

Probation/Parole Agent Style & Women Offender's Reactions to Supervision Interactions

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What happens when Probation/Parole agents are more supportive or more punitive in their supervision interactions with women offenders? The answer is more complex than you might think because it depends in part on each particular woman's crime-related needs.

Summary of Key Findings:

1. Women with more supportive agents experienced less psychological reactance (the perception that personal freedoms are being limited) after supervision interactions, and women with more punitive agents experienced lower self-efficacy to avoid crime-related behavior after supervision interactions.
2. Women who began supervision with relatively low criminogenic vulnerabilities (e.g., low anti-social attitude, few anti-social friends, low anger/hostility, low depression/anxiety) showed especially undesirable responses to agent use of a punitive style – they had increased reactance and decreased self-efficacy to avoid crime-related behavior.
3. Women who began supervision relatively high in criminogenic vulnerabilities (e.g., high anger/hostility, many antisocial friends, high substance abuse history, low general self-efficacy) reported especially high self-efficacy to avoid criminal behavior when their agents used a more supportive style.

*Methods & Results**

We examined **agents' reports** of their interpersonal style with clients:

Supportiveness: "I want _____ to feel free to discuss the things that worry her."
"I really care about _____'s concerns."
"I encourage _____ to work together with me."

Punitiveness: "I feel that it is sometimes necessary to punish _____."
"_____ feels I make unreasonable demands on her."
"Sometimes it is not possible to talk to _____ without talking down to her."

We also examined **client's reactions** to supervision interactions:

Psychological reactance:

"Suggestions and advice from my PO often make me do the opposite."

"When my PO pushes me to do something, I often tell myself, For sure I won't do it."

Self-efficacy to avoid crime-related behavior:

"Talking to my PO makes me more certain that I can avoid criminal people."

"Talking to my PO makes me more confident that I can work through problems without turning to drug or heavy alcohol use."

General Effects of Agent Style

Women with *more supportive agents*

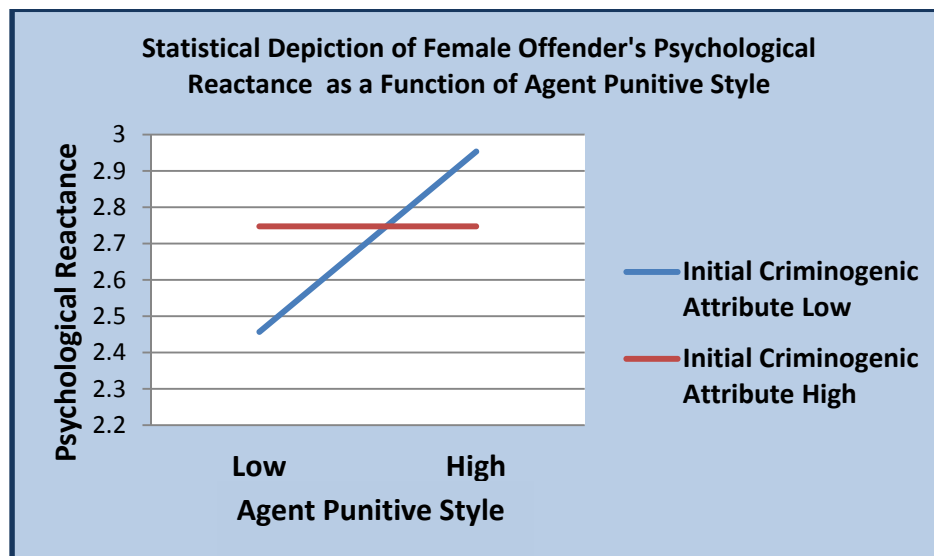
- responded to supervision interactions with lower psychological reactance
- did not differ in their self-efficacy to avoid crime-related behavior as compared with women whose agents used a less supportive style

Women with *more punitive agents*

- did not differ in psychological reactance as compared with clients with less punitive agents
- showed significantly lower self-efficacy to avoid crime-related behavior

The Uniquely *Undesirable* Effects of Agent Punitive Style for Some Women

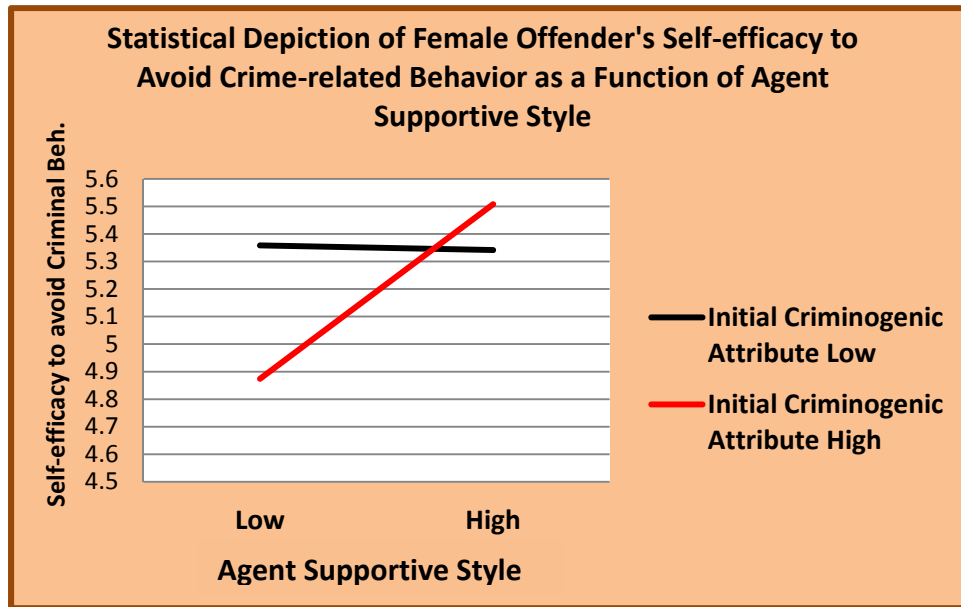
Although there was no general effect of agent use of a punitive style on psychological reactance, there was evidence that for some women, this interpersonal style had a substantial undesirable effect. Specifically, women who were relatively *low* in **Antisocial Attitudes**, **Antisocial Friends**, **Anger/Hostility**, and **Depression/Anxiety** when supervision began (the blue line below) reported significantly higher psychological reactance when their agents used a more punitive style. The agent's use of punitive style had no statistical impact on reactance for women who were initially high in these criminogenic attributes (the red line).



In a similar fashion, agent use of a punitive style was negatively related to women's self-efficacy to avoid crime-related behavior for women who were initially low in antisocial attitudes and antisocial friends. That is, women who had relatively positive attitudes and few antisocial friends reported lower self-efficacy to avoid crime-related behavior when their agents used a more punitive style.

The Uniquely *Desirable* Effects of Agent Supportive Style for Some Women

Although there was no general effect of agent use of a supportive style on self-efficacy to avoid crime-related behavior, there was evidence that for some women, this interpersonal style had a uniquely positive effect. Specifically, women who were relatively **high** in **Antisocial Friends, Anger/Hostility, and Substance Abuse History** when supervision began (the red line below) reported significantly higher self-efficacy to avoid crime-related behavior when their agents used a more supportive style. The agent's use of supportive style had no statistical impact on self-efficacy for women who were initially low in these criminogenic attributes (the black line).



*A few examples are presented for each measure.

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