



Effective practice: the past, present and future of probation research

Peter Raynor

Swansea University, UK

Tokyo 2017

p.raynor@swansea.ac.uk

Past and present (approximate dates):

- Until 1974: OPTIMISM about effectiveness
- 1974 – 1990: PESSIMISM
- 1990 – 2003: renewed OPTIMISM
- 2003 – now: REALISM ?

Early optimism:

Manuel Lopez-Rey, Head of UN Social Defence Section (1957): 'If I were asked which, among the modern methods for the treatment of offenders is the most promising, without hesitation I would say: Probation.'

Max Grünhut 1952:

- 'Probation is the great contribution of Britain and the USA to the treatment of offenders. Its strength is due to a combination of two things, conditional suspension of punishment, and personal care and supervision by a court welfare officer.'

I joined in 1970

Here is my warrant card from 1972:

Gloucestershire
Probation and After-Care Committee

**Probation Officer's
Certificate of Appointment**

I Certify that MR. PETER CAMPBELL
RAYNOR.

has been appointed a _____
Probation Officer in the Gloucester-
shire Probation and After-Care Service
with effect from 1ST JULY, 1972.

D. Hill
Secretary to the Gloucestershire
Probation and After-Care
Committee

Date 20.8.74



1974: the bubble bursts

- **'With few and isolated exceptions, the rehabilitative efforts that have been reported so far have had no appreciable effects on recidivism' (Martinson 1974)**
- **'Penal "treatments", as we significantly describe them, do not have any reformative effect . . . (John Croft, head of criminal justice research in UK, 1978)**

What probation research needs:

- UNDERSTANDING of activities and processes (e.g. in IMPACT did good and bad practice cancel each other out?)
- MEASUREMENT of inputs and, particularly, outputs (e.g. re-offending, re-incarceration)
- COMPARISON (the counter-factual: what happens to similar people who get different sentences? Does probation do any better?)

After 'nothing works', new realism about practice:

- 1990: Andrews et al. published a meta-analysis of the effects of different (good and bad) practices (i.e. they added *understanding* of practice to the established methods of *measurement* and *comparison*)
- Their findings were summarised as *RNR* – successful programmes target *risk* and *need* and use methods to which offenders *respond*.

Widening the research focus: from PROGRAMMES to SKILLS and IMPLEMENTATION

- Programmes based on RNR can typically reduce reconviction by 10% or more but often don't – why not?
- Studies of programme failure (e.g. the UK's Crime Reduction Programme) made researchers interested in practice skills ('core correctional practices') and in implementation.

The skills practitioners need include:

- Listening
- Understanding (empathy)
- Helping
- Being reliable and consistent
- Modelling and reinforcing appropriate thinking and behaviour
- Appropriate challenging

Here's a typical list (from Jersey Supervision Skills Study)

- Interview set-up
- Non-verbal communication
- Verbal communication
- Use of authority
- Motivational interviewing
- Pro-social modelling
- Problem solving
- Cognitive restructuring
- Overall interview structure

More skilled supervision produces better results (understand, measure, compare)

Percentage point reductions in re-offending associated with more skilled supervision/better trained supervisors:

- Trotter PSM study 24%
- Taxman PCS study 12%
- Bonta STICS study 15%
- Robinson STARR study 14%
- Jersey JS3 study 32%

Focus on Implementation:

Two of many examples:

- UK Crime Reduction Programme: a centrally-driven attempt at rapid mass implementation of CB programmes resulted in high failure rates and lack of support from practitioners.
- US HOPE probation experiment: consistent sanctions for non-compliance *combined with* effective help produced good results; replications which only implemented sanctions did not. (Remember Grünhut's definition.)
- Researchers now include focus on implementation context, organisational culture, management style etc. e.g. the Correctional Programmes Assessment Inventory (Gendreau and Andrews).

New realism: some things we now know

- Probation does not necessarily reduce imprisonment.
- For example: increasing use of community sentences in UK has been associated with reductions in fines, not reductions in imprisonment;
- Research by Marcelo Aebi et al. has shown that growth in community sentences is associated with growth in imprisonment throughout Europe (except Finland, Norway, Switzerland);
- In USA 'mass incarceration' and 'mass supervision' have grown at the same time.
- Probation *can* help to reduce imprisonment if this is a criminal justice policy which judges, professionals and politicians support.

More realism

- Staff do not easily change customary working practices to embrace new evidence-based methods unless:
- they understand the new practices and the evidence for them and believe that new practices can make their work more successful and worthwhile;
- they receive appropriate training and support, and are empowered to take responsibility for their own effectiveness in a supportive environment (e.g. a 'culture of curiosity');
- The right people with the right skills and the right support.

Beware of 'post-truth' policy-making

- Politicians can help probation; they can also hinder.
- Example: in England and Wales most of probation has been privatised because of ideological beliefs of particular politicians, without any evidence that it would produce any improvements
- And it hasn't (in fact so far it has made things worse)
- *But* we need to continue developing and presenting the evidence.

Priorities for future research?

- Continue to examine skills and implementation – *how* 'what works' works.
- Learn from ex-offenders about their pathways out of crime and how we can help to support desistance.
- Study how successful policies achieve support and legitimacy – from judges, politicians, and communities affected by crime.
- *UNDERSTAND, MEASURE, COMPARE* – *evidence is fundamental to effective probation practice.*
- Thank you for your attention!