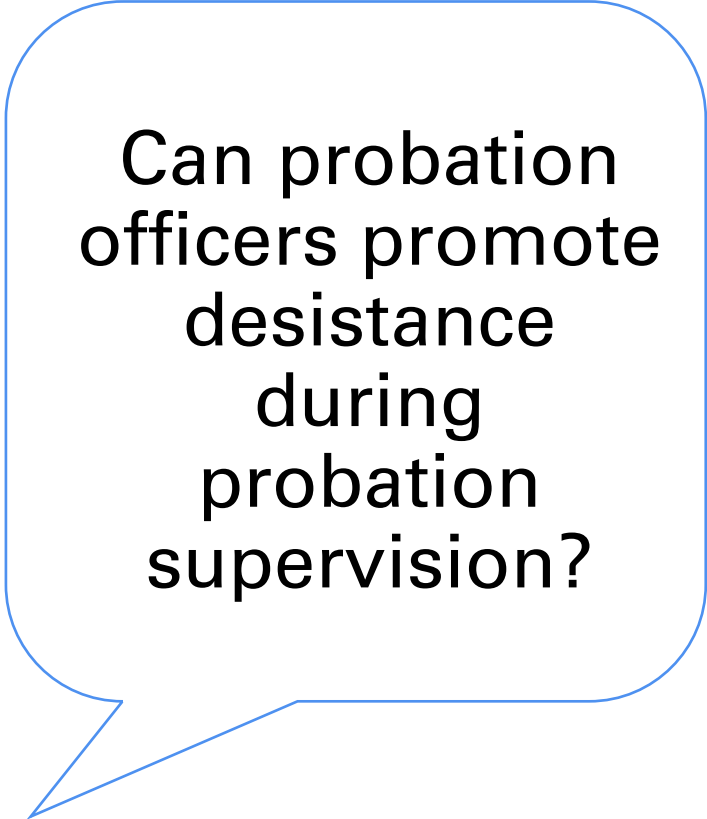


DESISTANCE AND PROBATION PRACTICE

Coffee & Learn Practice Seminar
Friday July 7th 2023



Question?



Can probation officers promote desistance during probation supervision?

Overview



* Why is desistance important?
(Grey literature)



* Year 1 – Systematic Narrative Review
(What does existing research say?)



* Year 2 – Probation officer's perspectives of desistance
(What did I find out?)



* Year 3 – Dissemination of research
(What next?)

Why is desistance important?



Recent buzz around desistance in grey literature:

- NB – The Desistance Strategy (2015), ceased in 2016 with no formal evaluation. Now the Adult Restorative Justice Strategy (2022).
- An Roinn Dlí agus Cirt agus Comhionannas (2020) - Department of Justice and Equality in Ireland
- Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (2021)
- Criminal Justice Inspectorate Northern Ireland (2020) "*Understanding desistance was inextricably linked to reducing the likelihood of reoffending*".
- Northern Ireland Audit Office – Reducing Reoffending in NI (2023) "*DoJ is aware of the key factors that impact on reoffending, and has been developing a greater focus on desistance and rehabilitation*".

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What is
commonly
known?
(deductions
from grey
literature)

- Contested concept
- There is no one all-encompassing definition
- No one singular theory
- Collection of theories, or a 'movement'

DEFINITIONS

“Desistance from crime as a process of
“going straight” or “self-reform”

Laub and Sampson, 2001

*“...the long-term abstinence from
criminal behaviour among those for
whom offending had become a pattern
of behaviour”

McNeill et al., 2012

*Adopted definition by the Desistance Strategy
(2015)

“At the heart of desistance research is
a very simple idea: people can
change”

Maruna, 2017

There is value in “bearing witness to
desistance”

Anderson, 2016



Desistance - differentiations

- Primary desistance – A period free from offending
- Secondary desistance – An individual's perspective of self and the creation of a non-offending identity
- Tertiary desistance - individual's pro-social changes are more successful if there are recognised by others
- Act desistance - periods of non-offending
- Identity desistance - internalisation of a non-offending identity
- Relational desistance - acknowledgement of change through others

Farrall (2004)

McNeil (2016)

Nugent and Schinkel (2016)

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CONTEMPORARY DEVELOPMENTS

• Then...

- Emergence in 1990's
- Individuals 'drift'
- Portrayal as a journey/process

& Now...

- Focus shifted to the outcome not the journey
- Emancipatory movement
- Social rights movement (Maruna, 2017)

Factors impacting upon desistance

- Age/maturation “growing out of it”

- Education “knows better”

- Employment “a steady job”

- Relationships “presence of one pro-social model”

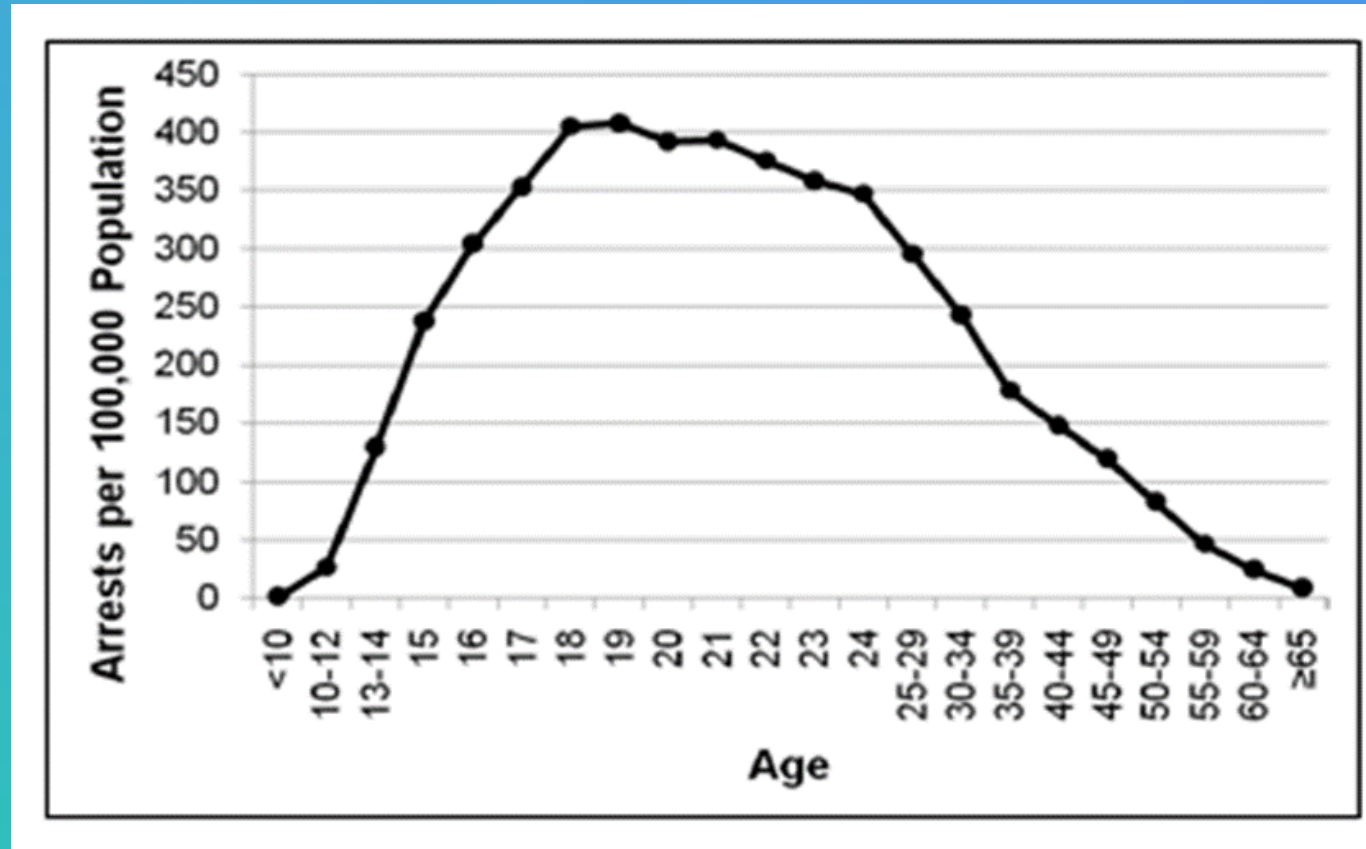
- Substance misuse – insert any “mal-adaptive” practice e.g. gambling .

- Adverse childhood experiences – presence of

- Accommodation - Access to services “post code lottery”

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The Age-Crime Curve



“Violence is a young man’s vice: it has been said that the most effective crime fighting tool is a 30th Birthday”

Times Magazine, 1994

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**“ OUR STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT
FOUND STRONG CONSENSUS THAT
INADEQUATE STABLE **ACCOMMODATION**
WAS THE GREATEST BARRIER TO
DESISTANCE, GIVEN THAT AN ADDRESS IS
KEY TO ACCESSING SERVICES INCLUDING
HEALTHCARE AND EMPLOYMENT.”**

NORTHERN IRELAND AUDIT OFFICE (2023)

YEAR ONE:

AN EXPLORATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PROBATION SUPERVISION AND DESISTANCE: A SYSTEMATIC NARRATIVE REVIEW

[08 IPJ Vol 19 An Exploration.pdf \(pbni.org.uk\)](#)

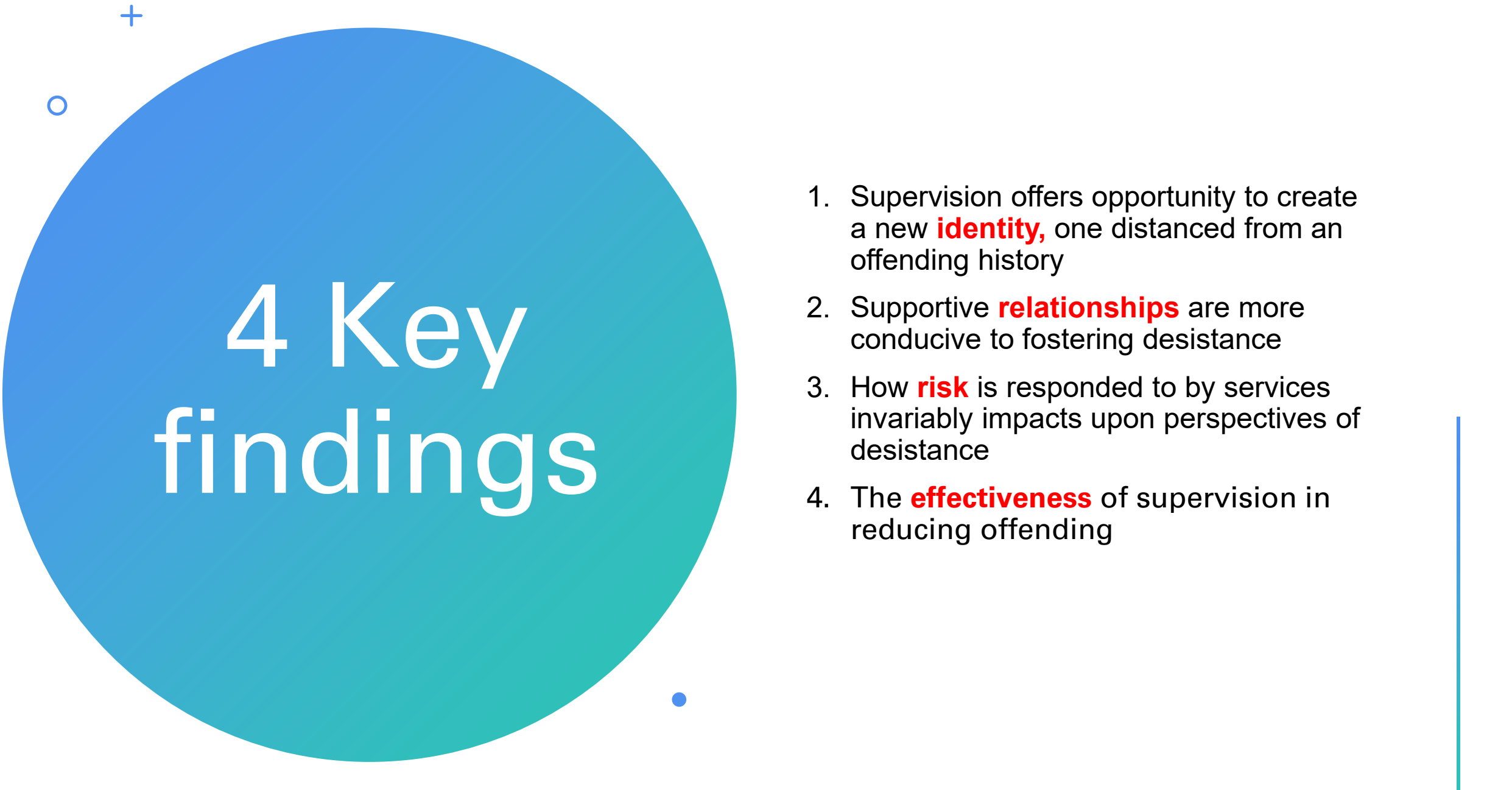
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Methodology

- Explore the relationship between desistance and probation supervision
- Completed 2021
- PsycINFO, Social Care Online, and Criminal Justice Database
- Search strategy, boolean algebra
- Inclusion/exclusion criteria
- 314 down to 18 total articles
- Quality appraised (QAT's)
- 20-year scope (1999 – 2019)



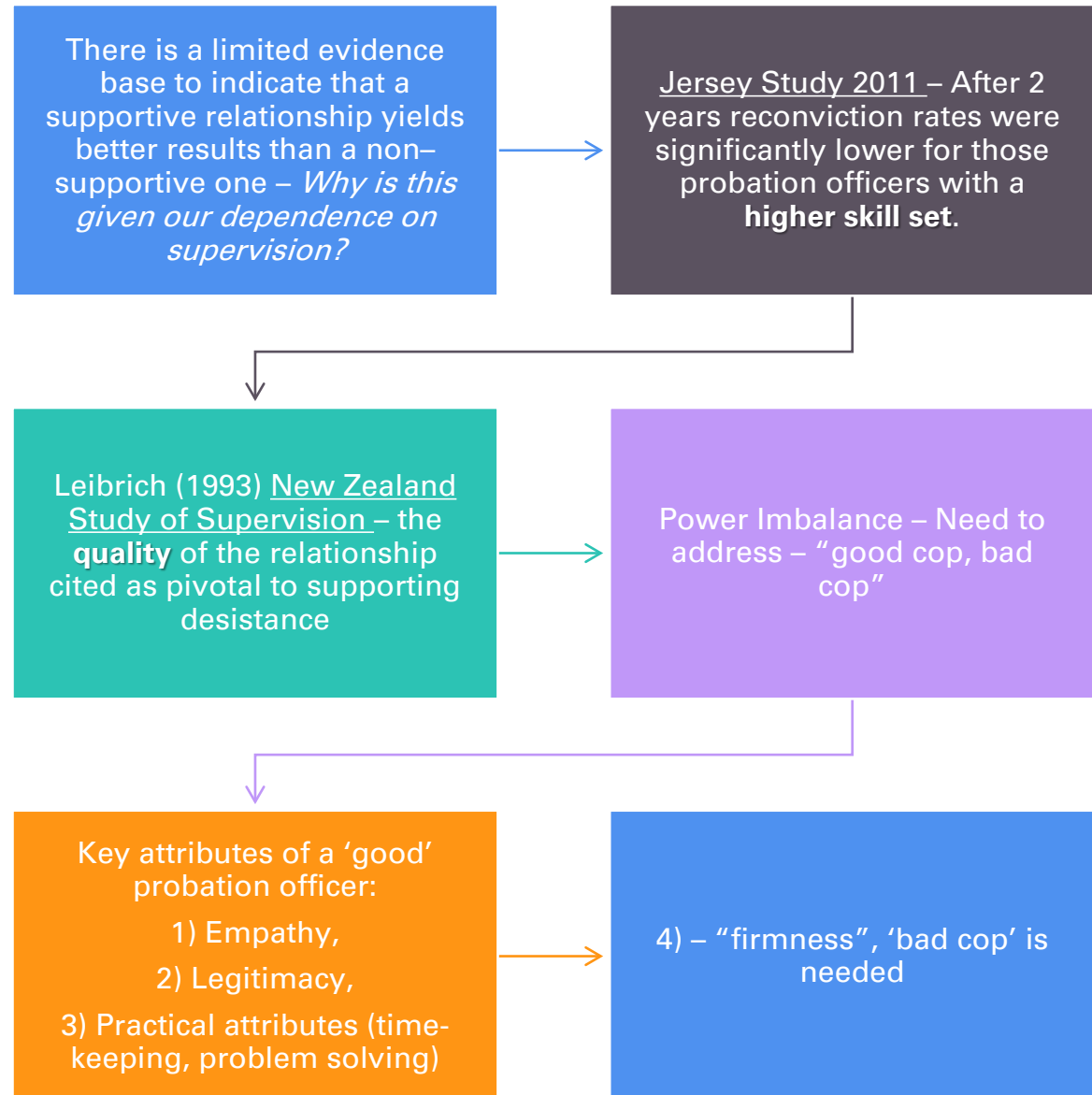
4 Key findings

1. Supervision offers opportunity to create a new **identity**, one distanced from an offending history
2. Supportive **relationships** are more conducive to fostering desistance
3. How **risk** is responded to by services invariably impacts upon perspectives of desistance
4. The **effectiveness** of supervision in reducing offending

Identity



Relationships "Good Cop, bad Cop"



Risk



Strong ties to RnR



Responsivity, specific criminogenic needs are more effectively addressed through **intensive supervision**, although the increased level of surveillance can adversely lead to **more violations** of sentence requirements.



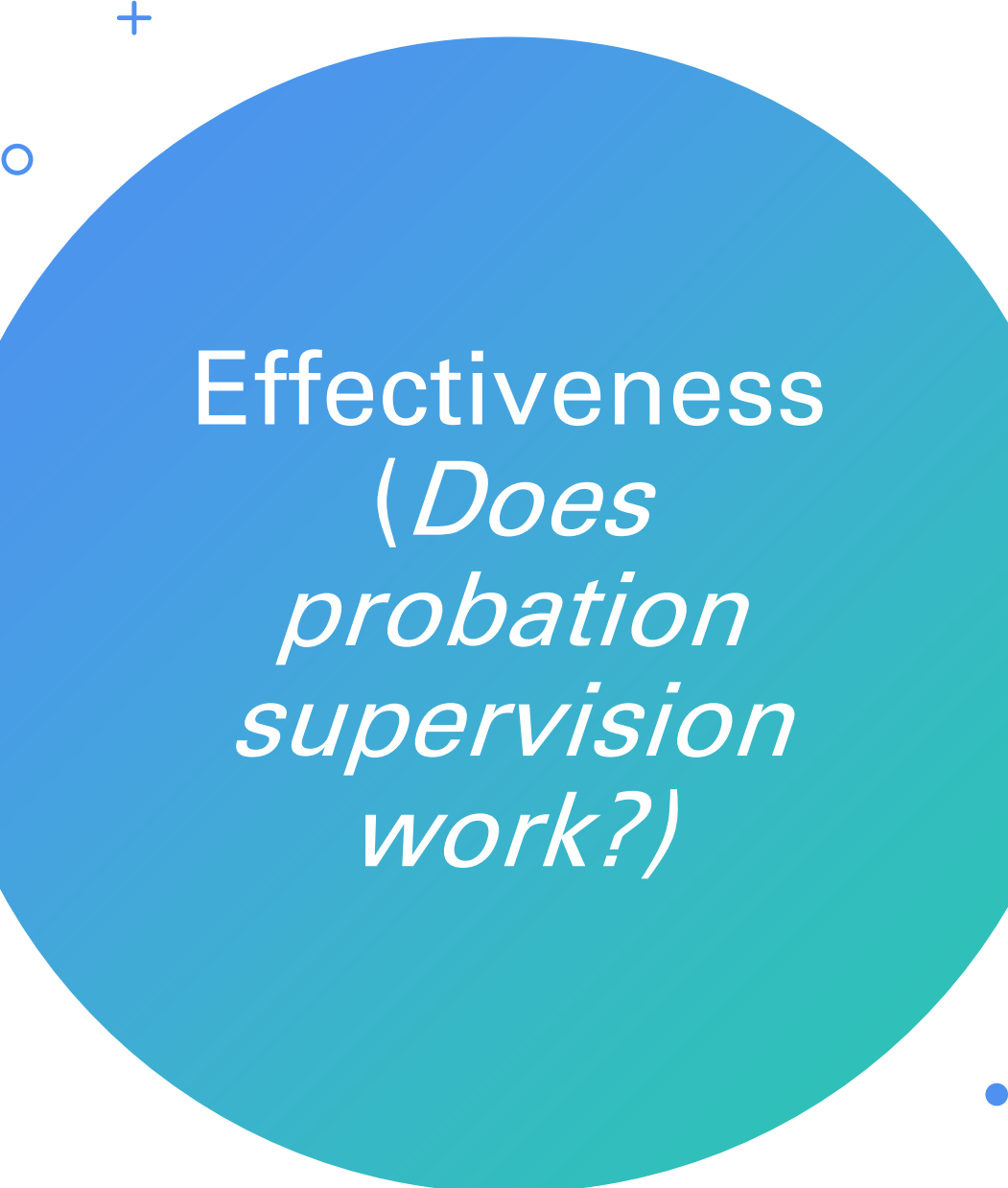
Where the frequency of supervision with probationers is determined by an **assessment of risk**, and where there is a scoring scale, this can result in some **criminogenic needs going unmet**.



Risk Management – CRC – NPS, lessons learned



Stigma attached to perception of risk



Effectiveness (*Does probation supervision work?*)

- **Yes**
 - Wealth of worldwide qualitative data that indicates those under probation supervision re-offend at a lower rate than those who are unsupervised
 - Same stands for supervision as opposed to custody
 - Variances in recidivism rates are consequence of a multitude of factors, local, internal...
 - The evidence base unequivocally portrays supervision's ability to offer a reduction in offending.
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YEAR TWO

“PATIENCE, PERSISTENCE,
AND PROPORTIONALITY”:

PROBATION OFFICER’S

PERSPECTIVES OF

DESISTANCE IN PRACTICE

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Research Rationale

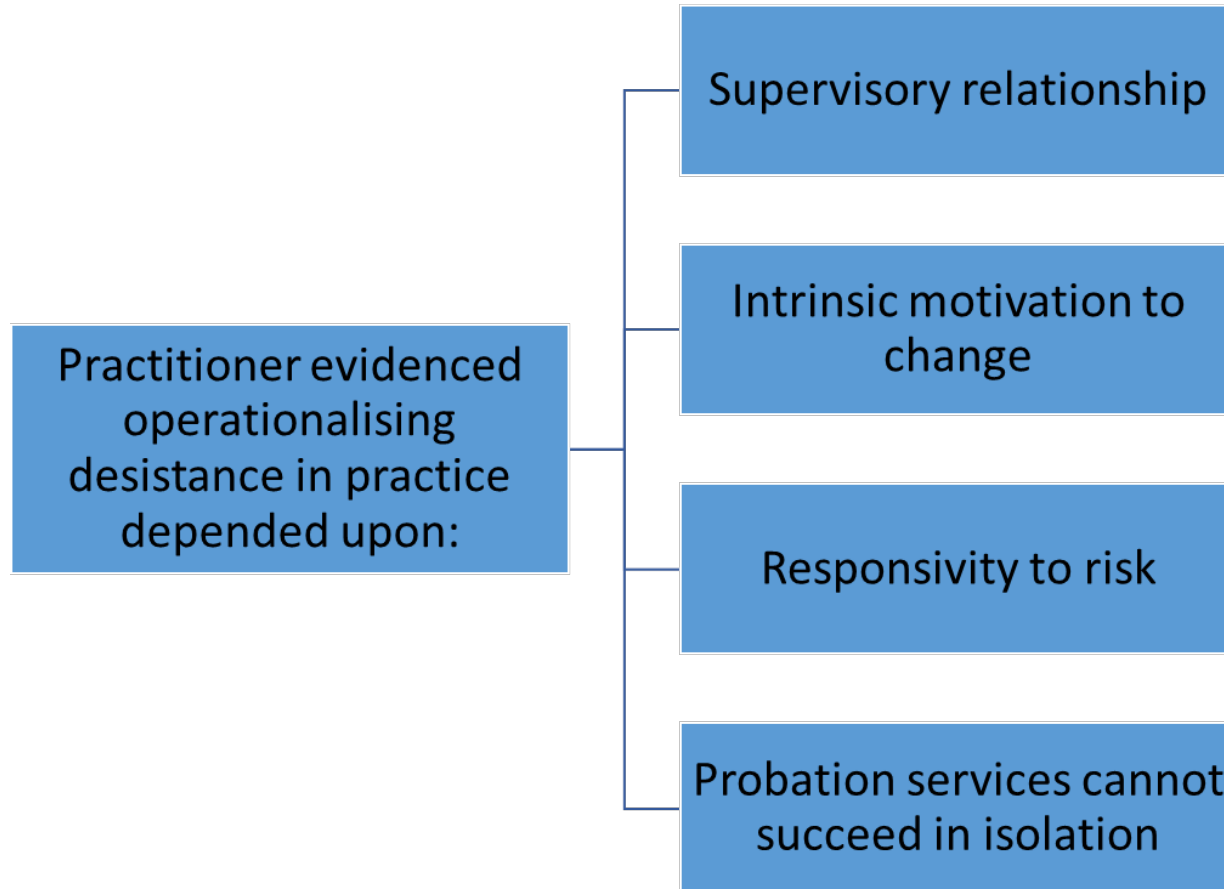
- Limited research into the perspectives of probation officers (Beck and McGinnis, 2022)
- The fundamental directive of probation services is to deliver a reduction in offending (Raynor, 2019)
- Desistance from crime is a priority for criminal justice policy, research, and practice (McNeil, 2006)



Methodology

- Completed 2022
- Qualitative design
- Semi-structured interviews
- Sample – 15 probation officers
- Reflexive thematic Analysis
- NVivo12

Findings



*Additional finding – how PO's conceptualise desistance

Supervisory relationships



- Relationships central to the promotion of desistance
- Premised on social work values
- Concept of power – Good Cop/ Bad Cop
- The absence of a supportive relationship can adversely impact upon desistance processes

Critical theme – desistance requires **patience**

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Individual's motivation to change

- Motivation to change viewed as prerequisite to desistance
- Probation officers considered themselves “agents of change”
- Assessment of needs was seminal – inclusive process
- Acknowledgement of barriers / hinderances to practice

Critical theme – desistance requires
persistence



Responsivity to Risk

- What happens when things go wrong?
- Practitioner/organisational response to risk invariably impacts upon desistance narratives
- Care vs Control debate
- Rehabilitation vs Risk Management
- “Resources follow risk”
- Stigma associated with risk categories – language

Critical theme - **proportionality**

Probation services cannot succeed in isolation

“Desistance is everyone's business”

Probation officers identified the limitations of their role

Exemplified during COVID-19 – Disconnected from communities

Desistance is not just the priority of the probation officers and services, but the prerogative of all services

Probation supervision is a small cog in a much greater mechanism



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Summary of findings

- Limitations – study unique to Northern Ireland, not necessarily reflective of wider probation services (especially non-social worker qualified)
- Practitioner have an affinity to the desistance informed practice
- Desistance focused practices sits well with core-social work values
- Desistance requires a greater audience and action
- Desistance theory's development from journey to social movement – A work in progress...



YEAR THREE
DISSEMINATION OF
RESEARCH

Endeavors to disseminate research



INDUCTION



LECTURES AT
ULSTERS
UNIVERSITY



SOCIAL WORK
CONFERENCE &
MORE



LUNCH SEMINARS/
COFFEE MORNINGS

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Can probation officers promote desistance during probation supervision?

Probation officers evidenced the promotion of desistance requires:

- **Patience** –relationships are not built overnight
- **Persistence** – changing harmful behaviour requires stamina
- **Proportionality** – What we do when things to go wrong

What's next for desistance?

Further research into the relationship between probation supervision and desistance & role/impact of the probation officer

More emphasis on the criminal justice system at undergraduate level (widening the training agenda)

Realise the envisioning of the emancipatory movement

Promotion of service-user lead initiatives/co-production

Requirement to view desistance beyond the risk paradigm (can become too rationalized/commodified)

The desistance paradigm

“Put simply, the implication is that offender management services need to think of themselves less as providers of correctional treatment (that belongs to the expert) and more as supporters of desistance processes (that belong to the desister)”

(Fergus McNeill, 2006)

DESISTANCE AND PROBATION SUPERVISION



“At the heart of desistance research is a very simple idea: people can change”

(Maruna, 2017)

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