

# Parole Officers' Perceptions of Juvenile Offenders within a Balanced and Restorative Model of Justice

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## **BALANCED AND RESTORATIVE**

Justice (BARJ) is a model of justice that has much of its roots in the work of Zehr (1990) and has most recently been researched and promoted by Bazemore and Umbreit (1997). It is presented in much of the literature as a well-rounded and pragmatic model of justice. BARJ takes into account both the risks and the needs of individual offenders without sacrificing the needs of victims. In this respect, BARJ can be understood as less retributive and less offender-centered than more traditional models of justice. The guiding principle of BARJ is the restoring of victims and their respective communities at large, while at the same time maintaining a focus on the risks and needs of the offender. The basic precepts of BARJ are classified into three general areas: 1) offender accountability—the obligation of each offender to restore the harm done to victims; 2) offender competency development—the need for each offender to become a capable and productive member of society; and 3) community protection—the right of each person to be safe and secure within his or her respective community environment. The basic notion of BARJ is that both effective and pragmatic justice can best be achieved when a balance of criteria related to restoring both the offender and victim is afforded. These criteria relate to members of the community, to victims of crime, and to the risks and needs of offenders (Maloney, Romig, and Armstrong 1989).

The Ohio Department of Youth Services (ODYS) is a leading agency in funding and in providing services to the juvenile justice population in Ohio. The general direction of the ODYS has been and continues to be to

integrate a balanced system of justice into many of its programs and services. Parole, Courts, and Community Services (PCCS) functions as a division of the ODYS, having a principal responsibility for assisting in the reintegration of incarcerated juvenile felons into the community from the institution. A juvenile offender is typically placed on parole for a period ranging from four to nine months, with specific goals being established in the three areas of BARJ, that is, in the areas of offender accountability, offender competency development, and community protection. The parole officer assigned to a juvenile offender on parole monitors the youth's progress or lack of progress in meeting specific established goals. A juvenile offender's discharge from parole is often linked to the satisfactory completion of these specific goals.

The present study began as a result of a dialogue between the authors, who inquired as to how one might quantify and measure balanced and restorative justice within the provision of aftercare services (i.e., parole supervision) to adjudicated offenders. The authors thought that the relationships and perceptions that parole officers have with juvenile offenders on their caseload are often the closest link that the juvenile justice system has to the juvenile offender. These relationships and perceptions, therefore, may provide a good basis on which to quantify and measure the components of balanced and restorative justice. The ongoing dialogue of the authors became the catalyst for the development of the Balanced and Restorative Justice Evaluation Screen (BARJES).

The authors conducted the study presented here at a regional, community-base juvenile

parole office. They designed and implemented the Balanced and Restorative Justice Evaluation Screen (BARJES). The BARJES was designed as a rating system to be completed by parole officers working with juvenile offenders. The BARJES was designed to measure parole officers' perception of the paroled juvenile offenders on their caseloads within the context of BARJ. The authors believe that parole officers' perceptions of juvenile offenders on their caseloads constitute valuable information that might be made more useful if such perceptions were quantified and measured. The purpose of this study was to demonstrate that reliable and valid rating instruments could be developed to quantify and measure the perceptions of parole officers about their juvenile offenders. This information could then be utilized to predict outcomes and to monitor a juvenile offender's progress with respect to parole services.

## **Method**

### *Subjects*

Parole officers (P.O.'s) at a regional juvenile parole office completed the BARJES for juvenile offenders (J.O.'s) on their caseload for a two-month period. A total of 72 BARJES were completed by 15 P.O.'s. The demographic composition of those participating in the study is outlined in the following table (see Table 1).

## **Instrumentation**

The Balanced and Restorative Justice Evaluation Screen (BARJES) is made up of fifteen items designed to quantify and measure, within the context of BARJ, the perceptions

**TABLE 1***Study Demographic Composition*

	Age		Gender		Race		
	Mean	SD	Male	Female	Black	White	Mixed
J.O.'s	16.9	1.2	62	10	33	36	03
P.O.'s	40.1	8.4	09	06	07	09	00

of parole officers concerning youth on their caseloads. The BARJES was designed to reflect the three basic areas of BARJ (i.e., offender accountability, offender competency development, and community protection). The BARJES is comprised of three item-pools made up of five items in each item-pool (see Table 2). The instructions provided to parole officers for completion of the BARJES were: *Read each item and select one response to the right of each item. Indicate in a clear manner the response that you select for each item. Answer all items according to your present knowledge of the youth.* The possible available rating responses to the right of each item

were 0 = never, 1 = seldom, 2 = average, 3 = mostly, 4 = total. The direction of scoring was identical for all items.

### Results

The results of administration of the BARJES are presented here from a sample of juvenile offenders (n=72) and includes (1) single-item mean scores and standard deviations, (2) item-pool mean scores, standard deviations, and item-pool coefficient alphas, (3) inter-item correlation coefficients, and (4) a test-retest coefficient from a smaller sub-sample from the study population (n=20).

Means and standard deviations were cal-

culated for each of the fifteen items of the BARJES (see Table 3). Item-pool means, item-pool standard deviations, and item-pool coefficient alphas were also calculated for the designated item-pools of offender accountability (OA), offender competency development (OC), and community protection (CP) (see Table 4). The mean of all fifteen items for the study sample was 25.4 with a standard deviation of 11. A coefficient alpha of .91 for the study sample, inclusive of all fifteen items, to measure internal reliability (i.e., item consistency), was obtained. A test-retest (M = 12.1 days, SD = 3.7 days) coefficient of .88 for a sub-sample (n=20), inclusive of all fif-

**TABLE 2***Item-pool Composition*

### Accountability of Offender

1. To what degree *has the youth restored* as much as is possible the losses to society or victim(s) that resulted from his or her criminal activity, etc.

4. To what degree has the youth *expressed an understanding and had appropriate feelings of remorse* for the damage or hurt caused.

7. To what degree *have victims* of the youth's criminal activity *been involved* in the justice process dealing with the youth.

10. To what degree has the youth *been compliant with the conditions* (i.e., rules) that were given to him or her to follow.

13. To what degree has the youth *met and completed the established conditions or agreements* that were given to him or her.

### Competency of Offender

2. To what degree has the youth *made beneficial gains in opportunities* provided him or her, e.g., education, training, counseling, groups, etc.

5. To what degree are the youth's skills and abilities now sufficient *in his or her present environment* to meet basic needs, e.g., food, clothing, shelter, etc.

8. To what degree has the youth *been successful* in positive conventional activities, e.g. recreation, school, work, etc.

11. To what degree has the youth *been involved in programs or services* that are able to help aid in increasing his or her competencies.

14. To what degree is the youth free from the need for *adjunctive mental health services*, e.g., for depression, anger, anxiety, etc.

### Protection of Community

3 To what degree is the youth's *present environment*, i.e., home or institution a support and a help in discouraging future criminal activity.

6. To what degree is the youth free from the need for *supportive supervision* to avoid involvement in criminal activity.

9. To what degree has the youth demonstrated a *freedom from* any type of participation in *criminal activities*.

12. To what degree *is the community* (i.e., institutional or non-institutional) *involved* with the youth to aid the youth in a non-criminal agenda.

15 To what degree do you consider the youth to be *free from the risk of becoming involved in criminal activity and re-offending*.

teen items, to measure external reliability (i.e., temporal stability), was also obtained.

Inter-item correlations for each of the fifteen items of the BARJES were calculated and evaluated at a two-tailed level of significance. There were 58 correlations significant at the .01 level and 17 correlations significant at the .05 level (see Table 5). In all, there were 70 significant inter-item correlations beyond what would be expected to occur by chance  $p \geq .05$ .

A follow-up study was conducted after six months for seventy-one of the initial juvenile offenders for which a BARJES had been completed. Written requests were sent to all re-

categorized as having met the criteria of *completion and discharge from parole*. In all, thirty-three juvenile offenders were designated meeting the criteria as successful in completing parole. Juvenile offenders were considered to be *unsuccessful* if they were categorized as other than having met the criteria for *completion and discharge from parole* with exception of those *still on juvenile parole status*. In all, thirty-one juvenile offenders were designated as unsuccessful in completing parole. Follow-up information on one of the initial 72 juvenile offenders was not received, and therefore, was not included in the

of 10. The mean total score on the BARJES for the *unsuccessful* juvenile parolees completing parole was 20.4 with a standard deviation of 10.2. This produces a substantial magnitude in the difference between these two designated groups, that is, an effect size of .88.

## Discussion

In this study, the BARJES was demonstrated to be a reliable and valid rating instrument capable of quantifying and measuring parole officers' perceptions of juvenile offenders within the context of the three basic concept areas of BARJ. The pragmatic applications

**TABLE 3**

*Item Means and Standard Deviations*

Item	Mean	SD	Item	Mean	SD	Item	Mean	SD
1	1.06	.96	6	1.47	1.07	11	1.94	1.12
2	1.71	1.18	7	.89	1.06	12	1.75	1.12
3	2.17	1.09	8	1.69	1.03	13	1.74	1.07
4	1.60	1.07	9	1.74	1.19	14	1.99	1.17
5	2.44	1.10	10	2.44	1.10	15	1.44	1.11

spective parole officers asking them to categorize each juvenile offender for whom they had initially completed a BARJES. The parole officers were asked to classify juvenile offenders into one of seven categories. These categories were: (1) adjudicated delinquent of a new offense, (2) revoked for technical violation of parole, (3) committed or recommitted while on parole for a new offense, (4) bound-over to the adult system, (5) convicted of an offense as an adult, (6) still on juvenile parole status, (7) and completion and discharge from parole. Juvenile offenders were considered to be *successful* only if they were

analysis. A total of seven juvenile offenders remained on parole and were not considered as successful or unsuccessful. A t-test was calculated between the two groups of juvenile offenders (i.e., successful vs. unsuccessful) for the individual item-pools of offender accountability ( $t=3.76$ ,  $df=62$ ,  $p<.001$ ), offender competency development ( $t=2.39$ ,  $df=62$ ,  $p<.01$ ), community protection ( $t=3.71$ ,  $df=62$ ,  $p<.001$ ), and for the fifteen item total score of the BARJES ( $t=3.53$ ,  $df=62$ ,  $p<.001$ ). The mean total score on the BARJES for the *successful* juvenile parolees completing parole was 29.4 with a standard deviation

of providing information to further guidance and development of broader agency-wide policy criteria, and also, of predicting individual success and non-success of juvenile parolees are far-reaching. The fundamental hypothesis on which this study was based was that those juvenile offenders who completed parole and were discharged were more likely to score higher on the BARJES than those who did not complete parole. In fact, the ability of the BARJES to predict group membership of juvenile parolees into categories of successful (i.e., categorized as having met the criteria of *completion and discharge from parole*) versus non-successful (i.e., categorized as other than having met the criteria for *completion and discharge from parole* with exception of those *still on juvenile parole status*) was excellent. In all, a breakdown into categories into which parole officers had classified juvenile offenders showed that 5 juvenile offenders were adjudicated delinquent of a new offense, 4 were revoked for technical violation of parole, 12 were committed or recommitted while on parole for a new offense, 1 was bound-over to the adult system, 10 were convicted of an offense as an adult, 7 were still

**TABLE 4**

*Item-Pool Means, Standard Deviations, and Coefficient Alphas*

Item-Pool	Mean	SD	$r_{xx}$
OA	7.12	5.27	.77
OC	9.77	5.60	.76
CP	8.57	5.58	.74

**TABLE 5***Inter-item Correlations*

	01-A	02-C	03-P	04-A	05-C	06-P	07-A	08-C	09-P	10-A	11-C	12-P	13-A	14-C	15-P
01-A	1														
02-C	** .52	1													
03-P	.07	.19	1												
04-A	** .50	** .62	** .41	1											
05-C	.22	.13	** .46	** .30	1										
06-P	** .55	** .53	* .25	** .71	** .36	1									
07-A	.01	-.14	.21	.00	.03	-.10	1								
08-C	** .54	** .78	* .23	** .69	** .32	** .60	-.06	1							
09-P	** .54	** .71	* .25	** .69	* .26	** .71	-.09	** .68	1						
10-A	** .59	** .83	* .27	** .76	* .23	** .69	-.08	** .80	** .85	1					
11-C	** .50	** .78	* .27	** .70	* .23	** .60	-.06	** .76	** .75	** .81	1				
12-P	.22	* .24	.18	.22	* .25	.10	-.11	.21	.21	* .23	** .30	1			
13-A	** .61	** .82	* .24	** .75	.17	** .71	-.04	** .75	** .80	** .93	** .82	.22	1		
14-C	* .25	** .33	.18	* .28	.11	** .47	-.15	* .27	** .43	** .40	** .31	* .24	** .34	1	
15-P	** .53	** .62	.21	** .77	* .23	** .72	.03	** .65	** .82	** .74	** .64	.20	** .74	** .35	1

*Note.* Item number followed by A = (offender accountability), C = (offender competency), and P = (community protection) and  $df = 70$ , .23 for  $p = .05^*$ , and .30 for  $p = .01^{**}$ .

on juvenile parole status, and 33 had completed and were discharged from parole.

The large number of significant inter-item correlations (with exception of one item) and the high fifteen-item (total score) coefficient alpha strongly suggests that the BARJES functioned in an overall homogeneous manner, that is, measuring, with excellent internal consistency, items of the same general composition. This was more the case with the fifteen-item total score of the BARJES than with the three smaller five-item scores for each of the three designated item-pools of offender accountability, offender competency development, or community protection. The three smaller five-item scores, however, also had good to excellent coefficient alphas, and therefore could be considered internally consistent and homogeneous. The single exception to the homogeneous fifteen-item (total score) of the BARJES was item 7 that asked for a rating of a victim's participation in the justice process. Interestingly, item 7 had no significant relationship with any other item. This was more than likely due to the reality that, at the time and within the jurisdiction

of this study, no program existed for mandating victim notification or for encouraging victim participation in the justice process. New legislation in Ohio, however, now allows for victim notification in some circumstances and for participation of victims in the process of juvenile justice. The BARJES demonstrated excellent test-retest stability (i.e., reliability) and substantial validity in its ability to differentiate (i.e., predict) group differences.

A few important precautions are in order in the interpretation of the results of this

study. The study provided data from only a small sample of juvenile offenders rated by parole officers on a fifteen-item instrument. The study design and method are somewhat limited. The data, for example, are comprised of correlations, which limits the interpretation of cause and effect relationships. The design (i.e., a number of parole officers rating juvenile offenders) also presents issues, in that more elaborate analysis of data is required to deal with the complication of multi-level (e.g., nested) data. The potential also exists for raters (i.e., parole officers) to

**TABLE 6***Item-Pool Correlations*

\* $p < .10$

Item-Pool	OA	OC	CP
OA	1		
OC	*.62	1	
CP	-.58	*-.69	1

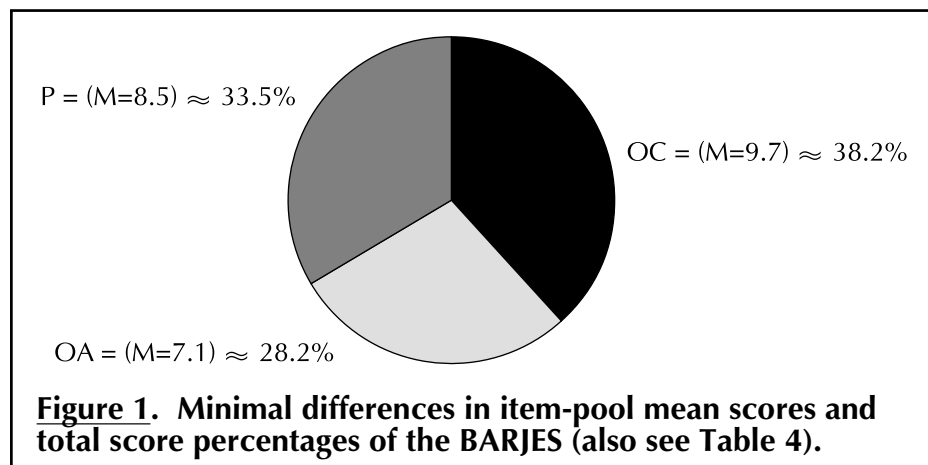
respond in ways common to these type of instruments (i.e., acquiescence, social desirability, indecisiveness, or extreme responding); this would breach the intended purpose of the instrument itself. However, with all of the possible routine criticisms that could be leveled against it, this study demonstrated that the BARJES was able to provide a useful quantification and measure of parole officers' perceptions of juvenile offenders on their caseloads within the context of BARJ.

and community protection might be enhanced to increase the probability of success for paroled juvenile offenders.

Offender accountability might be enhanced (1) by programs or strategies that encourage more stringent compliance with conditions (i.e., rules) of aftercare, (2) by programs or strategies that encourage offenders to make restitution directly to victims or to the respective community, (3) by programs or strategies that encourage opportunities for

This relationship, being inverse (see Table 6), may be interpreted to suggest that an increase in compliance with criteria, in both the areas of offender accountability and offender competency development, is associated with a decrease in compliance with criteria in the area of community protection. That is, an increase in the criteria related to offender accountability and offender competency (e.g., by the provision of educational or employment opportunities; by the provision of mechanisms for victim participation; or by the provision of mechanisms for offender restitution, etc.) is well associated with a decrease in the criteria required for community protection (e.g., the need for more intense offender supervision; for more intense offender monitoring, or for more intense structured environments, etc.). This trend may be interpreted to suggest that when a focus is placed not only on the *risks* of juvenile offenders but also on the *needs* of juvenile offenders, it can benefit not only the offender but also the victim and the community at large.

This study was an initial attempt to demonstrate the potential ability and pragmatic usefulness of quantifying and measuring, in a systematic manner, parole officers' perceptions of paroled juvenile offenders, on their caseloads, within the context of BARJ. The intention in developing the BARJES was not to present it as a ready-to-use tool, but to establish that mechanisms for systematic appraisals of parole officers' perceptions of juvenile offenders could be developed, and as a result, could provide useful if not vital information. The BARJES may well serve as a model amenable to revision as well as a guide in the development of similar tools. This study was completed with the hope that it might encourage practitioners in the field of juvenile justice administration to seek to continue to understand the meaning and practice of juvenile justice. How juvenile justice is now perceived and interpreted (in theory) and how it later becomes implemented (in practice) has much to do with its ultimate determined meaning. That is, the way crime and justice are conceptualized will greatly affect the selection of the outcome variables considered to be overall relevant to it (Zehr, 1990). The problem is that it is easy to become sidetracked from a larger context into routine ideas and practices. The authors hope, however, that



**Figure 1. Minimal differences in item-pool mean scores and total score percentages of the BARJES (also see Table 4).**

Parole officers perceived and rated an overall “balance” with respect to BARJ concerning paroled juvenile offenders at the regional level. This balance can be seen by mere visual inspection of existing minimal differences in the item-pool mean scores and total score percentages of the BARJES occurring between the three item-pool areas of offender accountability (OA), offender competency development (CD), and community protection (CP) (see Figure 1).

The combined percentages of the three item-pools of the BARJES, that is, the total (fifteen-item) mean score percentage were only equal to 42.4% ( $M = 25.45 \div 60$ ) of the total possible available score. This percentage is rather low and might suggest that participating parole officers were willing to respond irrespective of how their low responses might reflect on them, in an open and honest manner in their evaluation of juvenile offenders on their caseloads. The overall low percentage, however, might also indicate a substantial need to target for improvement each of the three item-pool areas of BARJ with respect to more specific agency policy criteria. In more pragmatic terms, this means that a number of possible agency policy criteria, in the three areas of offender accountability, offender competency development,

victims to become more involved in the judicial processes that deal with offenders, and (4) by programs or strategies that encourage the development of empathetic awareness in offenders for their victims. Offender competency might be enhanced (1) by programs or strategies that encourage the assurance that the basic needs of food, clothing, and shelter of offenders are met, (2) by programs or strategies that encourage the development of increased competencies for offenders (e.g., education, training, or employment opportunities, etc.), and (3) by programs or strategies that encourage the provision of necessary and supportive mental health services.

The protection of the community might be enhanced (1) by programs or strategies that encourage a greater degree of community involvement and participation with offenders, (2) by programs or strategies that encourage community-based, community-participatory supervision of offenders, and (3) by programs or strategies that encourage residential placements of offenders into supportive (i.e., non-criminogenic) environments.

The relationship between the two item-pool ratings for offender accountability (OA) and offender competency (OC) with that of the item-pool rating for community protection (CP) is a noteworthy trend.

this study will encourage individuals to think about the administration of juvenile justice with greater rigor, to find innovative avenues to explore, and to incorporate the dimensions of offender accountability, offender competency development, and community protection into various programs and services. The authors also hope that this study will encourage continued research of balanced and restorative juvenile justice.

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