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Agents' Perceptions of What Makes Offenders Successful in Intensive Supervised Release

Submitted by Sarah Becker
May, 2012

MSW Clinical Research Paper

The Clinical Research Project is a graduation requirement for MSW students at St. Catherine University/University of St. Thomas School of Social Work in St. Paul, Minnesota and is conducted within a nine-month time frame to demonstrate facility with basic social research methods. Students must independently conceptualize a research problem, formulate a research design that is approved by a research committee and the university Institutional Review Board, implement the project, and publicly present their findings. This project is neither a Master's thesis nor a dissertation.

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Abstract

The current study addresses what makes an offender successful in the Intensive Supervised Release program (ISR) by looking at agents' perceptions based on past success and failures and focusing on counseling strategies that are implemented in this correctional field. The participants of this study are made up of ten ISR agents between age 35 and 50 years old, consisting of two female and eight male agents. This study is qualitative in nature and the data obtained was assessed by using a semi-standardized interview. Each interview was transcribed in order to identify salient themes regarding agents' perceptions of what makes an offender successful in the ISR program. The offender's internal motivation for success was identified as the biggest indicator for success. The implications of this study indicate that further training regarding working with a client with mental illness may be beneficial for the agents, as well as developing interventions that help the offender achieve motivation for success.

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Over the years, many changes have occurred within the prison structure. Instead of prisoners completing their sentences until a parole board grants them release, prisoners are released into the community under the watchful eye of probation. Before the 1990's, both parole and probation revolved around counseling offenders during their release. With more offenders being released into the community and public safety a top priority, offenders are now being managed based on their level of risk, and counseling is less prevalent while surveillance techniques are more frequently utilized (Seiter, 2002). As more prisons are filled to the maximum capacity, more offenders are receiving sentences of probation in the community (Gray, Fields, & Maxwell, 2001). This appears to be an economical strategy, but research indicates that revoked offenders (offenders sent back to prison for violating their probation terms), has contributed to overcrowding prisons (Wodahl, Garland, Culhane, & McCarty, 2011). With crime on the rise, it is imperative that research reflects deficits in the system and positively reinforces evidence-based practices that aid in decreasing recidivism.

The Minnesota Department of Corrections is continuously broadening its scope to ensure that offenders are receiving the best possible services to increase the chances of successful reentry into the community. Predicting probation rates of success or failure provide important insight to program needs. Predicting rates of success and failure also plays a role in decision making, which can lead to safer and more effective use of community supervision (Gray et al., 2001).

Past research has identified factors that contribute to an offender's success in probation programs, intensive supervised parole programs and intensive community parole programs. Each state seems to have its own rules and regulations as to what each

program entails for the offender upon release. This research will focus specifically on Minnesota's Intensive Supervised Release Program (ISR). Minnesota's Intensive Supervised Release program was established in 1990 and requires that offender's who are classified as high-risk are identified while they are in prison and are placed on ISR when they leave prison (Minnesota Department of Corrections, 2011). The offender's classified as high-risk are to remain on ISR until they successfully complete the program or their sentence expires. Currently little research focuses directly on the ISR program. This study hopes to contribute to the field of corrections and social work due to its analysis of Minnesota's criminal justice system's current approach by identifying key social work values that may contribute to the reduction of recidivism. This study hopes to uncover specific information that can aid in helping an offender become a productive member of society following release from prison.

This study hypothesizes that the therapeutic approach chosen by the agent assigned to the offender will have a significant impact on the offender's success in the program. Based on the literature studied, it is predicted that utilizing a combination of counseling strategies and self-identification of risk factors that led to prior offenses will aid the offender in having more success in the ISR program than using punitive or surveillance strategies alone. The current study will attempt to address factors that make an offender successful in the ISR program in Minnesota. Previous research has uncovered many factors that contribute to an offender's success in a variety of different programs throughout the United States. This study will be focusing directly on the ISR agents' perceptions of what makes an offender successful in the program and explore different approaches agents use on a daily basis that influence their individual

perceptions. Due to lack of research in this area, the review of the literature is focused on many different kinds of community probation and will not be entirely focused on Intensive Supervised Release.

Literature Review

Intensive Supervised Release Overview

Our criminal justice system is unique in that rules and mandates vary throughout the United States. Each state has the ability to create and implement its own rules as to how offenders will be monitored. The state of Minnesota can be considered even more unique than other states, as Minnesota does not participate in traditional parole. When a prisoner is sentenced in traditional parole, they are given an indeterminate sentence by a judge. A judge is responsible for sentencing an offender a minimum and maximum stay and it is left up to a parole board to decide if the offender is ready to be released into the community. If the offender is released before the offender's maximum sentence is completed, it is then up to the parole agency to supervise the offender for the remainder of the offender's sentence (Travis and Lawrence, 2002). As times have changed, a parole board is now only responsible for the release of one out of every four prisoners that are released in the United States (Travis and Lawrence, 2002). Throughout the nation, many states have changed how they conduct parole and four out of five released prisoners are placed on some form of community supervision (Travis and Lawrence, 2002). Minnesota statutes mandate that an offender is sentenced and expected to serve two-thirds of his or her sentence within the prison system. The remaining one third of the sentence will then be served in the community. Some may argue that serving time out in the community is not a "just" form of punishment. However, there are offenders who choose to waive their rights to serving their one third in the community and choose to expire their sentence within the prison (Ostermann, 2011). This could be because the rules and regulations of ISR are too stressful for the offender.

In the past, when an offender was released in the state of Minnesota, they were traditionally put on Supervised Release (SR). Prior to 1990, supervision was of a very different nature. During the year of 1990, Minnesota statute 244.05 was passed which directed the Department of Corrections to establish Intensive Supervised Release (ISR). This statute was set forth to establish procedure for the supervision of high-risk-offenders under the program titled, Intensive Supervised Release (Minnesota Department of Corrections, 2011). According to this statute, offenders who were considered “high-risk” were automatically put on Intensive Supervised Release. While offenders are incarcerated they are given a LSI-R assessment (Level of Service Inventory Revised) which is a 54 item questionnaire assessing areas of risk in the offender’s life. If the offender scores a 21 or above, the offender is classified as high-risk and mandated to be on ISR. There are also certain offenses that require the offender to automatically be placed on ISR. Some of these offenses include sex offenses, murder, severe assaults, crimes involving a weapon and felony DWI (Minnesota Department of Corrections, 2010). Statute 244.05 was unique to the state of Minnesota; it was designed to deal exclusively with offenders with prison sentences and included those entering and exiting the prison (Deschenes, Petersilia, & Turner, 1995).

ISR was established to minimize the prison population and to save the state of Minnesota money. It was also established to work towards punishing an offender in a matter that did not trivialize the offender’s crimes (Deschenes et al., 1995). Knollenberg (2008) states that supervised release was designed as a separate sentence in addition to the sentence of imprisonment due to the abolition of Parole by the federal justice system, and is not to be considered an early release from prison. The ultimate goal of ISR is to

keep the community safe. Essentially, the offender is under the same strict adherence to rules that he or she was under while serving his or her sentence in the prison. ISR strives to facilitate employment for the offender and requires the offender to work towards payment of restitution to the victims of their crime (Deschenes et al., 1995). When an offender is under ISR, they are under community surveillance, compliance with any additional restrictions or conditions set forth by the agent, mandatory employment search, subjection to random drug and alcohol testing, and liability for the cost of their day to day supervision (Deschenes et al., 1995).

All ISR offenders are required to remain sober while they are in the program. By registering any units of use on a Breathalyzer, indicating alcohol in the system, the offender will be arrested and served a violation, which could result in restructuring of his or her phase and/or revocation back to prison. ISR envisions that intervening on low-level violations is important in the prevention of the occurrence of higher-level violations. Increased supervision allows ISR agents to intervene before offenders commit new offenses by enforcing strict release conditions and confronting any negative behaviors displayed by the offenders during their time of supervision. (Minnesota Department of Corrections, 2010).

Although Intensive Supervised Release was invented as a means to save the state capital, an offender on ISR costs the state or county approximately \$20 per day. The offender is required to pay between \$13-19 per day if they require GPS monitoring. On average, an offender in jail costs the state \$82 a day. The logistics of ISR appear to be economical, if an offender is successful in the ISR program. To promote community and agent safety, agents work in teams in order to guarantee random visits 24 hours a day

seven days a week to ensure the most intense supervision for the offender. This information was gathered from the Minnesota Department of corrections, (2010).

When ISR first began, the qualifications for the program were quite strict. From 1991-1994, ISR cases gradually rose from 119 cases to 796 cases (Deschenes et al., 1995). This was due to the qualification criteria changing for an offender to begin ISR, allowing for more offenders to qualify (Deschenes et al., 1995). Due to different criteria and the advent of community notifications, ISR caseloads are now dominated by level 3 (highest public risk) sex offenders. Level 3 sex offenders are required to be on ISR for ten years after they are released from prison instead of other offenders who are mandated to only be on ISR for one year following release (Minnesota Department of Corrections, 2000). An End of Confinement Review Committee (ECRC) is established at each Minnesota prison or treatment facility to determine the risk level of each predatory offender (Minnesota Department of Corrections, 2012). The ECRC determines risk based on the seriousness of the offense, the offender's offense history, the offender's characteristics and the availability of community support to the offender (Minnesota Department of Corrections, 2012).

The process of ISR is very complex to ensure the safety of the community and the offender's success. There are generally four phases of ISR for the offender. Level 3 sex offenders complete six phases of ISR. When an offender is on Phase One of ISR, they are to remain on house arrest and must stay at their approved residence during all hours, unless permission has been granted by their agent to go somewhere else, such as searching for employment, purchasing necessities or going to church services on Sunday. When an offender is on Phase One, they are required to be seen by their agent four times

per week and adhere to at least one random drug and alcohol test (Deschenes et al., 1995). Phase One lasts for approximately 4 months. Phase Two generally lasts four months and requires that the agent see the offender twice a week. The offender must also be subjected to drug and alcohol testing at a minimum of twice a month. Phase Three consists of about two months. This phase requires the agents to see the offender once a week with the offender remaining on modified house arrest. Modified house arrest allows the offender the privilege of leaving their place of residence for an approved pass. Phase Four lasts for generally 2 months or the duration of the offender's sentence. Phase Four requires two meetings a month and a set curfew for the offender (Deschenes et al., 1995). These phases are followed very closely with very little deviation from the prescribed limits of the release. If an offender violates the conditions of his or her phase, the offender is likely to either be restructured (returned to a higher supervisory phase) or at worst revoked (sent back to prison) (Deschenes et al., 1995).

Violations

Violations are a major setback in the offender's supervision. Violations are issued anytime the offender is not compliant with their written regulations. Common violations include unaccountability, use of drugs or alcohol and disobeying an agent's direct order. Under the rules and regulations of ISR, anytime the offender breaks a condition they may be served with a violation. When the offender leaves the prison environment and begins the first day of community supervision, the offender is given a list of conditions that they must abide by. Expectations of supervision are verbally discussed with the offender. Additionally, the offender is required to sign a document

verifying understanding of the terms of his or her supervision. If the offender should violate one of these conditions, they are served with a technical violation. If the offender should go out and commit a new crime, the offender is arrested and tried for the new crime that they committed. When the offender commits a new crime, it is referred to as recidivating.

When looking at violations of probationers, Gray et al. (2001) found that of the sample selected, 34% received a technical violation for failure to report their location and 22% received a technical violation for failing a Breathalyzer or a urine analysis. This finding demonstrated that 56% out of 64% of the people on ISR were revoked due to technical violations, which were not related to their original crime but a violation of their probationary contract (Gray et al., 2001). Legislation backing up the notions of ISR may advocate that failing to be accountable for residency location and use of chemicals are considered a risk to society, as these two variables tend to lead to recidivism.

Wodahl et al. (2011) found that as the number of high risk violations increased, the odds of success in intensive supervised parole declined. When an offender is issued a technical violation, they are either restructured by moving to higher intensity of supervision or subjected to revocation. If the offender receives the same violation in close proximity, then the option of revocation (returning to prison) will most likely be decided. When looking at a sample consisting of 124 Intensive Community Supervision (ICS) and 176 ISR offenders, Deschenes et al. (1995) found that offenders who received technical violations were more likely to be detained in jail and restructured to higher intensities of supervision than revoked back to prison.

In the Wodhal et al. (2011) sample, 64% of the sample were revoked and of the 64% revoked only 8% were revoked due to new criminal charges. This trend has been noted in numerous other research studies. In a 1997 study conducted to find the differences between success and failures in offenders on furlough in Vermont, it was found that most technical violations issued to offenders were initiated by agents during routine surveillance (Ryan, 1997). Over 800 offenders participated in this study and out of the entire sample only 14 offenders were arrested for committing new crimes (Ryan, 1997). However, of that sample 34% were revoked. The second largest violation was due to the offender being unaccountable and not being where the offender was supposed to be, making up 25% of the revoked sample (Ryan, 1997). Ryan (1997) found that 59% of the study's sampled offenders were charged with not being where they were supposed to be or with substance use. These violations occurred due to offender behavior contrary to their supervision contract as observed by their ISR agent. Jones and Sims (1997) looked at the success and failure rates of 2,850 offenders on supervision and found that of the 57% who failed supervision and were sent back to prison, 26% were revoked due to technical violations.

This trend appears to apply to an array of different convictions. In a 2006 study solely on sex offenders it was found that the majority of these offenders were revoked due to technical violations (Johnson, 2006). While focusing research on the mentally ill population, Tucker, Cosio and Mechreki (2003) found that inmates diagnosed as mentally ill have even higher counts of technical violations, likely reflecting symptomatic behaviors related to their mental illness diagnosis rather than criminal activity. This

research clearly indicates that many of these offenders are returning to prison due to violating the terms of their supervision rather than recidivating.

Recidivism

For the purpose of this research, recidivism can be defined as an offender committing a new crime while on ISR. Looking at factors of recidivism and revocations on supervision provides salient information that develops the premise of evidence-based practice. Research has shown that the age of the offender, past substance abuse and types of crimes committed have been relevant factors in recidivism. In a study of 237 male and female substance dependent probationers, Bateman, Hanlon, Nurco and O'Grady (1998) found that during a one-year duration of supervision, 40% of the study participants were charged with a drug related crime. Sixty percent of those charged with the crime admitted to chemical intoxication when committing their most recent offence. Of the entire sample, 50% of the population experienced a parole violation, arrest or re-incarceration during the year analyzed (Batemen et al, 1998).

Lurigio, Olson, and Snowden (2009) looked at offender characteristics and criminal histories of 3,400 probationers and found that of the 45% of the sample rearrested, age, drug abuse history, unemployment and previous convictions were correlated with arrests while on probation. Probationers with a history of substance abuse were 68% more likely to be rearrested and those who were unemployed were 47% more at risk for re-arrest than those employed (Lurigio et al., 2009). Similar to the previous study, Ryan (1997) indicated that drug use by the offender seems to be strongly associated with success or failure on probation. In this study, 41% of the sample who

were identified as “serious drug abusers” were revoked from probation, where as only 26% of offenders with no history of drug use were revoked (Ryan, 1997). In relation, other research (Jones and Sims, 1997) suggests that offenders with no history of substance abuse and being older than the age of 24 were less likely to be rearrested on probation. Ryan’s (1997) research demonstrates a positive correlation between young age and rate of recidivism or revocation within the sample studied. Gray et al. (2001) concluded that of the offenders who were rearrested or revoked on probation, 30% did so within the first 100 days of their supervisory period.

Previous research has indicated that steady employment and type of offense are also factors in recidivism. Based on the research of Bateman, et al. (1998), offenders who had fewer convictions and longer-term employment during the two years analyzed were more successful in the probation program. In reference to revocations, Ryan’s (1997) research suggests that offenders convicted of property felonies or misdemeanor violence were more apt to be revoked than offenders with differing offenses. Younger offenders with misdemeanor assault or property crime convictions were also more likely to be revoked (Ryan, 1997). Other research has found a positive correlation between the length of a sentence term increasing and the probability of failing on probation increasing (Jones and Sims, 1997).

Previous revocations on probation can also be looked at as a predictive factor of recidivism. Individuals, who had experienced a revocation or had committed a higher number of violations under previous supervision, were less likely to complete the intensive supervised parole program than the offenders who had not experienced a previous revocation while on intensive supervised parole (Wodahl, et. al., 2011).

Community Supports

Community supports have been recognized as beneficial to the offender's success in many research studies, which eventually led to the idea of releasing the offender into the community to serve the last two-thirds of his or her sentence. Prior to these laws being passed, offenders were released straight out of prison back into the community with little to no community supports in place. With the efforts of Supervised Release and Intensive Supervised Release, these offenders have gradually been exposed to the community and introduced to many different programs that can reduce their risk of recidivism. Rhine (2002) indicates that the most successful supervision devotes a significant amount of time connecting the offender with mentors and adults in the neighborhood where the probationer lives and seeks to ensure that the offender has pro-social peers.

Taxman (2002) found that family, peers and community might have a more powerful effect on the offender than law enforcement and the judicial system. Offenders that had been living with a minor child were 39% less likely to be rearrested while serving their probationary sentence (Lurigio et. al., 2009). Community seems to be so crucial that, Jones and Sims (1997) suggested that having negative friends might be looked at as a higher predictor of being unsuccessful in supervision rather than the number of past convictions. Although there was only a slight difference between the two, the research suggests that an offender's support system can have potentially positive or negative effects on the offender. Other positive factors influencing a more positive outcome include stable housing (which was measured by the number of address changes,

with fewer address changes equating more stable housing), a higher level of education, and some financial stability, decreases the odds of failing probation, more so than being married, having stable employment and being motivated to change (Jones & Sims, 1997).

The “broken windows” model of criminal justice is a term for connecting probationers and agents in a partnership to work with and contribute towards the quality of community life (Rhine, 2002). By moving the agents out onto the street, they are able to interact with offenders in a more efficient manner and develop a more informed understanding of the environment that the offender resides in, which is pertinent to the very importance of social work (Rhine, 2002). When the offender is introduced to the community and functions of the community, the stigmatization of just leaving prison may have dissipating effects.

Relationship with Agent

Prior research has found that the relationship between the offender and the agent can have a significant impact on how successful the offender is in the program. It has been indicated that the offender changing his or her behavior begins with the relationship that is built between the supervisor and the offender (Taxman, 2002). This relationship has a number of components that includes the probationary style the agent embodies, the interventions and tools that the agent uses and the amount of offender cooperation in regards to his or her programming. Rapport plays a crucial role in ISR and research suggests that building rapport with the offender will provide better outcomes versus simply just exchanging information with the offender (Taxman, 2002).

Throughout the last 30 years, there has been a shift in the role the agent plays in the offender's life. This shift has included moving from the rehabilitative role and pushing towards punishment and offense focused treatment (Barry, 2000). Research has found that there are two types of supervision style: casework style and surveillance style (Seiter, 2002). These two styles also have been referred to as reactive when the agent functions as a monitor, and proactive when the agent functions as a mentor (Barry, 2000). These styles have also been referred to as deterrent-based strategies and behavioral strategies (Wodahl et. al., 2011). Deterrent-based strategies align with surveillance and monitor strategies and focus exclusively on the use of punishment to increase compliance (Wodahl, et al., 2011). Behavioral strategies align with casework style and mentor strategies and use more of a comprehensive approach to promote offender compliance. This strategy is based upon operant learning theory, which focuses on the idea that consequences and rewards shape the offenders behavior and promote change. (Wodahl,et al., 2011).

Wodahl, et al. (2011) conducted a study on 283 probationers in Intensive Supervised Parole and found that supervision styles that included both sanctions for non-compliant behavior and rewards for conforming behaviors were most effective for improving supervision outcomes. Offenders who received a greater amount of punishments versus incentives had a low likelihood of completing probation (Wodahl, et al., 2011). In relation, individuals who had a 4:1 reward to punishment ratio were 71% likely to complete the probationary program in comparison to those with a 1:4 rewards to punishments ratio were only 11% likely to complete the program (Wodahl et al., 2011). Taxman (2002) inferred that the enforcer role is less successful, because it does not focus

on the underlying criminogenic risk and need factors of the offender. Each style, like everything else, comes with its pros and cons. In an effort to protect public safety, most probation programs are geared toward a more punitive style, a zero tolerance policy, which may or may not work for every offender. This is a key question that will be explored later in this research.

In an effort to provide a clearer picture of what relationship style works best for each offender, Barry (2000) interviewed offenders currently involved in supervision. After interviewing 155 cases, Barry, (2000) found that in general, an offender described having a “good relationship” with an agent as a key component in avoiding recidivism. The offenders perceived a “good relationship” as one built on trust, friendship, openness, caring and an easy-going manner. The offenders perceived a difficult relationship as an authoritarian, judgmental, rigid and distant approach by the agent. Twenty-six percent reported that the relationship between their supervisors would not affect their success or failure (Barry, 2000).

In a survey of 114 parole officers, key factors were identified as the most important aspect of improving offenders’ success rates (Sietzer, 2002). Of this sample, 33% identified supervision of the offender, 28% said assessing needs and directing the offender to appropriate community agencies, 20% identified helping the offender maintain employment and 13% identified holding the offender accountable (Sietzer, 2002). Interestingly, some of these findings were consistent with research exploring how offenders would respond if they were probation officers. The research indicates they would spend their efforts in finding out what the probationers’ problems were and get to the root of why the probationer was offending (Barry, 2000). These findings line up with

the 28% of the supervisors that said assessing needs was important. Although most agencies were incorporating the punitive type, zero-tolerance policies, the officers interviewed, identified that the casework side of supervision is most successful (Sietzer, 2002).

Sometimes relationships between the offender and the agent get even more complex when the offender has special needs. Some states incorporate specialty services for offenders diagnosed with mental illness, but in most cases those offenders diagnosed with mental illness are not differentiated from offenders not diagnosed with mental illness. Research about differences in supervision styles between specialty agents (agents with training in mental illness) and traditional agents has yielded interesting results. Results of interviewing 87 supervising officers indicate that traditional and specialty officers spend about the same amount of time with their clients, but the specialty officers tend to attend treatment team meetings (Louden, Skeen, Camp & Christensen, 2008). These specialty officers reported spending more time in treatment team meetings, discussing the offender's needs with case managers and others involved in the offender's treatment (Louden et al., 2008). These meetings can present officers with significant time to build rapport and provides a sense of investment in the offender's success.

Rapport is essential. It is not likely probationary meetings will impact the offender's behavior unless the agent's contact with offenders consist of more than basic check-ins (Taxman, 2002). In order for change to occur, a common trust must be a component of the relationship between offender and probation officer. Specialty officers spent more time in supervising offenders diagnosed as mentally ill, whereas traditional

officers tended to use more punitive sanctions to reprimand non-compliant behaviors. Most agencies lack formal policies on an officer's supervision of the persistently mentally ill (Louden et al. 2008). Taking a closer look at how agencies respond to offenders diagnosed as mentally ill warrants further research.

Interventions

The interventions employed by the agencies and agents can have significant impact on the offender and is as important as the relationship built between the offender and the agent. The perception and use of risk assessment tools has evolved over time (Van Benschoten, 2008). ISR uses the Level of Service Inventory-Revised (LSI-R) assessment to gauge the risk and needs of an offender. The LSI-R is an assessment that is composed of 54 questions which aims to identify the offender's risk of recidivism by uncovering problem areas in the offender's life (Rhode Island Department of Corrections, 2011). There are ten domains of the LSI-R, which include: Criminal history, education/employment, financial, family/marital, accommodation, leisure/recreation, companions, alcohol/drug problem, emotional/personal and attitudes and orientation (Rhode Island Department of Corrections, 2011). The LSI-R assessment is a tool that not only indicates the offender's risk areas, but can also aid in case planning after certain risk areas are identified. Years ago, agents relied on intuition to assess the level of risk the offender was to society. The risk principle, or the intensity of an offender's supervision and treatment must be proportional to his or her level of risk, is an effective method for classifying offenders. According to this principle, offenders with high risks of recidivism

must be closely supervised and offenders identified as displaying low risk of recidivism should receive minimal supervision. (Van Benschoten, 2008).

As research on effective interventions evolves, more and more evidence indicates the effectiveness of cognitive behavioral strategies when supervising offenders. A cognitive behavioral therapist (CBT) believes an individual's personality is formed by the central values that develop early on in this individual's life as a result of factors in their environment (Hansen, 2008). CBT interventions were tested in a study when 43 maximum-security inmates were put in the program called "The Phoenix Project" (Tucker, etc. etc., 2003). The program was 135 days long and worked to instill cognitive behavioral skills in the inmates serving in maximum security. CBT has very strict principles and requires homework and dedication by the individual. By the end of the study, 16 participants graduated and were let back into the general population, 11 returned to traditional segregation and 5 were released from prison. Eleven of the participants remained with the program (Tucker et al. 2003). When CBT programs are implemented as recommended, they have been shown to reduce recidivism (Hanson, 2008). Upon completion of the Phoenix Project, inmates were asked about their personal reactions about the interventions. The inmates reported increased knowledge regarding CBT skills from the Phoenix Project and a more productive adjustment to society (Tucker et al, 2003).

To date, there are many different CBT programs that offenders are participating in across the nation. Although many programs offer different important components of therapy to offenders, two CBT based programs stand out as being more effective in reducing recidivism (Hansen, 2008). Through a meta-analysis study, it was determined

that Moral Reaction Therapy (MRT) and Reasoning and Rehabilitation (R &R) have been the most successful CBT programs for offenders (Hansen, 2008). Moral Reaction Therapy works to enhance the social, moral, and behavioral deficits the offender embodies. Reasoning and Rehabilitation believes that offenders suffer from cognitive social deficits. Reasoning and Rehabilitation strives to change the impulsive, illogical, egocentric and rigid thinking of offenders by helping offenders apply these cognitive-behavioral skills to their everyday lives (Hansen, 2008).

There are many different treatment programs to which the offender can be introduced, recommended or required to attend, depending on the crime committed. Whatever treatment the offender is engaging in, it is imperative that the treatment provided is addressing the psychosocial needs of the offender (Taxman, 2002). In general, programs 90 days or longer in duration have better programmatic outcomes and decrease the offender's odds of recidivism (Taxman, 2002). Some prisons are incorporating interventions inside the prison walls to help the offender gradually re-enter the community. Depending on the crime committed, some offenders are required to discharge to residential programs. Offenders that were transferred to residential programs were more successful on supervised release than those who were simply transferred independently out into the community (Lowenncamp, Latessa, & Holsinger, 2004). When looking at recidivism rates of offenders in residential and non-residential treatments, both populations recidivated at equal rates, unless offenders who were high-risk were identified and offered more treatment services for a longer duration (Lowenncamp, Latessa, & Holsinger, 2004).

Through supervised release, offenders are required to actively seek employment. They are allotted scheduled time away from their homes to seek employment, even while undergoing house arrest. Employment has been identified as a successful intervention that provides structure and a sense of purpose for the offender. Securing employment at the end of one's supervision is significantly correlated with the offender's success and appears to impact the offender more so than securing employment at the beginning of the offender's term (Johnson, 2006). Competitive employment can be difficult to secure due to an offender's criminal records and the stigma related to having a criminal history. Education is one aspect that can help mitigate this and is encouraged within the prison walls. Education is correlated with reduced criminal behavior and increases the offender's chance of finding a job after they are released from prison (Johnson, 2006).

Conceptual Framework

The current study is based on the applied systems theory. The field of corrections in itself encompasses many different systems. The offender violates a societal system, goes on trial through a judicial system, is then sent to a prison system and then released to the system of community supervision. The applied systems theory is closely related with the ecological theory, in that a person's environment has a significant impact on the person. The applied systems theory takes the ecological theory just one step further by assessing how each system has an impact on the client (Forte, 2007). According to the applied systems theory, societies and other social systems are made up of many different parts that have the ability to work well with one another (Forte, 2007). When an offender first enters the corrections system, it can be assumed that something in the offender's personal system was not working well. While the offender serves his or her time in prison, it is the offender's time to reflect on his or her crime. When the offender is released from prison, it becomes the social worker's time to reflect on what may have caused the dysfunction in the offender's life that led the offender to commit the offense. In essence, the social worker acts as a system to help guide the offender to conform to society's system rules and norms in an effort to keep the offender from recidivating. The social worker's role is to work collaboratively with the offender to identify where dysfunctions may exist and help the offender correct or better manage these dysfunctions.

According to the systems theory, there are lower-level systems and higher-level systems. The lower-level systems are controlled by the higher-level systems and must conform to the higher-level systems in order to survive (Forte, 2007). In the current study, the offender on ISR is the lower-level system and the ISR agent is the higher-level

system, which guides the lower-level system to conform to societal standards. The applied systems theory believes that a society can achieve order through integration and socialization (Forte, 2007). The ISR program already embodies this belief by having the offender gradually ease back into society. The ISR agent works with the offender to help the offender establish a system of employment, a system of healthy relationships, and a community system. The ISR agent attempts to control which systems the offender can relate to and recognizes areas of risk for the offender that would be beneficial to avoid. The regulations placed on the offender are set forth for the purpose of crime being a spiraling event. For example if an offender violates one of the minor conditions, this may lead to the offender actually committing a new crime. There are actions that led the offender to the offense. ISR works not to stop the offense, but to stop the actions before the offense even occurs. "A client's troubles are associated with an intricate network of direct and indirect influences rather than with a single causal agent (Forte, 2007, p. 180)." For example, utilizing the spiraling event hypothesis, the offender may choose to drink alcohol one day and with resulting lowered inhibitions, choose to violate his or her terms of conditions once again by leaving the property. Perhaps after the offender leaves the property, the offender gets into an altercation or decides to commit a crime. It is the agent's goal to catch the offender at the home, after alcohol was first consumed, to prevent any further violations or crime from happening. Each system dysfunction plays a role in the system's whole (Forte, 2007).

This research examines the relationship between the offenders system and the ISR system by exploring the agent's relationship with the offender and the impact the relationship has on the offender. It further examines whether certain interventions are

more effective than other interventions based on the perspectives of ISR agents. The current research will look at how the offender's mental state plays a role in success or failure on ISR and what interventions can help or hinder this. According to applied systems theory, social systems can use feedback to change directions by recognizing the need to reevaluate and then focus on how to better the system (Forte, 2007). This research strives to provide awareness of strengths and potential areas of growth of the ISR program in Minnesota according to the agents interviewed.

Methods

Research Design

This research project is qualitative in nature. Participants' responses to a structured, open-ended interview were audio-recorded with the participants' prior permission.

Sample

The sample of this study was made up of ten ISR agents employed from an urban Minnesota county. Participants included eight male and two female employees with differing degrees of experience in Intensive Supervised Release. The ages of the participants ranged from 35 years old to 50 years old. The educational background of this sample consisted of five Bachelor degrees in criminal justice, one Bachelor degree in sociology of law and criminology and deviance, 2 Bachelor degrees in sociology, one Master's degree in social work and one agent who double majored with a Bachelor's in psychology and sociology. Their experience working with adult offenders ranged from 3 years to 25 years (with a mean of 15 years) and their experience working with ISR offenders ranged from 2 years to 20 years (with a mean of ten years). Participation in this interview was voluntary and took place after the interviewee signed the consent of participation form. The interviews of the participants remain anonymous to everyone but this researcher. After the agency gave this researcher approval to conduct research in this anonymous county, participants were asked to contact this researcher if they were willing to volunteer to be a part of this study.

Protection of Human Subjects

St. Catherine University and The University of St. Thomas have policies safeguarding and respecting the rights and welfare of human subjects in scientific research. The responsibility to protect human subjects in research in the MSW program was under the Institutional Review Board of St. Thomas. The process and procedures prescribed by the IRB at the St. Thomas campus were followed. Policies and procedures are designed to meet minimal criteria established by the Federal Law and Federal regulations and require separate application for research approval. An agency consent form was given to the Minnesota County chosen which granted this researcher permission to survey the ISR agents at the facility. This consent form can be found in *Appendix A*. The Institutional Review Board of St. Thomas University provided the agency consent form.

Individuals for this study participated voluntarily and were given a written consent form. The participants remain anonymous to everyone except this researcher and no identifiable information was included in the research study. A participant was not interviewed until the informed consent form was explained by this researcher and signed by the participant (*Appendix B*). The field notes written during the time of the interview will be kept in a locked file cabinet along with the audio recording device used during the interviews. The transcriptions were completed by this researcher only and are stored in a password-protected file to which only this researcher has access. Peer review of the transcriptions did not contain any identifiable information.

Data collection

In this qualitative study, the main instrument used to assess the data was processed through a semi-standardized interview (Berg, 2009). Data was collected by audio recording each interview. The interview contained a series of open-ended questions to which each participant responded during the interview. Interview times varied depending on the depth of responses, lasting between 30 to 60 minutes. Interview questions related to factors influencing an offender's success in the ISR program. The interview specifically highlighted the agent's perceptions of what role mental illness might play if at all in the offender's treatment, interventions the agent currently identifies as facilitating success, past success stories, predictors of recidivism and what kind of supervision style the agent embodies. The interview questions can be found in *Appendix C*.

Data Analysis

A qualitative approach was used for data analysis. In this interview, themes were carefully examined and used as a form of measurement. The interview was audio recorded and then transcribed by this researcher only. During transcription, this researcher examined recurring themes in the interviews collected. After the data was classified into themes, it was then compared to previous research. After each major theme was identified, this researcher then identified salient quotes and classified them under each research theme. Grounded theory was used to further analyze the data (Berg, 2009). Manifest and latent content were evaluated during the coding process.

To ensure reliability and validity, peer debriefing was used by a third party to examine the data transcriptions and field notes to identify recurring themes (Berg, 2009). After this process, this researcher and the third party compared notes on the themes identified to ensure accurate themes were appropriately identified.

Findings

Thoughts about rehabilitation

This interview inquired about the agent's thoughts on rehabilitation. The entire sample of participants reported that they felt rehabilitation was possible. Eight out of ten participants reported that the offender's motivation to succeed had the largest impact on rehabilitation. Support and environment were also other factors identified as increasing the rate of a successful rehabilitation. Living situation following incarceration was identified as a factor that can affect rehabilitation success rates. For example, re-entering the same community with the same or similar peers that influenced criminal behavior is perceived as a hindrance to rehabilitation. Most agents reported that rehabilitation involved change in all areas of the offender's life. Five out of ten agents reported that the ISR agent is instrumental in the change process by offering direction and provided the offender the knowledge and tools to succeed, but ultimately, change is left to the offender.

Success

Several items in the questionnaire involved the agents' perceptions on the offender's success. Four out of ten agents reported their belief that it is more difficult for a sex offender to complete the ISR program, as opposed to an offender who has not been convicted of a sex crime. They identified several factors that they believe influence poor success rates: lack of resources for sex offenders, the psychological issues of the offender, the rules and regulations of registering and the ten-year duration of supervision. Two out of ten participants reported that the type of crime committed does not matter in

terms of success. One of the participants reported that the offenders charged with drugs, weapons or burglaries tend to be more likely to be unsuccessful at ISR. This reasoning was based upon the offender doing less time in prison and having less time to work with their ISR agent when they are released to ISR.

Six out of ten agents talked about the support of family, friends and community playing a role in an offender's success. A number of supports were mentioned by ISR agents as factors that aid in a more successful outcome: supportive family, having children, case management, programming and living in a half way house. Five out of ten agents reported the offender's motivation to change as an element that had a direct impact on the offender's success on the program. Two out of ten agents reported that offenders need to buy into the ISR program. One of the agents commented,

“I think that they need to be 100% percent committed to submitting and that is such a strong word, but they really have to submit to this program. They almost have to accept it like religion. It's going to be prescribed to them and it's going to be watched very carefully. If they got that kind of attitude mentally that they are going to submit, then I think they will probably do well.”

Two out of ten participants reported that an offender's honesty and accountability with their agent aided in how successful they were in the ISR program.

ISR agents were asked to speak to their most successful and least successful client in ISR. Tables 1 and 2, reflect the results of these questions with discussion following the tables.

Table 1:

Agents' data representing their most successful client

Agent	Age of act	Time served	Age on ISR	Crime committed	Employment status	Good supports	Violations or Revocations	Factors leading to success
1	19	13 years	32	Second degree murder	Employed	Yes	Yes revoked 1 time	"Avoiding old negative influences, hard work and motivation"
2	17	14 years	31	Murder	Employed	Yes	No	"Good resources, him wanting to change, his daughter"
3	19	20 years	39	Murder	Employed	Yes	No	"Good attitude, secure housing"
4	16	9	23	Murder	Employed	No	Yes revoked 2 times	"Growing up, buying into the program and him wanting to change"
5	26	20 years	42	Criminal sexual conduct	Employed	Yes	No	"Good support system"
6	19	11 years	34	Robbery/ assaulting an officer in prison/ escape	Employed	Yes	No	"Motivated and remorseful"
7	40	4.5 years	45	Criminal sexual conduct	Employed	Yes	No	"Change of heart, spiritual conversion, took responsibility for his actions"
8	18	2 years	20	Second degree assault	Employed	Yes	No	"Prison scared him, not a lifetime felon"
9	21	16 years	37	Attempted murder	Employed	Yes	No	"Committed, willing to do whatever, good attitude, good supports"
10	28	7 years	35	Multiple criminal sexual conduct	Employed	Yes	No	"Desire to remain sober"

Seventy percent of the agents' examples in the data indicate that the offender committed his or her crime under the age of 25. Sixty percent of the offenders in the sample also served ten or more years in prison. This data could indicate a correlation between time served in prison and success rates in the ISR program. Further research would be beneficial to explore this possible correlation. The average age of offenders was at least 30 years old while serving in the ISR program in the data provided by ISR agents. Five out of 10 offenders in the sample discussed in the table were in prison for either murder or attempted murder, 3 out of 10 were in prison for criminal sexual conduct. This data seems to correlate with one of the agent's statements in the interview, "It goes against what you think, but the least likely to recidivate is usually the murderers and the sex offenders." The entire sample of successful offenders were employed and 90% had good supports. Eight out of 10 represented never had a violation or revocation while they were on ISR supervision. From the data gathered in Table 1, it can be summarized that an offender successful on ISR, has the following commonalities: Offenses occurring under the age of 25, serving ten or more years in prison (with an average of 11.5 years), 30 years of age or older while serving on ISR, active employment, good supports and no violations.

Table 2:

Agents' data representing their least successful client

Agent	Age of act	Time served	Age on ISR	Crime committed	Employment status	Good supports	Violation or Revocation	Factors leading to being unsuccessful
1	18	13 years	31	Level 3 sex offense	Employed for dad	No	3 revocations	"Very limited supports"
2	16	3 years	19	Aggravated robbery with weapon	Unemployed	No	4 violations and 2 revocations	"Never taught how to respect anything and was always unaccountable"
4	17	10 years	27	Assault and robbery	Going to school	No	8 revocations and recidivism	"No motivation for change"
5	23	6 years	30	Level 3 sex offense/ rape	Unemployed	No	4 revocations	"Bad attitude"
6	21	17.5 years	38	Second degree assault and attempted murder	Going to school and had employment	Yes	Revoked 3 times	"Institutionalized"
7	39	5 years	44	Criminal sexual conduct	Sporadic jobs employment	No	Revoked 6 times	"Use of drugs or alcohol"
9	18	3 years	21	Aggravated Assault	Unemployed	No	Revoked too many times to count	"Bad attitude"
10	44	1 year	45	Criminal sexual conduct/ failure to register	Unemployed	No	1 violation/ but was a short timer	"Mental health issues, chemical dependency and lack of motivation to change"

Two agents did not provide an example of an unsuccessful offender in the ISR program. These two agents generalized features of an unsuccessful client rather than providing a specific example of an offender who was unsuccessful. Agent 3 reported that unsuccessful offenders usually are younger, spend a short time in prison and have no support system. Agent 8 reported that unsuccessful offenders have a lifetime of interventions, have been involved in the system since they were children, and have no

desire to change. From the sample provided by the eight other agents, 6 out of 8 agents reported that their least successful client on ISR was under age 25 when the offense occurred. Three out of 8 of the sample represented in Table 2 served ten years or longer in prison for the offense committed. Sixty-two percent of the sample looked at was 30 years or older when he or she served on ISR. Three offenders were convicted with assaults, four offenders convicted with criminal sexual conduct and one offender was convicted of robbery. Only half of the identified unsuccessful offenders in the sample were involved in some type of education or employment. Seven out of 8 offenders did not have a support system. The entire sample represented for most unsuccessful offender had multiple violations or revocations.

From the data gathered in Table 2, it can be summarized that an offender unsuccessful on ISR, has the following commonalities: Offenses occurring under the age of 25, serving less than ten years in prison (with an average stay of 7.5 years), 30 years of age or older while serving on ISR, inconsistent employment, little to no supports and multiple violations and revocations. After comparing the data in Table 1 and Table 2 it appears that maintaining employment, having good supports and not having violations or revocations while ISR aides in success.

The participants were also asked what role the community plays in the offender's success. Housing appears to be a barrier for all offenders based on the agents' perceptions, however, access to housing is more of a barrier for Level 3 sex offenders than the other offenders. Stigma is another significant barrier for offenders. Four out of ten agents reported that there is high stigma associated with offenders and this can prevent offenders from obtaining housing and securing employment. Fifty percent of the

agents reported that the type of community in which the offender lives plays a huge role in their success. It was reported that many of the offenders are only able to secure housing in neighborhoods with higher crime rates due to their offense status. One agent reported concern about the reality of the housing situation for most Level 3 offenders. This agent expressed that the neighborhoods that are willing to accept a Level 3 sex offender are often neighborhoods with higher crime rates, stating,

“...Lots of shootings... it’s not all that uncommon to turn on the news when there is a shooting and hear what happened and I bet we got a guy on ISR living within a block or two of where that happened...”

Some agents also reported that some communities have more resources and programming available to aid in employment and education searches. It is perceived that this provides the offender with a better chance at success than other communities.

Agents’ role and interventions

The role the agent utilized in the offender’s time with ISR was examined. Four out of 10 agents reported that they took both a correctional role and a mentor role and work with the offender based on where they are at in terms of rehabilitation and readiness for change. Two out of 10 agents reported that they more frequently utilized a correctional role and sometimes incorporated mentoring tactics. Two out of 10 agents reported that they leaned towards the mentoring role and also incorporated correctional tactics. Two out of ten agents reported that they used mostly mentoring tactics when they worked with their clients.

All of the agents in ISR reported use of rewards and sanctions several times throughout the interviews. Direct communication was the most prevalent form of

intervention cited, with eight out of ten agents reporting use of direct communication to intervene with their clients. Some of the agents reported a more proactive approach to observed behaviors, reporting that immediate communication and intervention were preferred styles of intervention. Active monitoring was mentioned by a couple of agents as a means of intervention. They defined active monitoring as meeting with their client several times a week to facilitate conversation about client needs and any concerns of the agent. Three out of 10 agents reported use of restructuring (placing the offender on a more intensive phase of supervision) as a means of intervention. Agents reported implementing a “restructure” to increase supervision when they observe the offender is struggling or making choices that increase likelihood of being unsuccessful in the ISR program.

When the agents were asked about their familiarity with Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) interventions, four out of 10 agents were not familiar with CBT. However, four out of 10 agents reported that CBT is beneficial when working with offenders and reported that they refer their clients to outside programming involving CBT. Of those four agents, zero reported use of formal CBT interventions on an individual basis.

Support programs appeared to be a prevalent theme for programming. Five out of 10 agents reported that work readiness programs and supportive employment were both great programs for offenders. Programs such as sex offender treatment and chemical dependency treatment, including support groups such as AA and NA, were also discussed. During this item of the interview, many of the agents reported their perception that some programs appear to be more beneficial than others. The agents reported

consistently that word of mouth between agents and past experience with a program seems to be the primary mode of referral for programs deemed beneficial for ISR offenders.

Motivational interviewing was highly valued by fifty percent of the agents who stated use of motivational interviewing tactics on a regular basis. One agent reported that motivational interviewing is something that the agent uses as needed, but this agent does not necessarily use it on a daily basis. The remaining four agents reported their perception that motivational interviewing is naturally a part of being an ISR agent and did not view formal training in motivational interviewing as necessary.

Use of the LSI-R to guide treatment was varied. Three out of ten agents reported that the LSI-R is a good tool, because it provides understanding about the offender and builds rapport between the agent and the offender. Other answers included utilizing the results to refer to appropriate resources, a measure or indicator of success, and a tool to identify and discuss potential areas of risk for offenders. Agents were also asked about working with an offender diagnosed with a mental illness. Table 3 represents the agents' quotes from the interview, which demonstrate the agents' perceptions on working with and offender diagnosed with a mental illness and training the agents have had in regards to mental illness.

Table 3:

Agents' statements regarding offenders and mental illness

1. "I must admit, as important as it is, I don't think any of us get enough."
2. "I think most of our offenders have some type of mental illness, I really do, and some of it is undiagnosed, we don't have funding for that, yet I think that if we really look closely, I think that it is a piece of the puzzle that we are trying to improve."
3. "We got to break down the stigma. It's not having education on what the problem actually is and knowing how many different offenders actually have a mental illness underlying even if they are not diagnosed."
4. (When asked if mental health training would be beneficial) "Absolutely I do, because many of the guys probably have mental illness and they don't even know or are capable of even understanding and I think that if there was some more of that it would only benefit everyone."
5. "I've had pretty much every kind of mental health illness on my caseload at one time but I never really had any proper training."

The majority (70%) of agents reported that working with an offender with a mental illness takes up more of the agents' time and attention. The responses seemed to indicate a balance between increased strictness and increased understanding. Half of the agents reported that they used a different approach while working with an offender diagnosed with a mental illness. It was reported that minimal training regarding working with an offender with a mental illness was provided for eighty percent of the respondents. Almost all of the agents reported that more training in the area of mental health would be beneficial to their work with offenders diagnosed with a mental illness. One of the agents reported that he or she had been involved in a lot of mental health trainings, "I must admit, as important as it is, I don't think any of us get enough."

Effectiveness of ISR

An additional item of the interview inquired about agents' beliefs about the effectiveness of the ISR program in general. Ninety percent of the agents interviewed reported that they felt ISR was effective. Table 4 reflects the statements regarding the agents' thoughts on the effectiveness of the ISR program.

Table 4

Agents' statements regarding the effectiveness of ISR

1. "I think that it is effective when it's done the way it is supposed to be done. I think it is pretty much 100% effective. You are either going to have community successes or you are going to have a success with someone who is not fit to be in the community."
2. "We have a revolving door here, people come out and then you see them again. I do feel that if the program wasn't here, it would be more, we would be worse, we would have to have a second door or maybe build our prisons a little bigger...I think we do need a program like this."
3. "I think that it is good. Some of the offenses are serious enough that if they were somewhere else they wouldn't get out, so if we are going to let them out, I think they need to be watched very closely. These are big cases, I mean these are murders, these are very serious rapes, these are very violent robberies, these are assaults, these are guys that need to be watched closely. If you are going to let them out, then we got to keep a close eye on them. And the guys that make it, well there is proof that it can work fine, they could be out, they made it through, so I think it is effective."
4. "I think that it is very effective ten fold. The guys that do well probably go on to do well. I think if you can complete ISR, I'm not saying, oh its 100% but generally if you can complete ISR you are on the right path. If you're not doing what you need to do than that is the other end of it. Then I think you either need to go back and think about it or have a restructure and have another opportunity to go back and think about it, but either way it can be a positive thing, because success can sometimes also mean that the community is safe because the guy is in prison that was doing all of these disturbing things was really in a high risk situation to reoffend. So, I think it is very effective."

Dominant theme 1: The offender's motivation to succeed

The most dominant theme that emerged in relation to an offender's success in Intensive Supervised Release was the offender's motivation to be successful. Table 5 represents the illustrative quotes gathered by the agents, which reflect the offender's motivation to succeed.

Table 5:

Agents' statements reflecting the offender's motivation to succeed as a major theme

1. "You can't force them to do anything. You can lead them and try and give them references and referrals to places, but unless they are willing to do it or take them, it's pretty hard for them to change. So yeah you need a lot of support and first of all the offender wanting that help and wanting to get those resources."
2. "I feel that rehabilitation comes from people wanting to do better and wanting to change lifestyle and understanding right or wrong and the consequences that are going to happen. So I think that it comes from within for people."
3. "Number one, the person has to have individual responsibility or motivation or else I don't care what LSI (level of service Inventory) or EBP (evidence based practice) is going on, they have to be motivated for change."
4. "Basically they have to be motivated to change, be tired of where they are at and where they came from and ready to move forward."
5. "People can change if they are willing to change and want to put some work into it."
6. "Mostly it is up to the offender to change. I think that we give them the tools to change but ultimately they are the ones that have to do the change, we don't change anybody."
7. "I think we would be fooling ourselves to think that it could be completely up to us, because ultimately it is going to lie within the offender. If they want to change, absolutely it is possible."
8. "I think that rehabilitation and change and things along that line are completely up to that individual, it has to come from within. I think that we have a way of influencing people by way of conditions that we have or sanctions, but true rehabilitation comes from within and their own motivation to want to change."
9. "It is a gift that anyone can have, but it is something that they have to want and true change only comes from within that person and their ability to actually want to change."
10. "It comes down to determination, wanting to change. You know, they have to want to do well. They have to be able to take responsibility and do what they need to do and follow through with it."
11. "...Ultimately it comes back to what we said about changing. It has really got to be internal; you have to want to change. We can put out things and make all things available, but if they don't want it then it doesn't matter."
12. "If people want to be successful they will be successful. I don't think that we can dictate that."

The theme of an offender's motivation to succeed was reported consistently in terms of the agents' thoughts on rehabilitation to what extent can an offender change and what the agent believes needs to happen in order for an offender to be successful on ISR. This theme was also prevalent when the agents were asked to describe their most successful or unsuccessful offender. All of the agents reported a belief in the idea of the offender's desire to change or intrinsic motivation for change or success as an important factor determining success. When looking at the data in Table 5, several quotes were in response to an agent's thoughts on rehabilitation. The agents reported that they were not sure how effective the agent is in the success process and made it very clear that a lot of the offender's success is directly related to the offender's intrinsic motivation to be successful. From the agents' perspectives, the agent is akin to a guide in the journey. It is ultimately up to the offender to use the tools provided by the agent through referral to outside resources or direct education.

Theme of positive reinforcement and praise

Additional themes that related to the offender's success in ISR were not as prominent as the offender's internal motivation, but they definitely appeared within the interviews. Positive reinforcement seemed to be a considerable component of success. Positive reinforcements, praise and rewards were mentioned several times in the interviews to imply that positive reinforcement and praise play a significant role in the offender's success. Table 6 represents the agents' quotes regarding positive reinforcement and praise as a theme in this research.

Table 6:

Agents' statements suggesting positive reinforcement or praise as a theme

1. "I praise them a lot. I am a big stickler to giving credit where credit is deserved. When they are doing fine, I like to just tell them, hey you're doing fine, you're doing fine, you're doing great. I think it does have a big impact, just like us in our workplace with our supervisors. If your supervisor gives you praise, it's a good feeling and they need that too. A lot of these offenders have never gotten that."
2. "Ya know, I have children and that is kind of the way that I raise my children. If they do really well, I praise them and keep praising them and praise them as much as I can to reward good behavior. I probably do it more with my children than with the clients as far as positive reinforcement, because a lot of this is what you are supposed to do, ya know, in everyday life. So sometimes I have to find myself saying ok this is big for them, it might be normal for you and me, but it is not normal to them, this is a huge step for them."
3. "Sometimes I do it to try and emphasize the positive when they do well and for some guys even the littlest things. I have one of my offenders where two months is the longest he has ever gone without using. All of a sudden he calls me and goes ya know this is my 61st day, the longest I've ever been sober in the last 20 years. You take that and you run with that and you build off of that. That is great now tomorrow is 62 [days]."
4. "I think that it humanizes us a little bit. I think that some of the offenders see us as robotic. Maybe like these are the rules and all that we are doing is enforcing rules. It's constantly bam bam bam. I think when you stop and say things like nice work or I appreciate that, they see that you are just another guy talking to them."
5. "Because of the type of program this is and because of the structure and because it is a correctional program, rewards are always in the form of complimentary advice, ya know those sorts of things. Really that's about it, but I try always to have a carrot rather than show the stick."
6. "A lot of times it's not really the awards but the encouragement, the acknowledging that they are doing well, that they are doing what they need to do. Those kinds of more or less just words and letting them know you've noticed they are doing well."

Some of the quotes in Table 6 were gathered when agents were asked about their approach and what kinds of rewards they give their clients. Ninety percent of the participants reported that they reward their client's with praise and positive regards. One of the above quotes seems to put things into perspective about how powerful praise can actually be, relating how the average individual responds to praise (see quote #1). It also captured how some of these offenders come from very unfortunate circumstances. A few of the agents reported that they served as a positive role model in their client's life and provided them with praise or positive regard that they may have never experienced before.

As far as rewards, most of the agents reported that the offender's were rewarded with passes if they were following the structure and guidelines set forth by their ISR agent. The majority of the agents reported that positive reinforcement was a means of motivating the client to stay on the right track and help the agent build on the client's strengths. It was also mentioned how important positive reinforcement and praise can be in building rapport between the client and the agent. Although, a few of the agents reported that they did not want to overuse praise -- clients are expected to accomplish certain tasks, however they also seem to want to recognize the client's accomplishments in terms of healthier choices.

Theme of the Agent playing multiple roles or "wearing different hats"

Use of multiple roles was also identified as a theme in aiding an offender to be successful on ISR. This theme showed up predominantly when the participants were

asked if they related with the social work role or the corrections role. Interestingly, a significant number of participants responded with the phrase “wearing different hats” in regards to playing multiple roles and having many responsibilities when it comes to working with the offender. The following Table 7 represents illustrative quotes that reflect the agent playing many roles or “wearing different hats” as a theme in this research.

Table 7

Agents' statements suggesting multiple role use or "wearing different hats" as a theme

1. "You can really wear different hats depending on the type of person you are working with."
2. "For me there has always been that spectrum as long as it has been around with probation and parole. They always figure that we are somewhere between cops and social workers."
3. "I think it's being able to wear different hats with different offenders based on if you have a real discipline problem."
4. "We are the ones that force them to do all of these things, but we have to wear that other hat and try and motivate them too."
5. "In this job you wear so many hats, you do it all, and unfortunately sometimes you got to flip those hats at all times."
6. "I think our role is kind of unique in that we are kind of a balance on one hand viewed as a law enforcement piece and the other hand we are also kind of the counseling social work end of it. We kind of have the best of both worlds."
7. "It depends on the guy. For the guy that's done very well, he doesn't necessarily need a monitor all of the time. He maybe needs someone to guide him, maybe give him advice every once in a while. So really it depends. I think you have to be able to do them both sometimes and maybe you do both of those things with the same person. Some days I have to monitor this person then they get back on track and I tend to switch over to giving advice or sort of being more of a support to them than a hammer. You have to be able to walk both sides of the road."
8. "Be what you need to be in the moment."

From the agents interviewed, there were agents that related to the mentoring and social work role most and one agent that identified more with the correctional role. The other seven agents reported that they interchange between a mentor and a monitor

depending on the client and the situation. With that said the three agents that identified with the mentoring and social work role made it very clear that they stay in this role while following the rules of ISR and sometimes they have to take more of a correctional stance depending on the client. After analyzing the data it was clear that although some agents identified with one particular approach over the other, they all seem to incorporate corrections and social work tactics in their everyday work. When looking at Table 7, at the end of quote 7, the agent reported, "...You have to be able to walk both sides of the road." This quote seems to demonstrate how versatile of an approach an agent needs to embody in order to work with clients.

Theme of older age of the offender or longer prison sentence

The next theme that emerged from the research was the theme of older age or longer prison sentence relating to offender's being more successful on ISR. The following quotes in Table 8 represent the participant statements that suggest that the offender's age or serving a long sentence in prison as a theme in an offender's success.

Table 8

Agents' statements suggesting older age of the offender or longer prison sentence as a theme

1. "I think they all can change, it is just whether or not they have it in them and I think as time goes by, the older the offender the more willing they are to make that change."
2. "It seems like when they get into their 40's or 50's from what I've seen, in my dealings, I think a lot of age has to do with rehabilitation or length of time they have been in prison."
3. "In some of my experience, the guys that have done a significant amount of time, ten or more years, get out and they are older now. I think sometimes those factors and I'm not basing it on any study or anything just my own experience."
4. "Individuals that come out in their early 20's or under 30 in my opinion it doesn't necessarily matter what particular crime is there. These individuals I've dealt with, they kind of trip and stumble their way through this a little bit. They are a little more less disciplined in some respects and caught up sometimes in the moment or caught up back in their old environment."
5. "I think they can change, but in my experience the ones that have done a long time in prison, they value their freedom for the most part. I think the ones that have been in for a shorter amount of time, it's a slap on the wrist and it doesn't really matter for them."
6. "It goes against what you think, but the least likely to recidivate is usually the murders and sexual assaults. It's usually the guys with the drugs or weapons or burglaries that tend to be running circles more. A lot of them did the least amount of time incarcerated before getting released, which means they also had the least time left on their sentence when they got released on supervision, so less time to work with them too."

Six out of ten agents mentioned age or longer prison sentence as a factor of success during the interviews. Some of the agents reported that these two factors come

into play because the offender values his or her freedom when they are released, the offender ages out of crimes and finally decides to stop offending. They also cited that a historical lifetime of small crimes tends to lead to offenders being less successful.

Theme of the offender's available supports

Available supports is the last theme found throughout the interviews. Although there were not numerous quotes directly referring to supports, there were many inferences to supports such as programs mentioned and use of the word "resources" numerous times. Table 9 represents the agents' statements that suggest supports as a theme.

Table 9

Agents' statements suggesting the offender's available supports as a theme

1. "They really need a good support system, community support, but more importantly, family support."
2. "Guys that come out and have a good family support network whether it is relatives or cousins or parents or somebody, that's huge coming out."
3. "It helps too when we are all kind of working together especially when we are connected to family and friends and we are all on the same page and we are kind of helping as a group to get this person on track."
4. "I think it has a lot to do with their background, their family, their associates, their upbringing."
5. "Supportive family, children, ya know sometimes when people go to prison and they come back out and they have children involved and they are saying to themselves, ya know what I cannot make that mistake anymore, I got to be here for my children."

Family supports were talked about as the most influential regarding supports. When participants were asked to describe their most successful offender, 9 out of 10 agents reported that the offender identified positive supports in his or her life.

Discussion and Implications

Interpretation of findings

The first hypothesis of this study was that the therapeutic approach chosen by the agent assigned to the offender would have a significant impact on the offender's success in the program. The data of this research does not support this hypothesis. Although information was obtained which uncovered how versatile the role of ISR is and the factors that lead an offender to be successful in the program, this research was not able to demonstrate based on the findings that one approach is more successful than another. This research did find that a combination of corrections and social work for 7 out of 10 of the participants is utilized.

The second hypothesis stated that counseling strategies identifying past risk factors that lead to prior offenses aid the offender in having more success in the ISR program than using punitive or surveillance strategies alone. This study found that the majority of the ISR agents incorporate both rewards and sanctions. Rewards were identified as praise, advice, and passes, while sanctions were identified as "restructures" and revoking passes. The majority of the agents reported that they like to communicate with their clients directly and talk to them about observed behaviors that might put them at risk to re-offend, and develop a plan to address these behaviors. This approach appears to align more with a counseling approach.

Previous research discussed in the literature review did not identify an offender's intrinsic motivation for success as a factor leading to success in parole. According to the ten agents interviewed however, an offender's motivation to succeed was the major factor that leads an offender to success in the ISR program. Based on the perceptions of the

agents interviewed, if an offender is not motivated to change, the offender will not be successful in the program. Future research could focus on an offender's motivation to change in relation to success in ISR programs. If an offender's motivation to change is perceived by ISR agents as the biggest predictor of success, interventions could be informed by utilizing a motivational approach to increase an offender's intrinsic motivation to be successful.

This research also sought to uncover how the offender's mental health plays a role in success or failure. After review of the data, it was apparent that the participants perceived an offender's mental health to play a role in determining success. Many of the participants reported the difficulty experienced for someone to be in the ISR program who has no history of a mental illness and how the rules can sometimes be hard to explain or understand for those who have been diagnosed with a mental illness. Many of the agents also reported that they have to take a different approach when working with offenders diagnosed with a mental illness and have to incorporate different interventions. Some of the agents felt that working with an offender diagnosed with a mental illness resulted in spending more time working one-on-one with the offender. The lack of understanding that some of these offenders may have due to their mental illness correlates with the findings of a study in which inmates diagnosed as mentally ill have even higher counts of technical violations (Tucker, Cosio & Mechereki, 2003).

One of the most prominent things that emerged from this research was the lack of mental health training provided for the ISR agents. Many of them mentioned that they do not get many offenders diagnosed with a mental health diagnosis on their caseload very often. With that said, for the ones who do encounter offenders with mental illness,

training in this area would be beneficial, with 9 out of 10 agents reporting agreement with this idea. It also was mentioned that there are many offenders coming out of prison without a formal diagnosis, however they suspect an underlying undiagnosed mental health illness may have factored into their offense. Further training in this area may help the agents identify possible mental health symptoms so that they can provide adequate referrals for offenders to seek out the appropriate services.

This study set out to investigate factors influencing an offender's success in the ISR program. The results of the interviews are very similar to the results found in previous research. Having good supports, employment, serving longer sentences and being older while on ISR were all factors that appeared to be related to success. These factors were most apparent when the agent was asked to speak about their most successful and most unsuccessful client of their career to date. Ryan (1997) found that young age was the strongest correlate to recidivism. This was found when the agents were asked about their most successful or most unsuccessful client. Thirteen out of 18 of the offenders who were talked about in the total sample committed their crime under the age of 25. Offenders older than 24 were less likely to be rearrested on probation (Jones & Sims, 1997). Long-term employment was also looked at among this sample of offenders, as mentioned in Tables 1 and 2. Offenders with long-term employment have been observed to be more successful while on probation (Bateman, et. al., 1998). When looking at Table 1, all of the offenders labeled as successful had employment while they were on ISR. Research has demonstrated that as the number of high risk violations increased, the odds of success in Intensive Supervised Parole declined (Wodahl, et. al., 2011). This research supports the findings in Table 2. All of the offenders in the sample

from Table 2 had multiple violations or revocations where as only 1 out of 10 successful offenders had a violation or revocation. One of the findings in this research that contradicts previous research is that the longer the prison-sentence the better the success rate (Jones & Sims, 1997). Research suggests that as sentence length increased the probability of failing on probation increased (Jones & Sims, 1997). When looking at Table 1, 6 out of 10 of the most successful clients had prison sentences of ten years or longer. When looking at Table 2, only 3 out of 8 of the most unsuccessful clients served 10 years or longer and their prison time may have been extended due to revocations.

The interventions that lead to success were also other implications for this study. Research suggests that CBT interventions are effective in working with adult offenders to reduce recidivism (Tucker et al., 2003). Only 4 out the 10 agents questioned about CBT interventions were familiar with it and referred their clients to outside sources for CBT. According to the previous research in the literature review, one-to-one CBT sessions were found to be effective (Tucker et al., 2003). Further introduction to CBT interventions and strategies on a one-to-one basis with the agent may be an area that could improve success in ISR.

Strengths

The strengths of this study include the rich data collected by the ISR agents. This study was able to identify agent techniques and skills that increased an offender's success in the ISR program based on the agents' experience and opinions. By interviewing ten different agents with various levels of experience and backgrounds, this research provided insight in what seems to be working in each agent's offender success stories.

This study was able to demonstrate the different therapeutic style each agent uses and possibly educate other agencies or programs on how to better implement their services. Each agent worked alone with his or her caseload, so identifying other effective styles may aid in professional enhancement.

Limitations

The limitations of this study were found through the small number of agents in the sample. Originally this research wanted to look at the different styles incorporated by the agent, however the sample included eight agents with corrections backgrounds, one with a psychology background and one with a social work background. Previous studies were able to look at the differences between the two backgrounds while working with offenders, but this study was not able to do so. This study was also not able to compare gender differences among the participants due to the small number of female participants and the dominant number of male participants in this study. This research was also based upon the opinions of the ISR agent and lacked the offenders' perceptions of what elements make him or her successful in the program. This research was also an interview and not a witnessed study, which may have provided limitations of reporter bias. This was found in a previous study where agents identified that the social work aspect of corrections were most beneficial yet they were using more punitive correctional approaches with their clients (Barry, 2000).

This study was also limited to one urban county in the state of Minnesota. Although there are many counties in Minnesota that use ISR, each county implements ISR standards differently. For instance, in some counties, agents are required to complete

house visits with a partner. Each agency may incorporate a different style, yet this research will only reflect the style and values of one Minnesota county's ISR agents and the implementation of ISR standards.

The term success was also not defined to the agent during the interview, and from the perspective of the agents interviewed, success has several meanings. Some agents may view success on ISR as the offender not recidivating while others may view success on ISR as the offender not returning to prison for a violation. This may have skewed some of the agents' answers involving the word success because success was not clearly defined. As one of the agents commented that the perception of success in a case can turn out a couple of ways:

“...You have a guy who is law abiding and doing good and has been compliant and what not obviously everybody says, 'oh that's a successful case,' ...not engaging in risky behavior.” Catching him in what he is doing and removing him from the community is also a success. It's a success for the program and the amount of attention we give guys, so it is kind of two fold what is considered success.”

Another limitation is that while Minnesota reports that ISR programs are successful, there is no clear definition from the state of Minnesota regarding their perception of successful completion.

Implications

This research also focused on the ISR program. This program is not implemented in every state as of now and research on the program in general is lacking. Minnesota has found this program to be successful, so providing new research in this area may promote other counties or states to use this type of system. This research also uncovered the need for training and education in regards to working with offenders with a mental illness.

Ninety percent of the participants reported that mental health trainings would be beneficial for their career in ISR. The abundance of offenders in the system with undiagnosed mental health issues could benefit greatly from their ISR agent having some kind of background education regarding mental illness or recognizing mental illness to refer them to the appropriate resources. Although many of the agents reported that they practice interventions such as Motivational Interviewing and incorporating findings from the LSI-R in their treatment planning, the agents are not using one-to-one CBT interventions. Learning more about CBT and the effectiveness of using CBT interventions on an individual basis is an area that could benefit ISR in relation to social work.

In general the population of ISR is a population that has fallen through the cracks in the past in regards to social work. Using evidence based practice to motivate change and rearrange thinking by using cognitive behavioral interventions with offenders may be a future avenue of research. Another area that may be warranted for future research would be interviewing offenders who have made it through ISR to get the offenders' perceptions of what makes them successful on ISR. Although this program has been in practice for more than 20 years, more research in general is needed that relates directly to Intensive Supervised Release. Focusing on how social work values could be implemented in ISR would also benefit the field of social work as well as corrections.

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APPENDIX A

November 29, 2011

University of St. Thomas
2115 Summit Avenue
St. Paul, Minnesota 55105

To whom it may concern:

I am giving researcher Sarah Becker informed consent to conduct her research project with (anonymous) County Intensive Supervised Release. Sarah has gone over each area of her study with me and has made it clear that there are no risks or benefits to me or my agents involved in this study. I am aware that Sarah will be interviewing the agents that I supervise and the content of these interviews will be made public. I am aware that the identity of the agency and the participants will remain confidential and will not be included in the publication. I am aware that there is no compensation for participating in this study and that participation in this study is voluntary in nature. I have read and signed the agency consent form and I am ready to allow Sarah to begin the research process.

Sincerely,

(Anonymous)
Supervisor, Intensive Supervision Program
Adult Field Services

APPENDIX B
CONSENT FORM
UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS

Agents Perceptions on what makes an offender successful in the Intensive Supervised Release

[287418-1]

I am conducting a study in an effort to find out what makes offenders successful in the Intensive Supervised Release Program based upon the perceptions of ISR agents. I invite you to participate in this research. You were selected as a possible participant because you work as an ISR agent in the county that this study has been granted permission to interview. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by Sarah Becker and will be supervised under Philip AuClaire, affiliated with St. Catherine University and University of St Thomas Social Work Program.

Background Information:

The purpose of this research is to find out what makes offenders successful in the ISR program. This will be done based upon the experience of individuals that currently supervise offenders involved in the ISR program. Differing perceptions of what makes an offender successful could be beneficial to this agency and other agencies that operate under Intensive supervised release because it may identify what interventions and approaches other agents are using that possibly aid in an offender's success. This research may also help other facilities gain insight on how to become more effective in facilitating Intensive supervised Release.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to participate in a 30 to 45 minute recorded interview discussing your ideas on what makes an offender successful in the ISR program and what kinds of interventions and approaches you use with the offenders that you supervise.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

This study has no evident risks.

The direct benefits you will receive for participating involve a promotion of self-awareness about your own practice and possible approaches or interventions that could aid other agents in enhancing their own practice. This research will also provide a better understanding of what the Intensive Supervise Release program entails to the general population.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept confidential. In any sort of report I publish, I will not include information that will make it possible to identify you in any way. The agency that you work for will also not be included in my publication. The types of records I will create include an audio recording of the interview you are directly participating in and a transcript of the interview for documentation purposes. The audio-recorded interview will be held in my possession and stored in a secured area where no one else will have access. The audio will be destroyed on May 30th 2012 after this study is concluded. The transcript will be stored on my home computer in a locked file that only I have access to. The transcript will also be destroyed on May 30th 2012 after the study is concluded.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of St. Thomas. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time during the initial interview. Should you decide to withdraw data collected about you will be used in the research project. You are also free to skip any questions I may ask.

Contacts and Questions

My name is Sarah Becker. If you have questions or concerns, you may contact me or email me. You may also contact the research advisor Philip AuClaire. You may also contact the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board at 651-962-5341 with any questions or concerns.

You may request a copy of this form for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I am at least 18 years of age. I am aware that this interview will be audio recorder and that a transcript of the interview will be made. By beginning participation in the interview, I am consenting to participate in the study.

Signature of Study Participant

Date

Print Name of Study Participant

Signature of Researcher

Date

APPENDIX C

Agent Interview Questions

1. What is your Age?
2. What is your gender?
3. What is your educational background?
4. How long have you worked with adult offenders?
5. How long have you been working with ISR offenders?
6. What are your thoughts on rehabilitation? To what extent do you feel an offender can change?
7. How do you think the type of crime that the offender committed plays a role in how successful they are in the program?
8. What do you think needs to happen in order for an offender to be successful?
9. Can you describe for me in detail the kind of approach you use with your clients. For example, do you reward good behavior and punish bad behavior? What does a typical day of working with your offender look like? What kinds of things do you talk about when you meet with your offender or what usually goes on during your visits?
10. What kind of rewards do you give to your clients for good behaviors?
11. Can you take a moment and think of the most successful client you have ever had and tell me a little about the clients background? How old was the client, what type of crime did the client commit? Had the client been in the program prior to this time? Was the client employed? Did the client have a good support system? What factors do you think lead this client to be successful?
12. Can you take a moment and think of the most unsuccessful client you have ever had and tell me a little about the clients background? How old was the client, what type of crime did the client commit? Had the client been in the program prior to this time? Was the client employed? Did the client have a good support system? What factors do you think lead up to this client being unsuccessful?
13. What role do you think the community plays in the offender's success?

14. What role do you think the community plays in the offender's failures?
15. What are your feelings on working with offenders that are diagnosed with a mental illness? Do you use a different approach while working with these offenders?
16. What kinds of training have you been involved in that relates to working with offenders with a mental illness?
17. What types of interventions do you like to use with your client?
18. What kinds of programs do you feel are beneficial for you clients to be involved in?
19. How do you feel about cognitive therapy interventions?
20. How do you feel about motivational interviewing?
21. How does the use of the LSI-R guide your treatment with the offender?
22. Would you say you take a mentor role incorporating counseling and social work with your client or a monitor role taking the more correctional stance?
23. Is there a certain approach that you feel is most effective?
24. How do you feel about the effectiveness of ISR?