender and address any acute needs, review the previous contact session and treatment referrals, target a criminogenic need with a structured intervention, and assign a specific skill for the offender to practice before the next session. Therefore, agencies may benefit from varying caseload size by the risk level of offenders to ensure adequate session length.

Although the dominance of research in the field of effective correctional intervention focuses on program elements and offender characteristics, this work suggests the offender-officer relationship should be an equally important consideration. Researchers should continue to examine the role that staff characteristics specifically, and more generally CCPs, play in correctional treatment outcomes. As discussed here, training officers to establish trusting relationships may ultimately improve outcomes for offenders on community supervision. Therefore, future works should also investigate the impact that training and coaching in the RNR model and CCPs may have on the offender-officer relationship.

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## APPENDIX

Table 1

*Demographic Characteristics of Participants by Officer Training Status*

Characteristic	Trained		Untrained	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
	<i>n</i> = 19		<i>n</i> = 17	
Officers				
Male	10	52.6	7	41.2
White	19	100.0	14	82.4
Mean years of service ( <i>SD</i> )	9.8	4.5	11.1	5.3
	<i>n</i> = 91		<i>n</i> = 85	
Offenders				
Male <sup>*</sup>	81	89.0	64	75.3
White	44	48.4	37	43.5
Married <sup>a</sup>	12	13.3	10	11.8
Mean age ( <i>SD</i> )	31.7	9.9	31.3	10.1
Mean prior arrests <sup>b</sup> ( <i>SD</i> )	10.5	8.6	11.3	11.6

<sup>\*</sup>*p* ≤ .05.

<sup>a</sup>*n* = 175. <sup>b</sup>*n* = 173.

Table 2

*Group Differences of Perceptions of the Offender-Officer Relationship between Offenders Supervised by Officers Trained and Untrained in the EPICS Model (n = 176)*

Scale	Trained		Untrained		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>				
Fair/Care	143.7	19.1	142.4	18.2	-0.44	174	.663	.10
Trust	43.8	5.2	42.6	5.9	-1.43	174	.154	.22
Tough	18.4	4.5	17.6	5.0	-1.14	174	.258	.17
Total	205.9	24.3	202.7	25.0	-0.87	174	.386	.13

Table 3

*Group Differences of Perceptions of the Offender-Officer Relationship between Offenders Supervised by High-Fidelity and Low-Fidelity EPICS Officers (n = 173)*

Scale	High-Fidelity		Low-Fidelity		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>				
Fair/Care	144.0	19.6	143.0	17.9	-0.32	171	.751	.05
Trust	44.4	4.7	42.7	5.9	-2.07 <sup>a</sup>	158.6 <sup>a</sup>	.040	.32
Tough	18.9	4.2	17.8	4.8	-1.62	171	.107	.24
Total	207.3	23.7	203.5	24.7	-0.99	171	.324	.16

<sup>a</sup>The *t* and *df* were adjusted because variances were not equal.

Table 4

*Bivariate Correlations between PO Questionnaire Scores and New Arrest (n = 176)*

Scale	<i>r</i> [95% CI]
Fair/Care	-.06 [-.20, .09]
Trust	-.32 [-.50, -.20]
Tough	-.10 [-.24, .05]
Total	-.13 [-.29, .01]

Table 5

Logistic Regression Predicting New Arrest

Predictor	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>OR</i>	95% CI
Fair/Care	0.02	0.03	.375	1.02	[0.97, 1.07]
Trust	-0.21	0.07	.001	0.81	[0.71, 0.92]
Tough	0.03	0.07	.619	1.03	[0.91, 1.18]
Offender white	1.44	0.55	.009	4.21	[1.42, 12.43]
Offender male	-0.17	0.72	.810	0.84	[0.21, 3.43]
Offender age	-0.16	0.04	<.001	0.85	[0.79, 0.93]

Note. CI = confidence interval for odds ratio (*OR*).