February 6, 2007

SUBJECT: *Research in Review*

TO: Executive Staff
Superintendents
Other Readers

FROM: Gary Zajac, Ph.D.   Kristofer Bret Bucklen
Chief of Research and Evaluation   Senior Research and Evaluation Analyst

Enclosed please find Volume 9, Number 4 of *Research in Review* (RIR). This issue presents a summary and discussion of Phase II of the PA DOC's parole outcomes study, which examines factors leading to success or failure on parole of inmates released from the PA DOC (findings from Phase I were presented in Volume 8, Number 1 of RIR). This issue also contains an index of pieces contained in Volume 9.

This issue brings to a close Volume 9 of RIR. Volume 10 will continue to present findings from the PA DOC's own evaluation projects, including outcome studies of our reentry programs as well as findings from Phase III of the study of parole violators and parole successes conducted by this office. RIR will also continue with article reviews and briefing papers on topics relevant to corrections.

As always, 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 research, as well as article reviews, book reviews, and other relevant pieces.

Thank you for your ongoing interest in *Research in Review* as we enter our tenth year of publication.

Special Issue: PA DOC's Parole Violator Study (Phase 2)

The fourth issue of Volume 9 of *Research in Review* features a summary of the second phase of the Pennsylvania Department of Correction's (PA DOC) Parole Violator Study. This study was initiated in late 2002 in response to growing numbers of parole violator admissions to the PA DOC. 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.

Results from the first phase of this study were presented in a special issue of RIR in 2005 (Volume 8, Number 1). In the first phase, a large sample of parole violators who were recently returned to prison were surveyed and interviewed about the precipitators of their violations. With this second phase of the study comes new analysis of a comparison group sample of parole successes who have remained out of prison for longer than three years and seem to have successfully transitioned back to the community. Findings for the successes' responses are compared and contrasted to those from the violators in order to further understand pathways to either success or failure on parole.

The results of this study have primarily 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.

A future issue of RIR will summarize the third phase of the PA DOC Parole Violator Study, which includes an analysis of surveys and focus groups conducted with parole officers and community corrections providers to gain their perspective on the factors relating to success or failure on parole. Upcoming issues of RIR will also continue to feature summaries of other PA DOC 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 2)** |
| by |
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INTRODUCTION

Do successful parolees differ in fundamental ways from parolees who violate the conditions of their parole or commit new crimes? What does the recidivism process look like for parole violators compared to the desistance process for successful parolees? How can the criminal justice system intervene to alter the trajectories of failing parolees? Broadly speaking, similar lines of inquiry (e.g., the factors differentiating pathways to criminal persistence versus pathways to criminal desistence) raise important issues for criminologists to examine. Indeed, since the introduction of the criminal career paradigm into criminology 20 years ago (Blumstein et. al., 1986), the discipline has seen somewhat of a proliferation of research on the criminal recidivism process (Zamble and Quinsey, 1997) and on criminal desistence (Laub and Sampson, 2003; Maruna, 2001). Also, over the past 30 years, a parallel body of correctional research (i.e., the "what works" literature) has identified certain correlates (or risk factors) of criminal re-offending as well as common features of criminal justice interventions that are effective in reducing recidivism (Andrews and Bonta, 2003). More recently, in response to increasing numbers of offenders being released from prisons nationwide, issues surrounding prisoner reentry have gained prominence in research agendas (Visher and Travis, 2003; Petersilia, 2003).

What has been missing to date within these broad research agendas is a specific examination of parole violators. In Pennsylvania and many other states nationwide, the largest percentage of released offenders transition to the community under parole supervision. While under parole supervision, parolees are required to abide by certain technical conditions that, although not violations of the law if broken, nonetheless carry a potential penalty of return to prison for infractions. In many states (including Pennsylvania), prison admissions for parole violations have increased in recent years, contributing significantly to an overall increase in the prison population. Nearly two-thirds of these parole violator prison admissions are for technical violations as opposed to new criminal convictions (Travis and Lawrence, 2002). Despite these trends, research specifically examining the antecedents of parole failure is virtually non-existent. General predictors of criminal behavior identified in previous research may or may not explain parole failure, especially given the fact that approximately two-thirds of parole violator prison admissions are for technical parole violations which do not necessarily constitute new criminal behavior.

In Volume 8 of *Research In Review*, we reported on findings from the first phase of a study of parole violators conducted by staff at the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections (PA DOC). The purpose of this study was to expand upon existing criminological research in order to move beyond the general determinants of recidivism and identify more dynamic precursors to parole violations. From an agency perspective, the study was intended to serve 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. Utilizing results from a detailed survey administered to 542 parole violators and focus groups conducted with a smaller sub-set of parole violators, the first phase of the PA DOC's Parole Violator Study laid much of the groundwork for exploring parole violator needs and potential targets for intervention. Without a reference group, however, very little could be said about the differences between parole successes and parole failures. In other words, perhaps the problems observed among parole violators were also problems characteristic of parole successes, consequently lending no support for differentiating between successes and failures. For this reason, a second phase of the study was constructed in order to compare the original sample of parole violators to a new sample of parole successes.

METHODS

In January of 2004, a survey similar to the one previously administered to parole violators was mailed to a sample of 704 "parole successes", with 183 of these "parole successes" (26%) returning a completed survey.[1] In constructing this sample, parole "success" was defined as remaining on parole without returning to prison for at least three years. Certainly this is a less than perfect definition of success, as a sub-set of those meeting this definition will go on to return to prison at a later point in time after the study period. However, a recent re-examination of the "success" sample revealed that approximately 92% of those identified as parole successes continue to remain successfully on parole nearly three years later (meaning these parolees have now remained successfully on parole for nearly six years altogether). This, as well as other evidence presented later, supports the conclusion that the "success" and "violator" groups represent distinctly contrasting groups in terms of parole success.

Consistent with recent advancements in criminological research of "mixed methods" approaches that combine both quantitative and qualitative research methodology (Laub and Sampson, 1998), and also consistent with the approach taken in the first phase of this study, analysis of survey data for the success group was followed up with personal interviews to further explore reoccurring themes. Six parole successes were interviewed extensively via audio-recorded telephone interviews about their experiences on parole. Four additional parole successes participated in a focus group at a community corrections center in Philadelphia, discussing their life on parole and the factors they

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[1] The wording of a few questions on the "success group" survey had to be slightly modified from the parole violator version of the survey in order to provide a sensible frame of reference for those currently not in prison. Also, some questions were eliminated because they did not apply to a group of parole successes. Finally, a few additional questions were asked of parole successes that were not asked on the initial survey of parole violators, in order to gain a better profile of successful parolees.

attributed to their success. These interviews proved to largely reinforce the survey data results as well as to provide a richer context for more precisely defining the mechanisms at work in succeeding on parole. The study was certainly enhanced by this "mixed methods" approach.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Table 1 contains demographic statistics for the parole violator sample as well as for the new comparison group sample of parole successes. On average, parole successes were six years older than violators (41 vs. 35). This finding (that parole successes were older on average) seems to indicate an "aging out" effect, where parolees may be less likely to violate the conditions of their parole as they simply grow older, a finding in line with much prior research on the general relationship between age and crime (Hirschi and Gottfredson, 1983; Farrington, 1986; Blumstein et. al., 1986).

From Table 1, one can also observe a difference in racial composition between the success and violator groups. This is an artificial difference, however, that can be completely attributed to what is referred to as "selection bias". When comparing the racial composition of the much larger sample of those who were actually mailed a success survey (regardless of if they completed one) to the original parole violator group, we find no difference in racial composition. So whites were simply more likely to return a completed survey, and were not more likely to be parole successes. Looking further down Table 1, the difference between the two groups in the city they were last paroled to again demonstrates an artificial difference attributable to selection bias. Selection bias is always a concern when the return rate for a survey is relatively low. Given the relatively low return rate for the success group in this study (a 26% return rate), selection bias had to be tested for. From the analysis, it was concluded that selection bias was only a concern for the two demographic variables previously mentioned ("race" and "city last paroled to") and posed very little threat to the overall validity of the study findings, primarily because these two demographic variables are not widely considered to be criminogenic risk factors.
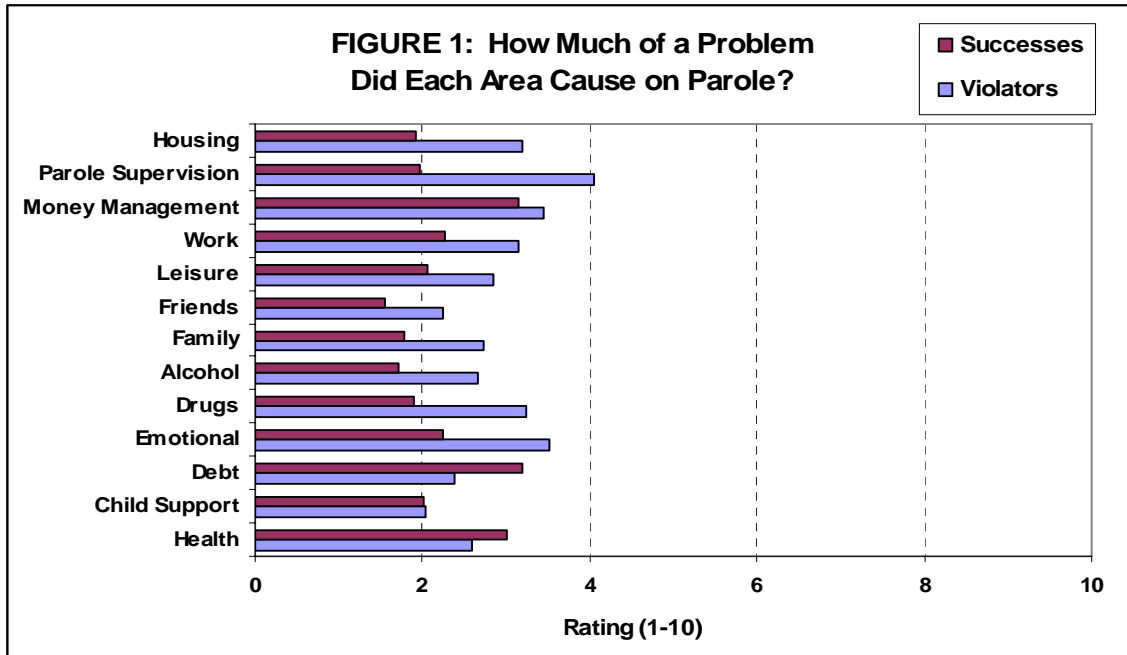
TABLE 1. Demographic Statistics

Age	Violators Mean (SD)	Successes Mean (SD)
	35 (8.7)	41 (11.1)

Race	Violators (%)	Successes (%)
White	28.2	53.2
Black	59.1	33.8
Hispanic	12.3	13.0
Other	0.4	0.0

Gender	Violators (%)	Successes (%)
Male	93.4	93.5
Female	6.6	6.5

Primary Offense	Violators (%)	Successes (%)
Murder/Homicide	5.7	14.3
Sex Offense	0.9	8.6
Assault	7.1	15.7
Robbery	21.9	12.8
Burglary/Property	26.7	22.9
Drugs	37.7	25.7

City Last Paroled To	Violators (%)	Successes (%)
Philadelphia	41.2	28.8
Pittsburgh	8.5	5.7
Erie	5.7	1.6
Reading	5.3	4.9
Allentown	3.2	0.8
Harrisburg	2.7	2.5
Chester	2.3	1.6
Other	31.1	54.1

No gender difference between successes and violators were observed. Differences were observed for the "primary offense" variable, however. This variable represents the last controlling offense for which the participant was previously incarcerated before being on parole. For most of the violent offense categories (murder, sex offenses, and assault), violent offenders were significantly more likely to be successful on parole. Conversely, drug offenders were significantly more likely to violate parole. This lends support to general recidivism data (both nationally and in Pennsylvania) suggesting that property and drug offenders are more likely than violent offenders to re-offend (Langan and Levin, 2002; Flaherty, 2005). One somewhat interesting finding is that robbery offenders were significantly more likely to violate parole. Robbery is typically considered a violent crime and, as previously indicated, violent offenders are generally less likely to re-offend. However, both national and state data indicate that robbery recidivism rates are the highest of all violent offense sub-types. An interesting question for future studies is why robbery offenders appear to demonstrate high re-offending and parole violation rates.
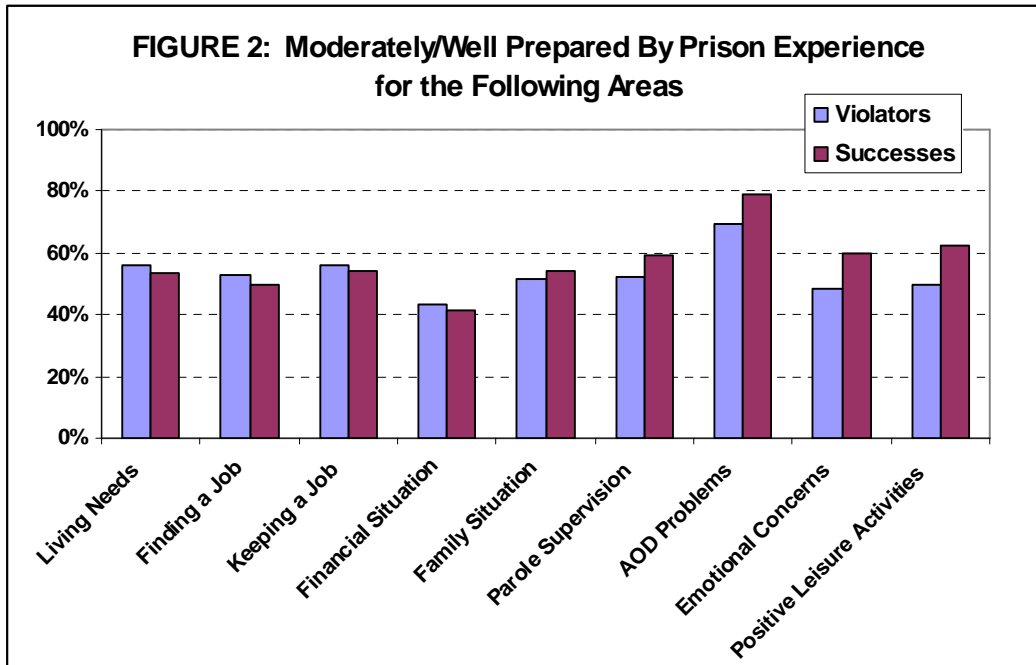
FINDINGS

In developing a strategy for analyzing the survey data and interview material, a three-step approach was adopted. The first step involved examining the results from broader survey questions that were intended to gauge more general problem areas. The second step was to then analyze data from more targeted survey questions across five domains, to further build upon themes from the broader questions examined in the first step. Lastly, the third step involved synthesizing interview/focus group transcripts and notes to look for evidence that would confirm or disconfirm the survey findings, as well as to provide a richer context for interpreting themes identified from the survey findings.

Figure 1 displays average ratings by group for one of the primary overview question on the survey, in which respondents were asked to rate how much of a problem a number of different areas caused them while on parole. These areas were selected as representing a variety of obstacles that are typically recognized in the broader reentry literature as being particularly problematic for offenders returning to the community. Respondents were asked to rate each area on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 meaning that the area was 'not at all a problem' related to parole success and 10 meaning that the area was 'a significant problem' related to parole success. While the average ratings for violators were higher than for parole successes across most areas (which would be expected), what is perhaps most interesting is that none of the average ratings for both groups were higher than the midpoint of 5. Low problem ratings for the success group are not so surprising, since those in this group were presumably able to succeed on parole (at least in part) by facing relatively few problems across these areas or overcoming obstacles in these areas. However, one would have expected parole violators to indicate a higher degree of problems across at least some of these problem areas, but instead violators indicated that no potential problem area stood out as especially troubling. Further, very little dispersion in average ratings across problem areas was observed for either group (i.e., ratings across all areas were clustered within a narrow range at the lower end of the scale), and observed differences between violators and successes across average ratings were trivial. Thus, simply examining results from this overview question provides very little basis for discerning the relative

FIGURE 1: How Much of a Problem Did Each Area Cause on Parole?

Rating (1-10)

(Legend: Successes, Violators)

Categories: Housing, Parole Supervision, Money Management, Work, Leisure, Friends, Family, Alcohol, Drugs, Emotional, Debt, Child Support, Health
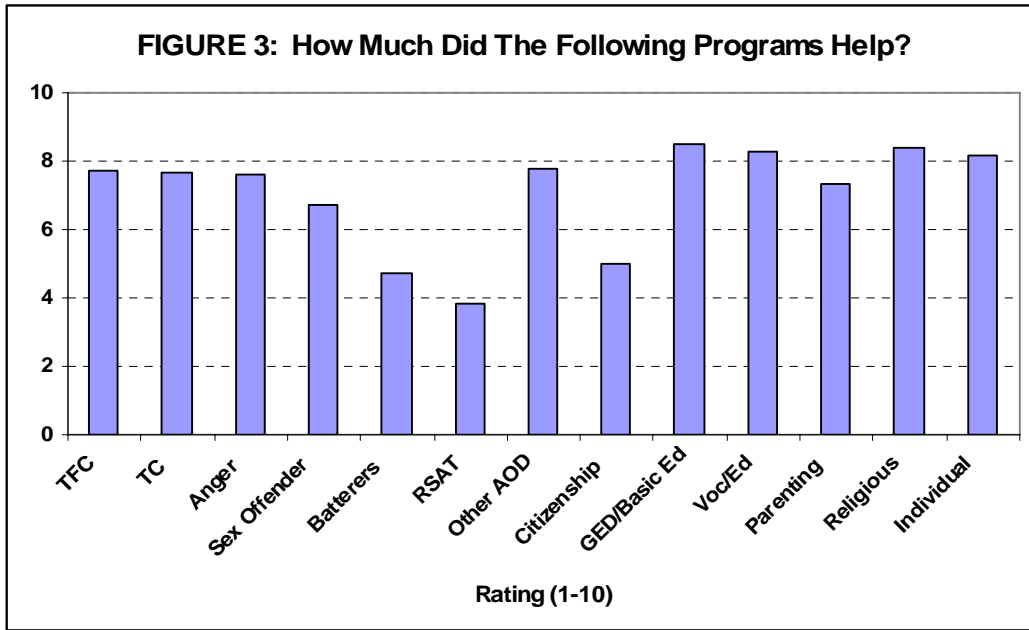
importance of problem areas within each group or for discriminating between the two groups across problem areas. For the violator group, two explanations may explain why their ratings were so low: 1) it may be that a cumulative effect is occurring, where individual risk factors are only weakly or moderately related to parole violations in and of themselves but strongly predictive of parole violations when combined, or 2) violators may hold unrealistic self-assessments of their situation and the degree to which problem areas presented obstacles to their success on parole. Evidence presented later in this paper lends support to the second explanation, although the first explanation is probably at work as well.

A second overview question on the survey asked respondents to indicate how well PA DOC programming prepared them to address various potential problem areas (see Figure 2). This question was intended to gauge departmental strengths and weaknesses in treatment/intervention programming. For example, if it is found that the violator group overwhelmingly report feeling much less prepared by prison programming in one particular area compared to other areas and that their indicated level of preparedness in this area is significantly lower than the level of perceived preparedness for the success group, a reasonable inference could be made that this would be an important area towards which to dedicate more treatment resources. Among both groups, respondents felt best prepared to address alcohol and other drug (AOD) problems and least prepared to address financial management problems. Across most categories, over half of respondents felt moderately-to-well prepared. Once again, however, very little differences between the two groups were observed. Therefore, this overview question provided little information on differences between parole successes and failures.

FIGURE 2: Moderately/Well Prepared By Prison Experience for the Following Areas

Area	Violators	Successes
Living Needs	56%	54%
Finding a Job	53%	50%
Keeping a Job	56%	54%
Financial Situation	43%	41%
Family Situation	52%	54%
Parole Supervision	52%	60%
AOD Problems	70%	79%
Emotional Concerns	48%	60%
Positive Leisure Activities	50%	62%

A third overview question was unique to the parole success survey and was not asked of the original parole violator group in the first wave of the study. This question asked respondents to rate the usefulness of all PA DOC treatment interventions and programs for which they participated in (see Figure 3). Ratings were on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 indicating that the program was not at all useful and 10 indicating that the program was extremely useful in helping to succeed outside of prison. While these rating cannot technically serve as measures of program effectiveness, they do provide a general indication of which programs are viewed by a group of parole successes as being relatively more or less beneficial in helping them towards their path of success. The following programs were rated: Thinking For a Change (which is a general cognitive-behavioral program), therapeutic communities, anger management, sex offender treatment, batterer intervention, Residential Substance Abuse Treatment, other types of alcohol and other drug treatment, Citizenship, GED/basic education services, vocational-education services, parenting programming, religious services, and individual counseling. Overall, the results from both this overview question and the previous overview question paint a favorable picture of PA DOC programming from the respondents' viewpoint. For most of the programs and services offered, respondents rated well above the mid-point rating of 5 and closer to the high end of 10. Only two programs were rated below 5 (batterers intervention and RSAT), but this may be a function of the fact that only about ten survey respondents participated in these two programs. The highest rated programs and services were GED/basic education services, vocational-education services, religious services, and individual counseling. Clearly this group of successes appeared to have benefited from a variety of PA DOC treatment programs and services.

FIGURE 3: How Much Did The Following Programs Help?

A bar chart titled "FIGURE 3: How Much Did The Following Programs Help?" with a vertical axis ranging from 0 to 10 and a horizontal axis labeled "Rating (1-10)". The categories along the horizontal axis are: TFC, TC, Anger, Sex Offender, Batterers, RSAT, Other AOD, Citizenship, GED/Basic Ed, Voc/Ed, Parenting, Religious, Individual. The approximate values are: TFC ≈ 7.7, TC ≈ 7.6, Anger ≈ 7.6, Sex Offender ≈ 6.7, Batterers ≈ 4.7, RSAT ≈ 3.8, Other AOD ≈ 7.8, Citizenship ≈ 5.0, GED/Basic Ed ≈ 8.5, Voc/Ed ≈ 8.3, Parenting ≈ 7.3, Religious ≈ 8.4, Individual ≈ 8.2.

Aside from providing favorable evidence for the beneficial impact of a variety of PA DOC programs and services, the above three overview questions provided very little insight into differences between violators and successes. At this point in our analysis we turned to more detailed survey questions across five primary domains: 1) social network and living arrangements, 2) employment and financial situation, 3) alcohol and other drug use, 4) life on parole, and 5) community supervision experience. Below are the findings across these five domains, integrated with findings from the qualitative interviews and focus groups.

Social Network and Living Arrangements

In the "social network and living arrangements" domain, the first set of questions examined the degree to which respondents affiliated with criminal others while on parole. Parole violators were significantly more likely than parole successes to hang around individuals with criminal backgrounds while on parole (58% vs. 40%). From the interviews and focus groups, it was further apparent that identification with criminal/anti-social peers while on parole was an important factor differentiating parole failures from parole successes. These findings come as no surprise given the well-documented relationship between peers and criminal behavior (Warr, 2002).

Other questions in the "social network and living arrangements" domain provided some indication that a quality marriage or intimate relationship was a protective factor for those on parole. Parole successes were significantly more likely to live with a spouse while on parole (34% vs. 22%). While the majority of those in both groups who indicated that they were in a relationship also indicated that the relationship was working out "mostly good" to "excellent", successes were nonetheless significantly more likely to report this (97% vs. 89%). The qualitative interviews, particularly with the parole successes, provided stronger evidence for these findings on the relationship between an

intimate relationship and success on parole. Those from the parole success group consistently reported being in stable, supportive relationships and primarily defined their identity as "family men". These findings are consistent with evidence in the "social bond" literature concluding that marriage acts as a type of informal social control in moving offenders towards a path of desistance from crime (Laub et. al., 2006).

One question asked of the success group but not asked of the violator group in the first phase of the study was whether or not they had a "mentor". Nearly two-thirds of parole successes (66%) reported having someone in their lives who served in a mentoring capacity. In the focus group and interviews, the majority of parole successes reported being in some sort of relationship where they could turn to for help or advice. While not always defining these relationships as mentoring relationships, they were in essence describing mentoring relationships. The mentoring relationships varied greatly, from family members to religious leaders to treatment counselors (both in-prison and in the community). Mentoring emerged as an important component of the lives of parole successes.

Finally in the "social network and living arrangements" domain, parole successes and failures did not significantly differ in their difficulty in finding a place to live after being released from prison. Only 18% of violators and 17% of successes reported having a "somewhat hard" to "very hard" time finding a place to live post-release. Interviews and focus groups again confirmed this finding, that obtaining a place to live post-release was really not a significant reentry concern and certainly does not appear to differentiate parole successes from failures.

Employment and Financial Situation

In the "employment and financial situation" domain, several survey questions attempted to disaggregate employment differences between the two groups. Despite violators being slightly more likely than successes to report having a "somewhat hard time" or "very hard time" getting a job while on parole (59% vs. 46%), the two groups were equally likely to report eventually obtaining employment. In fact, the majority of respondents in both groups indicated that they were employed at some point while on parole (83% of violators and 88% of successes) and that their primary source of income on parole was employment (76% of violators and 80% of successes). Further, the groups were equally likely to report that their job search process did not stress them out (77% of violators and 79% of successes). In interviews with violators, statements were frequently made such as "anybody with a driver's license can get a job" and "you can walk in today and anybody will hire you to flip burgers".

While simply finding a job did not appear to differentiate parole successes from failures, other aspects of employment did substantially differ between the two groups. Successes were significantly more likely than violators to report being employed the entire time they while on parole (69% vs. 48%), indicating more job stability among parole successes. As well, it became apparent from the interviews that those in the parole success group were overall more successful at keeping a job. The majority of successes reported some level of satisfaction with their job while the majority of violators indicated job dissatisfaction. Violators were particularly dissatisfied with the types of

jobs available to them, often indicating that their jobs did not provide enough money to pay bills and make ends meet. In fact, violators were more likely than successes to report a monthly income of less than $1,000 (55% vs. 33%).

Perhaps the strongest employment difference that emerged from the focus groups and interviews, however, was in attitudes towards employment. While successes were mostly committed to employment regardless of the type of employment, violators often refused to take lower end jobs and work their way up. Many in the violator group felt entitled to move right into higher-paying jobs straight out of prison, disregarding the realities of having a criminal record and of having to earn increased job responsibilities. Generally negative attitudes towards employment and unrealistic job expectations were consistently observed among the violator group. In interviews, parole successes were more likely to make statements such as "I've been working the same job for five years, I've never missed a day of work and I've never been late for work". One parole success who was interviewed indicated that he had to go out and get another job to make ends meet because his primary job only paid $4.68 per hour plus minimal tips, but he also indicated that he was "holding on to it, trying to find a better job". Violators often made comments such as, "I won't work at KFC no matter what", again indicating refusal to start with a "survival job" and work up to a "career job".

Significant financial management difficulties were also observed as being more characteristic of the parole violator group, further compounding the noted problem of low-paying employment. One proxy for assessing money management skills is asking whether a respondent has a bank account. Parole successes were significantly more likely than violators to indicate that they had a bank account while on parole (73% vs. 39%). Violators were more likely to report that they were "not at all" or "just barely" able to make ends meet (37% vs. 29%), despite the fact that the success group reported a median amount of debt that was over double the median amount of debt of the violator group ($5,000 vs. $2,000). Focus group and interview responses suggested that a larger proportion of those in the violator group simply lacked other basic financial management skills such as keeping a budget or prioritizing spending.

Alcohol or Other Drug Use

It was not surprising to find that parole violators were significantly more likely than parole successes to report that they used alcohol or other drugs while on parole (57% vs. 22%), despite the fact that both groups were equally as likely to have been previously assessed in prison as having an AOD dependence problem. For parole violators who drank or used drugs while on parole, their relapse was mostly not something that first occurred right around the time of their violation; 54% first relapsed longer than a month before their violation and only 26% first relapsed during the week of their violation. From the qualitative analysis, it became apparent that poor management of stress was a primary contributing factor to relapse for those who relapsed in both groups. This suggests that AOD use may be more of a symptom of deeper underlying problems such as poor self-management . While AOD use was clearly an important factor differentiating successes from failures, perhaps addressing problem-solving/coping skills is the more important target for treatment in this domain.

Life on Parole

The fourth domain of the study results ("life on parole") captured information about some of the dynamic events, thoughts, and emotions experienced by respondents that may have differentiated violators from successes. For parole violators, the findings in this domain specifically provided an immediate context to their recidivism incident, allowing for comparisons/contrasts to be made to parole successes who experienced similar contextual situations without recidivating. One survey question in this domain asked the parole violator group to indicate the range of emotions that they experienced in the last 48 hours before they violated parole. Nearly three-fourths (74%) of violators indicated that some sort of dysphoric emotion (e.g., stress, depression, frustration, worry, anger, etc.) was the strongest emotion experienced during the 48 hours preceding their violation. Dysphoric emotions also tended to be cumulative, with the majority of violators indicating experiencing multiple types of dysphoric emotions immediately preceding their violation. Additionally, in the focus groups, the vast majority of violators recalled that the moments leading up to their violation were characterized by a variety of confusing and unpleasant emotions. Clearly a correlation was present between being in a dysphoric emotional state and violating parole. The deeper question that begged to be examined, however, was whether this was a causal relationship in which violations were a direct causal result of parolees experiencing unpleasant emotional states, or a function of other "moderating" variables that helped to explain this apparent direct relationship. Indeed the collected data and interview notes suggested that this relationship was really explained by three other important variables.

First, post-release expectations helped to explain the relationship between unpleasant emotions and parole violations. Many parole violators held unrealistic expectations about what life would be like outside of prison. As evidenced in other domains throughout the survey, respondents in the violator group mostly reported 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. When asked how confident they were that they would succeed on parole, the vast majority in both the violator and success group reported being mostly or completely confident that they would succeed (91% of the violators and 98% of the successes). This degree of confidence seems reasonable for the success group, given that they do indeed appear to have been successful on parole. For the violator group, however, there is incongruence between their expectations of being successful while last on parole and their eventual parole violation. It becomes more difficult for a parolee to manage negative emotional experiences when they are expecting that life outside of prison will be easy and that most things will go right for them. Those respondents who failed to anticipate the problems and negative emotions that they faced were more likely to resort to parole violating behavior.

Second, the attitudinal disposition of parolees helped to explain the relationship between negative emotional conditions and parole violations. Parole violators were more likely than parole successes to maintain anti-social attitudes. When asked to think back to what good things and bad things they saw as potentially resulting from a parole violation and how they weighed the good and the bad things, successes were significantly more likely than violators to see nothing good as potentially

resulting from a parole violation (91% vs. 42%). Violators were more likely to see a variety of positive outcomes as being a basis for violating parole, including earning respect, getting more money, releasing tension, sexual pleasure, getting high or drunk, and having a sense of power or excitement. Conversely, successes were more likely to indicate that they saw negative consequences of violating parole, including the pain of a victim, returning to prison, family/friends being hurt, a sense of guilt, getting hurt or dying, losing a job, and breaking a religious or cultural code. When violators did see negative consequences, they more often saw the negative consequences to themselves and not to others. This general anti-social disposition was evidenced in several of the previous domains examined as well. For example, as noted in the area of employment, violators more typically held negative or unconventional attitudes towards work, often refusing to take certain jobs or to work at all. From the focus groups, when asked to provide a general explanation for what led to their violation, violators most often employed various "techniques of neutralization" (see Sykes and Matza, 1957), in which they minimized the impact of their behavior or shifted the blame for their violating behavior onto others instead of accepting responsibility for their behavior. All of these indicators provided strong evidence for a general anti-social disposition among violators, in which they were more likely to 1) view violating parole as an acceptable option in their repertoire of behavior, 2) maintain a general lack of empathy for others, and 3) shift blame or deny responsibility for negative behavior. When faced with negative emotional experiences, it becomes easy to see how those with a more general anti-social disposition are more likely to respond to their negative emotions by violating parole.

The third (and most significant) variable moderating the relationship between negative emotional conditions and parole violations was poor problem-solving or coping skills. In the previously examined question where respondents were asked to indicate positive and negative consequences of a potential parole violation, they were additionally asked to weigh these consequences and indicate whether: a) the benefits outweighed the costs, b) the costs outweighed the benefits, or c) the costs and benefits were equal. The vast majority of successes (95%) saw more bad things than good things resulting from a violation. In other words, successes viewed the costs as outweighing the benefits. On the other hand, only about one-third of violators (31%) saw more bad things than good things resulting from a violation, meaning that the majority of violators either saw more benefits than costs or saw the costs and benefits being equal for violating parole. This is a strong indicator of deficient problem-solving skills among parole violators, in that violators seemed unable to fully anticipate the long-term range of consequences of their violating behavior and instead saw more immediate benefits. Violators also failed to utilize resources to aid in solving their problems. For example, 77% of violators indicated that they did not turn to anyone for help or tell anyone that they were having thoughts of violating parole prior to doing so. Instead, parole violators' behavior tended to be better characterized as impulsive reactions to immediate situations. Nearly half of parole violators indicated that they did not consider alternatives to the sequence of events that led to their parole violation and 40% said they reached a point before their violation where they felt they were not in control anymore. Recall from previously mentioned findings that violators also tended to have more difficulties with financial management skills, which is one aspect of self-management/problem-solving. Indeed, when taking both the survey results and interview findings as a whole, parole violators appeared much less prepared than successes to manage their lives and

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successfully cope with daily obstacles across many different areas of life. Statements from the focus groups most typical of parole violators' problem-solving skills included: "I thought about alternatives and consequences, but got frustrated and just ran", "I just said f' it, deal with the consequences later", and "I never really thought about how bad [my violation] would be". Many violators could identify their problems but could not come up with a strategy for addressing them. The last question always asked at the end of each focus group was "what will you do differently the next time you are released". Again, while violators were not shy about providing long explanations for why they had previously violated parole, they typically were unable to provide a cogent response to this last question about how they would handle the future. Many spoke in terms of tunnel vision, viewing no visible alternatives. Frequently among the violator groups, stories were heard of a common pathway to violating parole, where the parolee would be going through something negative or run into a problem (e.g., having inter-personal problems with another resident in a halfway house, a family member dying, not having transportation to work, etc.) and was ill equipped to cope or solve the problem.

Successes, on the other hand, appeared more likely to have the necessary problem-solving abilities and coping skills to deal with the daily issues or concerns they faced. Successes were asked on the survey if they had ever come close to violating parole and if so why and how did they respond. The majority of successes who indicated that they had come close to violating parole reported that stress was the primary reason for coming close to violating. In fact, successes clearly went through the same rough times and faced the same types of problems and emotional difficulties that violators experienced. However, the success group's most frequent responses to these difficulties that brought them close to violating parole included "thinking about the consequences" (81%), "finding positive solutions" (75%), and "thinking through it" (73%). One statement from an interview most characteristic of parole successes' outlook was the following: *I knew that I had to perform whether I'm under stress or not. I'm not going to say that it wasn't hard because it was. You know, there was many nights where I felt like I couldn't do the job...but you keep working at it and working at it...you learn to deal with situations"*.

To summarize the major findings from this domain, an initial appearance of a significant relationship between negative emotional experiences and parole violating really turned out to be explained by three other variables: 1) post-release expectations, 2) attitudinal disposition, and 3) coping/problem-solving ability. Negative emotionality alone could not meet the standard for a causal variable, as violators and successes were equally likely to go through negative emotional experiences and face significant life problems in their transition to the community. They were differentially prepared to respond to these situations, however. Parole violators were more unrealistic in their expectations, held more anti-social attitudes, and indicated more deficient coping/problem-solving skills.

Community Supervision

The fifth domain of the study results ("community supervision") examined parolees' experiences living in halfway homes and interacting with their parole officers. Parolees' experiences with their parole officers and in community corrections centers clearly emerged as important factors in helping

to shape life outside of prison and success or failure on parole. Successes were significantly more likely than violators to indicate that their parole officer helped them in getting along outside of prison (59% vs. 33%) and that their experience in a community corrections center also helped (65% vs. 43%). Additionally, successes were significantly more likely than violators to indicate having a positive relationship with their parole officer (92% vs. 59%).

From the focus group and interview findings in this domain, both successes and violators indicated some significant concerns about their community corrections center experience and their experience with their parole officer that warrant further consideration by policymakers but are not discussed here because they have been previously described in the Phase I findings of this study (see *Research In Review*: Volume 8, Number 1) and are not germane to the current discussion of factors differentiating successes from failures on parole.

SUMMARY AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

To summarize, several major themes emerged from this study's findings. First, these results provide evidence that simply finding a job and a place to live are not the major reentry concerns that they are sometimes considered. Second, these results confirm previous research indicating a link between anti-social peer groups and recidivism. Third, evidence suggests that those who would violate parole have more difficulties with basic life skills such as financial management. Fourth, previous research findings connecting AOD use and recidivism can also be generalized to predictors of parole violations, in that substance abuse relapse is more of a problem among parole violators than among parole successes. Fifth, a number of protective factors against violating parole appear to include having a positive/healthy relationship with a partner or spouse, having some sort of mentor, and having a good experience in a community corrections center or with a parole officer. Sixth, the overarching theme is that there appears to be three primary factors differentiating successes from failures on parole: 1) parole violators are more likely to maintain unrealistic post-release life expectations, 2) parole violators more often demonstrate anti-social attitudes, values, and beliefs, and 3) parole violators are more likely to indicate poor coping or problem-solving skills as characterized by impulsivity, failure to generate alternatives, failure to recognize the consequences of certain choices, and keeping problems to oneself or failing to take steps of avoidance.

These results support several policy recommendations for aiding ex-offenders in successfully transitioning back to the community under parole supervision. First, offender programming should specifically focus on cognitive-behavioral types of treatment that involve teaching coping strategies, developing relapse prevention plans, and participation in behavioral rehearsal or role-playing to practice successful problem-solving skills. What programming should not do is teach offenders to avoid negative emotional experiences at any cost. Instead, offenders should be taught pro-social behavioral reactions to negative emotional experiences. Second, reentry programming should focus more on teaching offenders financial responsibility and money management skills. Third, reentry programming should move beyond simply helping released offenders to find a job or a place to live and instead should aim to teach employability skills and instill a positive attitude towards employment. Fourth, programming should not only aim to instill a positive attitude towards

employment but should more generally aim to instill overall pro-social attitudes, including pro-social attitudes towards inter-personal relationships and community supervision. Fifth, to the extent possible, programming should encourage offenders to maintain the positive/healthy pro-social relationships in their lives (e.g., a mentor, a spouse, a counselor, etc.) and leave behind pro-criminal relationships. Sixth, given the severity and extent of substance abuse problems and the higher incidence of reported AOD use among parole violators, it is important that intensive types of substance abuse treatment programs such as therapeutic communities continue to be utilized. Seventh, it is important that in-prison programming encourage offenders to stay "rooted in reality" and maintain realistic post-release expectations. Again, role playing is a particularly useful tool for simulating such a "real world" environment and preparing offenders to have realistic expectations.

One final footnote to this study is that it is important that such a study be taken within its broader context. One aspect of this context is the broader body of literature on the "principles of effective correctional intervention" (see Andrews and Bonta, 2003). Collectively, a number of studies over the past several decades have established a core set of principles that make up effective correctional programs. These principles include: 1) target criminogenic needs, 2) systematically assess criminal risk and needs and target programs to higher risk offenders, 3) base the design/implementation of a program on a proven theoretical model, 4) use a cognitive-behavioral approach to treatment, 5) target disrupting the delinquency network, 6) provide intensive services, 7) match offender personality/learning styles with program approaches, 8) include a relapse prevention component to programming, 9) integrate with community-based services, and 10) reinforce the integrity of the services delivered. One way that this current study must be taken in context of these principles is that the findings from this study should not replace individualized needs assessments (recall that conducing systematic, individualized assessment in one of the above-mentioned principles). For example, simply finding a job may not be an overall reentry need in Pennsylvania but may nonetheless provide a significant obstacle for certain offenders. For those who are assessed as having difficulty with simply finding a job, their treatment plan should include help in this area. We should not abandon helping offenders to find a job simply because finding a job is not an overall larger problem relating to success on parole. Finding a job may indeed present a major obstacle to success on parole for some.

A second integration of this study with the "principles of effective correctional intervention" is that evidence-based approaches must be utilized in addressing the needs identified in this study. For example, evidence has generally supported a cognitive-behavioral approach to treatment as an effective approach. When attempting to address deficiencies identified in this study such as poor coping/problem-solving skills, a cognitive-behavioral approach would be a better choice than other approaches such as didactic or "talking cures" approaches.

FUTURE DIRECTION

The PA DOC has learned a great deal from the results of this study. Further, this study has progressed the field's general knowledge of parole violators and on the factors differentiating successes from failures on parole. Already the policy recommendations of this study have been

incorporated into treatment programs within the Department and will continue to be incorporated further in the future. One aspect for future examination, though, is what staff view as the primary factors differentiating successes from failures on parole. The findings of this study to date are reported from the parolees' perspectives and on how they view their pathway to either success or failure. Staff may have a very different perspective. A future special issue of *Research In Review* will report on the third phase of this study in which parole agents and community corrections center staff were surveyed and interviewed about their perspective of the factors differentiating successes from failures on parole.

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