

COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
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SUBJECT: *Research in Review*

TO: Executive Staff
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Enclosed please find Volume 8, Number 1 of *Research in Review* (RIR). With this issue of RIR, we summarize findings from the first phase of the Department's in-house study of its parole violator (PV) population.

The Department's Parole Violator Study was initiated in late 2002 in response to trends of increasing PV admissions to Pennsylvania's prison. The purpose of the study was to identify factors contributing to success or failure on parole, in order to inform the design of more effective programs and treatment services for offenders preparing to return to the community. In order to examine these issues, a three-phase study was conceptualized, two phases of which have been completed to date. The first phase of the study, summarized in this issue of RIR, included the administration of a detailed survey to nearly 550 PVs returning to twelve State Correctional Institutions (SCIs). After compiling results from the survey, recurring themes were further explored through focus groups of approximately 60 PVs at four SCIs. The second phase of the study consisted of a survey of a comparison group of parolees who have remained successfully in the community. Results from the survey of parole successes were also followed up with a focus group and phone interviews to further explore recurring themes. The third phase of the study, not yet conducted, will include interviews and focus groups with parole officers and community corrections providers to gain their perspective on factors relating to success or failure on parole.

The results of the first phase of the PADOE Parole Violator Study suggest three primary factors relating to success or failure on parole. First, PVs tend to hold unrealistic expectations of how life outside of prison will be. Second, PVs tend to maintain anti-social attitudes, values, and beliefs that support offending or violating behavior. Third, PVs tend to possess inadequate coping or social problem-solving skills, especially when faced with emotional uneasiness or daily life problems.

We welcome your feedback on RIR. We also welcome your suggestions for specific topical areas for future issues. While we cannot promise that we can produce an issue in response to all suggestions offered, we are very much interested in knowing what questions and topics are most interesting to our readers. Future issues of RIR will continue with a review of our own departmental evaluation projects, as well as article reviews, book reviews, and other relevant pieces.

Thank you for your continued interest in *Research in Review*.

Research in Review

Office of Planning, Research, Statistics and Grants

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Special Focus on PADOc's Parole Violator Study (Phase 1)

The first issue of Volume 8 of *Research in Review* features a summary of the first phase of the Pennsylvania Department of Correction's (PADOc) Parole Violator Study. This study was initiated in late 2002 in response to growing numbers of parole violator admissions to the PADOc. The intent of the study was to determine the factors relating to success or failure on parole and to assemble a broad inventory of the needs of released offenders in order to prioritize departmental resources and develop more effective treatment services.

The first phase of the study involved administering a detailed survey to nearly 550 parole violators who were recently returned to prison. After survey results were compiled, recurring themes were further explored through focus groups of approximately 60 parole violators at four State Correctional Institutions (SCIs).

The results of the first phase of this study revealed three underlying factors that are most evident among those that violate parole. First, violators tend to hold unrealistic expectations of how life outside of prison will be. Second, violators tend to maintain anti-social attitudes, values, and beliefs that support their offending or violating behavior. Third, violators tend to possess inadequate coping or social problem-solving skills, especially when faced with emotional instability or daily life problems.

Future issues of RIR will summarize later phases of the PADOc Parole Violator Study, including an analysis of a comparison group of successful parolees and an analysis of interviews/focus groups with parole officers and community corrections providers to gain their perspectives on the factors relating to success or failure on parole. Upcoming issues of RIR will also continue to feature summaries of other PADOc research projects, as well as reviews of new and interesting journal articles and books. We at RIR hope that you find these topics to be informative, practical, and relevant to your work in corrections.

**THE PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION'S
PAROLE VIOLATOR STUDY (PHASE 1)**

by

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Introduction and Background

In Pennsylvania, as in many other states, the number of offenders being released from prison back into communities has increased significantly in recent years. From 1998 to 2004, the annual number of offenders released from Pennsylvania state prisons increased by 54%. Consistently during this time period, the majority of those who were released (nearly three-fourths of releases) were conditionally released onto parole supervision. The most current available statistics indicate that over half (56%) of those released onto parole supervision will return to prison within three years of being released, either for a technical violation of the condition(s) of their parole or for a new crime. Indeed, admissions to Pennsylvania's prisons for parole violations have increased at double the rate of new court commitments over the past seven years (51% versus 25%, respectively). The 13% overall increase in the Pennsylvania Department of Correction's (PADOC) inmate population over the past seven years has been in large part attributed to this trend of increasing parole violator (PV) admissions. Altogether, more than one-third of the Department's total admissions are now for parole violations.

In late 2002, in response to these trends, the PADOC initiated a study of the recidivism process of PVs. The primary objective of this study was to explore the types of events that were happening in released offenders' lives while out on parole that may have contributed to their eventual failure on parole and return to prison. Expanding upon the work of a similar Canadian study conducted in the late 1990s (Zamble and Quinsey, 1997), this study represented an attempt to move beyond the general determinants of recidivism and examine the more dynamic precursors of recidivism (e.g., the thoughts, feelings, and situations that occurred in the days and moments leading up to a parole violation). From a policy perspective, the study served as a broad inventory of offender reentry needs, with the goal of prioritizing departmental resources and designing more effective treatment services for inmates so as to better prepare them for the types of issues and situations that might present obstacles to their successful reintegration into the community.

The study was conducted in two phases, with the first phase involving an analysis of a sample of PVs who were recently returned to a State Correctional Institution (SCI) and the second phase involving an analysis of a comparison group sample of successful parolees. The following article is a summary of the findings from the first phase of the study involving the PV group. For this first phase, a detailed 85-question survey was administered to all PV admissions who were received at 12 SCIs

over a two-month period (from December 2002 to January 2003), representing approximately 75% of all parole violators received by the PADOc during that time period. The survey instrument incorporated questions on several central domains including personal background information, living arrangements, financial situation, employment, leisure activities, marital/family relationships, alcohol and other drug (AOD) use, emotional/mental/physical health, thoughts/feelings/actions related to the events of the violation, and parole/community supervision experience. Reoccurring themes from the survey results were further explored through focus groups that were conducted with approximately 60 PVs at four of the participating institutions. Results from the survey were also matched with external data sources in order to examine the consistency of respondents' answers as a measure of reliability.

In order to elicit fresh recollections of the events surrounding their violation, PVs were targeted to complete a survey as soon as possible after returning to incarceration for violating parole. On average, participants completed a survey within two to three months of being returned. By the end of the data collection period, a total of 542 surveys were collected. Table 1 contains summary statistics on various demographic characteristics of the PVs in the study sample. Male PVs comprised the majority of the sample (93%). While female PVs only comprised 7% of the sample, this still represented a slight over-sampling of female PVs, given that female PVs typically represent 4% of admissions to the PADOc. The average age of those surveyed was 35 years old. A breakdown of survey

TABLE 1. Demographic Statistics

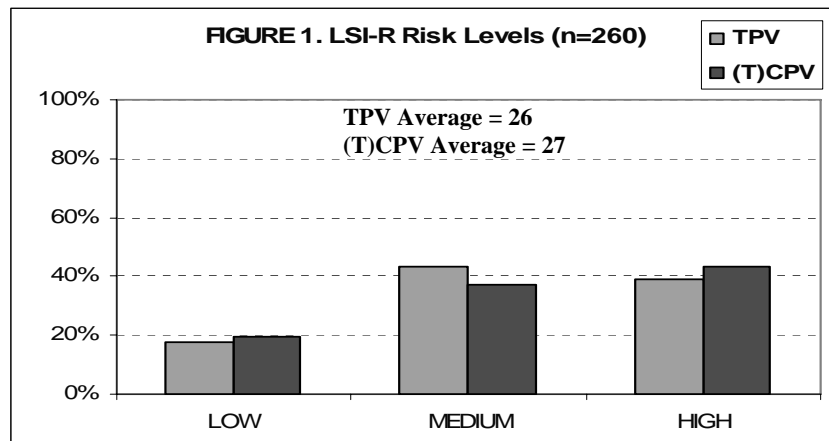
Age	N	%
24 or younger	52	11.0
25-34	195	41.1
35-44	158	33.3
45-54	63	13.3
55 or older	6	1.3
TOTAL*	474	100.0
Race		
White	140	28.2
Black	293	59.1
Hispanic	61	12.3
Other	2	0.2
TOTAL*	496	100.0
Gender		
Male	468	93.4
Female	33	6.6
TOTAL*	501	100.0
Parole Violation Status		
Technical Violator (TPV)	297	69.1
Convicted Violator (CPV/TCPV)	133	30.9
TOTAL*	430	100.0
Primary Offense		
Robbery	96	19.6
Burglary/Theft/Property Crime	117	23.9
Murder/Homicide/Manslaughter	25	5.1
Drugs	165	33.7
Assault	31	6.3
Sex Offense/Rape	4	0.8
TOTAL*	490	100.0
City Last Paroled To		
Philadelphia	218	41.3
Pittsburgh	45	8.5
Erie	30	5.7
Reading	28	5.3
Allentown	17	3.2
Harrisburg	14	2.7
Chester	12	2.3
Other	164	31.1
TOTAL*	528	100.0

* Totals do not equal across demographic categories and do not match the total sample size of 542 because unique identifiers or certain demographic info was not available for some respondents.

respondents' violation status revealed that approximately 69% of PVs in the sample were violated for breaking a technical condition of parole such as changing residence without permission or failing to report, while approximately 31% were violated for committing a new crime (including those who were violated for both committing a new crime and breaking a technical condition of parole). A breakdown of the primary offense for which PVs were last incarcerated revealed a variety of offense types represented in the sample, with the majority being drug offenses (34%). Half of those in the sample resided in either Philadelphia or Pittsburgh while last on parole. On average, PVs in the sample were out on parole for 16 months before returning to prison for a violation.

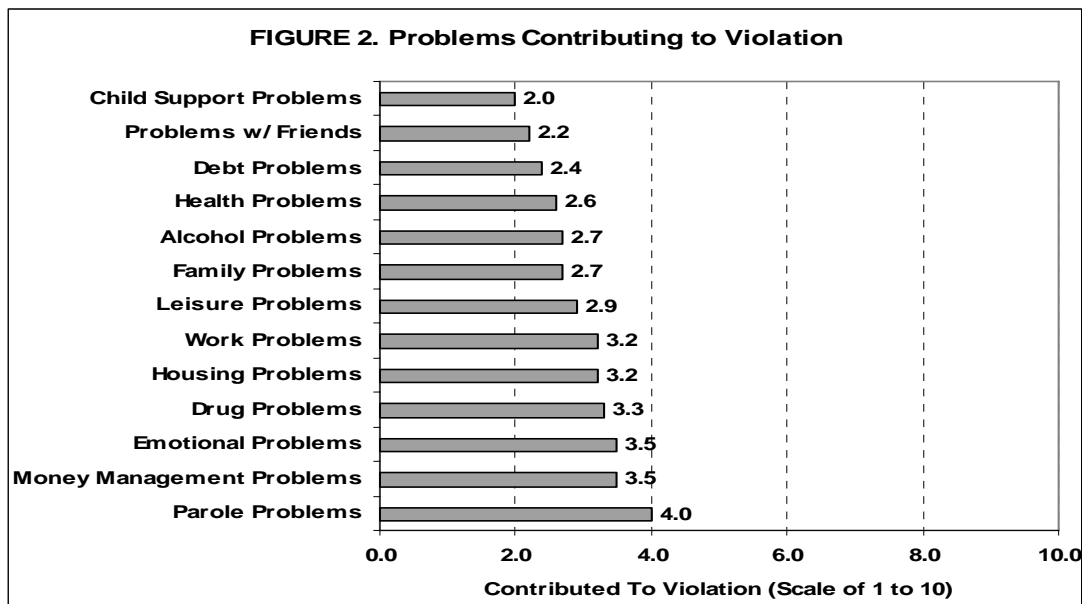
Technical Versus Convicted Parole Violators

A preliminary consideration in the analysis of the study results was whether or not the inclusion of both technical parole violators (TPVs) and convicted parole violators (CPVs) represented a homogenous group of parole violators. An examination of the given charges for technical violators revealed that 40% of the TPVs in the sample were charged with at least one technical violation that indicated that some sort of criminal activity had in fact occurred. For instance, one of the conditions of parole requires parolees to notify supervision staff within 72 hours of being arrested. A violation of this condition can be written up as a technical violation but also implies that a new crime has occurred, even if the offender is returned to prison as a TPV instead of as a CPV. A comparison of the assessed criminal risk levels of TPVs and CPVs, as measured by the Level of Service Inventory-Revised (LSI-R), revealed a very similar distribution of criminal risk for both groups (see Figure 1). The average risk score for TPVs was 26 while the average risk score for CPVs was 27, both of which fall in the “medium risk” category according to risk cutoffs established by the PADO and the Pennsylvania Board of Probation and Parole (PBPP). Finally, a statistical comparison of TPVs and CPVs on demographics and on all of the answers on the survey revealed only two significant differences: 1) CPVs indicated that money management problems more strongly contributed to their failure on parole than did TPVs, and 2) TPVs were more likely than CPVs to report trouble finding a place to live upon last being released. Other than these two marginally significant differences, answers on all of the remaining questions on the survey did not differ by parole violation status. All of this analysis led to the conclusion that in fact the study sample of TPVs and CPVs represented a homogenous group of recidivists with similar precursors to violating parole.

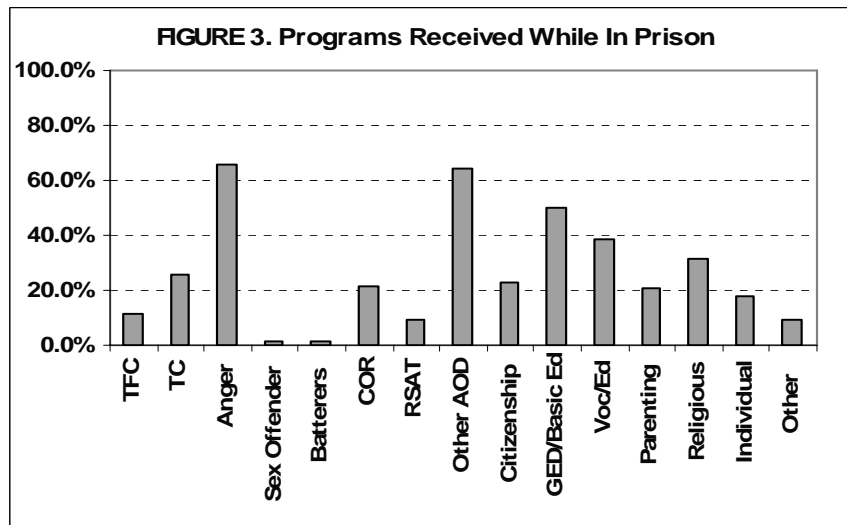


Overview Questions

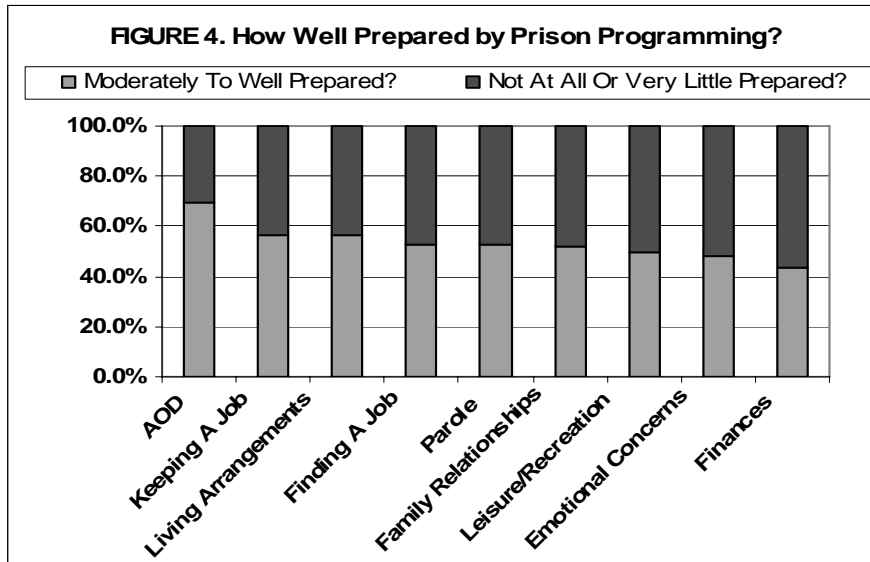
A starting point for analyzing the survey data was to examine results from overview questions that asked respondents to rank what areas caused them the most problems while on parole, what programs they received while last in prison that addressed some of these problems, and how well they felt that prison programming prepared them to address such problems. In the first question, respondents were provided with a list of areas that are typically recognized in the reentry literature as problem areas for offenders returning to the community, and asked to rate on a scale of 1 to 10 how much each area contributed to their parole violation, with 1 meaning that the area did not contribute to the parole violation and 10 meaning that the area strongly contributed to the parole violation (see Figure 2). The strongest reported contributors were parole supervision problems, money management problems, and emotional problems. At the lower end were problems with child support and friends. Interestingly, however, the minimum average rating (child support) was 2 and the maximum average rating (parole supervision problems) was 4. This represents a very narrow range of problem significance for the various areas that were rated. In essence, all of the areas were similarly ranked. Furthermore, all of the areas were ranked, on average, at the lower end of the scale. The strongest contributing factor (parole supervision problems) had an average rating of 4, which fails to even cross the halfway point of 5. A rating at the halfway point of 5 might be thought of as representing a “run-of-the-mill” problem; respondents therefore seem to be indicating that no potential problem area stood out as especially troubling. These results may indicate two conclusions: 1) it is the combination of multiple risk factors that leads to parole violations, not any one stand-alone risk factor, and/or 2) PVs may hold unrealistic views or provide inadequate assessments of their situation and the degree to which problem areas presented obstacles to their success on parole. The second conclusion will be important to return to later in this paper.



The second overview question asked PVs to indicate what prison programs they had participated in while previously incarcerated. A list of programs was provided, representing all of the major programs offered within the PADOc at the time of the survey including: Thinking For A Change (TFC), therapeutic communities, anger management, sex offender treatment, batterer intervention, Community Oriented Reintegration (COR), Residential Substance Abuse Treatment (RSAT), other alcohol and other drug (AOD) treatment, citizenship, GED/basic education, vocational education programming, parenting programs, religious programming, and individual counseling. Results indicated that the majority of PVs received some AOD treatment, anger management, and basic education and that these three types of programming had the highest participation rate of all of the programs offered (see Figure 3). A few of the programs with the lowest participation rate were presumably programs that could have benefited a wider range of offenders. For example, only 22% of PVs indicated that they participated in COR, which is the PADOc's primary reentry initiative that provides a refresher on treatment received while incarcerated and also provides specific community reintegration planning. Only 11% of PVs indicated that they participated in TFC, a cognitive-behavioral program with the potential for being broadly applied to various problem behaviors relating to criminal offending. Low participation in these two programs (COR and TFC) may be partially explained by the fact that both programs were relatively new to the PADOc and may not have been available when some of these PVs in the sample were last in prison.



The third overview question asked PVs to indicate how well PADOc programming prepared them to address various potential problem areas (see Figure 4). PVs responded that they felt the most prepared by prison programming to deal with AOD problems, their employment situation, and their living arrangements. PVs felt the least prepared to deal with emotional concerns and their financial situation. As with the first overview question, this question still provides little insight into differentiating the importance of problem areas since a fairly high percentage of PVs felt moderately to well prepared across all areas. This may again suggest that PVs provide an unrealistic self-assessment of how prepared they are for the problems that they will face while on parole and of the factors contributing to their parole violation.



A more in-depth analysis of survey responses to individual questions was clearly needed in order to gain more precise insight into the factors relating to violating parole. For analysis purposes, the detailed results from the questions on the survey were grouped into five domains: 1) social network and living arrangements, 2) employment and financial situation, 3) alcohol or other drug use, 4) thoughts, feelings, and actions while on parole, and 5) community supervision experience. Focus group questions also centered around these five domains.

Social Network and Living Arrangements

In the “social network and living arrangements” domain, evidence suggested that finding a place to live was not a significant reentry problem. Only 18% of PVs indicated that it was somewhat hard or very hard to find a place to live post-release. In the focus groups, PVs reaffirmed this finding, indicating very few difficulties with identifying a place to live upon release from prison. The majority of PVs lived with a family member or a significant other upon release from prison. Approximately 17% of PVs lived on their own. While finding some sort of place to live did not appear to be a major concern, the survey provided no measure of the quality of the living situation (e.g., whether or not the living situation was dysfunctional or a pro-criminal environment). Some evidence from the focus groups suggested that living arrangements for some PVs presented problems and was a source of stress. Further, several PVs from the focus groups did report a certain degree of difficulty in attaining approval from the Parole Board for their living arrangements because of the criminal record of others living at their proposed residence. Still, going back to the overview findings, PVs reported that living arrangements was one of the areas where they felt most prepared by prison programming. Overall, it appears that living arrangements, and specifically finding a place to live post-release, is not a significant reentry concern or factor contributing to violating parole. This finding may indicate that current services and programming for offenders are adequate to address living arrangement needs.

Problems with family relationships did not appear to be a factor that significantly contributed to parole violations. For the most part, PVs reported maintaining a solid support network of family to turn to for help or support. Seventy-two percent of PVs indicated that they were either legally married (17%) or had a girlfriend/boyfriend (55%) while last on parole. Of those who were in such a relationship, 89% indicated that the relationship was working out mostly good to excellent. Also, 89% said that they could go to their partner for help with a personal problem.

Eighty percent of PVs reported remaining in contact with at least one parent while last on parole. Eighty-nine percent said that they could go to a family member for help with a personal problem. Furthermore, PVs indicated that they spent the majority of their free time involved in family activities and with family members. From the focus groups, family members were also typically acknowledged as a valuable resource for identifying employment opportunities and reintegrating into the community.

Some indications of positive programming effects were noted for PADOc's parenting programs as well. Of those who participated in a parenting program, 33% reported feeling well prepared to deal with family relationships, while only 18% of those who did not participate in a parenting program reported feeling well prepared to deal with family relationships.

No clear pattern emerged concerning the extent of PV's criminal associations while on parole, other than that older PVs appeared to maintain less criminal associations than younger PVs. An inverse and statistically significant relationship was noted between the age of PVs and the extent of the criminal relationships that they maintained while last on parole. Confirmatory evidence of this finding was noted in the focus groups, as many older PVs spoke of losing contact with pro-criminal friends/family members over the years, most often as a result of imprisonment or death. Overall, 83% of survey respondents indicated that at least one of their family members or friends with whom they were in contact while last on parole had been arrested in the past. Further, some qualitative evidence from the focus groups did suggest that maintaining criminal associations posed a significant problem for a handful of PVs of all ages. As a measure of the reliability of the answers to the survey questions that were intended to gauge the extent of criminal association, two external measures of criminal association that were previously administered to a sub-set of this sample (i.e., the Identification with Criminal Others (ICO) sub-scale on the Criminal Sentiments Scale-Modified (CSS-M) and the Antisocial Associates (AA) sub-scale on the Hostile Interpretation Questionnaire (HIQ)) were matched with the survey results. It was determined that PVs indeed seemed to report fairly consistently across several measures about the extent of their criminal association, with an estimated potential deception rate between 12% and 19%.

Employment and Financial Situation

In the "employment and financial situation" domain, evidence suggested that simply finding employment was not a significant reentry concern related to violating parole. While 59% of PVs indicated that they had a somewhat hard or very hard time getting a job after last being released from prison, 83% were legally employed at some point while last on parole and 76% indicated that legal

employment was their primary source of income. Additionally, only 23% indicated that the job search process frequently or always stressed them out. From the focus groups, a reoccurring theme was that getting a job was not difficult. As with the finding that living arrangements did not pose a significant reentry problem, this finding on employment may in part indicate that currently offered programs and services are adequate to help the majority of returning offenders find employment.

What was more evident in the area of employment was that PVs tended to demonstrate negative attitudes towards their jobs and unrealistic job expectations. A common complaint in the focus groups was that the types of available jobs for parolees were unsuitable and provided insufficient income to make ends meet. To a certain degree, this represents a legitimate concern for the types of employment that are available and that parolees are eligible to obtain upon release from prison. On the other hand, the weight of the evidence from the focus groups suggested that PVs simply refused to take certain low end jobs and work their way up. Many PVs felt entitled to move right into higher-paying jobs straight out of prison, disregarding the realities of having a criminal record and of the workforce ethic of earning increased job responsibilities.

Significant financial management difficulties were noted among PVs, further compounding the problem of low-paying employment. Going back to the survey overview findings, PVs rated money management problems as one of the strongest problems contributing to their parole violation. One measure of money management is whether or not an individual has a bank account. Sixty-one percent of PVs responded that they did not have a bank account while last on parole. From the focus groups, many PVs reported difficulties with maintaining a budget and managing their financial resources in order to pay bills and debts. Many PVs spoke of simply being overwhelmed by the financial situation that they faced. Underlying the issues of money management seemed to be a more general issue of inadequate problem-solving skills among PVs.

While simply finding a job was not identified as a significant reentry concern related to violating parole, job retention seemed to pose more of a problem. Over half of those who worked while on parole (52%) did not consistently remain employed from the time that they attained employment upon last being released until the time that their parole was revoked. In addition, the majority of focus group participants who reported being employed while last on parole described frequent job turnover. When asked whether finding a job or keeping a job posed more of a problem, focus group participants most frequently responded that keeping a job was a bigger problem. Again, the issue of job retention seemed to be indicative of larger issues of inadequate problem-solving skills among PVs, as well as poor attitudes towards employment.

Indicators of positive programming effects on employment were noted for PADOC's vocational-education programs. From the survey findings, vocational-education participants felt significantly better prepared than non-participants to both find and keep a job. Further, focus group participants who went through a vocational-education program described their experience in such programs as a positive experience that helped them in their employment situation outside of prison.

Alcohol or Other Drug Use

In the area of “alcohol or other drug use”, 66% of PVs reported having a drug or alcohol problem at some point in the past and 57% reported drinking or using drugs while last out on parole. Of those who indicated some sort of AOD use while last on parole, 67% reported drinking alcohol, 45% reported using crack/cocaine, 26% reported using marijuana, and 15% reported using heroin. Fifty-four percent of PVs who drank or used drugs while last on parole first did so more than a month before receiving a violation. On average, those who drank or used drugs did so three days a week. Coupled with findings from the focus groups, this evidence suggested that a significant proportion of PVs drank or used drugs while last on parole and seemed to do so both regularly throughout the week and consistently from the time of their initial relapse until receiving a violation. For those who relapsed, the initial relapse occurrence did not appear to be something that happened in the last days and moments leading up to the violation but more often appeared to be initiated weeks or months before the violation. Yet, slightly over one-third of PVs (35%) reported drinking or using more than their usual amount during their last week out before returning to prison for a parole violation, indicating an increased level of AOD use in the last days and moments before the violation. Put together, the evidence from both the surveys and focus groups suggested that AOD problems were clearly related to violating parole for a significant proportion of PVs. Interestingly however, qualitative evidence from analysis of the focus group interviews suggested that there existed somewhat of a dichotomy between PVs with high need AOD problems and low need AOD problems. For a significant proportion of those who drank or used drugs while on parole, AOD use represented a major obstacle that appeared to significantly contribute to their failure on parole. These individuals represented the classic addicts. On the other hand, for another group of PVs who reported AOD use while last on parole, their violation did not appear to be the immediate result of their substance use but instead, for these individuals, their substance use represented one of many symptoms of more profound problems of antisocial values, attitudes and beliefs and inadequate problem-solving skills. An examination of scores from the TCU and PACSI AOD screening instruments confirmed this dichotomy, as slightly over one-quarter of those who reported drinking or using drugs while last on parole (26%) were not previously assessed to have an AOD dependence problem.

Seventy percent of PVs indicated that they received some sort of AOD treatment in the past. For those who participated in AOD treatment while last in prison, some positive programming effects were reported, specifically for therapeutic communities (TCs). Those who had participated in a TC indicated feeling significantly better prepared than non-participants to deal with AOD problems post-release. Interestingly, however, TC participants were slightly more likely than non-participants to report AOD use while last on parole. This may in part result from the fact that TC treatment is an intensive treatment option for mostly higher need AOD cases. It might therefore be expected that TC participants would report a higher prevalence of AOD use post-release, given that relapse is a common process among individuals with significant substance abuse problems, even if progress in treatment has been achieved.

Thoughts, Feelings, and Actions While on Parole

Perhaps the most significant and relevant findings from this study resulted from the domain examining PVs thoughts, feelings, and actions leading up to their violation. An examination of the emotional experiences of PVs in the last 48 hours preceding their parole violation overwhelmingly revealed a variety of dysphoric or unpleasant emotional experiences. A whole 74% of PVs indicated on the survey that some sort of dysphoric emotion was the strongest emotion experienced in the last 48 hours preceding their violation. In fact, PVs reported that emotional problems, such as stress, depression, frustration, anger, and worry, contributed more to their failure on parole than any other contributor, including those factors in the previously examined domains. In the focus groups, the majority of PVs recalled that the moments leading up to their violation were characterized by a variety of confusing and unpleasant emotions. Taken together, this evidence raises the question of whether a causal relationship can be established between unpleasant emotional experiences and violating parole. However, establishing a causal relationship would appear to raise two problems. First, intuitively one would not expect a direct causal relationship since every person experiences negative emotions at some point in life but most people do not resort to criminal or anti-social behavior when experiencing such emotions. Second, the general consensus from the broader body of research on risk factors predicting criminal behavior is that personal distress factors such as anxiety or depression are fairly weak predictors of criminal behavior (see Andrews and Bonta, 2003). Thus, the preliminary suspicion upon identifying this apparent relationship between dysphoric emotional experiences and parole violations was that there were mediating variables that helped to explain this relationship.

Indeed, three mediating variables were identified: 1) unrealistic post-release expectations of life outside of prison, 2) an increased presence of anti-social/pro-criminal attitudes, and 3) poor self-management, problem-solving, or coping skills. While it is complicated to establish a causal relationship between these three factors and an increased probability of violating parole, especially absent having the context of a comparison group of parole successes (i.e., the second phase of this study), evidence from this first phase of the study suggested that these three mediating variables were the most common problems related to violating parole. On unrealistic post-release expectations, going back to the overview findings, the first indication that PVs held to a generally unrealistic assessment of their situation was observed when PVs reported that no single potential problem area significantly contributed to their parole violation. As seen in many of the findings from the previous domains, PVs reported inflated confidence in their ability to easily find and keep high-paying jobs, avoid risky situations and people, maintain friction-free relationships, and generally be successful on parole. While 89% of PVs reported that they were mostly to completely confident that they would successfully remain out of prison while last on parole, 100% of respondents did not successfully remain out prison, given that they were all included in the study sample because they were recently returned to prison for a parole violation. This large incongruency provides strong evidence that PVs failed to anticipate difficult situations and held unrealistic expectations of what life outside of prison would be like.

Several indicators provided evidence that PVs tended to hold anti-social/pro-criminal attitudes. On the survey, PVs were asked to indicate both the good things and the bad things that they thought would result from committing the act that led to their parole violation. Prior to committing whatever act that led to their parole violation, over two-thirds of PVs reported seeing some sort of positive benefit resulting from violating their parole, including such benefits as earning respect, getting money, releasing tension, attaining sexual pleasure, getting high or drunk, or attaining a feeling of power, control or excitement. Further, PVs tended to report that violating the conditions of their parole or committing a new crime was an acceptable way of attaining such benefits. While PVs also reported viewing a variety of negative consequences resulting from violating parole, the most commonly reported negative consequences indicated little acknowledgment of a negative impact on others (e.g., victims), suggesting a general lack of empathy. When PVs were asked to weigh the benefits and costs of their violation, only 31% of PVs reported viewing more bad things than good things resulting from a violation. The remaining 69% either saw more good things resulting from their violation or saw the good and bad things as being equal. Going back to findings from the employment domain, recall that attitudinal problems were also among the primary problems relating to employment. In the focus groups, another indicator of a generally anti-social outlook among PVs was external blame-shifting. When probed for reasons leading to their return to prison, the majority of PVs in the focus groups primarily blamed external factors such as bad parole officers or poorly run community corrections centers, failing to take much of the responsibility, if any, for their return to prison.

The most evident of the three variables that were found to mediate the effect of negative emotional experiences on parole violations was poor social problem-solving/coping skills. In fact, the most prevalent theme identified throughout the study, across all of the domains examined, was that PVs tended to possess poor problem-solving skills in the presence of emotional instability or the daily obstacles of life. Poor problem-solving skills were particularly evidenced by four specific traits among PVs: impulsivity, failure to generate alternative courses of action, failure to recognize the consequences of actions, and keeping problems to oneself or failing to take steps of avoidance. Poor financial management skills, a lack of long-term goals or strategies for maintaining and improving one's employment situation, inadequate or narrow solutions to problems in one's personal relationships, and a tendency to turn to AOD use when faced with stressful situations were all common themes among PVs that provided evidence of poor problem-solving skills. Nearly half of PVs (45%) said that they did not even consider alternatives to the sequence of events leading to their violation. Forty percent said they reached a point before their violation where they felt that they lost complete control of themselves and their situation. Seventy-seven percent did not tell anyone that they were having thoughts about acting on the events that led to their violation, which perhaps indicates two factors relating to poor problem-solving skills: 1) many violations were impulsive (i.e., the events surrounding the violation were not planned but instead were such spontaneous acts that PVs did not have time to consider turning to someone else for help or advice), and 2) many PVs failed to utilize personal relationships as a resource for solving dilemmas or generating alternatives to violating parole. From the focus groups, many PVs relayed stories of being tripped up by a multitude of events or experiences, such as a family illness or death, and subsequently violating a condition of parole in an attempt to either fill an emotional void or solve an immediate problem.

The last question that was always posed in the focus groups was “now that you have explained to us what factors you felt led to your parole violation, what will you do differently when next released from prison?” When asked this question, the majority of PVs could not articulate a clear strategy for remaining out of prison and addressing their problems, despite often being able to describe their problems in great detail.

All three mediating variables are in fact closely related to each other. For example, it becomes more difficult for PVs to solve problem and manage negative emotional experiences when they tend to hold expectations that life outside of prison will be easy and that most things will go right for them. Anti-social attitudes and poor problem-solving skills go hand in hand in that often a PV’s skill set for solving day-to-day problems may be a function of his or her general anti-social frame of mind, leading to primarily anti-social solutions to problems. As well, an interaction effect between unrealistic post-release expectations and anti-social attitudes may in fact exist, in that part of the explanation for PVs tending to come out of prison holding unrealistic expectations may be that their expectations are guided by anti-social beliefs. For instance, if a particular parolee does not view his or her substance abuse problem as in fact being a problem, then he or she may not expect to run into future problems relating to relapse or violating parole.

Community Supervision Experience

In the area of “parole/community supervision”, PVs indicated some specific problems relating to their halfway house experience, although it was unclear as to whether these problems contributed to their violation or simply made for a more difficult transition to the community. Nearly two-thirds (65%) of PVs in this sample reported going to some sort of transitional halfway house (i.e., a community corrections center or community contract facility) after last being released from prison. From the focus groups, PVs who were released to a halfway house consistently reported several themes including: 1) that the centers were often too restrictive and inflexible for allowing parolees to go to work or reunite with family members, 2) that many of the facilities were poorly maintained facilities and breeding places from criminal activity, given their location and some of the staff members employed there, 3) that paying rent to a center tended to be a source of financial stress, 4) that much of the treatment provided in centers was a one-size-fits-all approach with little consideration for individual needs, and 5) that the centers were often located too far way from family members, making it more difficult to reunite with family. Interestingly, when PVs in the focus groups were given a hypothetical option of serving the time that they spent in a halfway house in prison instead, the majority indicated that they would have rather served the time in a prison. While some of the complaints about the halfway house experience clearly amounted to griping and blame-shifting, representing further signs of anti-social attitudes among PVs, other complaints such as the ones mentioned above warranted further exploration and room for concern, given that they were commonly repeated themes across independent focus groups at different locations.

Even given the complaints about problems relating to transitioning through a halfway house, a larger percentage of PVs indicated that the halfway house experience helped them get along outside of prison than did their parole officer. While 43% of those who went through a halfway house

indicated that their experience in the halfway house helped them to better get along outside of prison, only 33% indicated that their experience with their parole officer helped them to better get along outside of prison. Also, 70% of TPVs indicated that their parole officer never cut them a break or gave them a warning before returning them to prison for a parole violation. While these statistics seem to indicate that PVs found little help from their parole officer in succeeding outside of prison, 59% of PVs still reported that they had a good to excellent relationship with their parole officer while last on parole. This finding did not seem to connect with findings from the focus groups, however, as many PVs in the focus groups complained about adversarial relationships with their parole officer. As with some of the complaints about the halfway house experience, some complaints about parole supervision again indicated anti-social attitudes towards authority and blame-shifting. Overall, it was unclear as to whether or not parole officers had an impact on success or failure on parole.

Policy Implications

The results of the first phase of this study support four specific policy implications. First and foremost, offender programming should focus more attention and resources towards providing broader cognitive-behavioral treatment that aims to instill pro-social attitudes, values, and beliefs in offenders and strengthen or develop general problem-solving skills. As findings from this first phase of the study suggest, those that violate parole tend to demonstrate a variety of problems (e.g., poor financial management skills, unstable employment, substance use, emotional instability, etc.). These problems are symptomatic of common underlying themes, namely anti-social attitudes and poor problem-solving skills, which are more strongly related to violating parole and should therefore be considered primary targets for treatment. Previous research has established that cognitive-behavioral programming is an effective model of treatment for offenders (Andrews and Bonta, 2003). This study indicates that cognitive-behavioral programming which specifically concentrates on developing coping strategies and problem-solving skills, utilizing behavior rehearsal and relapse prevention techniques, may be particularly effective in discouraging parole violations. Resources should shift away from simply treating symptomatic issues and towards treating common underlying problems. For instance, offender programming should not focus on simply eliminating negative emotional experiences, but should instead focus on reinforcing pro-social behavioral reactions to negative emotional experiences. The emphasis should be that every person will undoubtedly and unavoidably experience unpleasant emotions at some point in life but when these uncontrollable experiences occur, an individual is able to control his or her behavioral response.

Second, reentry programming should focus more attention on teaching offenders specific and transferable life skills such as budgeting and money management techniques. Financial management seems to be one particular sub-set of life skills that presents difficulties for parolees. In order to succeed on parole, many parolees need to learn and rehearse the skills necessary to manage monthly bills and debt repayments, given the salaries that they are realistically able to obtain. This often requires advanced problem-solving skills, which we have already seen are lacking in many of those who fail on parole.

Third, due to the extent of reported substance use among PVs and to the severity of AOD problems experienced by a certain proportion of PVs, it is important that correctional systems continue to reinforce intensive AOD treatment programs that are known to be effective. Conversely, treatment staff should not make the assumption that all PVs who drink or use drugs while on parole must first and foremost receive intensive AOD treatment. In fact, in line with the first policy implication above, it is perhaps more appropriate that those PVs who use alcohol or other drugs while on parole but are assessed with a lower need for AOD treatment primarily receive a core cognitive-behavioral program that focuses on general attitudinal and behavioral skills that are transferable across various domains. In short, some sort of assessment of offenders should be utilized to determine whether AOD issues are primarily driving criminal behavior/parole violations or simply represent a symptom of more general problems such as poor problem-solving skills and anti-social attitudes.

Fourth, reentry programming should encourage offenders to stay “rooted in reality” upon release from prison and maintain realistic post-release expectations. Given the anti-social orientation of many offenders, incarceration itself may be viewed by offenders as their primary problem and simply being released from prison may be viewed as the solution to that problem. It then becomes important to help offenders realize that their problems don’t stop at the prison gates but often become more complex upon release from prison. Offenders must come to understand that life outside of prison will not be easy and that a criminal record can make life all the more difficult. For instance, employability training should prepare offenders for the real possibility that they may need to start off working one or more low-end jobs and gradually work up to a promotion or better job. In-prison treatment may be more effective if it is able to simulate real world situations within the artificial environment of prison. Again, role-playing is a particularly useful tool for simulating such an environment and preparing offenders for realistic life expectations.

Study Limitations

A few potential limitations to this first phase of the study must be noted. First, the findings from this phase of the study do not include a comparison group of parole successes to put in perspective these findings. Without a comparison group, how do we really know that the patterns that appear to relate to violating parole are indeed unique to PVs? The second phase of this study, which will be reported on in a future issue of RIR, includes findings from such a comparison group of “successful” parolees. This second phase builds upon the first phase, providing a clearer picture of the factors relating to success or failure on parole. Also, a third phase of the study is currently being conducted and will be summarized in a future issue of RIR, in which parole officers and community corrections providers will be surveyed/interviewed to gain their perspective on what they believe are the factors relating to success or failure on parole. This will provide another useful comparison.

Another potential limitation to this study is that the information gathered is primarily self-reported information. This calls into question the degree of confidence in PVs accurately and honestly reporting their experiences while last on parole. For example, the rate of self-reported legal employment among PVs while last on parole was surprisingly high from the survey results. Does this represent an accurate employment rate among PVs or did PVs over-report being legally

employed while last on parole? To answer such questions of reliability, official records and other data sources should be matched with self-reported information when possible. Future findings from this study will include such cross-reliability checks. For instance, to answer questions of reliability on employment data, a dataset containing official employment records, will be matched with this study's survey sample to examine consistency in reporting legal employment. Even with self-reported information alone, however, many researchers rely on such data and prior studies suggest that self-reported information among incarcerated offenders is mostly reliable (see Junger-Tas, 1999). In fact the richness of data gathered from self-reported information can actually be viewed as a strength of this study. One study on the self-report methodology in crime research makes the following observation: "*the self-report method is used all over the world to study opinions, attitudes, and behaviors concerning a great number of issues in the fields of health, education, employment, culture, leisure, and crime. In this respect, the controversial saying that "if you want to know something about people, just ask them" appears to have more truth in it than is commonly believed...the self-report method has outgrown its childhood diseases; it is now a true-and-tried method of research.*"

Conclusion

In conclusion, an aggregate needs assessment of PADOA's PV population and of the primary factors relating to parole violator behavior reveals that three underlying factors are most evident among those that violate parole. First, PVs tend to hold unrealistic expectations of how life outside of prison will be. Second, PVs tend to maintain anti-social attitudes, values, and beliefs that support offending or violating behavior. Third, PVs tend to possess inadequate coping or social problem-solving skills, especially when faced with emotional uneasiness or daily life problems. Resources for better preparing offenders for release from prison and for reducing PV admissions to prison should focus on addressing these three factors.

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