

**BUT SOME OF THEM DON'T COME
BACK (TO PRISON!): DETERMINANTS
OF PAROLEE SUCCESS**



Drug and Alcohol Conference – Treatment, Recovery and the
Criminal Justice System

State College, Pennsylvania

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Justice Center for Research

The Pennsylvania State University

PURPOSE

1. To explore the types of events that were happening in inmates' lives while out on parole that may have contributed to their eventual failure on parole and return to prison
2. To explore psychological and experiential antecedents of recidivism (i.e., acute dynamic risk factors)
3. To inform the design of more effective programs and treatment services for inmates
4. To better prepare offenders for the types of issues that might present obstacles to their successful reentry to the community

OVERVIEW OF STUDY DESIGN

PHASE 1- PVs

- Administered surveys to all PV admissions for 2 months at 12 institutions (representing 75% of all DOC PV admissions).
- Conducted focus groups with approximately 60 PVs at 4 institutions (SCI's Houtzdale, Somerset, Muncy, Graterford).

PHASE 2 – Comparison Group

- Mailed surveys to 704 parolees who remained successfully on parole or in the community for at least 3 years.
- Conducted focus groups/interviews with parolees from the “success” group.



SOCIAL NETWORK AND LIVING ARRANGEMENTS

EMPLOYMENT AND FINANCIAL SITUATION

DRUG AND ALCOHOL USE

LIFE ON PAROLE

SOCIAL NETWORK AND LIVING ARRANGEMENTS

MEASURE	PVs	PAROLEES
Friends have been arrested **	58%	40%
Parent(s) have been arrested	22%	21%
Brothers/Sisters have been arrested	38%	38%
Extended family members have been arrested	53%	49%
BOTTOM LINE: None of friends or family ever arrested *	17%	25%

*p<.05

**p<.001

SOCIAL NETWORK AND LIVING ARRANGEMENTS

Conclusions

1. Evidence suggests that finding a place to live is not a significant reentry problem.
2. PVs are significantly more likely to maintain relationships with friends who have a criminal past. It remains unclear whether PVs are more likely to maintain pro-criminal family relationships.
3. Evidence suggests that maintaining a quality relationship/marriage is a factor contributing to success on parole.
4. The majority of successes on parole report having some sort of a mentor.
5. Positive programming effects noted for *Parenting* and *COR*.

SOCIAL NETWORK AND LIVING
ARRANGEMENTS



**EMPLOYMENT AND
FINANCIAL SITUATION**

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EMPLOYMENT/FINANCIAL SITUATION

MEASURE	PVs	PAROLEES
Legally employed?	83%	88%
Primary source of income is employment	76%	80%
Somewhat Hard/Very Hard time getting a job *	59%	46%
Job search Frequently/Always stressed me out	23%	21%
Longest time ever worked at one place **	Avg. = 3.6 yrs.	Avg. = 5.8 yrs.
Employed the entire time on parole **	48%	69%

* p<.05

**p<.001

EMPLOYMENT/FINANCIAL SITUATION

MEASURE	PVs	PAROLEES
Somewhat Satisfied/Very Satisfied with current job	N/A	80%
Monthly income of less than \$1,000 **	55%	33%
Monthly income more than \$3,000	8%	9%
Median amount of debt	\$2,000	\$5,000
Not at all/Just barely able to make ends meet	37%	29%
Had a bank account while on parole **	39%	73%

** p<.001

EMPLOYMENT AND FINANCIAL SITUATION

- Voc-Ed participants indicated prison significantly better prepared them to both find and keep a job ($p < .01$)
- *FOCUS GROUPS:*
 - o A reoccurring theme was that getting a job was not difficult (“*anybody with a driver’s license could get a job*”).
 - o Unrealistic job expectations and inflated self-esteem: Many refused to take certain low-end jobs or refused to work up from the bottom (“*I won’t work at KFC no matter what*”)

EMPLOYMENT AND FINANCIAL SITUATION

Amount Earned

- 83% earned a total monthly income of less than \$2,000:
 - 81% of those indicating **legal employment** as primary source of income earned less than \$2,000
 - 42% of those indicating **illegal activities** as primary source of income earned less than \$2,000

- 8% earned a total monthly income of over \$3,000:
 - 8% of those indicating **legal employment** as primary source of income earned over \$3,000
 - 42% of those indicating **illegal activities** as primary source of income earned over \$3,000

EMPLOYMENT AND FINANCIAL SITUATION

Conclusions

1. Evidence suggests that simply finding employment is not a significant reentry concern. There's more to the story....
2. PV's tend to hold negative employment attitudes and unrealistic job expectations. Parole successes, on the other hand, report being satisfied with their current job.
3. Keeping a job seems to be a greater issue for concern rather than finding a job.
4. Indicators suggest that financial management is more of a problem for PVs, despite the fact that parole successes report having more debt.
5. Voc-Ed programming seems to have a significantly positive impact on both finding and keeping a job.

SOCIAL NETWORK AND LIVING
ARRANGEMENTS

EMPLOYMENT AND FINANCIAL SITUATION

DRUG AND ALCOHOL USE



LIFE ON PAROLE

DRUG AND ALCOHOL USE

- PVs were significantly more likely than parole successes to report that they used alcohol or other drugs while on parole (57% vs. 22%) **
- For parole successes who reported drinking/using while on parole, what triggered D&A use?
 - o Stress- 53%
 - o Just wanted it- 24%
 - o Friends- 20%
 - o Stopped going to treatment- 12%
 - o Don't know what triggered it- 12%

DRUG AND ALCOHOL USE

- Of those who drank or used drugs:
 - o 67%- drank alcohol
 - o 43%- used crack/cocaine
 - o 27%- used marijuana
 - o 13%- used heroin
- For those from both the PV and parole success groups who reported D&A use while on parole, there was no significant difference in the average number of days per week that they reported typically drinking or using drugs (average of 3 days per week).

DRUG AND ALCOHOL USE

- Those who participated in a TC indicated that prison significantly better prepared them to deal with D&A problems, when compared to TC non-participants **
- Evaluation of PADOX TC programs found 10 percentage point reduction in recidivism; thus, evidence of effectiveness.
- Those who participated in RSAT did not indicate that they were any better prepared by prison to deal with AOD problems, when compared to RSAT non-participants.
- Evaluation of PADOX RSAT program found no evidence of effectiveness.

** Difference is statistically significant ($p < .01$)

DRUG AND ALCOHOL USE

- The average TCU/PACSI score for both PV's and parole successes is 5
- TCU/PACSI scores indicate that approximately two-thirds of both PV's and parole successes have an D&A dependence problem (no significant difference in scores between two groups)
- How well did prison prepare you to deal with AOD problems? **
 - o 13% - not at all prepared
 - o 72% - moderately to well prepared

** Parole successes indicated they were significantly better prepared than PV's (see "overview" slide)

DRUG AND ALCOHOL USE

Conclusions

1. D&A assessment scores (i.e., TCU/PACSI scores) indicate that PVs and parole successes do not differ in the severity of their D&A problems upon release from prison.
2. A significantly larger proportion of PVs than parole successes reported D&A use while on parole, indicating that D&A use is an important factor relating to success/failure on parole.
3. Evidence suggests that poor management of stress is significantly related to D&A relapse (i.e., “parole successes” who report D&A use report stress as the primary trigger).
4. Overall, in-prison D&A programming (especially TC) seems to have a significantly positive impact.

SOCIAL NETWORK AND LIVING
ARRANGEMENTS

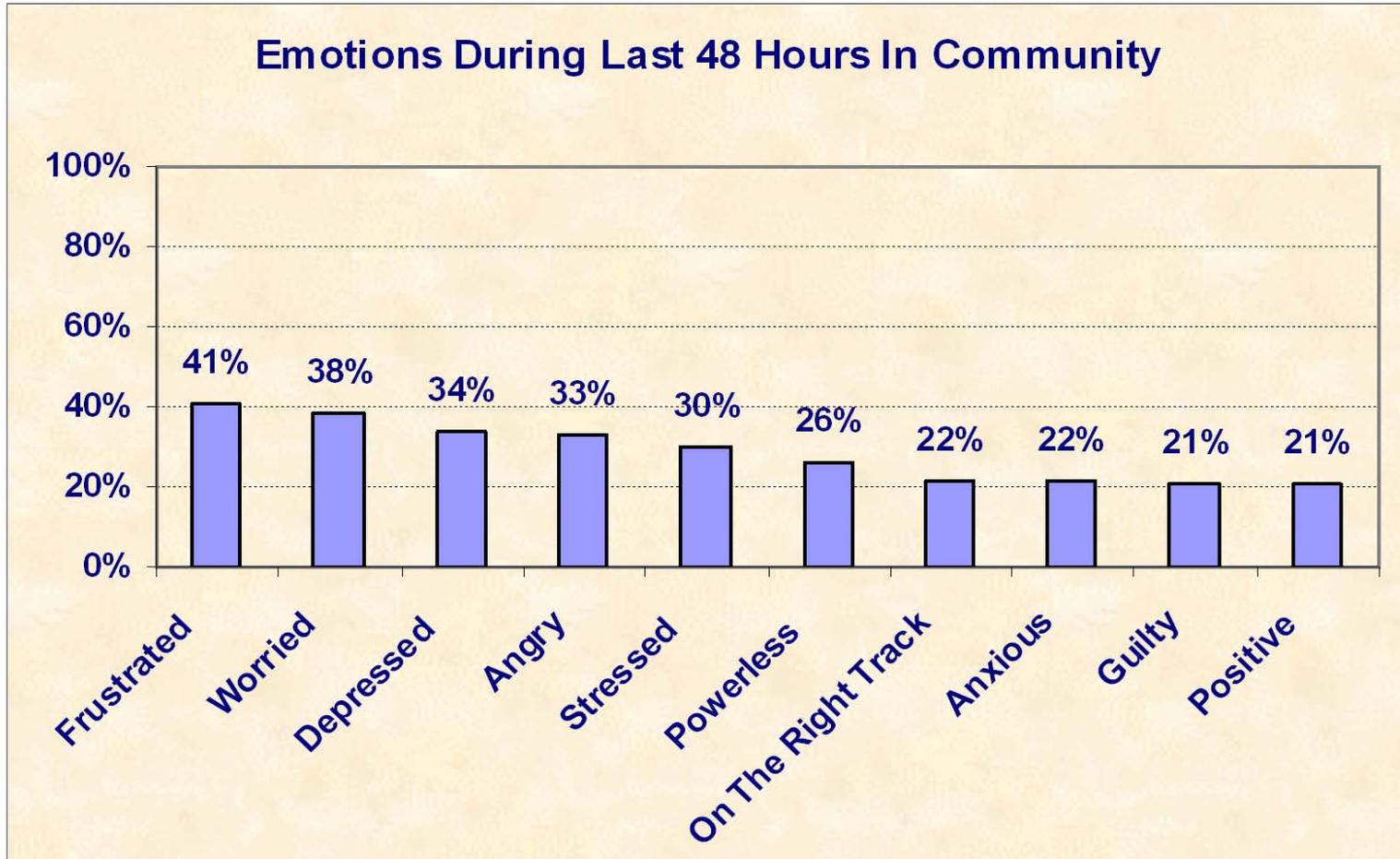
EMPLOYMENT AND FINANCIAL SITUATION

DRUG AND ALCOHOL USE



**LIFE ON
PAROLE**

LIFE ON PAROLE



NOTE: The above chart only includes PVs

LIFE ON PAROLE

- 74% of PVs said that **dysphoric** emotions were the strongest emotions experienced during the 48 hours before violating
- *FOCUS GROUPS*: The majority of PVs recalled that the moments leading up to their violation were characterized by a variety of confusing and stressful emotions

Are parole violations caused by stressful situations?

OR

Does it matter how they handle these situations?

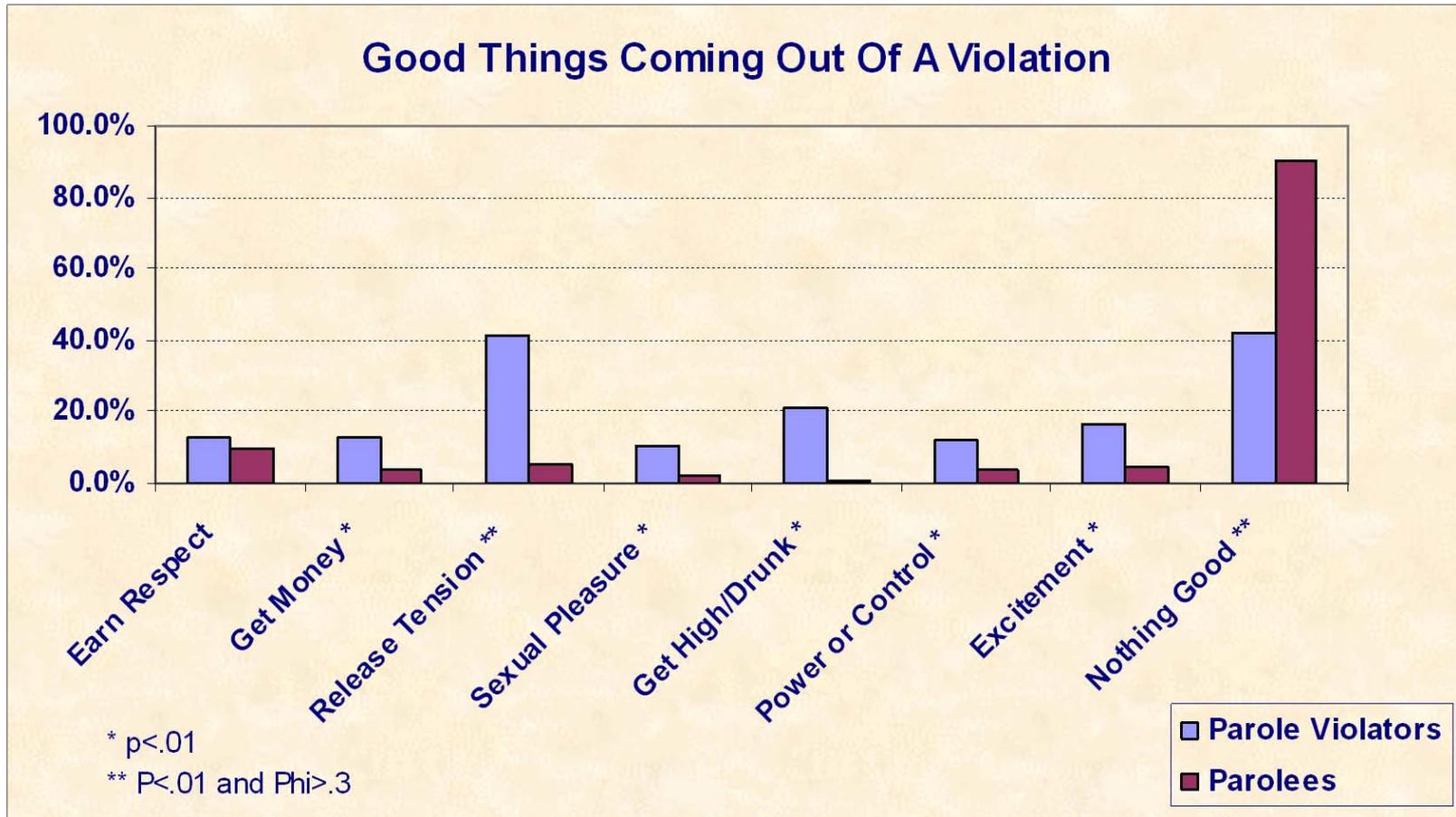
LIFE ON PAROLE

THREE CONFOUNDING VARIABLES:

1. Unrealistic Expectations
2. Anti-Social Attitudes
3. Poor Self-Management/Problem-Solving Skills

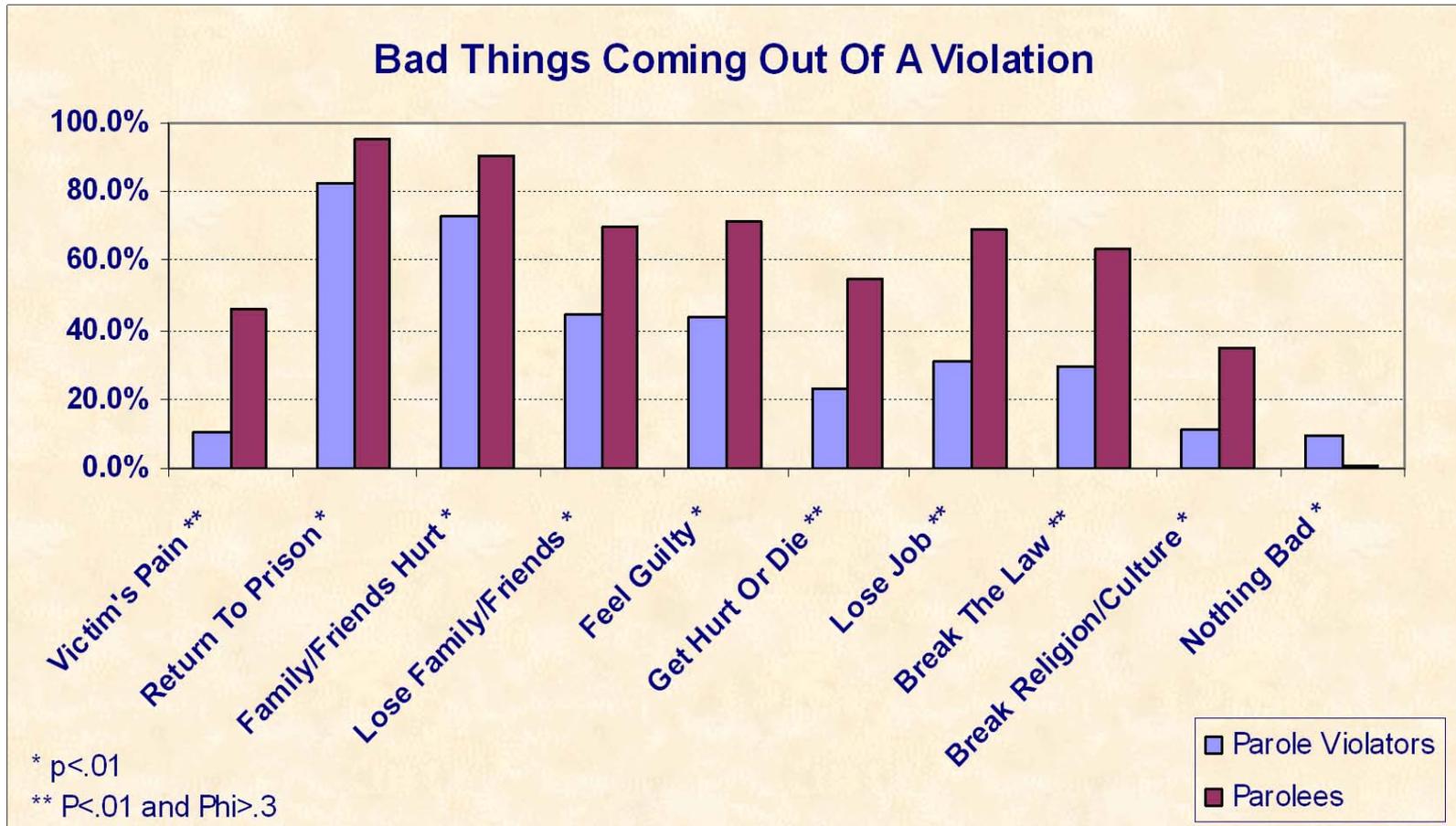
LIFE ON PAROLE

What benefits do you see resulting from a parole violation?



LIFE ON PAROLE

What bad things do you see resulting from a parole violation?



LIFE ON PAROLE

MEASURE	PVs	PAROLEES
Views more bad things than good things resulting from a violation *	31%	95%
Did not care at all about what others thought of me	25%	20%
Did not tell anyone of having thoughts of violating parole	77%	N/A
Mostly Confident/Completely Confident of succeeding on parole **	91%	98%

* p<.001

** p<.05

LIFE ON PAROLE

One-third of parole successes said that they have come close to violating their parole.

- Most frequent reasons given include:
 - o Angry- 25%
 - o Frustrated- 24%
 - o Stressed- 23%
- Least frequent reasons given include:
 - o Saw No other Way To Solve Problem- 8%
 - o Bored- 7%
 - o Needed Money- 6%

LIFE ON PAROLE

How did parole successes respond when faced with stressful events/situations that could lead to a violation?

- Most frequent responses:
 - o Think about the consequences- 81%
 - o Find positive solutions- 75%
 - o Think through it- 73%
- Least frequent responses:
 - o Get high or drunk- 2%
 - o Give up- .5%
 - o Don't know what to do- .5%

LIFE ON PAROLE

FOCUS GROUPS:

- **Over-arching theme was poor self-management, self-control, and problem-solving skills:**
 - Impulsivity: the guy in line at McDonalds who got in a fight because someone “disrespected” him
 - Many identified their problems but could not come up with a strategy for addressing them (e.g., what will you do differently the next time you are released?)
 - Many spoke in terms of tunnel vision with no visible alternatives (e.g., fleeing a center/parole supervision; being tripped up because of a family member illness/death)

LIFE ON PAROLE

FOCUS GROUPS:

- o Delaying gratification- *“why can’t I drink while on parole”*
- o *“you just say F’ it, deal with the consequences later”*
- o *“you react without thinking sometimes but know the consequences in the back of your head”*
- o *“I never really thought about how bad [my violation] would be”*
- o *“before I violated, I stopped paying attention to what I was doing”*
- o *“you think about alternatives and consequences, but you get frustrated and just run”*

LIFE ON PAROLE

FOCUS GROUPS:

- **Other themes noted to a lesser degree:**
 - o Inflated self-esteem
 - o Unrealistic post-release expectations
 - o Anti-social attitudes (especially attitudes towards authority)
 - o External blaming (especially parole agents)

**** BOTTOM LINE ****: Further exploration of survey data and focus group findings indeed reveal confounding variables, most importantly *poor self-regulation/problem-solving skills*.

LIFE ON PAROLE

Conclusions

Anti-social Attitudes:

- Parole successes are more likely than PVs to see nothing good resulting from violating parole.
- PVs are less likely than parole successes to see all categories of bad things potentially resulting from violating parole, specifically “victim’s pain”.
- Parole successes are much more likely than PVs to see more bad things than good things resulting from violating parole.

Post-Release Expectations:

- Both groups were overwhelmingly confident of succeeding on parole, despite the fact that all in the PV group did not succeed.

LIFE ON PAROLE

Conclusions

Coping/Problem-Solving:

- Parole successes were significantly more likely than PVs to accurately appraise the situation by identifying that more bad things than good things could come from violating parole.
- While one of the most frequent reasons given by parole successes for coming close to violating parole was stress, one of the least frequent reasons given was seeing no way to solve the problem. This indicates signs of positive coping skills despite difficult/stressful situations.
- Parole successes' most frequently reported responses when faced with situations that could lead to a violation indicate positive coping/problem-solving skills (e.g., *“think about the consequences, “find positive solutions”, “think through it”*).

SUMMARY OF STUDY RESULTS

1. “Big Three” factors clearly emerge as big differences between PVs and parole successes: 1) problem-solving skills, 2) anti-social attitudes, and 3) post-release expectations.
2. Results provide evidence that finding a job and a place to live are not major reentry concerns.
3. Results demonstrate a link between maintaining pro-criminal relationships (especially with pro-criminal friends) and violating parole.
4. Financial management skills/life skills emerge as important reentry concerns.
5. D&A use emerges as an important reentry issue (PVs are more likely to report AOD use while parole successes report being better prepared by prison to deal with AOD issues).

SUMMARY OF STUDY RESULTS

6. A positive/healthy relationship with a partner/spouse seems to be an important protective factor.
7. A good experience with a parole officer and/or in a CCC also seems to be a protective factor.
8. Evidence suggests positive programming effects (esp. TC and CBT programs).
9. PRIMARY THEME: PV's indicate poor self-management and coping skills when faced with life's problems- a) impulsivity, b) failure to generate alternatives, c) failure to recognize consequences, and d) keeping problems to oneself or failing to take steps of avoidance.

INDIVIDUAL VS. STRUCTURAL FACTORS?

When I compared the effective programs to the ineffective programs I noticed an interesting difference. Almost all of the effective programs focused on individual-level change. In contrast, the ineffective programs frequently focused on developing opportunities. For example, the cognitive skills programs emphasize individual-level changes in thinking, reasoning, empathy, and problem solving. In contrast, life skills and work programs, examples of ineffective programs, focus on giving the offenders opportunities in the community. Based on these observations, I propose that effective programs must focus on changing the individual. This change is required before the person will be able to take advantage of opportunities in the environment.

Doris Layton MacKenzie. 2006. *What Works in Corrections*. New York: Cambridge University Press. p.335.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

1. Programming should specifically focus on cognitive-behavioral treatment that involves **coping strategies, behavior rehearsal, and relapse prevention.**
2. Programming **should not** focus on eliminating negative emotional experiences but instead **should** focus on reinforcing pro-social behavioral reactions to negative emotional experiences.
3. Reentry programming should focus more attention on teaching PV's financial responsibility and money management skills.
4. Reentry programming should move beyond simply helping released offenders to find a job or a place to live (structural factors).

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

5. Programming should aim to teach and instill pro-social attitudes within offenders, particularly towards employment, authority, and social relationships.
6. To the extent possible, programming should encourage offenders to maintain positive/healthy social relationships (e.g., mentor, wife, etc.) and leave behind pro-criminal social relationships.
7. Given the severity and extent of D&A problems and the higher incidence of reported D&A use among PVs, it is important to continue reinforcing intensive D&A treatment programs.
8. Programming should encourage PV's to stay "rooted in reality" and maintain realistic post-release expectations.

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See: Bucklen, Kristofer B. and Gary Zajac. 2009. "But Some of Them Don't Come Back (To Prison!): Resource Deprivation and Thinking Errors as Determinants of Parole Success and Failure." *The Prison Journal*, 89(3), 239-264.