

Female Offenders' Multiple Goals for Engaging in Desired Communication with Their Probation/Parole Agents

Jennifer Cornacchione & Sandi W. Smith

What are the reasons why women on probation/parole talk to or avoid talking to their PO about their needs or problems?

When people communicate, there are often **competing goals** for engaging in or avoiding the interaction. For example, a woman on probation/parole may have started using drugs again and want to tell her supervising agent about it so that she gets the help that she needs. However, she worries that disclosing this behavior to the agent may result in a sanction or reincarceration.

Our Study

- 127 women on probation/parole wanted to talk to supervising agents about a difficult need or issue they were facing
 - 84 (66%) had the conversation
 - 41 (32%) did not have the conversation
- Topics of the desired conversations included:
 - Another relationship or person, including wanting to spend time with a friend or family member who was also on probation/parole
 - Housing
 - Interaction with police
 - Illegal behaviors committed during supervision, including relapse
 - Services needed, such as transportation, financial help, and employment

Reasons women reported that they **engaged in the conversation** included:

- To **receive support**, such as advice & referrals to programs
- To **inform** the agent about things that had occurred, including confessing crimes and general information about life events and day-to-day activities.

Reasons women reported that they **refrained from engaging in the conversation** included:

- Perception that the **agent does not have ability, desire, or resources to help**
- Fears of “**getting in trouble**,” for example reincarceration or unwanted treatment requirements.
- **Communication issues** with the agent, including that there wasn't enough time to talk about multiple issues

Practical Application

- The criminal justice system could equip agents with the necessary resources to help women with their common issues, such as transportation, housing, employment, and childcare help. Examples of resources include pre-made lists, social services agencies that provide help and referrals, and volunteer groups in the community.
- Agents could build trusting and supportive relationships with their clients, who will then become more likely to talk freely about her needs/problems.