

2022

## How do social relationships with parole officers impact parolee experiences while on community supervision?

April Lynn Maeschen  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Psychology and Community Services

This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

April Maeschen

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Walden University  
2022

Abstract

How do social relationships with parole officers impact parolee experiences while on  
community supervision?

by

April Maeschen

MS, Walden University, 2018

BS, National American University, 2015

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Forensic Psychology

Walden University

August 2022

## Abstract

The relationship between parolees and parole officers can be complicated, as parole officers often have dual functions. Parole officers try to encourage positive behavior while still enforcing rules and regulations on parolees in an attempt to help a parolee make pro-social decisions. Many challenges can arise during community supervision that can make it difficult for a parole officer to help guide the parolee. In this study, parole officers' perceptions were examined regarding supportive communication and how this can affect parolees' behavior during community supervision. Minimal research exists about parole officers and how effective communication styles can impact parolees. Two theoretical frameworks, social cognitive theory and communication theory were used to underpin the research. Data were collected through semi-structured virtual interviews with 10 parole officer participants who have experience supervising parolees. Participants discussed the communication styles they used and their perceptions on successful strategies for assisting parolees. The collected data were analyzed using NVivo and the following themes were identified: (a) rapport, (b) supervision styles (authoritarian versus counseling), (c) safety training, (d) mental health training, (e) mental health needs, (f) criminogenic needs, and (g) success. The results of this study have potential implications for positive social change by presenting opportunities to enhance relationships between parolees and parole officers to create more positive experiences during community supervision.

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## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, Joseph Maeschen; my children Ryder and Gracyn Maeschen; my parents, Jack and Deb Bartling; my in-laws, Barry and Diane Maeschen; and many friends, family, colleagues, and mentors who have provided me with incentive and encouragement to succeed throughout the time I have worked on my dissertation.

Dr. Jana Price-Sharps, you provided me the guidance and support that I needed to get me through this phase in life. You provided me the determination and push to get through the difficulties and challenges that may have arisen.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my family for supporting me through this process. Without them, I would not have been able to accomplish this goal. I would also like to thank Dr. Jana Price-Sharps and Dr. Scott Gfellow for assisting me and mentoring me through this process.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### **Introduction**

As parolees transition into the community, many barriers can impact their return to the community, such as paying supervision fees, finding a job, relapsing drug use, experiencing transportation issues, and complying with monthly reporting (Johnson, 2015). In this study, I explored the perceptions of parole officers on how supportive communication can affect parolees' behavior during their time on community supervision. I conducted a qualitative study using two theoretical frameworks—social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986) and communication theory (Roddy et al., 2019)—to help determine how the parolee–parole agent relationship can help parolees make pro-social decisions throughout their community supervision time.

In this chapter, the background section includes a review of previous research regarding the relationship between parole officer and parolee. I present the problem statement focused on parole officers' experiences with different communication styles that may affect parolees. I discuss the purpose of the study and the theoretical framework and how it relates to the study. I describe the nature of the study including methodology, design, and focus, and I define key terms, identify assumptions related to the study, and address the scope and delimitations of the study. The limitations of the methodology and the design are also considered, and I explore the significance of the study as it relates to parole officers, parolees, and community supervision.

## **Background**

Research indicates that supportive communication from a parole officer can help support parolees in avoiding substance abuse, which can increase their likelihood of a positive experience while on community supervision (Holmstrom et al., 2017). The relationship between parolee and parole officer can play an important part in how parolees experience parole. Supportive communication to parolees may stimulate behavioral changes that can help parolees lead a healthier lifestyle (Cornacchione et al., 2016). Supportive messages to a parolee from their parole officer can also encourage the incorporation of pro-social skills and behavior (Cornacchione et al., 2016). When there is a perceived positive relationship between a parolee and parole officer, there may be a greater willingness for the parolee to place trust in their parole officer (Chamberlain et al., 2018). Confidence instilled in the relationship can help create a window of opportunity for a parolee to ask for help when needed without feeling judged. In Chapter 2, I will delve deeper into how different communication styles can affect parolees' success on community supervision.

The results of this study help to address gaps in the current research for a better understanding of parole officers' perceptions regarding how communication with parolees can assist in changing parolees' motivation and encouraging pro-social behavior. Communication with parolees may influence parolees' complex lifestyles and can affect components of their parole. Parolees face far different problems as parolees than they faced as inmates. On community supervision, parolees are required to find employment, remain sober, pay fines, and navigate everyday life problems. In addition, parolees must

follow the terms and conditions of their supervision agreement with parole. Some parolees may experience issues with social supports and challenges in rekindling relationships with family or friends after imprisonment, and this can make the parolee–parole officer relationship essential to the success of their parole.

### **Problem Statement**

Parolees often struggle with unmet needs that, if met, could help them become productive members of society, such as reconnecting with family and friends who may provide a support system (Johnson, 2015). Social supports can be a critical factor in how parolees may act while on community supervision (Johnson, 2015). Parolees tend to be less likely to secure family support and housing while on parole (Johnson, 2015). For parolees, a parole officer can provide additional tools to provide a positive outcome and can be an essential aspect to community reintegration (Johnson, 2015).

The relationship between a parole officer and parolee can be complicated because of the parole officer's dual roles. Most parole officers show the parolee a caring, supportive side but also must enforce the law and procedures (Cornacchione & Smith, 2017). Blasko et al. (2015) suggested that parole officers can influence a parolee's perception of their supervision relationship. Parole officer behaviors may influence the formation of a positive relationship, making interventions easier to conduct and leading to less frequent violations (Blasko et al., 2015). Based on Klockars's (1972) model, the rapport that develops between a parole officer and a parolee can create an important social bond that may help prevent a parolee from returning to criminal behavior. Klockars

(1972) discussed how the relationship between parolee and parole officer will develop over time, and with time, rapport is established.

### **Purpose Statement**

In this study, I focused on the types of communication styles parole agents use and find effective, which can be critical to the success of a parolee on community supervision. Morash et al. (2015) suggested that depending on the relationship style a parole agent has with the parolee, that relationship will likely affect the parolee's attitude during parole. The type of communication a parole agent uses with a parolee can impact how that parolee makes decisions, including whether decisions are negative or positive. Researchers have found that the more positive a parole agent is with their parolee during supervision, the more positive the outcome of parole (Morash et al., 2015). The main objective of the study was to examine communication styles parole officers find most helpful in establishing rapport and assisting parolees in making pro-social decisions, ultimately leading parolees to successfully complete community supervision. Holmstrom et al. (2017) discussed how women on parole benefit from having social support to avoid substance abuse. Holmstrom et al. (2017) also found that female parolees benefit from a positive relationship with their parole officer, which leads to parolees staying sober and out of prison.

To understand how a professional support system, such as a parole officer, may impact a parolee requires a better understanding of how parole agents perceive the role of communication styles in influencing their relationships with parolees. Understanding how experienced parole agents communicate with parolees and how that communication may



create positive experiences might help additional parolees successfully complete their parole. Parolees tend to struggle with numerous issues, such as mental health, employment, and family relationships (Matejkowski & Ostermann, 2015). The objective of this study was to gain information from experienced parole agents that could then lead to improved training and knowledge sharing among newer parole agents to lead to more successful outcomes for parolees.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: What are the perceptions of parole agents about their relationships with the parolees on their case load?

RQ2: What communication strategies do parole agents feel are more effective in influencing and shaping the behavior of parolees, ultimately leading to more pro-social choices on the part of parolees?

RQ3: What are the perceptions of parole agents about their role as a social support for parolees, and how does that role impact parolees' successful completion of parole?

### **Theoretical Framework**

Two theoretical frameworks were used to underpin this research. The first theory was social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986), and the other theory used as a foundation for this study was communication theory (Roddy et al., 2019). In this study, I delved deeper into the perceived relationship between a parole officer and parolee, examining how this relationship may be related to parolees' performance while on community supervision. Communication theory is focused on how different situations can require

various forms of support. This support may depend on the characteristics of the people involved. Social support can provide either positive, negative, or mixed emotional responses, which may impact how parolees are feeling during their time on community supervision (Roddy et al., 2019). This approach can bring additional insight into how effective parole officers may be on altering the behavior mindset of parolees and their ability to make sound judgment calls and decisions. A focus on communication may bring more insight into how effective parole officers influence the mindsets of parolees, encouraging the parolee to use sound judgment and decision making. The second theory, social cognitive theory, is focused on thought processes and how people decide what behavior to imitate. The choice of behavior may ultimately stem from a complexity of the interactions between nature and nurture (Bandura, 1986).

### **Nature of Study**

I used a qualitative approach to conduct this research. The reason for this approach was that the study would involve gathering nonnumerical data. These data were regarding the types of relationships that develop between parolees and parole officers throughout community supervision time. These data were used to determine if the relationship between parolee and parole agent leads to a positive view during time on community supervision. Data collected for this study were interview data. In interviews, parole officers were asked about their perceptions of the parole officer-parolee relationship. Collected data were analyzed to identify themes, including information on communication strategies, rapport, and factors that may influence whether a parolee is successful or unsuccessful at completing parole. The research design was

phenomenological, and I focused on interviews with parole agents currently working in the field. Interview questions covered supervision styles, resources, communication, rapport building, and other tools parole officers use to help parolees. The results of this study may provide valuable information to other parole agents about strategies to assist parolees in successfully navigating community supervision.

### **Definitions**

Within in this study, several terms are used to help aid this study. Below are definitions of these terms:

*Communication theory:* A theory used to look at how different situations can require various forms of support; social support can provide either positive, negative, or mixed emotional responses that may impact how parolees are feeling during their time on community supervision ([Roddy et al., 2019](#)).

*Evidence-based practice:* Current research and best practices are used to help guide policy decisions and focus on approaches demonstrated by effective empirical research as opposed to anecdotal experiences (National Institute of Corrections, n.d.).

*Parole:* The temporary release of an active inmate to serve the rest of their sentence on community supervision with different conditions they must follow.

*Parolee:* An offender released on community supervision or parole who must live under certain conditions while in the community in an attempt to rehabilitate as a productive member of society.

*Parole officer:* Individuals who supervise offenders who have been released from an institution on parole who help ensure that all conditions of supervision are being met

and that parolees are working toward becoming productive members of society (US Legal, Inc., n.d.).

*Social cognitive theory*: Consists of thought processes and how people decide what behavior to imitate and may explain that behavior (Bandura, 1986).

*Supportive communication*: Verbal and nonverbal behavior with the intentions of providing support or assistance for others in need (Knapp & Daly, 2011). This type of communication can be important for parolees during parole.

### **Assumptions**

In this study, I assumed that the information provided by the parole officer would be truthful and adequate. Participation in the study would help reach a better understanding of parole officers' perceptions regarding effective communication styles for helping parolees. I assumed there would be a high willingness among parole officers to assist in this study. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, interviews were conducted via telephone or online through Microsoft Teams; interviews were confidential, private meetings. I also assumed that participants involved would have a clear knowledge of what communication styles they use and what information is deemed effective in their work.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

The scope of this qualitative study was to include up to 10 participants, all of whom were parole officers of varying age and gender, as well as varying years of service. Participation was volunteer only. The interviews consisted of at least 10 questions. The questions were used to ascertain parole officers' perceptions on communication styles

and how effective different communications styles are on supervision levels of parolees. I also considered barriers, demographics, and lack of resources that could affect how such communication styles may affect parolees' experiences on supervision. The study was limited to participants in one state but included different regions of the state, which could affect the results of the research due to using such a limited exposure of participants.

### **Limitations**

Certain problems that may have occurred involved interviewing parole agents and not enough data due to lack of participants. Alternatively, participants may not have felt comfortable in sharing their opinions on what resources they lack to help their parolees to be successful. Parole officers can often feel frustrated and overwhelmed with the numerous amounts of violations a parolee may conduct while on community supervision, especially when they provide adequate support during this time. When conducting the interview, parole officers were asked to describe the communication style they use and how they perceive this information.

### **Significance**

By conducting this research, the main objective was to reach a better understanding of relationships between parole officers and parolees to see what may create positive experiences that help a parolee complete parole successfully. In the study, I looked further into professional relationships between parole officers and parolees. The goal of the study was to determine how these relationships may affect a parolee in making decisions and positive changes in their lives. I explored communication styles parole officers use toward parolees to determine whether this affects parolees' successful

completion of parole. The objective was to take the information obtained and use it to enhance relationships between parolees and parole officer to create more positive experiences during community supervision periods.

### **Summary**

In Chapter 1, I presented an overall explanation of the purpose of the study and the problem within the topic. Information regarding the background was provided regarding the relationship between parole officer and parolee, which can be an imperative factor in the success of a parolee's time in community supervision. In the current study, I examined communication styles that parole officers use to supervise parolees to determine how effective communication between parole officer and parolee can be in producing a positive experience during parole. Parole officers can influence a parolee's perception of them even during difficult times or when parolees have complicated needs or backgrounds (Blasko et al., 2015). Building the relationship between parole officer and parolee can help create positive pro-social behaviors among parolees and help them determine good tools for them to use. Chapter 2 will include a synopsis of the literature used to guide this study.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

In the United States, approximately 6.4 million people are currently serving some form of sentence in prison or jail or on parole/probation (Prison Policy, n.d.). In 1876, penologist Zebulon Brockway initiated the United States' first parole release system (Encyclopedia, 2019). Since parole was established, several key changes have helped shape parole today. The purpose of parole is to help a parolee obtain extra guidance by providing tools and different resources through everyday life situations so they can adjust back into their community (Justice, 2015). However, there are times when these tools or resources are not sufficient to help the parolee become a successful member of society.

Parolees tend to struggle with different aspects of their life throughout their time on parole. Reconnecting with family may be an essential aspect to community reintegration (Johnson, 2015). While out on parole they may be less likely to secure that family support (Johnson, 2015). Parolees need to be able to have some form of support system, primarily that of a parole officer who can provide additional tools and support. This will increase the likelihood of a positive outcome (Johnson, 2015).

In addition to a potential lack of family support, there are other barriers and challenges that parolees face. Building a positive relationship with their parole agent can help parolees break through these barriers and lead successful and positive lives. Social support for parolees can be a critical aspect of how they may act while on community supervision. Blasko et al. (2015) described how parole officers can influence a parolee's perception of their supervision relationship. Parole officers' behaviors may influence the

formation of a positive relationship with the parolee, which can make interventions easier to conduct and lead to less frequent violations (Blasko et al., 2015).

The purpose of the study was to understand how a professional support system, such as a parole officer, can impact a parolee. How parole officers communicate with parolees may influence parolees' complex lifestyles and can affect components of parole. In this study, I looked at how parole officers' communication styles may impact the success rates of parolees while on community supervision. Parole officers can be a critical resource for parolees. A parole officer can help a parolee achieve short- and long-term goals, such as self-efficacy and sobriety. A parole officer can also offer behavioral advice and can enforce behavioral rules (Morash et al., 2015). There is a gap in the research regarding parole officers' perceptions of how they communicate with parolees and how that communication can assist in changing motivation and encouraging pro-social behavior.

In Chapter 2, I delve deeper into the literature relevant to the current research and provide support for the research questions guiding this study. The problem addressed is the relationship between parolee and parole officer and how their communication can lead to a positive experience of community supervision. I conducted a qualitative study and gathered data by interviewing parole officers. The interviews consisted of questions regarding communication styles, personal perceptions of parole, and successes/barriers on parole. In the literature review, I discuss what parole is and its background. I discuss the barriers parolees face and what contributing factors may lead parolees out of this



criminal thinking. Then, I discuss parolee–parole officer rapport and how supportive communication can affect parolees to create a positive success on parole.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

Literature was used to look at the relationships between parole officers and parolees, different barriers parolees face, and communication styles. Literature was obtained through several databases, such as Google Scholar, psychology databases combined, and the criminal justice database. The keywords used in the initial literature search were *parole*, *relationships*, *parole officers*, *parolees*, and *impact* or *effect* or *influence*. Depending on the search parameters, searches would yield different amounts of articles. In one instance, when searching *parolees* and *parole officer*, 60 different articles were located. The literature used in this research spanned publication dates from 1947 to the present.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

A theoretical foundation is a formal type of model or theory used to help explain what issue may be driving the research (Watson, 2020). When reviewing the literature, I discovered two theories that could provide a foundation for examining parole officers' perceptions of their communication with parolees. Determining which theory best fits the study helps to frame the research question and can be an important aspect of developing the shape and the structure of the research (Watson, 2020). Through the lens of both social cognitive theory and communication theory, researchers can gain a better understanding of the relationships between parole officers and parolees.

### **Social Cognitive Theory**

Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory is focused on thought processes and how people decide what behavior to imitate and may explain that behavior. The choice of behavior may ultimately be seen as stemming from the complexity of interactions between nature and nurture (Bandura, 1986). Through the examples of influences, most behaviors are either consciously or unintentionally learned (Bandura, 1977). Social cognitive theory can be used to explain the influences in a parolee's life that can affect their behaviors. This framework displays how parolees' behaviors can be influenced by their parole officers to lead them into making pro-social decisions. What motivates someone to participate in criminal behavior can be learned through associations with significant others (Bahr et al., 2010). If a parolee associates themselves with others who are involved with criminal behavior, then they too may conduct criminal behavior; if they were to associate themselves with someone not involved with criminal behavior, they are more likely to avoid illegal or deviant behaviors and actions (Bahr et al., 2010).

### **Communication Theory**

Communication theory is focused on how different situations can require various forms of support. Social support can provide either positive, negative, or mixed emotional responses that may impact how parolees are feeling during their time on community supervision (Roddy et al., 2019). Communication theory is used to explore effective communication skills (Morash et al., 2018). In this study, communication theory was used to look at the communication styles of parole officers and how effective they can be with supervising parolees. The approach of this theory helps bring more insight

into how effective parole officers may be on altering a parolee's behavior mindset and their ability to make sound judgment calls and decisions. A focus on communication may bring more insight into how effective parole officers may influence a parolee's mindset, encouraging the parolee to use sound judgment and good decision-making. This framework can be used to place emphasis on communication styles between parolees and parole offices that may be deemed effective in positive community supervision.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Parole**

As the prison systems grow, inmates being released to parole status or programs also increase. Parole officers have an opportunity to influence their relationship with parolees, including those with complicated backgrounds and significant needs (Blasko et al., 2015). This relationship and its influence create a need for additional research on the programs available and the relationships that parolees have with their parole officer.

Parole is the discretionary release of an inmate prior to completing an actual sentence to be served in the community (Blasko et al., 2015). Parolees are supervised by an agent during their time in the community in the hopes they will be rehabilitated into successful members of society. While on community supervision, parolees are required to follow certain conditions (Blasko et al., 2015). The parole board sets most conditions for the parolee, and the parole officers themselves can set other specific conditions. Parolees who fail to follow conditions are commonly referred to as parole violators and often are returned to prison as a sanction (Blasko et al., 2015).

Initially, parole's main objective was to help offenders' transition from prison out into the community by offering them support while finding employment and housing (Chamberlain et al., 2018). Similar to the original intentions, parole has tried to expand by providing a simple transition and providing support to parolees so they can become a more productive member of society. Parole agents and officers help restore or maintain a parolee during their time on parole by providing them the tools and resources they may need to complete parole successfully. Parole supervision has been a common intervention used to help offenders in the community in their rehabilitation (Cornacchione et al., 2016). Parole officers provide support to parolees, playing an integral part in the reentry process and the success of parolees as they transition into the community (Chamberlain et al., 2018).

Parole boards are designed to make decisions, such as releasing inmates to parole, setting specific supervision conditions while on community supervision, and if conditions are violated, using their authority to revoke parole and return parolees back to an institution (Encyclopedia, 2019). Parole board members are expected to make decisions based on complex legal rules and social sciences research (Rhine et al., 2015). Depending on the individual state, parole boards are created differently but all seem to have the same main objective, which is to determine when an offender is ready to be released from prison back into the community with certain stipulations and supervision agreements.

Parole is an extremely important part of the transitional period from prison to community. When offenders are released from prison, some are required to serve time on community supervision. Offenders participate in reentry programs to prepare them for a

successful reintegration into society (Bucklen & Zajac, 2009). This transition is extremely critical because it is the final opportunity corrections has to assist the parolee in developing the attitude, behaviors, and skills necessary to successfully function in the community (Hamin & Hassan, 2012). As parolees transition back into the community, they use this time to gain employment, reconnect with family, and establish a better understanding of what is expected of them (Bahr et al., 2010). Having access to basic amenities such as employment, housing, and clothing has been correlated with parole success (Costanza et al., 2015).

As time has passed, changes have been made to policies associated with parole. Public views of parolees may include skepticism and may include concern about the release of an inmate into the community (Freiberg et al., 2018). Several factors, including public views, instances of parolees reoffending, and sentence structures, have resulted in policy changes within the parole system. Parole systems have adopted different guidelines, policy-driven decision-making instruments, and risk assessment tools to help them make certain decisions about whether to grant or deny parole (Rhine et al., 2015).

Within the parole system, the parole board plays a critical role in the formation of prison policies (Rhine et al., 2015). The parole board can also be part of reducing mass incarceration (Rhine et al., 2015). Over time, the amount of discretion given to parole boards has changed. Procedures that surround discretionary parole release are to be reviewed on a regular basis to determine the quality of the power parole boards have over parolees' lives (Rhine et al., 2015).

Parolees may be re-arrested when on parole, resulting in them returning to prison on a violation of parole or on new charges. Parolees are given certain conditions they must follow throughout their time on community supervision. One challenge parolee's often face is following instructions provided by the parole board and the combination of supervision duties (Hamin & Hassan, 2012). When parolees do not follow certain conditions, they can be found noncompliant, which can trigger consequences such as a parole revocation bringing a parolee back into custody (Henshaw et al., 2019). Ostermann et al. (2015) discussed how different impacts of operationalizations may affect parole. Several studies have been conducted to examine how efficient parole supervision can help reduce recidivism (Ostermann et al, 2015).

Some social issues may trigger reoffending and parole violations (Henshaw et al., 2019). When parolees are released from prison they often must start over. They are required to find employment, housing and maintain sobriety. The increase in poverty and institutionalized issues play a major factor in this increased parole revocations (Henshaw et al., 2019). When parolees associate themselves with deviant peers, they are more susceptible to negative experiences and bad behaviors (Bahr et al., 2010). The different associations of the parolee may influence the parolees' behaviors (Bahr et al., 2010)

The focus of the parole officer is to help the parolee complete parole successfully. Parole officers often face challenges when monitoring parolees out in the community. One of the challenges is the balance between the two main functions. Parole officers are rehabilitating agents and provide policing aspects such as surveillance and control (Hamin & Hassan, 2012). Another tool that parole officers can use of case management

tools to assess their parolees. The need for risk assessments is crucial to improve the allocation of programs for parolees (Schaefer & Williamson, 2018). Studies have indicated that assessments are either not being completed or are being completed incorrectly due to the increase in caseloads and diminishing resources available to parole officers (Schaefer & Williamson, 2018).

The communication theory reviewed in this study looks at how different communication styles may be more effective in assisting parole officers in supervising a parolee. According to Morash et al. (2018) research has predicted that there is a positive relationship between conversational communication and agent/parolee relationship that utilizes caring and fairness tactics. How a parole officer communicates and reacts to a parolee can make a difference in how effective that parole officer's supervision style will be on the parolee. The other theory reviewed was the social cognitive theory. This theory reviews how the social interactions a parolee is involved with can affect their community supervision. Bandura (1977) stated that behavior patterns can either be acquired through direct experiences or by observing that behavior. Parolees often are involved in criminal behavior because of observing others involved with that type of behavior. Over time what parolees have seen or learned is the behavior that they will follow.

### **History of Parole**

In 1876 a proposal was established at the Elmira Reformatory for youthful offenders based out of New York, NY. the proposal utilized a grading system that inmates could earn a form of parole out into the community (encyclopedia, 2019). As years passed major concepts were established in the United States such as 1) sentence

reduction based on good behavior, 2) community supervision of the parolee and 3) indeterminate sentencing (encyclopedia, 2019). Only a few states had adopted this type of system, and by 1944 every jurisdiction of the United States had incorporated some form of parole system (encyclopedia, 2019). There are approximately 2.12 million people currently incarcerated in a United States prison (Szmigiera, 2021). As of 2019, approximately 878,000 inmates were out on parole status (*U.S. Residents on Parole 2019* / Statista, 2019).

### **Barriers of Parole**

When a parolee transitions from prison to society they typically will rely on a form of parole to help them make that transition successfully. Many challenges can arise when offenders are released into the community. Such challenges focus on structural factors that related to limited opportunities and resources (Bucklen & Zajac, 2009). Often, they are subject to supervision conditions that would require them to find and maintain employment, remain drug free, report to their agent on a weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly timeframe depending on their supervision level, submit to random drug testing, not associating themselves with any other felons and not involving themselves in any sort of criminal activities (Bahr et al., 2010). How parolees relate to different views and how they handle different situations can impact the relationship they may with their parole officer. Parolees come from varying backgrounds, their attitudes and beliefs can affect their time while on community supervision.

Woman parolees have similar difficulties as men do while out on community supervision. In some cases, woman parolees may be classified as victims themselves,



making them more vulnerable in some situations. Winham et al. (2015) discussed how childhood victimization, poor adult attachment, psychological distress, and substance abuse might cause a strain on female parolees. The study suggests that psychological distress and substance abuse could be caused by attachment from reports of childhood victimization, this can then lead the parolee to have a negative outlook while on community supervision. It may also hinder their relationship with their parole officer.

### **Demographics**

There are many different types of barriers that can affect an individual's time on parole. One of these barriers can be demographics of the individual, specifically female versus male. Parolees both men and woman can face extreme challenges during their time on community supervision. When inmates are released onto a community supervision status, they can return to poverty communities lacking in housing, employment, and education opportunities (Johnson, 2015).

Woman often struggle with higher substance addictions, along with mental health issues, trauma, and abuse history, typically causing low self-efficacy and pro-social networks (Stone et al., 2018). Women parolees have been known to struggle during their time on parole; when adjusting from prison life to parole life, their actions can negatively impact their abilities and motivation, causing issues with being successful (Johnson, 2015). Specific reentry needs such as employment, family support, housing, transportation, and parental skills are some of those important needs for parolees to be successful during parole (Johnson, 2015). Woman parolees often face the unnerving task of recovery with their family and friends, relying heavily on the need of financial and

emotional support from them to get through this difficult time (Johnson, 2015). Woman can also face caregiver obligations and challenges (Stone et al., 2018). Stone et al (2018) stated that often women who are on parole are also mothers, especially acting in a single parent role while attempting to provide a safe and stable life for their family.

Just as women who struggle while on community supervision, men can also face detrimental challenges that can cause them to be unsuccessful during their community supervision time. Challenges that men can face while on community supervision are lack of employment, housing, transportation, or addiction issues. Men on parole can also struggle with a lack of social connection and sometimes they can face scrutiny for being a felon. Having the support of their parole agent may lead them to make better decisions further down the road.

### **Lack of Resources**

When parolees are released from prison, resources made available to them can play a major role on how successful they may be while out on parole. With the different programs made available to parolees, there still seems to be a need for more resources to help guide parolees through their time on community supervision. Location can also play a big factor when determining the different resources made available. Parolees releasing to smaller communities may not have the opportunity that others may have releasing to bigger communities. Another factor that can affect the number of resources available to parolees is funding, communities have a set amount of specific funding that can be used for the different resources along with whatever donations may be provided as well.

Employment can be viewed as one of the most critical aspects in a parolee's success. Barriers to employment for parolees may include external factors such as job markets, the legal aspect of hiring a felon, transportation issues, and the reluctance of hiring someone that just simply may not show up for work (Bucklen & Zajac, 2009). Housing can also be a key factor in how time out on community supervision may go for a parolee. Some of those barriers may consist in lack of affordable housing, reluctant property owners not willing to lease to felons, and certain restrictions on where a parolee can be housed (Bucklen & Zajac, 2009).

Sex offenders can fall into a unique offender group thus making the relationship between sex offender parolee and parole officer different than that of another parolee (Bailey & Sample, 2015). Sex offenders have different barriers that they must hurdle to succeed at parole. The additional barriers that sex offenders face are residential restrictions. They are required to register with the county they are going to live in that they are a sex offender and must avoid certain zones when determining where to live (Bailey & Sample, 2015). Sex offenders typically have consequences that can affect them along with their family. These consequences can create a decrease in their social bonds with their family, unstable housing and employment which could inevitably cause future recidivism (Bailey & Sample, 2015). Conditions such as GPS monitoring, sex offender treatment and polygraph sessions may also be placed on the sex offender parolee as an additional safety precaution.

## **Criminal Behavior**

Mental health can play a major factor in increased levels of criminal behavior. Parolees with mental health issues often struggle with daily life occurrences that can cause them to continue their criminal thinking. In some states, parole officers can impose certain conditions on a parolee's supervision agreement, requiring them to adhere to specific programming that may help reduce their criminal involvement (Matejkowski & Ostermann, 2015). According to Matejkowski and Ostermann (2015), that there is an association between the reduction to dynamic criminal risk factors and a reduced criminal behavior among parolees, however there is still a need to train agents in addressing criminogenic needs, identifying what services are available that may target those with high risks in criminal behavior within the population that they may supervise.

## **Successful Transition Out of Criminal Behavior**

Although many factors can negatively affect a parolee during their transition into community supervision, there are also positive influences on their behaviors while out on community supervision. Positive relationships with friends and family can influence and benefit a parolee during their parole time, leading to pro-social behaviors on the part of the parolee. Relationships with parole officers can be deemed as affective in parolees making decisions that can lead to a successful community supervision. According to Chamberlain et al. (2018), the quality of the relationship between parole officer and parolee can affect a parolee's reentry process into the community.

Other factors such as positive experiences with employment, housing, and social interactions with the community can desist parolees from criminal behaviors. Bahr et al.

(2010) stated that parolees that developed positive relationships with friends and participated in enjoyable activities were more likely to succeed on community supervision. Positive associations with peers at employment can create structure and restrict parolees from engaging in criminal activities (Bahr et al., 2010). The utilization of sanctions such as short jail time stints have commonly been used in community supervision (Boman et al., 2019).

### **Parolee–Parole Officer Rapport**

The relationship between a parole officer and parolee can be very detrimental to their time during community supervision. Parole officers have been seen as an important part of the reentry process that a parolee endures and how that quality of relationship between parolee and parole officer can determine their success (Chamberlain et al., 2018). That relationship can be used as a tool to help the parolee in becoming successful while out on parole. When parole officers utilize effective intervention principles when supervising parolees, this can impact public safety (Kennealy et al., 2012).

Parolees already struggle with social aspects in their life, they often lack in close relationships with their family due to the choices they have made in the past. Parole officers can create a critical link for parolees to successfully reintegrate into society (Chamberlain et al., 2018). Sometimes, parolees' needs may go unseen because they do not disclose what they may need or may not find that specific option available. When a parolee can have a positive relationship with their parole officer, they are more likely to confide in the officer and communicate how they might be feeling (Chamberlain et al.,

2018). Parolee's may also feel inclined to accept what feedback the parole officer may have for them.

Often parole officers juggle with a “dual role relationship” (p. 3583) acting as a social worker and a police officer, they provide that social support while managing to enforce the supervision conditions (Chamberlain et al., 2018). How the parole officer behaviors could be a grave element that can support the formation of a positive relationship (Blasko et al., 2015). Utilizing that dual role of emphasizing the change of parolee behaviors while maintaining public safety, parole officers may hope to resolve any dilemmas that may arise (Kennealy et al., 2012). Having the ability to switch back and forth may increase challenges but keeping that balance can benefit both parties. For a parolee to disclose what problems or struggles they may be experiencing, parole officers must earn the trust of the parolee (Kennealy et al., 2012)

Parole officers are deemed as a major social support system for parolees (Bares & Mowen, 2020). The quality of the relationship between the parolee and parole officer can play a vital role in the successful reintegration back into the community (Chamberlain et al., 2018). The better the relationship between parole officer and parolee the lower the odds of parole violations that may occur (Bares & Mowen, 2020). The more positive the relationship is between a parole officer and parolee the more willing the parolee may be to comply with their supervision conditions (Chamberlain et al., 2018). The better the rapport between parole officer and parolee the more comfortable the parolee is willing to talk about service needs during their communication supervision with their parole officer (Chamberlain et al., 2018).

### **Supportive Communication**

Communication can be an important factor in assisting parole officers with parolees. Supportive communication can be defined as verbal and non-verbal behavior that is produced with the intention in aiding those perceived as needing assistance (Knapp & Daly, 2011). Supportive communication from a parole officer can help provide support in avoiding substance abuse for parolees, which can increase the likelihood of a positive experience while on community supervision time (Holmstrom et al., 2017). One of the main functions of supervision is the manner in how parole officers respond to the different behaviors of an offender (Steiner et al., 2011). Parole officers tend to find a balance between control and treatment to determine the best way to supervise a parolee and will promote community safety while facilitating a successful reentry into the community (Steiner et al., 2011).

### **Supervision Styles**

There are different ways a parole officer can choose to supervise their parolee. One method used would be a caseworker approach which entails more on assisting the parolee with whatever problems they may have (Seiter & Crews, 2003). Parole officers may provide some form of counseling and/or social support to complete parole successfully. Another method surveillance entails the actual monitoring and enforcing the different conditions that may be placed on a parolee (Seiter & Crews, 2003). According to Hamlin and Hassan (2012), roles of parole officers are being shaped by different supervision models. Parole officers in the United States tend to favor the combined

rehabilitation and surveillance model (Hamin & Hassan, 2012). This combined model can be effective in the supervision of parolees.

Parole officers' primary objective is to rehabilitate parolees while protecting society from those who do not desire rehabilitation (Seiter & Crews, 2003). By utilizing both types of supervision styles, parole officers seem to have a more effective result with those that they are supervising. Officers who utilized both caseworker and surveillance tend to seek balance in control and treatments by discovering efficient ways to ensure public safety while allowing the successful reentry of parolees (Steiner et al., 2011)

Depending on the size of the case load and supervision levels of the parolees can affect how the parole officer chooses their style of parole supervision. A parole office's attitude can play a big part in how they choose to supervise their parolees (Steiner et al., 2011). How parole officers perceive things can influence how they may interact with the parolees they supervise and how effective their supervision style may be with the parolee. Current studies have indicated that parole officers' attitudes about supervision could predict the supervision style they may follow (Steiner et al., 2011).

### **Communication Strategies**

Communication can make a difference in the success rate a parolee may have in completing parole. Parole officers need to have effective communication skills to pass along to parolees that can assist them in encouraging legal pro-social behavior. The integration of different communication strategies combined with enforcing conditions of parole and monitoring the behaviors of parolees, has provided a major shift in how parole officers approach their jobs (Viglione et al., 2017). Steiner et al. (2011), stated that



communication patterns applied in a community corrections setting can play a critical role how parole officers supervise their parolees.

There are a couple of different types of communication strategies that parole officers have used: Motivational communication and Directive communication. The motivational communication approach involves intrinsic motivation to help individuals make pro-social changes (Viglione et al., 2017). The directive communication approach emphasizes on the authoritarian and punitive strategies in enforcing the rules on a parolee (Viglione et al., 2017). Other communication strategies have been determined to assist parole officers in providing positive communication to a parolee. Smith et al. (2016) discussed the relationship between parole agent and parolee as being akin to a parent and child relationship where the parole agent attempts to alter the parolee's behaviors and value system. This study discusses the different communication styles that may impact the parolee's relationship with their parole officer.

Miscommunication can also affect the community supervision of a parolee. Communication between a parole officer and parolee can be an important factor to effective supervision. A parole officer establishes a clearly defined goals and conditions for community supervision and strategies to achieve these goals (DeMichele & Payne, 2007). Hamin and Hassan, (2012) stated that parole officers who possessed professional values such as empathy, good listening and communication skills tend to implement good programs for parolees out on community supervision.

**Memorable Messages**

One effective communication strategy that has been known to stimulate behavior change is called memorable messages. Memorable messages when realized can influentially desist an offender from crime and may have the ability to instill pro-social norms and law-abiding behaviors (Cornacchione et al., 2016). When providing messages to parolee's that can be used to encourage positive pro-social behavior can be a crucial factor in changing criminal thinking. Memorable messages are typically recalled during uncertain situations, generally are brief messages that provide encouragement and can help produce problem solving (Cornacchione et al., 2016). Parole officers use small gestures or words of encouragement when a parolee has done well on a task. Studies have found that memorable messages can be essential self-assessment tools of personal behavior, helping stimulate behavior change (Cornacchione et al., 2016). Parolees can use the memorable messages that they have received overtime to correct bad behavior and make the right decisions.

**Contributions to the Success of Working with Parole Agents**

Parole officers play an intricate in assisting a parolee throughout their time on parole. A parole officer's typical role is to enforce the conditions that have been laid out to a parolee, facilitate a transition from prison to the community with the least number of mishaps, and establish a successful experience for parolees. Parole officers typically engage in supportive functions that assist a parolee in finding employment and appropriate services like treatment, counseling, and social supports (Bares & Mowen, 2020).

When parolees utilize their parole officers as a resource it can help them create a successful time while on community supervision. Often parolees may be less inclined to make the right decision when it comes to their life choices. Having a considerate parole officer provides options for opportunities and listening to the parolee can impact how the parolee may make their decisions (Kennealy et al., 2012).

Morash et al. (2015) suggested that depending on the relationship style that the parole agent has with the parolee, that relationship will likely affect the parolee's attitude during parole. The more positive a parole agent is with their parolee during their supervision time, the researchers found that more positive the outcome of parole.

### **Parolees Successfully Completing Parole**

The success of a parolee completing parole is one of the main objectives that parole officers have. Several contributing factors can assist a parolee in the completion of parole. According to Allen (1947) a study was done that indicated that there is not just one dominant factor that can lead a parolee to either have success or failure during parole. Allen (1947) also stated that there are at least eight factors that can be tied into the successfulness of parole. Structured activities such as employment is one factor that can create positive networks of support and eliminate criminal opportunities (Bahr et al., 2010). When a parolee is employed, it can provide a sense of accomplishment and self-worth. Informal social interactions with law abiding peers can re-establish responsibilities, self-monitoring and develop social bonds creating a positive experience (Bahr et al., 2010). Parolees who successfully completed parole were more likely to

engage in positive problem-solving abilities and have coping skills inline to help face any concerns they may have (Bucklen & Zajac, 2009).

Other contributing factors such as reentry programs within the institution have shown significant benefits to offenders being released out onto parole (Bucklen & Zajac, 2009). Looking at principles targeted at criminogenic needs can be a critical aspect in effective offender intervention (Bucklen & Zajac, 2009). Providing programs that help address needs such as antisocial attitudes, poor decision making, problem solving, and self-control/self-regulation skills can reduce future parole violations (Bucklen & Zajac, 2009).

### **Parole Officer Perception of Relationships**

The attitudes parole officers have towards their jobs may influence how they respond to parolees' behaviors (Steiner et al., 2011). Parole officers' communication patterns tend to be related to the relationship patterns they may have with a parolee (Steiner et al., 2011). There are several factors that have been linked to a parole officers' behavior. Such factors like employment, demographic and caseload characteristics can play a significant role in a parole officers' behavior. Parole officers' behavior can affect how they supervise parolees.

Demographic characteristics can affect how a parole officer perceives their relationship with a parolee. Characteristics such as age can play a factor in how they may make sanction decisions. Older parole agents may resemble a more traditional style in supervision with harsher sanctions (Steiner et al., 2011). Other characteristics such as gender influences may have an impact on how they socialize with others. Female parole

officers tend to have a more sympathetic view of parolees (Steiner et al., 2011).

Employment characteristics such as the level of education, length of service and rank have been linked to how parole officers supervise parolees (Steiner et al., 2011).

Caseload characteristics such as the caseload's size and the type of caseloads can influence their perception of their relationship (Steiner et al., 2011). Based on such characteristics parole officers' perceptions towards their relationships with their parolees can be greatly impacted by the parolees' behaviors.

### **Caseload Size**

Parole populations have increased overtime. With the increase in cases, parole officers' decisions on how to handle their caseload can be affected (DeMichele & Payne, 2007). Parole officers typically deal with unique caseloads, where each parolee has different needs, serving time on various crimes and may have different backgrounds that can affect their behaviors and supervision levels (Seiter & Crews, 2003). Parole officers must handle each parolee differently and sometimes must change their styles interchangeable with each parolee.

When parole officer's handle larger caseloads, they tend to have limited time to focus on each of the offenders and their individual needs (Seiter & Crews, 2003). Parole officers often find themselves focusing on the monitoring aspect of supervision. With the monitoring focus of, parolees' basic and individual needs can be pushed to the wayside. By providing smaller caseloads to parole officers, they can essentially support parolees and help them strive to make better and more pro-social choices.

As the caseloads and the lack of individual focus increases, parole violations can increase. According to Seiter and Crews (2003), that when a parole officer changes from caseworker to a surveillance style, parole revocations have increased. By providing an adequate case load, parole officers can spend the time they need to with the parolee to assure the right tools are provided which will likely increase the parolee's successful completion of community supervision. According to data obtained by Seiter and Crews (2003), parole officers believed that a casework style is more effective for long term supervision but due to larger caseloads and the paperwork required, they felt forced to sway towards the surveillance style to simply move offenders through the system.

### **Supervising Roles**

One of the main functions that a parole officer has is to supervise offenders who are released from prison who must meet certain conditions. The supervision of offenders out in the community is a critical component in the corrections system (Seiter & Crews, 2003). Parole officers have different supervising roles that they follow. Understanding what may influence a parole officers' supervisory practices can help shed light on supervision outcomes (Steiner et al., 2011).

Parole officers require community supervision training to effectively implement programs with parolees (Viglione et al., 2020). This training can assist parole officers with different influential supervising roles. According to Alarid and Jones (2018), trained officers who engaged more in active listening, clear instructions, reinforced pro-social behaviors, and better problem-solving skills provided parolees with adequate skills in completing parole with success.

## **Summary and Conclusions**

This literature review provides the foundation for the current study and focuses on parole officers' perceptions and communication styles. This review delves deeper into two main theories: social cognitive theory and communication theory. The social cognitive theory looks at how specific influences in a parolee's life can affect their behaviors (Bandura 1986). Communication theory looks at how effective parole officers may have on altering a parolee's behavior mindset (Morash et al., 2018).

The literature review delved deeper into what parole is and what influences can affect parolees while out on community supervision. The contributing factors that influence the relationship between parole officers and parolees was discussed. In addition, the contributing factors that can impact the success of a parolee while on community supervision was also addressed. Parole is the release of an inmate out into the community. Parolees often attempt to transition from prison life out into the community with the hope of becoming productive members of society. Parole officers/agents supervise parolees in the attempt to complete parole out in the community successfully. Parole officers/agents provide support to parolees during their time of transitioning back into the community.

Many barriers can affect a parolee's time while out on community supervision. Demographics and lack of resources are some of the main barriers that can play a major factor in how parolees may complete their supervision. Criminal behavior can also play an influential factor in a parolee's time out on community supervision (Matejkowski et al,

2015). Parolees can complete community supervision successfully with the assistance of positive relationships amongst friends, family, and peers.

Effective, supportive communication can be very critical in the supervision of parolees out in the community. Parole officers utilize a combination of different supervision styles to ensure that parolee's complete parole successfully. Parolees are deemed more successful when they develop a positive relationship with their parole officer. When there is a positive relationship between the parole officers and the parolees, the parolees tend to make pro-social choices throughout their community supervision time (Chamberlain et al., 2018).

Contributing factors such as reentry programs and structured activities can play a major role in parolees' success. Parole officers assist parolees navigating through major life situations. Just as positive factors can reinforce a parolee, negative influences can cause a parolee to make bad decisions (Bahr et al., 2010). Other contributing factors such as structured activities and social interactions can play a factor in whether a parolee is successful or unsuccessful while out on community supervision.

The perceptions of the parole officer can impact how they may supervise a parolee. Certain factors such as demographic, employment and case size characteristics can play a major role in the attitudes parole officers may have. These attitudes can affect how they may choose to supervise their parolees (Steiner et al., 2011). The size of caseloads that parole officers hold can affect how well they may supervise their parolees. With higher caseloads parole officers may see an increase in parolee's violating the terms



of their community supervision. Overtime this can create strain on both the parole officer and parolee.

Many barriers can affect a parolee's time while out on community supervision. The more positive relationship between parolee and parole officer the more positive experience the parolee has on parole. When parole officers have effective communication skills and effective training, they tend to have a higher success rate with parolees. One specific study describing memorable messages insists that when parole officers provide positive feedback or messages to parolees, the parolees have a more positive experience while on community supervision (Cornacchione et al., 2016).

Chapter 3 will delve deeper into the research methods planned for this study. A qualitative study utilizes the phenomenological method to explore the different relationships between parole officers and parolees. This study addresses specifically parole officers' perceptions and how that relationship may affect a parolee's supervision out in the community.

## Chapter 3: Research Method

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to use the phenomenological method to explore the perspectives of parole officers regarding the relationships between parolees and parole officers to determine how this relationship may affect the parolees' community supervision period. The results of this study may provide valuable information to other parole agents about what strategies might be used to assist parolees in successfully navigating community supervision. The information obtained can help enhance training of new parole agents and assist them in establishing good rapport and communication with parolees on their case load to create more positive experiences during parolees' community supervision.

In Chapter 3, I discuss the methodology and research design chosen for the study. Throughout this chapter I cover the research design and rationale; the role of the researcher; participant selection logic; instrumentation; procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection; data analysis plan; and ethical procedures. This chapter will conclude with a summary and a preview of Chapter 4.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: What are the perceptions of parole agents about their relationships with parolees on their case load?

RQ2: What communication strategies do parole agents feel are more effective in influencing and shaping the behavior of parolees, ultimately leading to more pro-social parolee choices?

RQ3: What are the perceptions of parole agents about their role as a social support for parolees, and how does that role impact parolees' successful completion of parole?

### **Research Design and Rationale**

The focus of the study was parole officers' perceptions of the parole officer–parolee relationship. I used a qualitative method with a phenomenological design to help describe the perceptions parole officers have about how communication with parolees can assist in changing motivation and encouraging pro-social behavior. I used a qualitative method to gain an understanding of the phenomenon, which was the perceived relationships between parole officers and parolees. This approach to the study was the best fit as the sample of the study provided perspectives and displayed how individuals may think or feel; a quantitative study would have been used to look at figures and determine a conclusion based on numbers and not perceptions (Creswell, 2014).

In the study, I focused on the perceptions of parole officers and the relationship between parolee and parole officer. Specifically, in this study, I attempted to understand what communication style the parole officer can use that might best influence the behavior of parolees, which will ultimately lead to the parolee making pro-social choices. Morash et al. (2015) suggested that, depending on the relationship style a parole agent has with a parolee, that relationship will likely affect the parolee's attitude during parole.

The more positive a parole agent is with their parolee during their supervision time, the researchers found a more positive outcome of parole (Morash et al., 2015).

### **Role of the Researcher**

The role of the researcher was to conduct professional interviews with study participants. The purpose of these interviews was to gain a better understanding of what communication styles may be effective in supervising parolees. A phenomenological design allows a researcher to gather, shape, and examine perceptions of those who have experienced a phenomenon (Burkholder et al., 2016). The interview data were collected from participants who were parole officers with a caseload of different supervision levels to obtain a wide range of data. No more than 10 parole agents were recruited to interview about their lived experiences with parolees, how they handle difficult situations, what style of supervision they use, and how their communication style may affect parolees.

As a staff member of a parole board, I deal with parolees on a regular basis, which could have created bias in the research. I needed to understand what research bias is and to recognize when it was happening to avoid any sort of falsification in the results of the study (Galdas, 2017). To avoid bias in the research, there were a few things I did. Leaving personal opinions out of the research and only using factual data along with researching all avenues within a topic can minimize some of the bias from research. Some other ways to eliminate bias is to recognize the different types of bias, review guidelines set up by Walden University for conducting research, use all data researched, and keep accurate records of any data obtained. Authorization from the IRB was obtained prior to commencing the present study.

## **Methodology**

### **Participant Selection**

The participants were parole officers of any gender who had an active caseload with different levels of supervision parolees. A purposive sampling approach was used to select participants for this study. This type of sampling is used to deliberately choose participants based on the participants' knowledge or experience of the phenomenon of interest (Etikan, 2016). The goal was to gather at least 10 participants who could provide detailed information on their perceptions of the parole officer–parolee relationship until data saturation was reached.

### **Procedures**

Fliers were sent to the personal emails of parole officers. Once officers responded affirming interest in participating, interview times and dates were determined. Due to the COVID-10 pandemic protocols in place, all interviews were conducted through an online platform. Participants were asked a series of questions in an in-depth, semi-structured interview. Participants had the opportunity to provide information about their perceptions of their relationships with parolees and how it may impact parolee compliance with community supervision. Interview questions were focused on supervision styles, resources, communication, rapport building, and other tools used to help parolees. In addition, parole officers were asked about what strategies they use to best assist parolees in making pro-social decisions. The data were analyzed using qualitative-based software to identify themes, including information on communication strategies, rapport, and

factors that may influence whether a parolee is successful or unsuccessful in completing parole.

### **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

The primary goal was to use purposive sampling to recruit participants who may have been able to provide detailed lived experiences of the phenomenon of interest. Participants gave verbal consent during taped interviews. Implied consent was established when the participant was emailed a copy of the description of the study and agreed to set up a time to be interviewed. I received an approval from the IRB to conduct the current study, approval number 09-08-21-0744552.

Data were obtained through in-depth semi-structured interviews with parole officers. These data provided a better perspective on the relationships between parolees and parole agents. The information gathered from these interviews was used to identify the different strategies of parole officers and how those strategies generate different experiences.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

The method used was a phenomenological type focusing on interviews with parole agents currently working in the field. There are two different types of phenomenology: descriptive and hermeneutic (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Descriptive ‘brackets off’ any influences surrounding the phenomenon to get to its point and hermeneutic also known as interpretive phenomenology interprets what meanings may be found in relation to the phenomena of interest (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). For this study, a hermeneutic (interpretive) phenomenology would be used as it focuses on human

experiences. Parole officers utilize their experiences to determine what communication strategies may be more effective in the influencing and shaping of the parolee's behavior that may lead to more pro-social choices.

Interpretation can be a very critical aspect to understanding experiences and can influence perceptions (Lavery, 2003). The data analysis for this study consisted of identifying themes from the data obtained from the interviews conducted with the parole officers. A thematic analysis identifies patterns or themes throughout the data that may be important in addressing the research or explaining an issue (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Once the data was collected and themes identified, any names of participants were coded to protect their identity. A software called NVIVO was used to help organize and analysis the data that has been collected. By utilizing a software to assist me in organizing my data helped ensure that all information obtained is being reviewed and that I am getting the most of this data. Data collected was used in a hermeneutic (interpretive) analysis to determine how parole officers perceive their experiences on how communication with parolees can effectively influence pro-social behaviors from parolees.

The results of this study provided valuable information to other parole agents about what strategies might be used to assist parolees in successfully navigating through their community supervision. The data used was the types of relationships that would develop between the parolee and the parole officer throughout their community supervision time. This data were used to determine if there is a relationship between the parolee and parole agent that leads them to a positive view during their time while on community supervision.

### **Ethical Procedures**

During my research, ethical consideration was a major factor when obtaining data from participants. Minimal risk is defined as the probability of harm that is anticipated in research is not greater than risk from daily life encounters (UABResearch). When dealing with research participants there are some ethical considerations that researchers should investigate such as consent, privacy or confidentiality, and respect for people's rights and dignity (APA, 2018). It is important for a researcher to follow the ethics codes laid out for them in the APA (2018) Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct as this can be used as a guideline for them on how they should conduct themselves during the research process especially when dealing with a population in their research.

### **Summary**

Chapter 3 explained the research design and the rationale of that plan. The role of the researcher and how applicable ethical issues should be addressed were discussed. Additionally, the interview process was discussed and what information is projected to be obtained. Throughout this chapter, an outline of the methodology is discussed along with the reasoning why a qualitative, phenomenological method would be more applicable with the perceptions of parole officers' relationships with parolees and how this may affect their completion of community supervision. The results of the study were explained further in Chapter 4.



## Chapter 4: Results

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the perceptions parole officers have about different styles of supervision and how these styles are helpful in building rapport and maintaining control with parolees and with completion of their parole. In this study, one-on-one interviews were conducted with voluntary participant parole officers. The interviews provided data on parole officers' experiences and ideas on what types of supervision help them connect with a parolee and how this relationship may affect parolees' community supervision period. The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: What are the perceptions of parole agents about their relationships with parolees on their caseload?

RQ2: What communication strategies do parole agents feel are more effective in influencing and shaping the behavior of parolees, ultimately leading to more pro-social parolee choices?

RQ3: What are the perceptions of parole officers about their role as a social support system for parolees, and how does that role impact parolees' successful completion of parole?

I designed this study to understand what communication styles parole officers can use that might best influence parolee behavior, which may ultimately lead to parolees making pro-social choices. A parole officers' perceptions of supervision styles and how they communicate with parolees can be beneficial in gaining a better understanding of

what does and does not work. Research questions were explored through the experiences of 10 parole officers who provided valuable insight into the trial and errors they have experienced when working with parolees. The results of this study can enhance the training of new parole agents, helping them understand ways of establishing good rapport and communication with parolees on their caseload and how to create more positive experiences during community supervision.

In the study, I used a phenomenological design to understand parole officers' perceptions of how they communicate with parolees. I used semi-structured interviews to collect data by asking parole officers questions about their perceptions of challenges, successes, supervision styles, and communication efforts they have found most helpful when working with parolees. In this chapter, I present the findings obtained from the data collection and analysis. Chapter 4 includes setting, demographics, data collection and analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, and results. A summary will conclude this chapter.

### **Setting**

The setting consisted of where the interviews took place and what measures were taken to ensure confidentiality. An invitation email was sent to all current parole officers in the field. Once an email was received stating that a parole officer was interested in participating in the study, another email was sent with the informed consent form. When the parole officers replied that they consented, participants selected an interview date and time. Interviews were conducted online via Zoom, recorded, and saved to a secure computer that was password protected. The location of the interviews was either behind

closed doors or in my private office. In some cases, headphones were used to ensure privacy.

### **Demographics**

The only criteria required for participants to participate was that they needed to be active or retired parole officers who currently have or have had supervised parolees. Invitations were sent to all current parole officers in the field. 10 individuals participated in the study. Participants ranged in age, years of service, and gender. Ages ranged from early 20s to early 50s. Years of service ranged from seven months to 16 years with the parole services division. There were six women and four men who participated in the study. The group of participants provided their perceptions of lived experiences on how communication with parolees can effectively influence pro-social behaviors.

### **Data Collection**

Zoom interviews were scheduled with participants. The interviews lasted on average 15–40 minutes. Participants were given a choice of location and appointment time. During the Zoom interviews, participants were allowed to provide in-depth responses to the questions. Before the interviews, participants were assured their information and interview would be held in the strictest confidentiality and that no identifying information would be reported in the final dissertation. Participants were informed that any recorded electronic data would be stored securely. Participants were also advised that the recorded data would be destroyed with best practices and legal standards once the time had lapsed.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 parole agents. Participants were asked 19 questions. Of the 19 questions, 11 were open-ended; the other eight were primarily demographic. The open-ended questions focused on training, establishing good rapport, primary communication style used, style of supervision, significant challenges, significant successes, and a brief description of the supervision style that best suited them when supervising parolees. The nature of the semi-structured interviews was to allow participants to detail their answers and provide insights into what they perceived as helpful to parolees.

Interviews were conducted via a personal Zoom account and were recorded using the Zoom recorder. The recording was stored on a personal computer that was password protected. The interviews were analyzed in private, using headphones; summaries were produced from the information.

### **Data Analysis**

The research outcome discussed in this chapter is solely based on my analysis of the data obtained from participant interviews. I identified themes during the interpretation of the research findings. Identifying themes is the starting point to the findings in a study (Bazeley, 2009). I identified four main themes from the data gathered: (a) communication, (b) needs, (c) education and training, and (d) offender success. In the data collected, there was also discussion about major challenges and major successes. Themes presented from the data are labeled for meta-categories within the data and are used to organize the areas discussed (Bazeley, 2009). The themes were further categorized into broader superordinate themes listed in Table 1 that were more

comprehensive and easier to understand: (a) rapport, (b) style (authoritarian vs. counseling), (c) mental health needs, (d) other criminogenic needs, (e) safety training, (f) mental health training, and (g) success. The information obtained from the interviews was consistent with the themes.

**Table 1**

*Superordinate Themes*

Categories	Themes
Superordinate Theme 1	Rapport
Superordinate Theme 2	Styles (authoritarian versus counseling)
Superordinate Theme 3	Safety training
Superordinate Theme 4	Mental health training
Superordinate Theme 5	Mental health needs
Superordinate Theme 6	Criminogenic needs
Superordinate Theme 7	Success

**Evidence of Trustworthiness**

To establish trustworthiness and credibility, I chose a data collection method that best addressed the research questions in the study. Trustworthiness is how well the findings can be trusted and whether they are credible, dependable, and confirmable data (Korstjens & Moser, 2018) that can help explain the experience parole officers are having with parolees. Credibility is the confidence placed in the truth of the research findings and those findings can be correctly interpreted (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Interviews were the method of data collection used to determine any commonalities or themes among all the participants' responses. The interviews were recorded and stored on a personal computer. The videos were reviewed several times to ensure that each interview was complete and documented and that all questions were

asked and answered. NVivo software was used to help organize and analyze the data collected. The software was helpful in identifying themes and organizing the data. The videos were uploaded into the NVivo transcription site where the interviews were transformed into a written transcription. Once the transcription was completed the transcriptions were proofread and imported into NVivo to be coded so that themes could be identified.

### **Results**

The 10 parole officers who participated in this study described their thoughts, perceptions, and experiences with supervising parolees. Participants were all active parole officers/agents with different levels of experience. The one-on-one interviews provided insight into parole officers' perceptions of the different supervision styles that work best with parolees. Parole officers' thoughts on the best practices and training used to make their jobs more efficient were similar.

Parole officers tend to work in an environment with high uncertainty (Steiner et al., 2011). Parole officers must have adequate training and tools to assist them in their supervision of parolees. Sometimes, a parole officer's level of involvement with a parolee can provide parole officers with additional information about that parolee's lifestyle that could influence how that parole officer may decide to supervise them (Steiner et al., 2011). Parole officers manage to deal with different levels of supervision in case-by-case scenarios.

Participants varied in years of service, agent roles, and demographic information. Participants stated they have gone through a wide range of different scopes of training

from defensive tactics training, primary field training, sober tracks, and scam; some agents are certified in firearms, oleoresin capsicum (OC) spray, reality-based training, creating regulation and resilience training (CR2), evidence-based training, motivational training, Epic on-the-job training, and policy training. The educational background of the parole officers consisted mainly of criminal justice, sociology, psychology, law enforcement, and clinical psychology degrees. On average, parole officers supervise anywhere from 40–100 parolees, depending on the region, seniority, and the role they currently hold. One of the participants stated that usually supervisors do not have a caseload; however, due to recent turnover rates, supervisors have had taken on a load. Throughout the years, parole officers have seen many parolees' complete parole; however, parole officers seemed to not typically keep track of how many parolees' successfully complete parole. P7 explained that parole officers/agents often focus more on those who fail because that is what they see more of, so it can be difficult to track those who succeed.

### **Superordinate Theme 1: Rapport**

Establishing rapport for a parole officer can be one of the most beneficial tools. P1 discussed how being honest, showing up, and keeping their word were the main focal points in building rapport with parolees. Due to the high number of absconders that P1 has on their caseload, they often struggle with building rapport with those individuals.

P2 explained that by looking at the supervision style they use and gaining more confidence in their supervision style, they could connect with parolees. P2 also stated, "This job is so diverse, and as parole officers, we have a lot of discretion, so being able to

learn from the different supervision styles is very helpful when starting.” P2’s goal as an agent is to help enhance motivation and what is important to parolees to make those self-sustainable decisions and long-term goals. P2 uses active listening when dealing with parolees; P2’s time is the parolees to have during an allotted time. P2 stated that they do not divert from the conversation by answering phone calls or emails during a parolee’s specific time. Using this form of listening, P2 has built rapport with parolees. Dealing with parolees who do not seem to care much about their time on supervision, P2 explained that rapport did not seem to develop with those individuals. P2 also explained that apathy and old habits take over before working the program, which can get in the way of building on that rapport. Being honest shows parolees, they can trust their parole officer understands what parolees are going through and not just associate blame with every mistake.

P3 explained that if a parole officer is not yet fully established in their role, parolees may not trust their parole officer yet. P4 indicated that the best way to gain rapport is through communication and collaboration. Understanding their role as parole agents and consistently following up with the parolees can create a better connection. P4 explained that when it comes to individuals they cannot build on, rapport can be caused by letting emotions run the show. Sometimes there is a lack of connection between people, which can be uncontrollable. Over the years, P5 felt they had built rapport with different parolees, and in some cases, a few have completed parole that still stay in touch to let P5 know how they are doing outside of parole. P5 indicated that they do not seem to have any problem building rapport with their parolees, there is a small batch of



individuals who do not want to do the work, and there does not seem to be a connection when trying to work with them.

P6 says that being human can help build rapport, they further explained that some may fake rapport, so it can be challenging to decipher what is real and not. “Rapport building can go a long way in this industry.” P6 feels that a lack of a father figure can play a significant role in how parolees have learned to interact with daily life. When building rapport, P7 stated that listening is critical when establishing a connection. Parole officers need to be fair but firm and keep consistency throughout supervision. Those who are strongly opinionated and have their own agenda may create that disconnect when building rapport. It also depends on how a parole officer displays themselves, especially during office visits, if they are simply there to check off because it is required, this may diminish that rapport building they would have gotten if they took the time to talk and listen to what the parolee has going on at the time.

P8 explains the key is to “have the ability to listen and deliver on to what I can say I can do,” you come to the agreement that both sides need to participate in the relationship and work together on what needs to be done. There are always those “tough personalities” who can make their supervision time difficult; parolees just want to do their time and not make those pro-social changes. P9 explains that the main factor in creating rapport is noticing a change in their behavior and emphasizing that. P10 has used some of the various factors to help establish rapport: “to show them what’s normal and what’s not normal.” This can motivate parolees to see the difference between what is right and wrong. On the other side of the prospect’s when looking at factors that diminish

rapport, P10 explains that some parolees do not like to take orders from females and have an issue with authoritarian figures.

### **Superordinate Theme 2: Style (Authoritarian Versus Counseling)**

Next, a few questions discussed the authoritarian and counselor styles of supervision and how this can influence rapport with parolees. P1 talked about how you must utilize the authoritarian style to address specific issues that may come up in some cases—then using the counseling style supervision to emphasize that they still see them as human beings and that they want to help them succeed, “that you’re not just out here to send them back to prison.” Over time P2 felt that they could build on their supervision style with the experience they gained. P2 stated when discussing the authoritarian style influencing parole success “definitely has to be there”. However, too much use of authoritarian style in a parolee’s life may not be helpful but uses this style to steer someone who may be veering off in the wrong direction. P2 felt that the authoritarian style paired with a supportive style can be effective in experiencing positive supervision. P2 also stated that not many parolees respond well to someone in that authoritarian mindset, “that it has to be there for the accountability,” but it does not work with building rapport. P2 feels that there is more success in reaching parolees with integrating both the authoritarian and counselor style of supervision. P2 stated that when they have an opportunity to be heard, this is a huge factor in gaining that rapport.

P3 explained that with the authoritarian style, parolees still need someone to “kick them in the butt” to get them to do what they need to do. With the counseling style, P3 felt that women parolees tend to accept this style better than the men parolees but still

feels it can be a helpful tool. P4 explains that the authoritarian supervision style has a time and place depending on the type of offender you must work with. P4 further explained that gender could play a significant factor in choosing the style to supervise. Regarding authoritarian supervision style influencing rapport, P4 stated “that it all depends on who you are working with and how you come across” while feeling the same way when it comes to the counselor style of supervision; P4 is not a counselor and does not understand the concept of utilizing this style. When both the authoritarian and counselors’ supervision styles were discussed, P4 concluded that it all depends on whom you are working with and how you should handle the case. P4 felt that the best thing to do is focus on case planning when the parolee comes out of parole and base the style on their needs.

P5 explained that this style does not work. Parolees already have those authoritarian figures in life, so they need someone to help them build on that rapport. When you take a different approach in talking to them, you get a more positive response. P5 further expanded on this question, stating that they do not look down on them and treat them like they treat anyone they talk to. P5 said that the best way to build rapport is to create “baby steps” little by little. When the counselor’s style was discussed, P5 felt this is a significant aspect of supervising individuals. P5 is honest with them from the get-go; they elaborate on how their conversations can sometimes resemble how a counselor’s session may go. P6 explained that you must set boundaries somewhere; the authoritarian style is sometimes needed. Still, if that is all that you utilize, more than likely, it is not going to get you anywhere in this relationship. P6 felt that the authoritarian style does not

influence rapport with parolees. When asked about the counselor style of supervision, P6 stated, “we wear many hats in this industry,” this role is a lot of what they do when assisting parolees. P6 found it helpful to show them that there are different lifestyles, not just those involving criminal activities. Showing a parolee that parole agents/officers are there to help them, that they believe in them, and show them that they want them to do good in the long run.

P7 discussed that the authoritarian style of supervision can really “feed that perception of that adversarial type of relationship,” some clients they have may be more submissive in how they do things, and so utilizing this style works for them. This style does not seem to help the parolee solve their problems. P7 indicated that it places a barrier on how parolees may communicate with their agents, which then can cause issues with rapport. When the counselor style of supervision was discussed, we look at the relationship parolees have with parole officers/agents. Parole officers/agents try to be mentors and encourage those pro-social viewpoints to parolees. In some cases, parole officers/agents often struggle with being those mentors because they try not to cross lines or boundaries with sharing too much of their own life with parolees but feel they must. After all, it shows they can relate to them. P7 explained that the counselor approach can sometimes be seen as an authoritarian style of counseling which can be hard to convince a parolee that they are here to help them, and they do care. P7 further explained that we need to look at the tone or what we say to someone, which can leave a better mark on someone.

P8 described that “respect is a two-way road; conversation goes a long way.” P8 further explained that yelling at them does not do anything to motivate them; P8 advised them to take care of their business to move on. P8 explained that most parolees have struggled with authoritarian figures growing up, so they may not respond well to that form of supervision; P8 does not “over supervise or under supervise.” P8 typically allows parolees to dump whatever they need help with or struggling with so that they can figure it out together. P8 tried to “empower the parolees” to handle challenges on their own. P9 explained a time and place for it when it comes to the authoritarian style. Depending on the situation, the authoritative style may be more beneficial in helping the parolee get through an issue. Again, there is a time and place when it comes to the counselor’s style. P9 stated, “To make a change in a parolee’s life, you have to be able to hear them out, by removing your opinion and that authoritarian style” to make a difference in their life. Parolees can appreciate empathy that may come from their parole officers/agents during difficult times they may have on parole.

P10 stated that they are very black and white when it comes to supervision style. P10 said that parolees still need to be held accountable and that they try to be “the constant in their life.” P10 stated by clarifying at the beginning of their supervision; this is what is expected of them; parolees could rely on their agent to be there for parolees when working on themselves. When looking at the counselor’s supervision style, P10 found it helpful to talk through issues and traumas a parolee may have experiences and provide them with the different options they may have that would benefit them in the

long run. P10's goal is to help parolees make those pro-social choices and retrain them into becoming functioning members of society.

The last question asked to all the participants was about what style of supervision they utilize and why they primarily use it. Each participant seemed to own their answer. P1 explained that they mainly use the counselor style based on their professional background. P1 found that using all the "tools in their toolbox" can be beneficial to helping parolees make sound decisions. P2 integrated both support and accountability when supervising their parolees. The best practice is treating them like human beings, having a conversation about what is expected, and not demanding anything from the parolees. P3 discussed that they use a mixture of all styles; they are not authoritarian; they are here to help them and do not feel that yelling at them will benefit them. P4 stated that there is not one set style, but we should treat them like human beings. "If you want respect, then you must show respect." P4 felt there is a need to "understand their role and the broader picture" to make a better division and better help parolees. P5 states that their style is fair but firm. P5 developed their style throughout the years by understanding those on their caseload; their psychology background helped them become this type of agent.

P6 stated that the best style is to treat parolees like human beings and to assist them in everything they may need, to show them that parole officers/agents want them to be successful out there in the community. P7 stated that they follow more of the place-based supervision style. P8 stated they do not have just one supervision style: it is case by case. Depending on what their needs are, "you have to take a different approach in

supervising them.” P9 stated that they utilize both the authoritarian style with reason and the counselor style when supervising their parolees. P10 used the hands-on style. P10 is very black and white when supervising and holds their parolees accountable. P10 stated, “there is always going to be bumps in the road; it’s how you handle those bumps.”

### **Superordinate Theme 3: Safety Training**

The superordinate theme of Safety Training addresses the question a). What training parole officers/agents felt useful when working with parolees? P1, answered that the CR2 training that was newly implemented within the last couple of years; Creating regulation and resilience (CR2) focused on how staff approached clients. P2 described case planning, CR2, and reality-based training were some of those found useful in supervising parolees. This training piece helped prepare them to react to high-intensity situations. P3 described that CR2 and reality-based training have been the most helpful in supervising parolees. This training helps get you into the mindset of what could happen. P4 and P6 both stated that the best training is shadowing other agents; this training can help them understand why they supervise the parolees. When new agents can follow other senior agents, they can grasp that knowledge and make better decisions in difficult times. P5 stated that the best training received is evidence-based training and EPICs. P7 talked about the “tool belt analogy,” the training you receive is the tools on your tool belt. P9 discussed that the most helpful training is behavior training, mental health, and safety training which can help a parole officer with those problematic issues a parolee may be facing. P10 states that all the communication training, CR2, EPICS, and motivational

interviewing, along with any safety training, has been very beneficial with supervising parolees.

#### **Superordinate Theme 4: Mental Health Training**

Mental health training is a must when working with parolees. Although there is not much mental health training, most parole officers have an educational background in a mental health related. Parole officers find it important to have that background when working with a parolee population. When interviewing participants, most parole officers had some form of education that was related to mental health.

#### **Superordinate Theme 5: Mental Health needs**

Mental health needs are one of the challenges that came up during the interviews. Facilities can be expensive, and there are often not enough beds to assist those who need help. A challenge that P5 have seen are the difficult parolees that do not want the help themselves. P6 stated that the struggle with mental health systems is a major challenge is supervising parolees. P6 felt that the system is broken and that parolees or those with mental health get lost in the system.

#### **Superordinate Theme 6: Other Criminological needs**

There are many different challenges that can arise when supervising parolees. P1 stated that the number one challenge was absconding and connecting parolees to the appropriate resources. They further talked about how difficult the system can sometimes be to navigate, creating those challenges in getting them the assistance they need. P2 felt that communication is key to success on parole, and sometimes there can be language barriers that can interrupt communication or understanding. Another challenge P2 has



seen is obtaining IDs when they are released from prison; it is vital to have an ID to get jobs and establish certain personal things while on parole. Without an ID, it can be difficult to establish these situations. Directing parolees to proper resources can be a challenge; especially living in small rural areas, there is a limit in the choices for treatment for individuals or assistance in obtaining basic life needs.

Other challenges that P2 had seen can also consist of transportation, weather, and the ruralness of the community. Significant challenges that P3 had seen with parolees are drug and communication issues. Once parolees have absconded supervision, any ground that has been gained with parolees is lost. The challenges that P4 had seen throughout the years are dealing with different genders, cultures, rural locations, resources, and races, which can play a factor in a disconnect. Things that have happened in the past have inadvertently affected how we deal with others.

The challenges that P7 has seen can depend on what needs they need when they are released from prison. When parole officers/agents feel a disconnect with a parolee they are trying to supervise, there can be challenges throughout the whole process. When it comes to challenges that P8 has seen, they feel that there is just not enough time during the day to be flexible for parolees. P8 explained that some of the factors they have seen that can block rapport are a parolee's attitude when they come out of prison and race issues, parolees tend to think that everyone is out to get them because of their skin color and that parole officers/agents do not want to help them because of that. The challenge that P9 has had with parolees is dealing with those with drinking problems, "they will do so well for years on end and then crash, they are unaware of their triggers." The

challenges that P10 has seen when dealing with parolees are the family that enables the bad behavior, parolees who release with nothing, and language barriers.

### **Superordinate Theme 7: Success**

P3 described that the higher the supervision level, the more help they get and felt that this can lead to more successful completion of parole. P5 felt that it does not matter the level of supervision when parolees complete parole; it's whether they want it. P5 clarified that they are here to help parolees and not beat them around the bush. When it came to the best supervision level to complete parole, P6 stated that they have seen all levels complete parole and that it depends on how well that parolee did on parole. P7 indicated that the best supervision level to complete parole is your medium level. P7 has seen parole change its course; when parole officers/agents first started, they were there to do social work and now are gearing more towards the law enforcement side. All levels of supervision have the opportunity to complete parole; they need to stick to the program and look at what motivates them to get to the end game. The way a parole officer responds to a parolee can play a factor in how their supervision time will go, meaning that it does not matter what level they are at when it comes to completing parole. When looking at the different supervision levels, maximum is the best supervision level that can successfully complete parole.

The next question asked was regarding success the parole officer may have seen throughout their time as an officer. P1 stated that the small victories could be seen as wins. P2 brought up an example of a parolee who has worked for different jobs here and there, getting paid under the table in and out of prison most of his life. One day P2

received a call from the police stating they had one of their parolees cited for petty theft. When talking to the parolee, the parolee said that he had received a legitimate job and needed supplies for his job, so he went about getting those supplies the wrong way. P2 viewed this as a success because the parolee would be starting a legitimate job. P2 further explained that most parolees do not feel self-worth in their lives, so when they make those positive life-changing decisions, no matter how small, it is nice to have someone to believe in them and make them feel worthy. P2 also states that it does not have to be just discharged to be successful. "It's making those small changes to do things the right way" that counts.

P3 felt that when parolees think they are making accomplishments, that is a win. When P3 thought of the successes, they discuss how parole officers/agents have built that rapport with parolees to diminish any fatal outcomes. P4 explained that due to the rapport when a parole officer goes out to see a parolee with a police officer, the situation's outcome is a better experience because the parole officer is there. Another success that P4 boasted about is that they have not had any parole officer involved in shooting for several years. The success that P5 has seen is that when there is a problematic parolee, they can help the parolee turn themselves around. P5 explained that "you just can't give up on them," and you keep trying until they can get something done correctly. P5 had one individual that completed parole and is now working on the pardon process to get this off her record.

The successes P6 has seen are when they see parolees outside of work, especially when they are off parole, "You have that human interaction with them and see them

being successful members of society.” P7 stated they have seen some successes throughout their career; when parolees can go long periods without difficulties or setbacks, that is counted as a win. One success P8 has seen when an individual on parole for a while is out in the community thriving still. One of the major successes that P9 has had is when years down the road, individuals who have been released from parole, are influencing other parolees to make pro-social choices. The successes P10 has seen are when the parolees who have more authoritarian families than the parole officer and parolees who leave prison are motivated to better themselves.

### **Summary**

Chapter 4 described the findings of the current study. While using a phenomenological approach superordinate themes were identified that obtained a more in-depth understanding of the lived experiences parole officers had when supervising parolees. The information reviewed and addressed in the interviews was the basis for this study. This study was used to examine the parole officers’ perceptions of the parole-parolee relationship and how parole officers’ communication with parolees may influence the behaviors of parolees.

The results from the interviews revealed how similar the parole officers felt about different themes. The participants agreed that training was beneficial and enabled them to better assist parolees. They also agreed that there were many challenges that parole officers face when assisting parolees. This chapter included the participants views regarding the supervision style that works best when establishing rapport and how building rapport with a parolee can influence the parolee’s pro-social behavior. Chapter 5

discussed further the interpretation of findings, any limitations to the study and recommendations made.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand how a professional support system, such as a parole officer, can impact a parolee. The focus of this study was on parole officers' views on how communication can affect a parolee completing parole and making pro-social decisions. This study may increase understanding of how parole agents perceive the role of communication styles and how those styles may influence their relationships with parolees. The information obtained from this study can help enhance the training of new parole agents and assist them in establishing good rapport and communication with the parolees on their caseload, which in turn may increase positive experiences during a parolee's community supervision period.

In Chapter 5, I provide an examination of the themes developed from data collected during semi-structured phenomenological interviews with parole agents who supervise parolees. Analysis of the data collected led to identifying patterns and themes in the thoughts or ideals shared by each of the participants. This chapter will include the interpretations of findings, limitations of the study, recommendations and implications, and conclusions.

In this study, I explored parole officers' perspectives on their relationships with parolees and how those relationships can be influential in the success of parolees. The

parole officer participants agreed that having a positive relationship with a parolee proved beneficial to the parolees and increased the likelihood of a positive parole outcome. The parole officers in this study explained there are many challenges that may arise for parolees. These challenges include lack of resources, drug addictions, and lack of transportation that can deter a parolee from moving forward and making pro-social decisions. Participants all agreed that they rely heavily on the training they received and their educational background to overcome challenges that may arise when dealing with the parolees.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

#### **Superordinate Theme 1: Rapport**

Establishing rapport with a parolee is an important role for parole officers. Typically, a parole officer provides critical support to the parolee, helping the parolee to successfully reintegrate into the community (Chamberlain et al., 2018). Often parole officers need to build rapport with parolees. Parole officers should have an established understanding and good communication with parolees (Chamberlain et al., 2018). Participants agreed that by being honest with their parolees, parole officers are able to build on that rapport, making connections with the parolees.

Establishing rapport was an important topic when the participants discussed their relationship with parolees. Depending on the characteristics of the parolee, the relationship may be a major factor in whether the parolee successfully completes parole. Parole officers are an important part of a parolee's reentry process. The quality of the relationship between parolee and parole officer can partially determine the parolee's

success (Chamberlain et al., 2018). Because parolees are diverse in background, ethnicity, and coping strategies, what may work with one parolee may not work with another. P4 stated that when parole officers gain more confidence in a supervision style, they use it can help parole officers build rapport with parolees. P4 also stated that active listening and engaging with parolees can play a huge role in building positive rapport. Parole officers need to maintain a positive relationship with parolees they supervise. By meeting with parolees on a regular basis and being honest with parolees, parole officers can build rapport. Another tactic used by parole officers to create rapport is simply treating parolees with dignity.

Some participants discussed certain issues that prevent the development of rapport with parolees. Often parole officers juggle a “dual role relationship” (page 3583) acting as a social worker and a police officer, they provide social support while managing to enforce supervision (Chamberlain et al., 2018). One participant discussed how newer parole agents, who are not fully established in their role, can struggle with building trust and rapport with parolees. Parole officers can view a lack of rapport as parolees not wanting to better themselves, thereby making the process difficult. Other participants stated that when parolees abscond right away before making that connection it can be hard to establish rapport with them. Parolees often have a strong opinion about parole and parole officers, making it difficult for the parole agents to build rapport with parolees.

### **Superordinate Theme 2: Style, Authoritarian Versus Counseling**

Among the different styles of supervision, the main two are authoritarian and counselor supervision. For the most part, participants explained that they use a healthy

mix of both the authoritarian and counselor style. A few participants were apprehensive about an authoritarian style and one participant indicated that they used neither authoritarian nor counselor style to supervise their parolees. One method used would be a caseworker approach, which entails more assisting the parolee with whatever problems they may have (Seiter & Crews, 2003). Another method, surveillance, entails actual monitoring and enforcing the different conditions placed on a parolee (Seiter & Crews, 2003).

Parole officers build on their style of supervision over time by gaining experience with many different types of parolees. Parole officers tend to find a balance between control and treatment to determine the best way to supervise a parolee. A parole officer will promote community safety while facilitating a parolee's successful reentry into the community (Steiner et al., 2011). With the amount of training a parolee receives, mixed with time, parole officers can develop a supervision style that works for them. When discussing the different styles of supervision, parole officers understood the concepts on authoritarian and counselor styles of supervision. P1 stated that, in some situations, a parole officer must use an authoritarian style to address an issue but then use a counselor style to emphasize they recognize the parolee is a human being who made a mistake.

### **Superordinate Theme 3: Safety Training**

Training can be vital for parole officers, especially safety training. Parole officers require community supervision training to effectively implement programs with parolees (Viglione et al., 2020). When parole officers were asked what training, they had received that had been the most useful, they replied that CR2, job shadowing and reality-based



training were the most helpful when learning how to better work with parolees. Parolees can be very unpredictable at times. The participants agreed that understanding the mindset of what could happen and how to react to these high-intensity situations can be beneficial. Parole officers need to be prepared in every aspect of their job for their safety, the safety of the public, and the safety of the parolees.

Parole officers train annually and over time can gain new tools to help them be more successful in supervising their parolees. According to Alarid and Jones (2018), trained officers who engaged more in active listening, clear instructions, reinforced pro-social behaviors, and better problem-solving skills provided parolees with adequate skills in completing parole with success. Supervising parolees can be a challenging and dangerous job at times, having the right tools and proper training can assist a parole officer in responding to parolees. There is never a right way to supervise a parolee, so parole officers often look at their case load case by case, utilize what they have training they have received to determine how to supervise that individual

#### **Superordinate Theme 4: Mental Health Training**

Mental health training is very minimal but a must when working with parolees. Most parole officers have an educational background that they can utilize when working with parolees. Parole officers can attend to the sensitive needs a parolee may have and to provide support to a parolee. With the knowledge parole officers have they are able to assist paroles through difficult situations they may be in.

**Superordinate Theme 5: Mental Health needs**

South Dakota is a rural state and there is major problem with access to the adequate number of resources for those that may need them. Mental health facilities are one of those resources that is lacking in the area. Some of the participants discussed that the system is broken and often parolees get lost in the system. Since being a rural state there is a lack in the number of facilities available to those in need.

Mental health needs are a vital part to a parolee's success while on parole. When a parolee has a stable mentality, they can continue to make pro-social decisions throughout their community supervision. Parolees build on better coping skills that assist them in positive decisions. Parole officers often struggle to provide adequate mental health needs due to the lack of resources in the area.

**Superordinate Theme 6: Other Criminological Needs**

While out on community supervision, parolees are required to follow certain conditions (Blasko et al., 2015). These conditions can create challenges for both parolees and parole officers. When a parole officer understands what challenges may arise during parole, they can better prepare themselves for future incidents that may arise. All the participants that were interviewed agreed that number one main challenge is parolees who abscond. Absconding is when a parolee fails to meet with their parole officer or has run away from where they are to be residing at. Parolees can spook easily, when they have used drugs or not doing what they are supposed to do, they often will run or hide from their parole officer because they are worried about the consequences of not maintaining sobriety. When a parolee has absconded from supervision, any rapport

building or ground gained with a parolee has been lost, parole officers will have to start at the beginning when the parolee is apprehended again.

Another challenge that parole officers have witnessed is the lack in resources. Initially, parole's main objective is to help offenders' transition from prison out into the community by offering them support while assisting them in finding employment and housing (Chamberlain et al., 2018). Resources as getting an ID can be challenging, especially those who are from out of state. For a parolee to get employment or receive any benefits they will need some form of ID. When there are limits on how they can obtain this can create barriers in their community supervision time. Another factor is cultural, race and gender factors that can create a disconnect between parole officer and parolee. A male parolee may not be accepting in taking orders or working with a female parole officer or vice versa a female parolee may not feel comfortable because of past experiences with a male parole officer. Cultural issues could be that parolees are made to believe from family views that authoritative figures such as parole officers are the enemy.

One challenge that parole officer may have been how they feel about assisting parolees. A parole office's attitude can play a big role in how they choose to supervise their parolees (Steiner et al., 2011). When dealing with parolees, parole officers can often become frustrated with the parolee. It can seem like a repetitive situation that never seems to change, and parolees often become part of a cycle where they will do well for a little bit and then fall out of good behavior to proceed in bad behavior.

**Superordinate Theme 7: Success**

The question I asked regarding what supervision level has the most success rate, most of the participants were comfortable with any level can achieve success. It doesn't matter the level of supervision; the parolee must want to be successful for parole to work. Community supervision is just that, supervision of an individual out in the community. In order for a parolee to be successful, they need to do the work and to accept the help from their parole officer. A parole officer who listens and is considerate to the parolee may impact how the parolee makes decisions (Kennealy et al., 2012).

Participants have seen many successes through their years of service, which makes the job rewarding. Success can range anywhere from receiving a legitimate job to parolees staying out on parole for a few months longer than they had prior. Taking the small victories can be rewarding to the parolee, so when parole officers emphasize on these victories as success this can create more positive stints on parole. Most parolees do not have a lot of supportive cheerleaders in their corner so when they do make those positive life-changing decisions, it is great to have someone such as their parole officer believing in them and making them feel worthy. Parole officers typically engage in supportive functions that assist a parolee in finding employment and appropriate services like treatment, counseling, and social supports (Bares & Mowen, 2020).

Some of the best successes is when a parolee has completed parole and now live in the community as productive members of society. Some participants have been able to witness this out in the community. When parole officers see that someone, they used to

supervise has completed parole and are now living a pro-social life out in the community it makes their job worth it.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The study was an examination of the perceptions and experiences of parole officers supervising parolees. I asked 10 parole officers 19 questions about their experiences supervising parolees. Research questions and the interview questions are listed in Appendix A below. There are some potential limitations in this study. Based on a parole officers' duties, the interviews gave them an opportunity to be heard without scrutiny or judgment. During the interviews I discussed confidentiality with the participant. However, it is feasible that participants may have had some concern that did not express which hampered them from fully answering the questions. Some parole officers limited what they discussed while others delved more information than was needed.

Bias may be another limitation of this study. In attempt to avoid bias in this study I took several steps to eliminate this. Every effort was taken to leave personal opinions out of this study by only using factual data along with researching all avenues within the topic. It was also important that this study was approached with an open mind in order to try and eliminate any bias that may arise from working in the field of corrections.

### **Recommendations**

Parole officers have extremely stressful, dangerous at times and frustrating job duties. Their job duties fluctuate depending on the situation. Parole officers must be able to make quick decisions and move through the different roles they hold. In certain

situations, parole officers can become frustrated with a parolee. Parole officers are then forced to make decisions that they do not necessary want to make. These difficult decisions can create issues with parole success and establishing rapport.

Further research is required to gain a better understanding on how parole officers' relationships can affect a parolee. This study reflects on how the parole officer perceives their social support with the parolee and feel that with a positive behavior towards a parolee, there is more of a greater chance that a parolee will complete parole successfully. Gearing more towards training that supports how to build on rapport and assisting in the navigation of resources may be beneficial in the future of parole officer-parolee relationships.

### **Implications**

The results of this study produced several implications that are deemed relevant to the research of what types of communication styles parole agents utilize and find effective, which can be critical to the success of a parolee on community supervision. Parole officers supervise parolees while in the community. One of the many jobs a parole officer has is assisting a parolee in making pro-social decisions. There are many factors that can negatively impact a parolee's time on community supervision. A parole officer can provide support needed to assist the parolee in changing behavior that may lead to more pro-social behavior. The themes identified from the interviews conducted with the participants indicates that parole officers believe that their behaviors can influence the formation of a positive relationship with the parolee and can lead to positive changes

within the parolee. These changes may lead to the parolee making better decisions and less frequent parole violations.

### **Conclusions**

We often forget that individuals who have been locked up in prison are still human beings and when released to the community parolees may have difficulties adjusting back into the community. It can take some time for parole officers to help navigate parolees through the system often creating barriers. It is important for parole officers to create a relationship with the parolee that can help them complete parole successfully and make pro-social decisions. Parole officers will first establish rapport and then continue to build on that rapport throughout a parolee's time on community supervision.

The interviews conducted in this study indicated that participants agreed amongst each other that establishing rapport, training and how parole officers react to parolees is an important part of their work. While conducting the interviews it was obvious that all participants were passionate about their work, that they as parole officers had a mission to help others especially those viewed as outcasts. Interviews explored on the themes, indicating that with establishing rapport, abundances of training, overcoming the challenges, using the right style of supervision for the parolee, and asserting parole success, parole officers can utilize what tools they have to better assist those parolees they supervise.

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## Appendix A: Interview Questions

### Demographic information

1. Gender?
2. Age?
3. How many years have you been a parole officer?
4. What is your educational background?
5. What training have you received?
6. How many parolees do you currently supervise?
7. What supervision level do you mainly supervise?
8. Approximately how many parolees have you supervised that have completed parole?

### Interview Questions

1. What training did you find useful when working with parolees?
2. Is there a specific supervision level that seems more successful in helping parolees to complete parole?
3. Were there parolees that you were able to establish a good rapport with? What factors do you feel were important in the development of good rapport?
4. Were there parolees that you were unable to develop a good rapport with? What factors do you think may have prevented the establishment of good rapport?
5. How does the authoritarian style of supervision influence parole success?
6. How does the authoritarian style of supervision influence the development of rapport?
7. How does the counselor style of supervision influence parolee success?
8. How does the counselor style of supervision influence the development of rapport?
9. What are some of the major challenges you have had with parolees?
10. What are some of the major successes you have had with parolees?
11. Can you describe the type of supervision style you use and why you primarily choose to use this style?