

Evidence-Based Practice and Evidence-Informed Practice in Community Corrections: Definitions, Debates and Potential Pathways

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ROBOT CIRCUS

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Swinburne think forward

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Background

Academic Experiences – providing evidence

Program Evaluation Experiences – assessing evidence

Program Development Experiences – responding to agency/organizational needs for evidence

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Issue

Creation of a structured and defensible framework for ensuring that the development, implementation and delivery of an intervention (program) is effective and not harmful

What can I do to best ensure that the program is defensible should a question arise (likely due to harm)?

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Program: LEVEL-UP

Overarching Purpose – educational program aimed at significantly enhancing **daily decision-making** through an understanding of the **original core cognitive skills** through the inclusion of **technology, gaming and standardization**.

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Cognitive Skills & Education (1970' s/80' s)

- Research by educational psychologists indicates that the educational success of a child is linked to his or her ability to, “**cognitively understand and process the information provided through the teaching experience ... as well as to apply this knowledge outside of the learning environment**” (i.e., having the core skills to learn as well as successfully integrate within society)

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<h4>Cognitive Skills Related to Learning</h4> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Locus of Control • Self-Regulation • Self-Esteem • Cognitive Distortions • Life Problem-Solving 	<h4>Application to Juvenile Offenders</h4> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moral Reasoning • Risk/Sensation Thinking • Impulsiveness • Social Problem Solving • Attitudes <h4>Application to Adult Offenders</h4> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empathy • Conflict Resolution • Anti-Social Behaviour
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Pfeifer – 2013 (CCSA): (note order)

- Problem Recognition & Acceptance (proactive - knowing when a decision is needed)
- Openness to Intervention (taking advice)
- Locus of Control (understanding what you can and cannot control)
- Basic Decision-Making Capability (cognitive biases)
- Emotional Intelligence & Regulation
- Motivation & Resilience

*Decision-making, Technology, Standardization, Gaming

The Process of Making an Informed Decision

Understanding the Historical Origins and Conceptualizations

Assessing the Current State of the Issue

Investigating the Applicability of Existing Models/Frameworks & Information to Guide the Decision

Historical Context

Public (Government) Attention to Social Science Interventions – during the 1960'/1970's increased attention began to be paid to the effectiveness of social science interventions due to a number of factors:

- increased number of programs
- increased levels of accountability (i.e., taxpayer/government funding)
- increased attention to ethics in the social sciences
- increased number of tort (civil) liability claims

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Historical Context

Social Science Response – the increased public attention and accountability led to an initial response by the social sciences which included:

- an emphasis on the research/practitioner educational and professional model
- the development of an Evidence-Based Practice Framework aimed at assisting practitioners and others (evaluators, government agencies, etc.) to assess the empirical “quality” of programs and interventions

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Evidence-Based Practice Framework

Medical Definition – evidence refers to whether, and to what extent, a statement about a certain issue is empirically founded and is generally characterized as a decision-making process informed by 3 distinct sources of influence:

- (1) Best available evidence (systematic reviews, meta-analyses)
- (2) Clinical expertise
- (3) Client values

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Adaptations by Profession

APA – “Evidence-based practice in psychology is the integration of the best available research with clinical expertise in the context of patient characteristics, culture and preferences”

Education – “The integration of professional wisdom with the best available empirical evidence in making decisions about how to deliver instruction”

Social Work – “EBP is a process in which the practitioner combines well-researched interventions with clinical experience and ethics, and client preferences and culture to guide and inform the delivery of treatments and services”

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Challenges for Community Corrections

(1) **Multi-Disciplinary Delivery** – the delivery of treatments and service in CC is based on a variety of disciplines – as such which definition of EBP is the “right” one?

Example:

- Medical intervention
- Psychiatric intervention
- Neuropsychological intervention
- Psychological intervention
- Psycho-educational intervention
- Educational Intervention
- Vocational Intervention

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Consequences of these Challenges for Community Corrections

- (1) Heavy Reliance on Academic Assessments of Evidence (potential lack of understanding, personal involvement/input)
- (2) Reliance on Evidence Assessments that are not Specific to the Program in Question (generalizing from assessments of “similar” programs)
- (3) Development of Alternative Models (e.g., Evidence-Informed Practice)
- (4) Academic/Researcher – Practitioner Tension

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A Potential Pathway for Community Corrections

Is there a way to address some of the challenges faced by community corrections agencies and staff with regard to the issue of Evidence-Based Practice?

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A Potential Pathway for Community Corrections

What are some of the issues that need to be included in a proposed framework for community corrections?

- An understanding that CC is a multi-disciplinary field
- An understanding that programing/interventions can occur at 2 levels: organizational and operational

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A Potential Pathway for Community Corrections

- Acknowledgement that any framework needs to allow practitioners to believe that their knowledge-base and experience is an important and respected component
- The inclusion of an informed decision-making model that is specific, articulable and defensible
- A clear understanding of the implications related to the implementation of programming (e.g., legal, ethical)

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Existing Models & Frameworks

Are there any existing models or frameworks that might inform a potential pathway for community corrections with regard to evidence-based practice and which respond to the identified issues?

Search for models that revolve around individuals making an informed decision about some aspect of research.

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Existing Models & Frameworks

- (1) Human Research Ethical Principles: (harm, informed consent, deception, debriefing & confidentiality)
- (2) Legal Decisions Regarding Expert & Empirical Evidence
 - Tort Liability Law
 - *Daubert* Standard for the admissibility of expert evidence

Tort Liability Law

Tort (Civil) law suggests that one's potential liability for a decision is based on a number of factors, including the following:

- Whether there is a breach of one's duty of care based on a reasonable person standard (standard varies by profession etc.) **Who am I?**
- The degree of risk and/or level of invasiveness regarding the action (i.e., as risk/invasiveness increases so should the degree of due diligence) **How much risk is there?**

Daubert Standard for Assessing Expert Evidence

Court in *Daubert* delineated a standard for assisting judge's to assess the acceptability of expert evidence on empirical research.

Emphasis was placed on:

- **Relevance** – the degree to which the evidence (program) is relevant to the case at hand (identified need)
- **Reliability** – the degree to which evidence (program) rests on a reliable foundation

Defining Reliability

The Court in *Daubert* “defined scientific methodology as the process of formulating hypotheses and then conducting experiments to prove or falsify the hypotheses and provided a set of general observations that it considered relevant to establishing the validity of scientific testimony.

General Guidelines for Assessing Empirical Reliability

1. The degree to which the technique is able to be empirically tested (i.e., falsifiable, refutable)
2. Whether it has been subjected to peer review and publication
3. The known or potential error rate
4. The existence and maintenance of standards and controls concerning the operation of the program
5. The degree to which the theory or technique is generally accepted by a relevant scientific community

Potential Pathway

Given the confusion and debate over the issue of Evidence-Based Practice (& Evidence-Informed Practice) as well as the fact that Community Corrections involves a variety of disciplines, it may be argued that a more effective pathway for the assessments of programs may be found through a two-prong adaptation of the legal approach.

Assessing Programs within a Community Corrections Context

Step 1: Risk/Invasiveness Assessment:

- use of a low, medium, high designation protocol may be developed by the organization.
- guidance for this may be sought from Ethics Boards.
- designation may inform decisions regarding research/practitioner balance (i.e., the higher the risk the more the emphasis should be placed on research)

Step 2: Relevance Assessment:

- structured assessment of why and how the program meets the specified needs of the client(s)
- comparative analysis of competing programs, identifying how and why they do not meet the specified needs of the client(s)
- identification of the guiding discipline (e.g., psychology, social work, education) in order to establish the reasonable person standard (e.g., acceptance level of qualitative data across disciplines)

Step 3: Empirical Reliability Assessment:

1. The degree to which the technique is able to be empirically tested (i.e., falsifiable, refutable)
2. Whether it has been subjected to peer review and publication
3. The known or potential error rate
4. The existence and maintenance of standards and controls concerning the operation of the program
5. The degree to which the theory or technique is generally accepted by a relevant scientific community

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Thank You.
Questions?

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