

Large-Scale Implementation and Evaluation of the Strategic Training Initiative in Community Supervision (STICS)

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The Strategic Training Initiative in Community Supervision (STICS) may be an effective model for improving the effectiveness of community supervision.

Background

Community supervision (i.e., probation and parole) is the most widely used correctional sanction in Canada. The most effective intervention is achieved when it is delivered to higher risk offenders (risk principle), targets criminogenic needs (need principle), and delivers interventions in a way that matches the offender's abilities, motivations, and learning style, mostly using cognitive-behavioural techniques (responsivity principle). The evidence in support of risk-need-responsivity (RNR) principles is robust and applicable to a range of offenders (e.g., sex offenders, women, youth; Bonta & Andres, 2017).

To enhance RNR adherence among probation and parole officers (POs), researchers from Public Safety Canada (PSC) developed a training model called the Strategic Training Initiative in Community Supervision, or STICS. It was first evaluated in a randomized experiment involving 52 volunteer POs from British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and Prince Edward Island (Bonta et al., 2011). The POs audio recorded a sample of their supervision sessions with their clients, and a two-year follow-up was conducted on client recidivism. The results demonstrated that the STICS-trained POs showed better adherence to RNR principles in their supervision sessions with their clients than the probation-as-usual POs. Additionally, the clients of the STICS-trained POs had a significantly lower 2-year recidivism rate (25%) compared to the clients of the POs providing probation-as-usual (40%).

Current study

Encouraged by the results from the 2011 evaluation, the community corrections division of British Columbia decided to implement STICS across the probation service with the assistance of PSC.

The purpose of the current study was twofold: (1) examine the extent to which STICS training in BC had an impact on officer behaviour, including the discussion of criminogenic needs and the application of intervention techniques (e.g., cognitive-behavioral techniques); and (2) examine the impact of STICS training and PO behaviour on client recidivism.

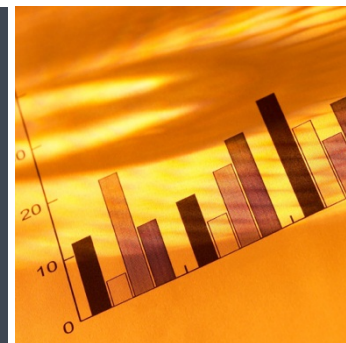
Method

The current study included 357 POs, who were trained between September 2011 and February 2015. POs were, on average, 41 years old (age range = 23-63), female (64%), and Caucasian (79%).

POs were asked to audio record supervision sessions with medium and high risk clients both before and after STICS training to measure behavioural change. As all POs were to receive STICS training, PO behaviour was assessed pre- and post- training.

To examine the impact of STICS training on recidivism, we compared the reconviction rates of the clients supervised by STICS-trained POs ($n = 829$ clients) with the reconviction rates of a randomly selected sample of clients supervised by the same POs prior to STICS training ($n = 467$ clients). These clients had minimal exposure to STICS and were not audio recorded. The primary source of recidivism information was the national database of criminal history records held by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP). The average follow-up period was 3.5 years (ranging from 0.1 to 5.8).

We also examined the relationship between specific PO behaviour and client recidivism. Only clients who were audio recorded were included in these analyses ($n = 283$ pre-training clients and $n = 829$ post-training clients).

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Findings

A total of 201 POs submitted samples of both pre- and post-training audio recordings. Analyses of these audio recordings showed clear changes in PO behaviour following training. Consistent with the STICS model, POs spent a greater proportion of their sessions on criminogenic needs, especially procriminal attitudes/cognitions, and less on noncriminogenic needs and the conditions of probation. POs also engaged in more and higher quality cognitive-behavioural interventions.

Fixed 2-year follow-up information was available for 798 clients of STICS-trained POs and 396 randomly selected clients who were supervised prior to STICS training. Clients of STICS-trained POs had a significantly lower 2-year reconviction rate (43% for general and 14.9% for violent reconvictions) than clients supervised prior to STICS training (61.4% for general and 21.2% for violent reconvictions). The same pattern of results was observed after controlling for age, risk, and time offence-free in the community before selection into the study.

An examination of specific PO behaviours suggested that addressing procriminal attitudes/cognitions in supervision sessions with clients and the use of cognitive interventions were particularly important in the reduction of recidivism. Every 10% increase in the proportion of each session spent discussing procriminal attitudes/cognitions resulted in approximately a 5% decrease in any new criminal reconvictions. Additionally, clients who were exposed to cognitive techniques were approximately 28% less likely to be reconvicted of a new criminal offence compared to clients who had not been exposed to cognitive techniques at all.

Implications

The current study suggests that STICS may be an effective model for improving the effectiveness of community supervision. More generally, it demonstrates that, with the proper resources and dedication to treatment integrity, a community corrections agency can benefit from an evidence-based approach to probation supervision.

Source

Bonta, J., Bourgon, G., Rugge, T., Pedneault, C., & Lee, S. C. (2020). *Large-Scale Implementation and Evaluation of the Strategic Training Initiative in Community Supervision (STICS)*. Public Safety Research Report. 2021-R003.

Additional sources

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<https://doi.org/10.1080/10509670802134085>

Bonta, J., Bourgon, G., Rugge, T., Scott, T. L., Yessine, A. K., Gutierrez, L., & Li, J. (2011). An experimental demonstration of training probation officers in evidence-based community supervision. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 38(11), 1127–1148.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0093854811420678>

For More Information

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