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Crime control in the twenty-first century: Science-Based Supervision (SBS)

Faye S. Taxman [a]

[a] Department of Criminology, Law & Society, George Mason University, Fairfax County, VA, USA

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INTRODUCTION

Crime control in the twenty-first century: Science-Based Supervision (SBS)

Faye S. Taxman*

Department of Criminology, Law & Society, George Mason University, Fairfax County, VA, USA

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Criminal justice policy is being revolutionized with the transformation of the era of mass incarceration into a new, yet to be defined focus in this newest era of crime control and prevention policy. Like the call for graduated sanctions in the 1990s, policy is turning to community corrections to reduce the fiscal, human, and social costs related to incarceration. The recession quelled the fervor of incarceration due to the tremendous fiscal costs to governments along with the social costs of addressing the problem of reentering citizens to communities. Moreover, scientists have recently confirmed that incarceration is criminogenic or increases criminal offending behaviors of those involved in the justice system (Nagin *et al*. 2009, Bales and Piquero 2012), which dampens the thirst for increased use of incarceration. During the period of mass incarceration, scientists conducted studies to advance our understanding of community supervision that can inform the steps to develop a community correction system. These studies are important to learn how to transform justice agencies in an era when incarceration is just one of many punishment options.

For lack of a better name, we dub the new era Science-Based Supervision (SBS). This new era requires attention to policies and practices that will serve to deter criminal offending but also correct the errors of the period of mass incarceration. The restorative components of mass incarceration also need to be interwoven into the transformation policy in order to address the human costs of incarceration. The era of mass incarceration has a well-documented series of consequences affecting all aspects of life and liberty, including limitations on housing, employment, parenting, education, and other aspects of daily living. Further, these consequences have affected generations of individuals who have been exposed to the justice system. The burden is high on creating a community corrections system that can prevent crime, protect the public, and assist offenders in being productive citizens. The SBS era is based on using data to drive policy and practice in corrections.

*Email: ftaxman@gmu.edu

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A review of our knowledge and practice

Since Martinson's declaration that 'nothing works,' the emphasis of probation and parole shifted from rehabilitation to enforcement. Probation and parole agencies underwent a transformation in the late 1970s–1980s to focus on enforcement, or ensuring that offenders comply with the conditions of release. The 1990s contributed with a renewed emphasis on adding conditions of release, including drug testing, curfews, house arrest, fines and fees, and special treatment conditions. The increased number of conditions added more opportunities for probationers or parolees to violate conditions of release. Findings from the largest randomized controlled experiment in probation settings – increasing the contacts between probationers and officers – generally found that intensive supervision did not improve offender outcomes but had a negative effect of increasing technical violations (Petersilia and Turner 1993).

The era of the 1990s spurred interest in trying to find alternative strategies to handle drug offenders as a result of the 'war on drugs,' which resulted in an increased number of offenders with substance abuse disorders. Drug treatment courts evolved, paving the way for using more intensive oversight (monitoring) combined with treatment. Studies have found that drug treatment courts are effective in reducing criminal behavior (Mitchell *et al.* 2012). Along with drug treatment courts, other innovations that intensified treatment tend to find positive findings, such as DTAP (Belenko *et al.* 2005, Zarkin *et al.* 2005), therapeutic community treatment with aftercare (Martin *et al.* 2011), and probation with treatment (Paparozzi and Gendreau 2005, Drake 2011). The lesson across this broad array of work is that coerced treatment can be effective (Marlowe 2006). More importantly, the literature points to core therapeutic concepts that are relevant in supervision context, and to a certain degree, are critical to better outcomes in community supervision (Taxman 2002, Skeem and Manchak 2008). The notion is that some of the strategies used to engage and retain people in clinical services are relevant to the supervision environment. The question then becomes how to translate these 'clinical' skills into supervision environments, and how to adapt the strategies to be used by probation and parole officers.

A related evolution occurred with the concept of core correctional practices defined by Dowden and Andrews (2004) to be effective use of authority, modeling and reinforcing prosocial attitudes, teaching concrete problem solving skills, advocacy or brokerage of community resource, and relationship factors. Recent studies have examined the degree to which officers use core correctional practices, particularly those focused on criminogenic needs, and found that many officers do not understand the core practices (Bonta *et al.* 2008). Moreover, when officers improve their use of core practices, there are positive changes in offender behaviors (Bonta *et al.* 2011). However, it is as yet unclear which practices are more likely to lead to improved changes or how best to assess officer skills in this manner. Related to these core correctional practices are studies that reinforce the importance of using risk assessment to triage to services, where higher risk offenders are prioritized for more intensive services (Lowenkamp and Latessa 2005), program quality affects positive outcomes (Lowenkamp *et al.* 2006), and solid working relationships are important to improve outcomes (Friedmann *et al.* 2008, Taxman 2008).

Along with focus on the components of programs and the skills by justice actors, this era also demonstrated the importance of systems collaboration and integration

to achieve better offender outcomes. The results from a series of studies on therapeutic communities in prison with aftercare in the community (see Simpson *et al.* 1999) propelled an interest in systems integration efforts (Taxman 1998, Fletcher *et al.* 2009). Drug treatment courts assisted in paving the pathway for judiciary-treatment-probation being integrated and packaged into a 'one-stop' shop program. Like therapeutic communities, the emphasis on a program transcending systems and reinforcing comprehensive treatments gave way to the importance of providing treatment for longer durations than a single program. That is, for treatment to be useful it was recognized that various agencies were needed to reinforce the priority to treatment, to increase the duration of treatment, and to provide for a continuum of care regardless of status of the offender. The concept of boundaryless systems of care promotes organizations that share information, integrate services, and work on compliance (Taxman and Bouffard 2000).

More treatment and more conditions of release have an unintended consequence of increasing the opportunities for technical violations or returns to prison due to failure on probation or parole. California is known for typifying the problem of the cycle of failure, where offenders on community supervision fail program requirements and are reincarcerated for parole violations. The Bureau of Justice Statistics estimates that roughly a third of new prison intakes are failures on community supervision (Guerino *et al.* 2011). Morris and Tonry (1991), in *Between Prison and Probation*, recommended a system of graduated sanctions or correctional options as alternatives to prison. These correctional options provide more controls than standard probation and simulate a 'prison without walls' (increased controls). Burke (1997) outlined administrative sanctions where jurisdictions could limit discretion of officers by using a matrix of procedures using various forms of responses to respond to non-compliant behavior. The matrix identifies the recommended level of interventions based on type of non-compliant behavior. This innovation was designed to limit the use of reincarceration for failure to comply with conditions of release. These administrative sanctions are important to the field of supervision since they offer a different strategy than revocations to handle program violations.

The era of enhancing conditions of release under supervision was accompanied by various innovations to strengthen community supervision and judicial intervention to be viable punishments. Along the way, an evidence-based supervision construct evolved based on an accumulation of findings across a wide spectrum of studies. This evidence-based supervision model focused attention on the myriad components involved in effectively managing offenders in the community.

Science (evidence)-based supervision

The cumulative evidence about effective correctional practices redefined community supervision to become a behavioral management model. The concept of behavioral management was created by combining accountability (boundaries and compliance) with services (addressing criminogenic needs). Community supervision is partnered with other community resources to address the factors that contribute to criminal behavior. But this era also developed a body of knowledge that could be used to transform probation. Two types of initiatives occurred during this era: the outline of an evidence-based supervision model, and a policy framework to advance the uptake of evidence-based supervision, as described below.

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Evidence-based supervision. Taxman (2002, 2008) framed a new model of supervision that incorporated the 1990s view of effectiveness in correctional interventions. This model incorporated the 'what works' literature espoused by Andrews and Bonta (1996, 2003) with a particular focus on community supervision. A translational document – *Tools of the Trade: A Guide to Incorporating Science into Practice* (Taxman *et al*. 2004) – provides a detailed description of the components of the four parts of the model: (1) use standardized risk and needs assessment; (2) target offenders to appropriate treatment and controls based on the risk and need factors; (3) use cognitive behavioral programming for offenders in treatment programs and have officers use cognitive restructuring strategies with offenders; (4) use administrative sanctions and rewards that are swift and certain to address compliance issues; and (5) develop a positive working relationship (in the therapeutic literature it is referred to as alliance or rapport) to facilitate offender change. Crime and Justice Institute at Community Resources for Justice (2006), drawing upon these five principles, also added other components to the model, including developing natural support systems, enhancing intrinsic motivation, increasing positive reinforcement, measuring relevant process, and providing measurement feedback. Recent studies have confirmed that when officers practice the 'Risk-Need-Responsivity' model, there are reductions in recidivism (Taxman 2008, Jalbert *et al*. 2010, Drake 2011).

Policy framework. The EBP for community supervision was based on the rudiments of operational practice at the officer level. The Pew Foundation's Public Safety Performance project crafted a policy framework to support the use of EBP supervision: (1) use evidence-based practices; (2) use earned compliance credits (incentives to reduce sentence length); (3) use administrative sanctions; (4) provide for performance incentive funding (incentivize organizations to develop community corrections); and (5) provide for performance measurement to document outcomes and to develop organizations (see Fletcher *et al*. 2009). This framework addresses the organizational responses in improving their ability to communicate results by first defining key outcomes and then measuring results. In addition, the framework provides a targeted manner for organizations to focus on the core aspects of EBP supervision, including having a talented workforce, having policies that encourage offender compliance, and providing the tools to increase funding for positive outcomes (organizationally and individually).

Similarly, the efforts of Travis County, Texas in implementing EBP supervision from a policy perspective highlight the 10 key steps to improving organizational responsiveness. These steps occur in three main areas: (1) establishing an agenda for change by engaging and informing key stakeholders; reviewing and evaluating current departmental policies and practices; and developing the tools to oversee change; (2) redesigning policies and procedures, including screening and assessment, alignment of supervision plans with screening and assessment as well as incentives and sanctions, and developing recidivism reduction training; and (3) implementing procedures to monitor progress and quality through a process and outcome accountability system, redefined personnel evaluation system, and goal-driven performance measures (Council of State Governments 2011).

The policy framework to support EBP supervision has the potential to alter how supervision agencies function. The large unanswered questions are the degree to which these policy frameworks alter the practices at the front-line and their impact on offender behavior.

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Understanding science (evidence)-based supervision policy and practice

SBS is designed to frame community supervision as a viable punishment in an era where incarceration-based policies dominate. Drake's (2011) analysis confirmed the efficacy of the SBS approach, generally an application of the Risk-Need-Responsivity model for supervision. Now we need to turn our attention to which components of SBS supervision and techniques to transform organizations have greater influence and uptake. SBS provides the technology for change, but it is less clear whether these changes can and do occur. This edition embarks on the journey of examining a wave of research designed to assess these efforts, research that can inform us about the next steps in moving the field forward. We begin with an overview by Denise O'Donnell, Elizabeth Griffith, and Edward Banks of the Bureau of Justice Assistance (US Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs) of how the evidence-based policies and practices are being integrated into grant and demonstration projects efforts by the US government. This is an important development in that these science-based practices are being prioritized for implementation through one funding agency, and from these efforts we can learn more about implementation and uptake of science-based policies and practices.

This edition has several articles devoted to the question related to officer skills and knowledge regarding SBS, expanding upon Bonta and colleagues' (2008, 2011) examination of supervision officers in Canada. The question whether supervision officer's practice of 'core correctional practices' remains unknown but with great skepticism, leading to efforts to define how to retool the workforce with these skills. Several different strategies exist, but most importantly, these strategies recognize that traditional training (in-class, didactic information sharing sessions) are unlikely to transform the skills of the workforce. Borrowing from the notion that workforce development must focus on declarative (the facts), procedural (the processes), and strategic (the 'how to') knowledge (see Burke and Hutchins 2007 and Aguinis and Kraiger 2009 for reviews on improving training efforts), the field has been trying to alter how training can occur to affect workforce issues. One challenge inherent in the movement to implement SBS is the expectation that officers will focus on addressing procriminal attitudes and using cognitive intervention strategies in their one-to-one interactions (face-to-face contacts) with offenders.

In two articles and one research note in this edition, scholars explore these issues. Guy Bourgon and Leticia Gutierrez, in their article on the impact of probation officers' use of cognitive restructuring strategies supervision, report the findings from participation in Strategic Training Initiative in Community Supervision (STICS) on recidivism. Offenders who had officers that focused on cognitive interventions tended to have improved outcomes while the officer's attention to procriminal attitudes did not have the same result. Robinson and colleagues at the Administrative Office of the Courts conducted similar analyses using their own training protocol. They used different measures of officer skills but found that offenders exposed to officers that tended to use problem-solving skills (that focused on criminogenic needs) had better outcomes than offenders who were not exposed to these outcomes. Both studies pioneered the use of audiotaping of interactions to measure the style and techniques used by the officers. The research note by Smith and her colleagues at the University of Cincinnati also examined the use of audiotaping. Smith noted that officers improved with more coaching sessions but noted the difficulty of collecting audiotapes. The use of tapes as both training/coaching tools and data collection

tools is an advancement in the study of interactions. All three studies using audiotaping found that it was difficult to systematically collect data using audiotapes given that officers taped their own session and had to return the tapes. The studies also shared similar data collection issues with attrition problems that illustrates the difficulties of maintaining integrity in the data collection schedule, the failure for officers to comply with the schedule and the loss of data. Even more so, the techniques for coding the interactions and measuring use of risk-need responsivity techniques challenges the field overall to better conceptualize SBS, or what we expect officers to do in their work with offenders.

In terms of other practicalities that affect science-based supervision, the techniques to manage low-risk offenders and the size of the caseloads are commonplace issues. Barnes and colleagues report on the findings from randomized controlled trials examining techniques for managing low-risk offenders on probation supervision. Administrative or 'stacked' caseloads (where officers have 400+ offenders to supervise) have no impact on recidivism rates for low-risk offenders; although the results are not statistically significant the null results suggest that either method generates similar findings. While the study did not have a cost effectiveness analysis or benefits, the authors support the use of administrative caseloads for low-risk offenders. Jalbert and Rhodes report on a study of using RNR supervision techniques (mostly unmeasured) with reduced caseloads as compared to standard caseloads. The findings generally support that reduced caseloads facilitates the greater use of RNR practices and the reduced caseloads result in reduced rearrest rates, although same results are not obtained for technical violations. Both authors emphasize the need for more research on the nature of supervision employed in these experiments. Neither study directly measured the interactions of supervision or the contextual factors that guide the supervision interaction. This research calls for the need for greater attention to research in this area. The need for better understanding officer-level activities, actions, behaviors, and attitudes is discussed in the research note by Oleson, Vanbenscotten, Robinson, Lowenkamp, and Hostlinger. In this note, the authors examined the knowledge of officers on the RNR principles in supervision; they note that the limited knowledge about science-based supervision is a major struggle for the field. All of these papers highlight that researchers need to directly measure supervision interactions and offender responses if we want to further our knowledge about effective practices in supervision settings.

The next series of articles examined the use of graduated sanctions in parole agencies. Turner and her colleagues evaluated the California Parole Violation Decision-Making Instrument. The use of administrative sanctions is one of the main policy initiatives to address the issues of compliance to the rules of parole supervision. This well-designed quasi-experiment illustrated that the use of administrative and graduated sanctions were not well received by officers, and that the implementation was faulty. Not surprising there is no impact on offender outcomes, even for lower risk offenders or lower level violations. Rudes, using ethnographic methods, assists in understanding how parole officers resisted the strategies to reduce incarceration for parole technical violations that did not involve new criminal behaviors. Rudes illustrates the clever techniques used by parole officers to continue their enforcement goals. Parole officers found techniques to underplay the use of these administrative sanctions in the spirit of trying to pursue administrative sanctions. Makarios, McCafferty, Steiner, and Travis, in a study of the Ohio Adult Parole Authority Progressive Sanctioning Grid, examined the role of

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senior administrators (those that do not have direct oversight) on parole officer perception of the fairness of the sanctioning grid. This study illustrates some critical factors that administrators may consider as they pursue policy reforms – that is, the officers' level of satisfaction with their regional administrator had impacts on the parole officers' attitudes on the fairness of the sanction grid, the amount of power over offenders provided by the sanctioning grid, and feelings of respect towards the sanction grid.

The final article focuses on the special needs for offenders with mental illness. Lurigio and colleagues assess the current knowledge about effective supervision practices for this special population and report on the need to further understand the factors that affect better outcomes of offenders with mental illness. This research note examines offenders with mental illness, an area of growing concern given the number of probationers and parolees with mental health issues.

Together, this collection of article illustrates an emerging field of knowledge about supervision, and how to advance the implementation of reforms in supervision settings. Collectively the studies demonstrate the challenges of improving offender outcomes in the context of emerging and evolving field of community supervision. Even though community supervision is recognized as important in the era of reducing the need for incarceration, we have a lot to learn about the delivery of supervision services including the business practices of officers. While prior efforts have focused on treatment programs as the main component of evidence-based practices, the issues related to the attitudes, behaviors, and actions of supervision officers are critically important to incorporating science into daily business practice.

From this set of articles, we have learned that organizational change is a challenge that exceeds the traditional training program. The issues surrounding technology transfer are paramount in terms of addressing knowledge and skills, the transfer process, fidelity to the model, and critical outcomes. Besides establishing the efficacy of different approaches, greater attention is needed on studies of implementation and transfer as well as the tools to measure implementation. Rudes, in her study of parole officers in California, noted how top-down change strategies do little to alter the activities of line officers. The studies on training probation officers (Robinson *et al*., Bourgon and Gutierrez, Smith *et al*., and Oleson *et al*.) highlight some of the difficulties with traditional styles of training in terms of transferring knowledge and skills into business practices. Most of the studies using audiotapes demonstrated the difficulties in measuring officer-offender interactions, which is an important aspect to assess in order to determine whether science-based supervision is being implemented. This set of articles confirms the advancements in the field of supervision but it also demonstrate the challenges before us. For example, the favored technique to measure the officer-offender interactions (audiotapes) has a number of methodological issues which make it difficult to use in research studies and even more difficult to use in practice to measure officer performance. More attention in the future needs to be given to the key components of the supervision processes and offender-officer interactions. This will be the major challenge in the next generation of articles assessing the adaptation of evidence-based practices in community supervision settings.

With these articles we now have a new set of research questions to answer about community supervision. The first and foremost should focus on implementation of SBS – in fact, our knowledge about implementation strategies is extremely limited. We need to build our knowledge about implementation, and organizational change, including a better appreciation for the gains in each stage of implementation. As

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noted by Taxman and Belenko (2011), implementation has a number of phases that are distinct in their ability to advance the sustainability of sound (science-based) practices. And, there are a number of strategies available including process improvements, change teams, practice guidelines, management initiatives, boosters and coaching, and external facilitation. At this point, we are unsure about the effectiveness of these various change efforts at improving the organization and the implementation of evidence-based practices, officer skills and use of SBS, or offender-level outcomes. Similarly, research is needed on better measurement tools and processes in supervision context and interactions. While community supervision is now expanding, it is also important to expand research to fill in the gaps of our knowledge about implementing science-based supervision.

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Notes on contributor

Faye S. Taxman, Ph.D. is a University Professor in the Criminology, Law and Society Department and Director of the Advancing Correctional Excellence Center at George Mason University. She is recognized for her work in the development of the seamless systems of care models that link the criminal justice with other service delivery systems as well as reengineering probation and parole supervision services. She is the co-author (with Steven Belenko) of *Implementation of Evidence Based Practices in Community Corrections and Addiction Treatment* (Springer, 2011).

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