

# Self-directed Workbooks: Evaluating Their Efficacy in a U.S. Probation Setting

Ralph C. Serin and Stephanie M. Biro  
Carleton University

**NOTWITHSTANDING A SLIGHT** decrease of .9 percent in the adult population of parolees or probationers in 2019, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, there remain just under 4.4 million adults under community supervision in the 50 states and Washington, D.C. (Oudekerk & Kaeble, 2021). Presented differently, this represents that 1 in 59 adults in the U.S. report to probation or parole officers and must abide by certain supervision conditions to avoid incarceration. Probation is over-represented, accounting for about 80 percent of those under community supervision, compared to parolees, who represent the remaining 20 percent.

The supervision of clients within the community after sentencing has been shown to be significantly less costly than incarceration, with incarceration costing eight times more (i.e., \$34,770 annually per incarcerated individual on average versus \$4,392 per community supervised individual; U.S. Courts, 2017). Given the proportion of individuals under community supervision, as well as the difference in cost when compared to incarceration, the continual improvement of community interventions to promote prosocial behavior change should continue to be a major focus for correctional agencies and policymakers. Based on these numbers, even a minimal increase in the effectiveness of both case management techniques and intervention strategies will produce significant cost

savings for correctional agencies, enhancing decarceration efforts.

Over the last few decades, considerable research has provided a theoretical perspective to understanding criminal behavior, as well as a set of principles that intend to guide the management and treatment of correctional clients (Bonta & Andrews, 2017), including those under community supervision (e.g., Bourgon & Gutierrez, 2012). Importantly, it seems that the transition into a criminal lifestyle and the transition out of such a lifestyle are quite different processes (e.g., Serin, Lloyd, & Hanby, 2010). While current interventions are successful at reducing the risk of recidivism (Chadwick et al., 2015; Robinson et al., 2012), there is considerable room for improvement when it comes to understanding what motivates an individual to change behavior (i.e., lead a prosocial life), as well as the interventions that agencies can provide to assist in this process.

Beyond cost savings from decarceration, both ideology and research have led to an evolution in community supervision practice. In terms of philosophy, over the past decade, supervision practices have evolved to a greater emphasis on officers being change agents (Bourgon et al., 2011) or coaches (Lovins et al., 2018), balancing the more traditional role of surveillance (Viglione et al., 2017). Against this backdrop, the recent COVID-19 pandemic has significantly changed community supervision client contact, suggesting self-directed workbooks may have appeal in supporting and facilitating change-related work by officers. Of note, previous research has suggested journaling is an effective

intervention to target general recidivism among incarcerated individuals (e.g., Proctor et al., 2012). The present paper describes the findings from a small random assignment pilot study in a U.S. probation site comparing client outcomes when officers did and did not use self-directed workbooks.

## Evidence-Based Practice and Policy

EBP is the notion that policy and practice (i.e., including decision-making) should align with current empirical research in order to best achieve the desired outcomes and to make the most efficient use of financial resources (Taxman, 2012). Specific intervention skills are encompassed in the concepts of EBPs, often referred to as core correctional practices (CCPs) in community corrections (Dowden & Andrews, 2004). Briefly, models of community supervision that adhere to evidence-based practices attempt to move away from surveillance-based and brokerage of services activities toward a model where officers serve as an active participant in the delivery of rehabilitative services. This emphasis on officer involvement in rehabilitative work has often been referred to as being a change agent (Bourgon et al., 2011) or coach (Lovins et al., 2018).

Encouragingly, evidence-based supervision is associated with reductions in recidivism compared to the status quo training that is provided to community supervision officers (e.g., Robinson et al., 2012). A recent meta-analysis of training programs aimed at enhancing the use of evidence-based practices in community supervision found that clients supervised by

<sup>1</sup> Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Ralph C. Serin, Ph.D., C.Psych., Department of Psychology, Carleton University, 1125 Colonel By Drive, Ottawa ON K1S 5B6, Tel: 613-520-2600, ext. 1557, ralph.serin@carleton.ca

officers trained in Core Correctional Practice demonstrated an approximately 13 percent reduction in recidivism, compared to clients supervised by officers who did not receive the supplemental training (Chadwick et al., 2015). Unsurprisingly, such research and changing philosophy about community corrections has led to increased interest in the development of standardized training curricula for community supervision.

## Successful Reintegration

When individuals under community supervision fail to abide by the conditions assigned by the courts or parole boards, they are at risk of being returned to jail or prison. These returns to jail, or unsuccessful exits, are significant drivers of incarceration (Oudekerk & Kaeble, 2021). For probationers, about 16 percent of the unsuccessful exits resulted in reincarceration, and 10 percent were otherwise unsatisfactory. For parolees, 29 percent returned to incarceration (Oudekerk & Kaeble, 2021). The Council of State Governments (CSG) similarly highlighted the impact of supervision violation behavior on prison admissions, noting that on any given day there are 280,000 people in prison because of a supervision violation, which is nearly 1 in 4 (CSG, 2019). In addition, estimates indicate that approximately 48 percent of probation violations and 64 percent of parole violations are for technical reasons (e.g., breach of conditions and not necessarily new criminal behavior on its own), amounting to costs of \$2.8 billion to the criminal justice system (CSG, 2019).

The high number of individuals that fail to complete their community supervision (i.e., commit a new offense or incur a technical violation) is of concern, as it results in many new crimes being committed, increased victimization rates, and an increase in spending through court costs and incarceration costs. This situation suggests that there is room for improvement regarding the efficacy of current supervision practice. One potential option is to use interactive journals in the reentry process, as they have demonstrated their effectiveness with incarcerated individuals (e.g., Proctor et al., 2012).

## Influencing Client Change

Interventions that align with the RNR principles have continually been demonstrated to significantly reduce recidivism (e.g., Bonta & Andrews, 2017; Lowenkamp et al., 2006; refer to Smith et al., 2009, for a systematic review). Criminogenic needs (Andrews &

Bonta, 2017) have been widely accepted to be key targets whereby attenuation of these needs improves client outcomes and would therefore seem to be important topics to be included in client workbooks. In addition, staff's ability to build strong working relationships with clients (Ross et al., 2008) and high fidelity of the intervention (Andrews & Dowden, 2004; Lowenkamp et al., 2006) are also important to influence client change.

While many structured group-based programs are didactic or psychoeducational, strategies such as self-directed journaling and experiential disclosure have been used to influence client change across a variety of settings and for different client concerns (Frattaroli, 2006, Proctor et al., 2012, Richards et al., 2000). Of these two strategies, the experiential disclosure is much more unstructured than self-directed journaling. A structured and experiential writing process known as Interactive Journaling®, based on the Transtheoretical Model, cognitive behavioral therapy, and motivational interviewing principles, aims to reduce substance abuse and substance-related behaviors (e.g., recidivism) by motivating and guiding individuals towards positive life change. Interactive Journaling® is also included in SAMHSA's National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices (SAMHSA, 2014). Research has indicated that Interactive Journaling® with incarcerated individuals may be successful at reducing criminal thinking (Folk et al., 2016), substance use (Scheck et al., 2013), and recidivism (Proctor et al., 2012), as well as receiving positive feedback from participants (e.g., Scheck et al., 2013). Structured journaling has been used as both a self-administered resource or as a complement to individual or group counseling (Davidson et al., 2008). It is against this background that we developed self-directed workbooks, wanting to create materials that had structured content regarding criminogenic needs and that required clients to complete written work, optimally prompting greater self-awareness.

This project consisted of developing and piloting 5 self-directed workbooks for use by probation officers. The primary research goal was to examine their effectiveness at reducing recidivism and technical violations. The workbooks were designed for use with lower risk clients, consistent with the Risk and Need principles (Andrews & Bonta, 2017) or as preparation for higher risk clients to participate in formal intervention. The hypothesis was that clients who participate in

self-directed, criminogenically relevant efforts would have lower rates of community supervision failure.

## Methods

### Participants

For the purpose of the current study, a sample of 32 probation clients from a probation site in Texas was recruited in person between January 2017 and April 2017. Participants were low-moderate risk probationers who had previously been assessed using the Texas Risk Assessment System (Criminal Justice Connections, 2015), which combines and interprets an individual's criminal history and criminogenic needs to create the most effective case management plan. As such, this is a conservative test of the efficacy of self-directed workbooks. Each participant was randomly assigned to either the control (i.e., current probation practices only) or experimental group (i.e., self-directed workbooks alongside current probation practices).

Of the final sample ( $n = 32$ ), seven identified as female and the remaining 25 identified as male. The participants' ages ranged from 22 to 59 ( $M = 36.97$ ,  $SD = 10.15$ ). The sample comprised approximately 84 percent who identified as Caucasian ( $n = 27$ ), while the other 16 percent ( $n = 5$ ) identified as other. As well, 52 percent (17) of the sample identified their ethnicity as Hispanic. Approximately 68 percent of participants indicated that they had a grade twelve education or less ( $M = 12.50$  years), and 59 percent had a previous offense that was a felony.

(See Table 1, next page)

### Measures

**Intervention.** A set of five self-directed workbooks (i.e., clients complete the exercises within each workbook at their own pace and with little staff contact) that make up the Client Handbook Series was used as the intervention in the current study. The workbooks were based on criminogenic needs identified through previous research (e.g., Bonta & Andrews, 2017), and each workbook targets a different factor (e.g., motivation, anger, criminal peers, criminal attitudes, and substance abuse) essential to managing criminal behavior. These workbooks are designed to assist clients in reflecting on the different choices and thought processes that have led them to their involvement in the criminal justice system. Clients are to work through them at their own pace. The goal of the workbooks is to provide alternative, more prosocial ways

of thinking and behaving in a variety of situations specific to the individual that result in successful community reintegration (i.e., the individual desists from crime). Workbooks present information and then provide reflective opportunities for the client to apply this information to the client's situation as a written exercise. The format is introduction, key issues, examples and worksheets, summary.

The workbooks were developed according to the Flesch-Kincaid scale, so that individuals with lower level reading skills would be able to complete them (see Table 2). Scores computed by this formula range from 0 to 100, where higher scores indicate reading material that is easier to read. Workbooks vary slightly in

length (Motivation – 15 pages; Anger – 12 pages; Criminal Attitudes – 8 pages; Peer Relationships – 11 pages; Substance Abuse – 12 pages).

Within each workbook, the content is organized hierarchically from basic to more advanced. More specifically, the first few pages of the workbooks help the clients learn the core concepts and reflect on the choices and behaviors that have led to their current situation. In the next set of pages, the clients apply the core concepts to their specific life situations through a variety of activities (e.g., “make a list of three factors that hold the highest risk for you” or “what are your reasons for abstaining completely”). The clients are

encouraged to reflect on these experiences and their responses. Finally, each workbook ends with a summary of what they've learned. Skill development is a process (i.e., awareness of new concepts, learning those new concepts, applying those new concepts to one's everyday activities), and these workbooks attempt to help to build the skills these individuals require to remain crime free in the community.

**Outcome data.** Initially, both probation sites were to provide a de-identified dataset that would list all of the charges each client had acquired approximately four months after the implementation of the workbooks; this time frame was extended to seven months post-implementation. The number of charges for each individual was expected to vary, so the Cormier/Lang method, which assigns a weight to each charge type, was going to be used to code the most serious charge (Harris, Rice, Quinsey, & Cormier, 2015). Next, the charges were to be recoded into four new variables: (1) technical violations (e.g., breach of supervision restrictions), (2) general recidivism, (3) violent recidivism, and (4) any recidivism (i.e., technical violations or a new charge). For the current study, general recidivism was to include all charges for drug-, driving- or property-related offenses, while violent recidivism was to include any charges related to assault, sexual assault, domestic abuse, robbery and armed robbery, or manslaughter and homicide. However, given the extremely small sample size and the dataset that was provided, the data were recoded into: 1) technical violations and 2) any new charges.

Finally, time at risk was to be calculated using the supervision start date and the date of the new charge. For those individuals who did not receive a new charge, time at risk was to be calculated to the end of the follow-up period (i.e., December 2017). Unfortunately,

**TABLE 1.**  
**Client Characteristics**

Demographics		Condition		
		Control	Experimental	Total
Age (years)	Mean (SD)	38.50 (10.35)	36.27 (10.22)	37.97 (10.15)
	Minimum	27	22	22
	Maximum	59	55	59
Age (grouped)	20 - 29	20% (2)	32% (7)	28% (9)
	30 - 39	40% (4)	36% (8)	38% (12)
	40 - 49	20% (2)	23% (5)	22% (7)
	50 -59	20% (2)	9% (2)	12% (4)
	Gender	Male	60% (6)	86% (19)
	Female	40% (4)	14% (3)	22% (7)
Race	Caucasian	90% (9)	82% (18)	84% (27)
	Other	10% (1)	18% (4)	16% (5)
Ethnicity	Hispanic	40% (4)	59% (13)	53% (17)
	Non-Hispanic	60% (6)	41% (9)	47% (15)
Level of Education (years)	Mean (SD)	12.50 (2.84)	12.50 (2.04)	12.50 (2.27)
	Minimum	7	10	7
	Maximum	16	16	16
Level of Education (grouped)	Less than grade 12	30% (3)	36% (8)	34% (11)
	Grade 12	40% (4)	32% (7)	34% (11)
	Any higher education	30% (3)	32% (7)	31% (10)
Previous Offence	Misdemeanor	50% (5)	36% (8)	41% (13)
	Felony	50% (5)	64% (14)	59% (19)
<b>Total</b>		<b>10</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>32</b>

**TABLE 2.**  
**Readability of the client self-directed workbooks**

Workbook Topic	Flesch-Kincaid Scale	
	Grade Level	Reading Ease <sup>a</sup>
Motivation	5.2	79.7
Anger	4.5	80.9
Criminal Attitudes	6.2	72.6
Peer Relationships	5.3	75.7
Substance Abuse	6.0	73.0

<sup>a</sup> Higher scores indicate easier readability. Scores of 65 indicate plain English.

while the supervision start date was provided in the dataset, the date of the new charge was not, meaning time at risk was unable to be calculated.

### Procedure

Following ethics approval, an email recruitment notice was sent to the POs that also included an informed consent form and recruitment script. Consenting participants were randomly assigned to either the control or experimental group using an online randomizer. If the participant was assigned to the experimental group, they were provided with the self-directed workbooks to use alongside the current probation services. At this location, POs acted as a support for using the workbooks—if clients had questions or wished to discuss the workbooks with their PO, they were encouraged to do so. If the participant was assigned to the control group, the participant followed the current community supervision of that site only. All clients who chose to participate received 10 hours of Community Service Restitution (CSR) credits, whether they were assigned to the control or the experimental group. Clients were then debriefed through an internal bulletin board notice that was posted partway through participant recruitment.

Finally, outcome data (i.e., new offenses and/or technical violations) was collected for all participants at the site seven months after implementation was complete (i.e., December 2017). As stated previously, the probation site provided a de-identified dataset that would list charges each client had acquired since the sharing of the workbooks.

## Results

### Data Preparation

Missing data. First, key variables were screened for missing values, and there were no out-of-range values on any of the key variables. Despite the small sample size ( $N = 32$ ), violations or normality were not a concern, nor were there univariate outliers.

### Differences Between Groups

In order to examine whether the individuals in the workbook group differed on demographic characteristics compared to those in the control group, independent samples  $t$ -tests and chi-square tests were conducted. Odds ratios and Cohen's  $d$  were used to examine effect size.

There were no significant differences between groups in terms of age  $t(30, N =$

$32) = .57, p > .01, d = .22, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.96, .54]$ , although the experimental groups was slightly younger.

The relationship between age and condition was not significant,  $t(30, N = 32) = .57, p > .01, d = .22, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.96, .54]$ .

The relationship between gender and condition was not significant ( $N = 32, p > .01$ , two-tailed). In comparison to the control condition, the workbook condition had a higher percentage of males (i.e., 86 percent compared to 60 percent) and a lower percentage of females (i.e., 14 percent compared to 40 percent). Furthermore, men were 4.22 times more likely to be in the experimental group ( $OR = 4.22, 95 \text{ percent CI } [0.73, 24.44]$ ).

The relationship between race and condition was not significant ( $N = 32, p > .01$ , two-tailed). In comparison to the control condition, the workbook condition had a lower percentage of Caucasian participants (82 percent compared to 90 percent) and a higher percentage of participants who identified as other (18 percent compared to 10 percent). Individuals who identified as Caucasian were .50 times more likely to be in the experimental group ( $OR = .50, 95 \text{ percent CI } [.05, 5.15]$ ).

The relationship between ethnicity and condition was not significant ( $N = 32, p > .01$ , two-tailed). The percentage of Hispanic participants was higher in the workbook condition compared to the control condition (i.e., 59 percent versus 40 percent). Individuals who identified as Hispanic were 2.17 times more likely to be in the experimental group ( $OR = 2.17, 95 \text{ percent CI } [.47, 9.95]$ ).

The relationship between education and condition was not significant,  $t(30, N = 32) = .00, p > .01, d = .00, 95 \text{ percent CI } [-.75, .75]$ .

The relationship between previous offense and condition was not significant ( $N = 32, p > .01$ , two tailed). The workbook condition had a higher percentage of participants whose previous offense was a felony (i.e., 64 percent compared to 50 percent in the control condition) and a lower percentage of those with a misdemeanor (i.e., 36 percent compared to 50 percent). Individuals whose previous offense was a felony were 1.75 times more likely to be in the experimental group ( $OR = .175, 95 \text{ percent CI } [.39, 7.95]$ ).

Overall, the experimental group was male, younger, and had a more serious criminal history.

### Differences Between the Conditions on Recidivism

To examine whether the individuals in the

workbook condition significantly differed in technical violations or any new charges compared to those in the control group, Fisher's exact tests were conducted. Given the small sample size and the nature of the data that was received from the probation site, an examination of the time to failure across the conditions was unable to be conducted.

Comparisons were made between those in the experimental condition and those in the control condition for both technical violations and any new charges. Fisher's exact test was used to examine technical violations across the experimental and control conditions and then to examine the difference between the two conditions on any new charges. As stated previously, this procedure is typically used on a  $2 \times 2$  contingency table (i.e., two variables, each with two levels) with a small sample.

A Fisher's exact test was performed to examine the relationship between technical violations and condition (see Table 3, next page). The relationship between technical violations and condition was not significant ( $N = 32, p > .01$ , two tailed). An examination of the relative frequencies was conducted next (see Figure 1, next page). The workbook condition had a lower percentage of participants who experienced a technical violation post-treatment (i.e., 50 percent compared to 80 percent in the control condition). Furthermore, individuals in the control group were 4.00 times more likely to have a technical violation than those in the experimental group ( $OR = 4.00, 95 \text{ percent CI } [.69, 23.26]$ ).

A Fisher's exact test was performed to examine the relationship between any new charges and condition (see Table 4, next page). The relationship between any new charges and condition was not significant ( $N = 32, p > .01$ , two tailed). An examination of the relative frequencies was conducted next (see Figure 2). The workbook condition had a lower percentage of participants who received a new charge post-treatment (i.e., 5 percent compared to 10 percent in the control condition). Furthermore, individuals in the control group were 2.33 times more likely to have a new charge than those in the experimental group ( $OR = 2.33, 95 \text{ percent CI } [.13, 41.46]$ ).

## Discussion

The aim of this study was to explore the effectiveness and utility of a set of self-directed criminogenic-focused workbooks in a community supervision setting. While similar workbooks have been used in a variety of contexts with in-custody populations, this is

one of the first studies to explore the use of workbooks with a community sample and their effect on recidivism. Thus, the descriptive nature of this study makes it the first step in determining the utility of these workbooks, and the results of each research question will be discussed separately. Practical implications and limitations will then be discussed. Suggestions for future research will be discussed more generally at the end.

### Summary and Implications of Findings

We hypothesized that there would be no major demographic differences between the workbook and control conditions, given that participation was voluntary and a process was used to ensure random assignment to groups. While there were no statistically significant differences between groups, the experimental group (i.e., workbook condition) was more likely to be younger and to have a previous felony conviction than those in the control condition. Efforts to ensure random assignment were insufficient, perhaps due to the small sample.

We also hypothesized that the individuals in the workbook groups would have lower rates of recidivism (i.e., either technical violations or new charges) and longer time to failure in comparison to the control groups. Again, while there were no statistically significant differences on either outcome variable across the workbook and control conditions, there was some variation when the relative frequencies and effect sizes (odds ratios) were examined. This demonstrated a very modest treatment effect; workbook use was related to slightly improved outcomes for the experimental group.

Individuals in the control group were 4.00 times more likely to have a technical violation and 2.33 times more likely to have any new charges, even though individuals in the workbook group were likely somewhat higher risk (i.e., younger, male, previous offense is a felony). This difference is encouraging, as some technical violations are related to factors that the workbooks target (e.g., avoiding substance use as a condition of probation). While the results of the current study are insufficient to fully support the efficacy of the set of workbooks in a community supervision setting, participants did not reject their use, nor did their use yield iatrogenic effects in this very small pilot study.

Replication with a larger sample could demonstrate the effectiveness and usefulness of these workbooks, which would give

supervision agencies reason to consider their implementation in the future. Considering the success of similar workbooks with in-custody populations (e.g., Proctor et al., 2012), it is not unrealistic to suggest that future research with these workbooks may produce favorable results for probationers.

### Limitations

Originally, this study was to be implemented at two probation sites in the United States. Unfortunately, organizational changes at one probation site led to implementation delays that ultimately resulted in the study being dropped.

The next limitation was the small sample size and resulting inadequate power, which prohibited the use of most inferential statistical procedures. The observed findings should

be considered very preliminary, and further investigation with a larger sample is necessary. Furthermore, this resulted in limiting the generalizability of any findings to the broader population of clients under community supervision.

Another limitation is that information regarding the clients' motivation and readiness to change and perceived self-efficacy prior to workbook implementation, which are important factors to consider, were not examined. Scheck et al. (2013) observed a weak correlation between knowledge and attitude, suggesting that education alone does not allow anyone to infer an adequate level of motivation to promote successful behavior change, at least in the context of substance use behaviors. Controlling for prior programming and supervision experience and motivation

**TABLE 3.**  
Results of Independent Samples t-tests and Fisher's Exact Tests for Age, Gender, Race, Ethnicity, Education, and Previous Offense Across Condition

Demographics	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i> / OR	95% CI
Age (years)	.57 <sup>a</sup>	.57	.22 <sup>c</sup>	[-.96, .54]
Gender				
Male	–	.17 <sup>b</sup>	4.22 <sup>d</sup>	[0.73, 24.44]
Female				
Race				
Caucasian	–	.99 <sup>b</sup>	.50 <sup>d</sup>	[.05, 5.15]
Other				
Ethnicity				
Hispanic	–	.45 <sup>b</sup>	2.17 <sup>d</sup>	[.47, 9.95]
Non-Hispanic				
Level of Education (years)	.00 <sup>a</sup>	.00	.00 <sup>c</sup>	[-.75, .75]
Previous Offense				
Misdemeanor	–	.70 <sup>b</sup>	1.75 <sup>d</sup>	[.39, 7.95]
Felony				

<sup>a</sup> *t*-statistic. <sup>b</sup> *p* value for Fisher's exact test. <sup>c</sup> Cohen's *d* value. <sup>d</sup> Odds ratio.

**TABLE 4.**  
Results of Fisher's Exact Tests for Technical Violations and Any New Charges Across Condition

Outcome	Condition		Total	<i>p</i> <sup>a</sup>	OR	95% CI
	Control	Experimental				
Technical violation						
Yes	80% (8)	50% (11)	59% (19)	.14	4.00	[.69, 23.26]
No	20% (2)	50% (11)	41% (13)			
Any new charges						
Yes	10% (1)	5% (1)	6% (2)	.53	2.33	[.13, 41.46]
No	90% (9)	95% (21)	94% (30)			

<sup>a</sup> *p* value for Fisher's exact test.

level could be important in understanding the incremental utility of journaling.

Despite efforts to have the workbooks at a

high ease of reading level, the reading level of clients was not formally assessed prior to the implementation of the workbooks. Of note, no

clients requested that the PO read aloud the consent form during the recruitment process of the current study. All text included in the workbooks is intended for individuals with a reading level between the grades of four and six. Furthermore, the text is broken up into short, easy-to-digest sections, and there are a variety of graphics to accompany the key concepts, mitigating the potential challenge of reading ability.

It is also important to note that we were unable to complete a client feedback survey that may have been instructive. While participants received compensation in the form of CSR credits for their involvement in phase one, they did not receive any compensation for their involvement in completion of the survey.

*Future Research*

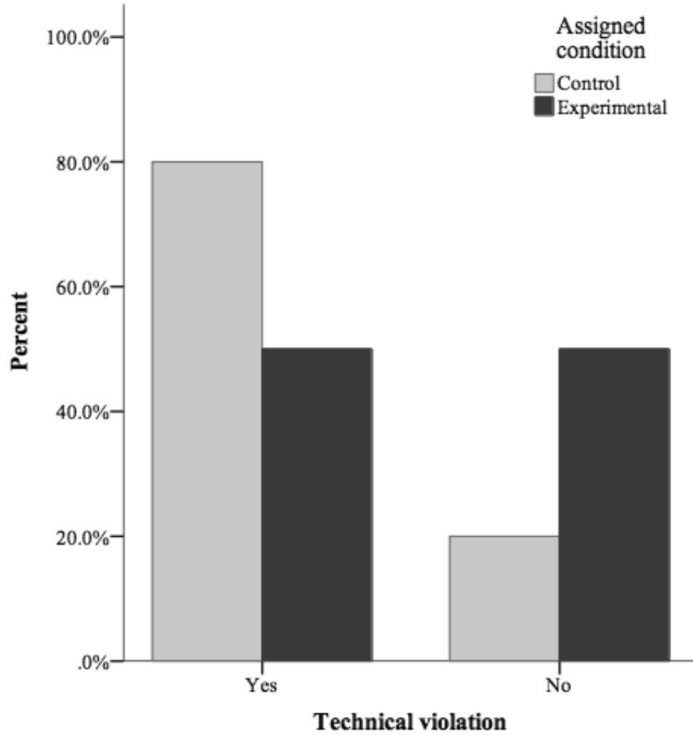
Given these limitations, we present several over-arching suggestions for future research on the self-directed workbooks. First, in order to prevent having such a small sample size, it may be more effective to use a matched sample based on either exact matching or propensity matching instead of a control group, as this will allow for a larger experimental group without significantly compromising the conclusions that could be made.

Second, running a focus group in order to assess the participants' views on the usability of the workbooks may prevent a no-response situation, as well as allow for more detailed responses from the participants. With a higher level of detailed responses in a semi-structured interview setting, a thematic analysis of the responses and suggestions for changes to the workbooks could be conducted. It is also possible that just providing clients with a paper copy of the survey would have increased responses.

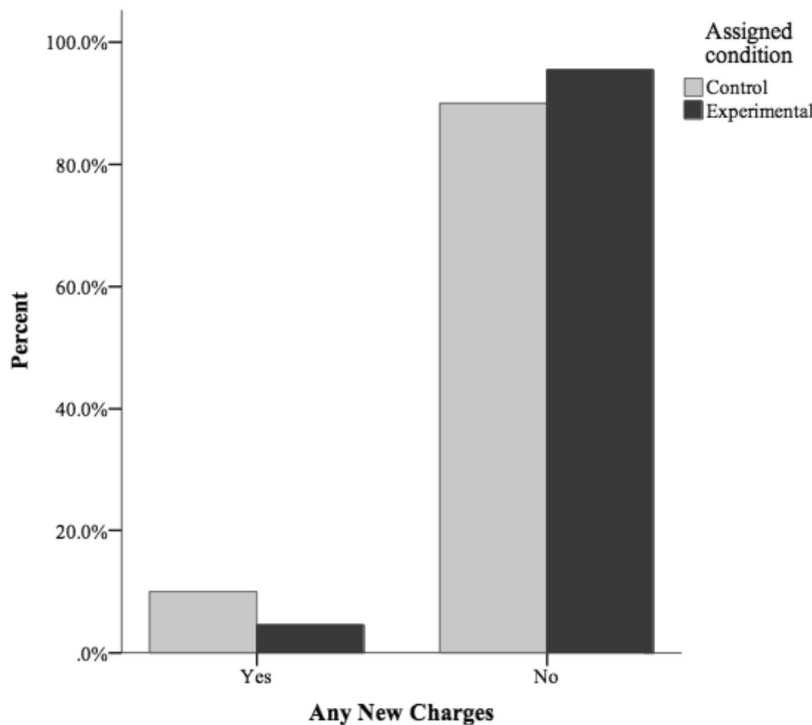
Recently we added reentry and trauma workbooks into our suite of workbooks to broaden their utility and address emerging concerns. Our experience regarding their use in a remand center indicated that many clients enthusiastically completed all the workbooks, potentially out of boredom or to present to the courts when adjudicated. Ideally, a risk and need assessment should be used to match the workbook(s) to client needs. Nonetheless, it is possible that the workbooks may have application in the pretrial world.

Finally, given the high rates of mental health diagnoses in this population (see Prins [2014] for a systematic review), future research should consider the impact of major mental

**FIGURE 1.**  
Relative Frequencies of Technical Violation Across Condition.



**FIGURE 2.**  
Relative Frequencies of Any New Charges Across Condition.



health disorders on the efficacy of this intervention. Studies that evaluate the potential mediators and moderators of efficacy could further refine our understanding of the merits of self-directed workbooks and journaling.

## Conclusion

Despite the limitations, especially the small sample and non-significant findings, self-directed workbooks still may have potential to reduce both technical violations and recidivism among individuals supervised in the community. More research is necessary to make stronger conclusions that could inform policy and practice; however, this is a sufficient first step or proof of concept to warrant expanding this type of intervention, especially to lower risk clients. Most notably, there is no indication they have an iatrogenic effect, they are minimally invasive, and they have no financial cost, supporting their inclusion in the community supervision arsenal.

## References

- Andrews, D. A., & Dowden, C. (2004). Managing correctional treatment for reduced recidivism: A meta-analytic review of programme integrity. *Legal and Criminological Psychology, 10*, 173-187. doi:10.1348/135532505X36723
- Bonta, J., & Andrews, D. A. (2017). *The psychology of criminal conduct* (7th ed.), New York, NY: Routledge.
- Bourgon, G., Gutierrez, L., & Ashton, J. (2011). The evolution of community supervision practice: The transformation from case manager to change agent. *Irish Probation Journal, 8*, 28-48.
- Bourgon, G., & Gutierrez, L. (2012). The general responsiveness principle in community supervision: The importance of probation officers using cognitive intervention techniques and its influence on recidivism. *Journal of Crime and Justice, 35*(2), 149-166. doi:10.1080/0735648X.2012.674816
- Chadwick, N., DeWolf, A. H., & Serin, R. C. (2015). Effectively training community supervision officers: A meta-analytic review of the impact on offender outcome. *Criminal Justice and Behavior, 42*, 977-989. doi:10.1177/0093854815595661
- Council of State Governments. (2019). Confined and costly: How supervision violations are filling prisons and burdening budgets. *Council of State Governments*. Retrieved from: <https://csgjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/confined-and-costly.pdf>
- Criminal Justice Connections (2015, January/February). *The Teas Risk Assessment System: A new direction in supervision planning*, 22 (3). Retrieved from: [https://www.tdcj.state.tx.us/connections/JanFeb2015/Images/JanFeb2015\\_agency\\_TRASS.pdf](https://www.tdcj.state.tx.us/connections/JanFeb2015/Images/JanFeb2015_agency_TRASS.pdf)
- Davidson, J. T., Crawford, R., & Kerwood, E. (2008). Constructing an EBP post-conviction model of supervision in United States Probation, District of Hawaii: A case study. *Federal Probation, 72*(2), 22-28.
- Dowden, C., & Andrews, D. A. (2004). The importance of staff practice in delivering effective correctional treatment: A meta-analytic review of core correctional practices. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology, 48*(2), 203-214. doi:10.1177/0306624X03257765
- Folk, J. B., Blasko, B. L., Warden, R., Schaefer, K., Ferrisizidis, P., Stuewig, J., & Tangney, J. P. (2016). Feasibility and acceptability of an impact of crime group intervention with jail inmates. *Victims & Offenders, 11*(3), 426-454. doi:10.1080/15564886.2014.982777
- Fratraro, J. (2006). Experimental disclosure and its moderators: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin, 132*(6), 823-865. doi:10.1037/0033-2909.132.6.823
- Lovins, B. K., Cullen, F. T., Latessa, E. J., & Jonson, C. L. (2018). Probation officer as a coach: Building a new professional identity. *Federal Probation 82*(1), 13-20.
- Lowenkamp, C. T., Latessa, E. J., & Smith, P. (2006). Does correctional program quality really matter? The importance of adhering to the principles of effective intervention. *Criminology and Public Policy, 5*, 575-594. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2012.09.002>
- Oudekerk, B., & Kaeble, D. (2021). Probation and parole in the United States, 2019. *Bureau of Justice Statistics*. Retrieved from: <https://bjs.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh236/files/media/document/ppus19.pdf>
- Prins, S. J. (2014). The prevalence of mental illnesses in U.S. state prisons: A systematic review. *Psychiatric Services, 65*(7), 862-872. doi:10.1176/appi.ps.201300166
- Proctor, S. L., Hoffmann, N. G., & Allison, S. (2012). The effectiveness of interactive journaling in reducing recidivism among substance-dependent jail inmates. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology, 56*(2), 317-332. doi:10.1177/0306624X11399274
- Richards, J. M., Beal, W. E., Seagal, J. D., & Pennebaker, J. W. (2000). Effects of disclosure of traumatic events illness on behavior among psychiatric prison inmates. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 109*(1), 156-160.
- Robinson, C. R., Lowenkamp, C. T., Holsinger, A. M., VanBenschoten, S., Alexander, M., & Oleson, J. C. (2012). A random study of Staff Training Aimed at Reducing Re-arrest (STARR): Using core correctional practices in probation interactions. *Journal of Crime and Justice, 35*:2, 167-188, DOI: 10.1080/0735648X.2012.674823
- Ross, E. C., Polaschek, D. L. L., & Ward, T. (2008). The therapeutic alliance: A theoretical revision for offender rehabilitation. *Aggression and Violent Behavior, 13*, 462-480, doi:10.1016/j.avb.2008.07.003
- Scheck, A. M., Hoffmann, N. G., Proctor, S. L., & Couillou, R. J. (2013). Interactive journaling as a brief intervention for Level-II DUI and DWI offenders. *Journal of Alcohol & Drug Education, 57*(3), 66-85.
- Serin, R. C., Lloyd, C. D., & Hanby, L. J. (2010). Enhancing offender re-entry: An integrated model for enhancing offender re-entry. *European Journal of Probation, 2*(2), 53-75.
- Smith, P., Gendreau, P., & Swartz, K. (2009). Validating the principles of effective intervention: A systematic review of the contributions of meta-analysis in the field of corrections. *Victims & Offenders, 4*(2), 148-169, doi:10.1080/15564880802612581
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2014). *Interactive Journaling*. National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices. Retrieved from: <http://www.nrepp.samhsa.gov>
- Taxman, F. S. (2012). Crime control in the twenty-first century: Science-based supervision. *Journal of Crime and Justice, 33*(2), 135-144. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0735648X.2012.686583>
- U.S. Courts. Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts (2017). Incarceration costs significantly more than supervision. Retrieved from: <https://www.uscourts.gov/news/2017/08/17/incarceration-costs-significantly-more-supervision>
- Viglione, J., Rudes, D. S., & Taxman, F. S. (2017). Probation officer use of client-centered communication strategies in adult probation setting. *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation, 56*, 38-60. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10509674.2016.1257534>