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Effective Practices in Community Supervision model: Staff perceptions of the model and implementation

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Abstract

Staff who provide service to individuals under correctional supervision are critical to organizational change, implementation, and sustainability of policies and practices. The training on evidence-based practices demonstrates a movement toward effective interactions with community supervision officers and their clients, specifically to the Risk–Need–Responsivity model and core correctional practices. Research over the past several decades provides that fidelity to Risk–Need–Responsivity and core correctional practice can reduce recidivism among the community correctional population. However, the correctional field has a history of training staff, but limited success in implementing and sustaining these practices. The current qualitative study analyzes the feedback from 307 community supervision officers who responded to open-ended questions regarding the implementation of Effective Practices in Community Supervision model, a curriculum that incorporates the Risk–Need–Responsivity model and core correctional practices. Qualitative responses indicate key themes that help and hinder the implementation of evidence-based practices: individual attitudes and beliefs, organizational elements, and leadership.

Keywords

Community supervision, core correctional practices, corrections, EPICS, implementation

Introduction

Across the American criminal legal system, practitioners and policymakers alike tout the use of evidence-based practices (EBPs). The emphasis on EBPs has had significant

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challenges and barriers in real-world application, implementation, and sustainability within and across community correctional agencies, particularly when it comes to fidelity and adherence to these EBPs (Lowenkamp et al., 2006, 2013; Porporino, 2018; Taxman and Belenko, 2012; Viglione et al., 2018). An understudied, yet important area of community corrections are the frontline workers (hereafter referred to as POs for probation and parole officers) tasked with using, implementing, sustaining, supervising, overseeing, and maintaining the quality of these practices (Viglione et al., 2015b) and overall processes that help or hinder implementation, sustainability, and fidelity to these EBPs (Elliott and Mihalic, 2004; Taxman and Belenko, 2012). With approximately 4.4 million adults under community correctional supervision in the United States as of 2018 (Kaeble and Alper, 2020), it is vital to understand not just *what* works but *how* EBPs can be best translated into the real world.

Research indicates that human services can be ineffective, inefficient, and potentially harmful to clients if not implemented with quality, consideration, and support for those staff who are tasked with carrying out EBPs (Fixsen et al., 2009; Institute of Medicine, 2001). Furthermore, EBPs delivered by staff who are not competent in the given EBP can result in null or negative outcomes (e.g. increases in recidivism); high-quality implementation and fidelity can result in greater recidivism reductions even when controlling for other moderating variables (Barnoski and Aos, 2004; Lipsey and Cullen, 2007; Lipsey et al., 2007; Salisbury et al., 2019; Wilson and Davis, 2006).

To better understand what helps and hinders implementation and sustainability of EBPs in community corrections, specifically among POs, the current qualitative study attempts to gain better insight into aspects that help or hinder the use and implementation of the Effective Practices in Community Supervision (EPICS) model, developed by the University of Cincinnati Corrections Institute (UCCI).[1] The EPICS model integrates the Risk–Need–Responsivity (RNR) model of assessment and supervision and core correctional practices (CCPs) for POs to engage in more effective one-on-one meetings with the clients they supervise. Using the three open-ended questions from a larger survey of correctional personnel, I gleaned information from EPICS end-users (those who received the training that also supervised clients) regarding their own use and their agency's support (or lack thereof) in implementing EPICS.

Background

Overall, research, including meta-analyses and systematic reviews, indicates the "get-tough" approaches to community supervision of the 1980s and 1990s such as boot camps, intensive supervision, shock incarceration, electronic monitoring, scared straight, and house arrest, among others, are ineffective at reducing recidivism and restoring clients as prosocial, contributing members of society (Belur et al., 2017; Bonta and Andrews, 2017; Bonta et al., 2000; Fulton et al., 1997; Latessa et al., 2020; Meade and Steiner, 2010; Petersilia and Turner, 1993; Petrosino et al., 2004; Welsh and Rocque, 2014). The heightened focus on surveillance, management, and compliance for clients under probation or parole supervision is generally ineffective or potentially creates worse outcomes than more rehabilitation-oriented strategies that balance accountability with a treatment-oriented approach (Bonta et al., 2008; Andrews et al., 1990; MacKenzie, 2000; Petersilia,

1997; Petersilia and Turner, 1993; Rhine et al., 2006). Traditional models of probation and parole supervision have focused, and continue to focus, highly on sanctions and detection, compliance with conditions, and purely making referrals to community-based treatment and services, which provides limited efficacy in reducing recidivism (Bonta et al., 2008; Bourgon, 2013; Gleicher et al., 2013; Latessa et al., 2020; Lowenkamp et al., 2013; MacKenzie, 2001; Smith et al., 2012).

Over four decades of research provides evidence on EBPs to reduce recidivism, including the adherence to the RNR model of assessment and supervision (Andrews et al., 1990; Bonta and Andrews, 2017; Latessa et al., 2020). In particular, the development and implementation of the RNR model of assessment and supervision and CCPs can effectively reduce recidivism, transforming POs into "change agents"—helping enhance positive behavioral change among their clients (Andrews et al., 1990; Bonta and Andrews, 2017; Bourgon et al., 2011).

RNR model

The RNR model "combines an actuarial, managerial approach with a rehabilitative, clinical model for supervision" (Viglione, 2019: 656; see also Bonta and Andrews, 2017). That is, the RNR model uses standardized, validated assessments using a science-based statistical approach to enhance the efficacy of decision-making among POs (Bonta and Andrews, 2017; Taxman and Dezember, 2018; Viglione, 2019). The RNR model describes three primary principles that help identify risk factors to target for intervention that are the most effective at reducing risk of recidivism for individuals under probation or parole supervision: risk, need, and responsivity principles (Bonta and Andrews, 2017).

The risk principle identifies the "who" or which system-involved individuals to allocate the most resources and time with—those assessed at higher risk of recidivism (Bonta and Andrews, 2017; Latessa et al., 2020). The need principle identifies the "what" or what risk factors, specifically associated with risk of recidivism, should be targeted for change (Bonta and Andrews, 2017; Latessa et al., 2020). This includes the seven dynamic risk factors that have been identified through research as directly associated with risk of recidivism: antisocial attitudes, values, and beliefs; antisocial/nonprosocial peers and associates; antisocial personality traits such as impulsivity, poor problem-solving skills, and aggression; family/marital relationships; substance misuse or substance use disorders; work/school; and leisure and recreation time (Bonta and Andrews, 2017).

The responsivity principle identifies the "how" in promoting positive behavioral change (Andrews et al., 1990; Andrews et al., 1990; Bonta and Andrews, 2017). This includes specific responsivity—tailoring style and mode of learning to individual—and general responsivity—incorporating practices and principles that work best for most people (e.g. social learning, cognitive-behavioral-based interventions) (Bonta and Andrews, 2017). Overall, research on the use of the RNR model of assessment and supervision demonstrates, when used with fidelity, recidivism reductions anywhere from 10% to 30% (Andrews et al., 1990; Cullen and Gendreau, 2001; Cullen and Jonson, 2012), with some of the most effectively implemented programs having the potential to reduce recidivism by 40%–50% (Lipsey, 1999).

CCPs

Based on, and aligned with, the RNR model is a set of practices known as CCPs. These practices are used to enhance correctional programming and practices via therapeutic efficacy and provide skills POs can use to encourage and motivate behavioral change. These CCPs align specifically with general and specific responsivity as they are based on cognitive, behavioral, and social learning theories (Andrews and Kiessling, 1980; Dowden and Andrews, 2004; Latessa et al., 2020; Trotter, 1996), recognizing both the cognitive and behavioral aspects that influence individual behavior (Durnescu, 2020; Latessa et al., 2020). Initially consisting of five CCPs outlined by Andrews and Kiessling (1980)—effective use of authority, prosocial modeling and reinforcement, problem-solving, use of community resources, and interpersonal relationships—CCPs have been expanded multiple times (Andrews and Carvell, 1998; Gendreau and Andrews, 1990; Latessa et al., 2020). The CCPs that POs can integrate to act as change agents include cognitive restructuring, skill building, problem-solving, anti-criminal (prosocial) modeling, effective reinforcement, effective disapproval, effective use of authority, relationship skills, and motivational enhancement (Andrews and Carvell, 1998; Bonta and Andrews, 2017; Latessa et al., 2020).

Overall, these skills attempt to target both cognitive and behavioral aspects of antisocial or criminal behavior. Specifically, this is done through (1) POs building rapport (also referred to as therapeutic alliance or relationship skills) and motivation with clients they supervise; (2) teaching clients on their caseload emotional, cognitive, and behavioral skills to move individuals to engage in more prosocial behaviors and responses, especially in risky situations they may encounter; and (3) using communication skills that help reinforce prosocial behavior and discourage/disapprove of negative behavior. More descriptive information on the RNR model of assessment and supervision and CCPs is described in Bonta and Andrews (2017), in addition to Durnescu (2020).

More recently, several manualized models of the RNR model of assessment and supervision and CCPs have been developed to create a semi-structured format for integrating the RNR model and CCPs into POs' daily work. To assist in the integration and use of the RNR model of assessment and supervision and CCPs, several types of curriculum for POs have been developed as RNR-based models of supervision that incorporate CCPs. Examples of these models include Strategic Training Initiative in Community Supervision (STICS) (developed by Canadian Department of Public Safety), Staff Training Aimed at Reducing Recidivism (STARR) (used by the Administrative Office of the US Courts), Effective Practices in Community Supervision (EPICS) (developed by the UCCI), and Maryland's Proactive Community Supervision (PCS) (developed through researcher–practitioner collaboration), to name a few. This study specifically analyzes staff perceptions related to the EPICS model.

The EPICS model

EPICS is a 3-day, in-class, end-user training that aims to teach community supervision practitioners how to translate and implement RNR principles and CCPs into their daily interactions with clients on their caseload. The training consists of the rationale, objectives, and research; live and video models of skills; and role-playing/practice and feedback on skill use

(also referred to as teach-backs). Community supervision practitioners are taught to follow a structured framework in their contact sessions with clients while adhering to RNR principles and using CCPs. The training consists of 13 modules which include the following:

1. Rationale and foundation;
2. EPICS model (components);
3. Building a collaborative relationship;
4. Setting goals;
5. Identifying targets for change;
6. Cost–benefit analysis;
7. Cognitive restructuring;
8. Structured skill building;
9. Problem-solving;
10. Reinforcement;
11. Punishment
12. Continuing to support behavioral change;
13. Summary and fidelity measures.

After the 3-day end-user training, the UCCI assigns a coach to work with the site for approximately a 5-month follow-up period. During this time, the UCCI coach works with the site and practitioners by conducting five monthly coaching or refresher sessions to review skills learned in the training and troubleshoot any issues practitioners may encounter, providing feedback on EPICS model use through monthly audio submissions (five total), and developing peer coaches within the site through separate peer coaching calls in which these peer coaches are taught to provide feedback on the EPICS model use by learning to code audios based on UCCI's EPICS feedback form by the UCCI coach (Smith et al., 2012; UCCI, n.d.). This follow-up coaching aims to create internal infrastructure to support staff use of the EPICS model once UCCI is no longer part of the training and coaching process (Smith et al., 2012).

The structured framework for EPICS consists of four main components: check-in, review, intervention, and homework (Smith et al., 2012; UCCI, 2019). The *check-in* consists of practitioners building rapport with clients, assessing any crises or acute needs, asking open-ended questions about criminogenic needs that may need to be targeted, and discussing compliance and any issues surrounding compliance (Gleicher, 2018; Latessa et al., 2020). The *review* allows the practitioner to go over skills discussed, learned, or practiced in the previous contact; how the client has used that skill; and identify any issues or trouble in use of the skill outside of the contact session. This is also a time in which the practitioner and client set goals or review goals that have been previously set, identifying smaller steps to reach those goals while checking in on goal progress (Gleicher, 2018; Latessa et al., 2020). The *intervention* is the bulk of the session, in which the correctional practitioner pulls in information from the check-in or discusses and identifies areas of continued need or current issues in which the practitioner can teach a relevant skill to the client (Gleicher, 2018; Latessa et al., 2020; UCCI, n.d.). The last part of the EPICS model is *homework and rehearsal*, which provides the correctional practitioner an opportunity to demonstrate the skill, allows the client to

practice this skill, and assigns and provides instruction on homework that incorporates practice and use of that skill outside of the contact session before their next meeting (Gleicher, 2018; Latessa et al., 2020).

Efficacy of RNR and CCPs in probation and parole supervision

When POs and programs and services for system-involved individuals adhere to the RNR model and CCPs with fidelity, agencies can achieve the desired outcomes for those under probation or parole supervision. In their meta-analysis, Andrews and colleagues (1990) found that programs that adhered to the RNR model, particularly regarding behavioral treatment, could reduce recidivism by 30%, whereas those programs that were inappropriate with a lack of adherence to the RNR model increased recidivism by 7%. In addition, Bonta and colleagues' (2011) study on a supervision model that incorporates RNR principles and CCPs found that clients supervised by those POs trained in the model had a 25% reconviction rate compared to a 40.5% reconviction rate of clients supervised by POs not trained in the model. In addition, Chadwick and colleagues' (2015) study of individuals supervised by POs trained in CCPs had an average of 13% lower recidivism rate compared to those using standard practices (those POs not trained in CCPs). When correctional treatment programs and services use the RNR model, studies suggest a potential 20%–25% recidivism reduction (Cullen and Jonson, 2012).

Efficacy of the EPICS model

The EPICS model was developed to combine correctional practitioner monitoring, linkage to services, and in-person interactions that allow enough treatment "dosage," providing the best possible use of in-person contact sessions (Latessa et al., 2020). This is especially useful in areas that have limited access to resources and services and as a way to use community supervision practitioners as more effective agents of change; however, EPICS is not intended to replace other treatments, programs, and services that the client needs (Latessa et al., 2020). Research suggests EPICS is a promising practice for POs. For example, in the pilot study of EPICS, correctional practitioners trained in EPICS demonstrated more regular use of CCPs, particularly in relation to targeting criminogenic needs compared to those who were not trained in EPICS (Smith et al., 2012). In the same study, findings indicated that trained correctional practitioners were also more likely to challenge pro-criminal thoughts and beliefs, reinforce prosocial behavior, and assign skill-based homework compared to correctional practitioners who were not trained in the EPICS model (Smith et al., 2012). These findings also held true in Labrecque and Smith's (2017) study that analyzed an 18-month follow-up period of trained and untrained staff on use of CCPs; training and coaching for correctional practitioners trained in the EPICS model demonstrated general increases in skill use over time, particularly CCPs, compared to those who were not trained.

Despite the development of evidence-based curriculum for community supervision practitioners and the wealth of research that indicates integration of RNR principles and CCPs is vital to successful treatment and supervision outcomes in a variety of settings and with various types of individuals (Dowden and Andrews, 2004; Skeem et al.,

2007; Smith et al., 2009), there are still substantial barriers to successful implementation and long-term sustainability of RNR principles, CCPs, and, more generally, EBPs (Fixsen et al., 2005, 2009; Joyce and Showers, 2002; Miller and Mount, 2001; Viglione et al., 2015b).

Less is understood in community corrections as to how EBPs are used on the POs, including how POs may be supported and how EBPs are implemented and sustained among POs within their respective agencies. This is where the nexus of efficacy currently lies—in not *what* to implement, per say, but *how* to implement EBPs with quality and fidelity, particularly to that local context and on a larger scale (Bertram et al., 2015; Bourgon and Canada, Public Safety Canada, 2009; Bourgon et al., 2010). This produces what is frequently referred to as a knowledge–practice gap (Viglione et al., 2015a, 2018), in which actual translation of the best practices in real-world settings may prove ineffective or create potential negative or null effects, for various reasons. Furthermore, it has become clearer that implementation quality "is a key moderating variable for reducing future crime" (Salisbury et al., 2019: 20; see also Bourgon and Armstrong, 2005; Curtis et al., 2004; Kennealy et al., 2012; Lowenkamp et al., 2006; Lowenkamp and Latessa, 2005; Sexton and Turner, 2010).

Challenges to implementation

The move toward EBPs has brought about several challenges to on-the-ground use and sustainability of best practices to affect change (Latessa et al., 2016; Rhine et al., 2006; Viglione et al., 2018). Generally, programs and practices specific for system-involved individuals are implemented with little fidelity and limited integration, and infrequently sustain at high fidelity (Fixsen et al., 2013; Lowenkamp et al., 2006, 2010; Miller and Maloney, 2013; Viglione et al., 2015b). Human service agencies are complex and ever-changing, seemingly in a constant state of transition that affects not only the clients served but also the staff responsible for serving clients (Bertram et al., 2015; Fixsen et al., 2005; Gleicher, 2018). Staff are generally left juggling the balance between their dual role that mandates both punitive- and rehabilitative-oriented practices.

This is further exacerbated by conflicting messages from multiple trainings received, policies left on the books, new policies added, and the variety of practices that POs are asked to use that also straddle the control- and rehabilitative-oriented spectrum (Gleicher, 2018; Rhine et al., 2006; Schwalbe and Maschi, 2009; Steiner et al., 2004). Agencies currently struggle to align policies, practices, and culture with EBPs at both the individual and organizational level, resulting in many short-lived trainings and even less sustained use (Blasko et al., 2018; Fixsen et al., 2005; Miller and Mount, 2001; Taxman, 2008a, 2008b). Policies and procedures may conflict with trainings on EBPs, creating confusion and difficulty at all levels of staff within an agency and their ability to fully implement EBPs with fidelity to achieve desired outcomes.

Frequently, agencies stop short of integration of EBPs into their agencies, as 80%–90% of organizations tend to stop at what Fixsen and colleagues (2005) refer to as paper implementation or a "recorded theory of change" in which policies and practices may be written down, creating a paper trail, but does not integrate operational changes or routines into practice (see also Fixsen et al., 2009; Hernandez and Hodges, 2003; Rogers,

2003; Westphal et al., 1997). Important to the implementation of EBPs are the individual attitudes and perceptions of the staff tasked with taking on and being the deliverers of these programs and practices, in addition to those supervising staff and the administration responsible for overseeing the agency and its practices (Fixsen et al., 2005). However, these individuals are frequently left out of the conversations as agencies tend to go with the latest "fad" or funding, despite limited understanding as to what it means for their agency, their employees, their clients, and the supports needed to implement and sustain best practices (Bourgon et al., 2010; Durlak and DuPree, 2008; Gleicher, 2018).

There are a variety of individual and organizational factors that help or hinder implementation of EBPs. Although the research is limited specifically to probation and parole and the criminal legal system more generally, there are several findings that suggest there are factors that help or impede the ability of individuals and organizations to successfully implement and integrate EBPs. These factors include individual characteristics (e.g. views toward EBPs, education level, demographic factors such as age, gender, and years employed) and organizational characteristics (e.g. organizational culture and climate, staff resistance to change, staff understanding and rationale for changes, organizational context) (Agocs, 1997; Fixsen et al., 2005; Latessa, 2004; Taxman and Belenko, 2012; Viglione et al., 2018). This study attempts to identify these factors using a qualitative approach.

Present study

This study analyzes the qualitative information of respondents from 20 EPICS sites based on a survey conducted by Gleicher (2018), approved by the University of Cincinnati's Institutional Review Board.[2] These 20 sites varied in size, client population (adult, juvenile, or both), number of individuals trained, and whether the sites had trained trainers. For this study, Microsoft Word was used to code the qualitative data. The research question, and purpose of this study, is the following: What are staff perceptions of implementing EBPS in their agencies?

While the survey included predominately close-ended questions, three open-ended questions were included in the survey to elicit staff perceptions regarding general EBPs, the EPICS model, and the implementation and sustainability of EBPs and the EPICS model within their respective agencies. The three open-ended questions respondents could answer as part of the larger survey used for the current qualitative study included the following:

1. What would be the most helpful for you to implement EBPs in your agency?
2. What is the least helpful for you when learning new EBPs?
3. What are the greatest barriers to implementation within your organization/agency?

Sample

Respondents included individuals trained in the end-user EPICS training (with coaching) from 20 sites across the United States and one international site by the University of Cincinnati between 1 January 2011 and 1 December 2015, which was extended to 30

September 2016 for seven sites that had internally trained trainers who had trained and coached agency staff in the EPICS end-user model. Surveys were distributed to sets at the end of January/beginning of February 2017 (depending on the site), and surveys closed mid-March/mid-April 2017 (also depending on the site). Three tailored follow-up reminders for the survey were distributed by the principal investigator or a point of contact at the site (depending on site) between 8 and 10 days apart, following Dillman et al.'s (2014) method to increase the potential response rate.

Of the 637 respondents who indicated they were trained in EPICS, 307 had a response in at least one of the three open-ended questions. For the purpose of this study, only those survey respondents who had a response to at least one of the open-ended questions related to this study were kept in the final sample for qualitative analysis. Therefore, the final sample for this study is 307 correctional professionals. Of the 307 respondents, 209 identified as correctional line staff (e.g. POs, case managers, treatment providers), 91 identified as supervisors/managers or administrators, and 7 had unidentified job titles (Figure 1).

Most frequently, respondents identified as White, female, between the ages of 44 and 54 years, employed between 4 and 7 years at their current agency, had a bachelor's degree, and had a current job title of probation officer. In addition, the sample was fairly split between agency population (juvenile, adult, or both), although respondents were predominately from probation agencies. The majority also identified as having a caseload, suggesting these individuals are most likely to be providing direct supervision and service to clients. Sample demographics are provided in Table 1.

Coding procedure

The researchers developed the coding manual through an iterative process, which included a multi-step coding process. This multi-step coding process aligned with the grounded theory analysis of qualitative data (Charmaz, 2006). During step 1, an initial coding manual outline was created by the principal investigator (provisional coding manual) using provisional coding and was refined with the other researcher after the second researcher's review of the qualitative responses and dual open coding of the first 10 pages of qualitative responses. The use of an open coding method during the first step allowed researchers to remain open to all potential theoretical possibilities indicated in the qualitative responses, where researchers could identify other potential substantive codes not initially identified in the first draft of the coding manual (Charmaz, 2006). This also allowed us to create a manual in which we themed the data to identify and summarize the specific themes. This initial coding manual provided definitions for each descriptive code and potential sub-codes, categorizing the data into segments.

During step 2, the researchers met to discuss and compare coding, refining the coding manual definitions and sub-codes through techniques of axial coding, including examples of what may be considered under each code, comparing across themes/codes, while removing potentially duplicative codes and identifying thematic codes that best represented the qualitative data (Simmons, 2017). During step 3, the researchers coded the next 30 pages and met to discuss coding and any potential updates or refinement to the coding manual. This was done until the entire document was coded, and both researchers

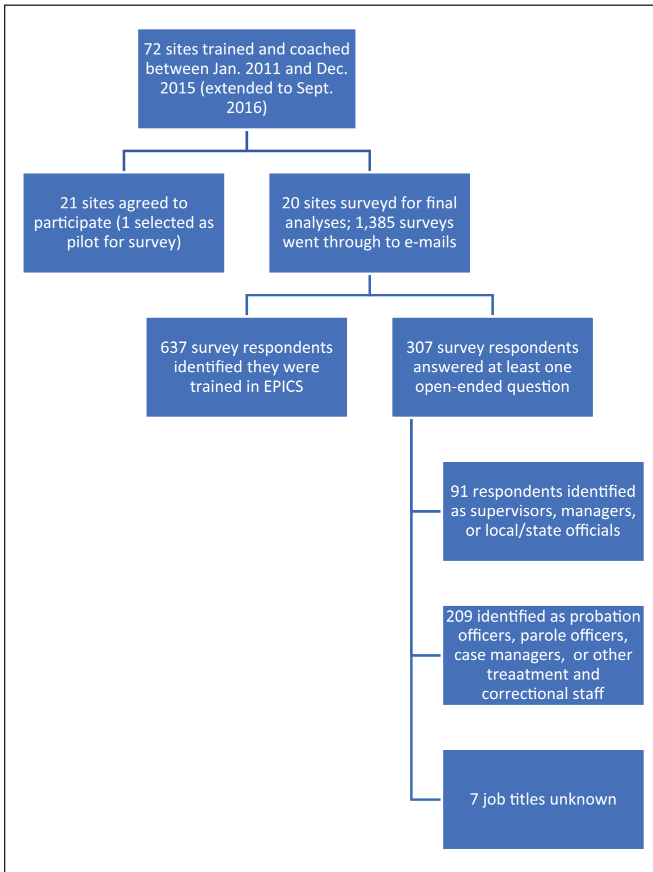

Figure 1. Survey response collection and final qualitative sample size.

Table 1. Respondent characteristics (N = 307).

Characteristic	n (%)
Trained by (n = 276)	
UCCI trainer	185 (67.0)
Internal trainer	91 (33.0)
Agency[a]	
A	7 (2.3)
B	51 (16.6)
C	21 (6.8)
D	9 (2.9)
E	4 (1.3)
F	13 (4.2)
G	10 (3.3)

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued)

Characteristic	n (%)
H	7 (2.3)
I	4 (1.3)
J	3 (1.0)
K	8 (2.6)
L	34 (11.1)
M	4 (1.3)
N	35 (11.4)
O	9 (2.9)
P	14 (4.6)
Q	19 (6.2)
R	17 (5.5)
S	13 (4.2)
T	25 (8.1)
Gender (n = 304)	
Female	164 (53.9)
Male	140 (46.1)
Age (n = 304), years	
18–24	1 (0.3)
25–34	53 (17.4)
35–44	94 (30.9)
45–54	105 (34.5)
55–64	49 (16.1)
$\geqslant$65	2 (0.7)
Race/ethnicity (n = 282)	
White	187 (66.3)
Black	45 (16.0)
Latinx	32 (11.3)
Other	18 (6.4)
Highest educational attainment (n = 305)	
HS diploma/GED	9 (3.0)
Some undergraduate	8 (2.6)
Associate degree	9 (3.0)
Bachelor's degree	157 (51.5)
Some graduate school	40 (13.1)
Graduate degree	82 (26.9)
Current job title (n = 295)	
State-level administrator	13 (4.4)
Supervisor	65 (22.0)
Intake officer/staff	5 (1.7)
Unit manager	14 (4.7)
Parole officer	21 (7.1)
Probation officer	137 (46.4)
Case manager	31 (10.5)

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued)

Characteristic	n (%)
Detention officer	4 (1.4)
Local agency official	5 (1.7)
Years employed (n = 231)	
<1	23 (10.0)
1–3	68 (29.4)
4–7	78 (33.8)
8–10	27 (11.7)
11–14	35 (15.2)
⩾15	–
Agency population (n = 231)	
Adults only	105 (34.2)
Juveniles only	114 (37.1)
Adults and juveniles	88 (28.7)
Caseload (n = 305)	
Yes	194 (63.6)
No	11 (36.4)
Agency type	
Probation	190 (61.9)
Parole	34 (11.1)
Other community corrections	23 (7.5)
Halfway house	9 (2.9)
Community-based program	17 (5.5)
Jail	10 (3.3)
Prison	10 (3.3)
Other	14 (4.6)
Internal coach	
Yes	87 (28.3)
No	220 (71.7)
Trained trainer	
Yes	64 (20.8)
No	243 (79.2)

UCCI: University of Cincinnati Corrections Institute; HS high school; GED, General Educational Development.
Characteristics without a small n had no missing data.
[a]Sites were given letter identifiers to protect confidentiality.

agreed on the full documents' coding. Themes were also identified and confirmed by the frequency of key words under the main themes.

Findings

The results of the qualitative analysis are organized around the three questions presented in the survey: what is the most helpful for staff when implementing EBPs, what is the

least helpful for staff when implementing EBPs, and what are barriers that exist to implementing EBPs. Within and across questions were multiple themes. Researchers analyzed across and within responses to the three questions as responses to some questions may have been the opposite of what the question was asking. For example, when asked what is the most helpful in implementing EBPs, respondents frequently indicated something that was not helpful and frequently reiterated this in the second question, what is the least helpful in implementing EBPS. Therefore, these themes consider how the respondent answered the question presented. The core themes that emerged are the following: individual attitudes, perceptions of organizational elements, and attitudes toward training and EPICS model (including a sub-category of positive comments regarding EPICS).

Individual attitudes

Under these themes, researchers coded information related to respondent beliefs about punishment, rehabilitation, and EBPS; individual beliefs about offender change and their own ability to be change agents; beliefs about the criminal and juvenile justice, respondents' purposes and perceptions of utility, and job role in these systems; and distrust of researchers. Most frequently, respondents brought up the belief that probation officers are not counselors and that EPICS will not work with their populations (this spanned populations).

Some responses that stood out in relation to this theme were related to individual beliefs about the model and its relevance to their clients, in addition to how they perceive themselves in their job role. One respondent indicated, "I don't have the skills, training, knowledge or qualifications to properly counsel the youth like a certified therapists [sic] or counselor," whereas another respondent indicated, "I think EPICS is asking JPOs [juvenile probation officers] to not only supervise youth on probation, but to be their therapists, counselors, mentors, and teachers." Frequently respondents indicated that ". . . we are not counselors," felt they were expected to "do something that I feel is morally/legally wrong. I am not a LMHC [licensed mental health counselor]," "Let's be JPOs [juvenile probation officers] and not counselor's or case workers," or "We are probation officers and not counselors."

Furthermore, those who responded also demonstrated resistance to EPICS, frequently indicating they already know what they are doing and are already using parts of EPICS. For example, one respondent indicated they use parts of the EPICS model when warranted, "but the parts I use are things that I have been doing for the past 14 years." Another respondent stated,

> For me, I use parts of Epics [sic], but not as its [sic] presented. I am already using Epis [sic], I call it doing a good job, using common sense, using my experience of working with thousands of people over a long career, using skills from multiple trainings, my college experience, and many other life experiences. It's not using your gut, it's using 20+ years of experience.

Others indicated, "Already use evidence based practices [sic]," "We use evidenc-base [sic] programs—just not EPICS," and "We have EBP in our agency."

Interestingly, respondents who served adults and juveniles felt differently about whether EPICS was relevant to their clients, with one respondent noting, "EPICS does

not seem extremely relevant for our super-high risk kids" and another juvenile practitioner indicating they feel ". . . EPICS is designed to work with juveniles but is geared more towards adults." Conversely, other respondents indicated they felt "it is really not as useful for adults." Others suggest that EPICS seems to be developed for ". . . offenders in a ½ house [halfway house] setting or inpatient treatment facility," that it seems to be ". . . made more for a routine setting, such as a residential treatment program or an hour long [sic] (or more) session with a case manager our counselor . . .," and that EPICS as presented and trained is ". . . not a realistic model for offenders on the street" and "EPICS is not formatted for Pos [probation officers] in the field." Furthermore, many respondents who identified the perceive utility (or lack thereof) of EPICS also indicated they frequently use motivational interviewing, which some suggest is not discussed or integrated as part of EPICs, with one respondent indicating, "I do not think EPIC [sic] integrates either of these models [motivational interviewing and stages of change] into the EPICS model."

In addition, there was a good level of distrust in research and research presented as part of the first module of the EPICS training that provides the rationale, utility, and research of EPICS. Ironically, respondents indicated that "I would like to see evidence or stats that this program is better than what we are currently doing," "Evidence validating positive outcomes in our area," that the practice ". . . is proven to work in an urban area," and that "The evidence based model has been tested on youth that are serviced by my agency." In several respects, these comments are valid; however, the only way to examine and analyze EPICS with respect to outcomes for respondents' specific agencies and clients would be for staff and the agency to, minimally, pilot EPICS and allow for an evaluation. This, therefore, necessitates training, coaching, and smaller-level implementation to occur first—otherwise, there is no way to obtain the answers and requests based on the respondents' comments. To that end, these practitioners who may be the first trained could be the premise for those evaluations.

Perceptions of organizational elements

Most frequently, respondents indicated staff buy-in and staff unwillingness to change at all levels in the agency as something that was least helpful and a barrier to implementation. Furthermore, time and caseload size were frequently identified as barriers to implementation of EPICS. Though less frequent, respondents also identified staff turnover; staff accountability; lack of support, direction, and vision by management; inconsistent policy, practice, and expectations; and lack of plans and follow-through for implementation and lack of line staff involvement in discussions as aspects that hindered implementation or were considered barriers to implementation of EPICS and EBPs.

When respondents mentioned buy-in and staff willingness to change, this was frequently in relation to the cyclical trainings provided that "staff are expected to use and explore for a particular time, and then disappear" and the frequency with which trainings turnover. For example, one respondent indicated that "regular practice and development" would be most helpful in implementing EPICS, but "not to be trained and then move on to another hot topic." Other respondents indicated a "lack of commitment and willingness to change—lack of build-up and preparation for the EPICS training," whereas

another respondent indicated that "the person in charge of implementing EPICS in the state does not have consistent policies and procedures for the implementation." Others commented on their peers', supervisors', and administrators' lack of buy-in and understanding what training and implementing new practices mean to line staff and the agency. One respondent indicated, "Many people are very resistant to trying new things. People who have been here for many years are set in their ways and do not trust that supervisors are effective when making decisions regarding new strategies." Another respondent stated, "Having Administrators at the training of a new practice, sitting in the back of the room on their cell phones instead of getting involved in the training. Sends the message that the training is not all that important."

In addition, respondents also identified lack of planning and strategy by their respective supervisors and administrators, with respondents noting, "Our department should have been more thoughtful in stategizing [sic] how to introduce EPICS to the department. There was resistance from the very beginning," whereas others identified that "Support from the top down [sic] including policies that are enforced and ALL are held accountable to them" would be most helpful in implementing EPICS. Most poignantly, another respondent noted,

> While the implementation of EPICS may be very beneficial in the long run, I feel that not having effective and efficient processes in place BEFORE implementing the model only adds to already existing confusion, frustration, and tension amongst the agency.

Other respondents identified a lack or limitation of resources in their agency, including funding, support, and consideration for caseload sizes and time. On respondent noted, "We need funding . . . our agency still is not able/willing to provide the necessary funding for the trainers to train the different circuits in the manner that we now know is most effective." The same respondent noted that the agency ". . . need pay incentives for probation officers based upon their years with the department during which they met high standards and for excelling in certain areas . . . [including] earning proficiency in utilizing EPICS."

Another respondent indicated that the most helpful to implementation of EBPs, including EPICS, would be "In depth [sic] planning and front line [sic] staff in put [sic] towards new ideas," whereas others indicated "More support and guidance from administration and "Continued support from supervisors and management." Several respondents suggested administration and leaders ". . . are not listening to the staff" and are creating greater issues and barriers to doing their jobs as leaders are, "adding additional duties to staff who are struggling with current duties without any incentive or reward," and that ". . . caseloads are too high and time is not available."

Attitudes and perceptions of EPICS training and model

When it came to specific factors related to the training and coaching process, most frequently staff indicated issues and barriers related to the audio recordings, practicality of the model, the format of follow-up coaching sessions, and the nature of the feedback forms for audio recordings. Additional comments related to the EPICS training and

model include trainers without probation experience (despite the accuracy of this belief), length of the training (too short or too long), relevance, and it being too didactic.

Most frequently, comments related to the length of time it takes to use the EPICS model, the format of the model, and the practicality of the model were noted. Respondents identified time and practicality as barriers or factors that are least helpful to implementation of EPICS, including ". . . the length of time it takes for staff to complete the components," ". . . having the time to learn/practice the intervention techniques so that one becomes comfortable with their use," and that "The tool must be practical and not take 200 hours to be effective." An area deemed helpful for EPICS implementation was ". . . watching videos of epics [sic] being used with clients." Some respondents, though less frequently, found the EPICS model (or minimally, "bits and pieces") as useful. On respondent noted that EPICS is "A well rounded [sic] program that encompasses MH [mental health] issues, SA issues [substance abuse] (and drug tests} and behavioral issues," whereas another respondent indicated that "EPICS is the most detailed and organized manner" that their agency has seen in quite some time. More frequently, respondents identified that "There are some techniques that are useful, but not all" or that ". . . there are some good points about EPICS. Most of the time, we use bits and pieces."

Some respondents indicated that the training had "An overload of written material," "To [sic] much information at one time," and "length of the training sessions [to be shorter]" as barriers or factors that were least helpful to implementation of EPICS. Respondents also commented that the "EPICS model training was not very helpful. The format was poor, the materials were poor" and that several indicated they found a "manual or guidebook" least helpful for implementation of EPICS. Others found the training highly didactic, the beginning feeling like a "sells [sic] pitch" and that it was "Death by power point! [sic]." Others noted that there was "Too much time focused on theory and not enough on practical application."

The audio recordings were noted as uncomfortable and some understood that audio recording, "although I understand it is to learn if facilitator is proficient . . . creates a barrier and distraction with the client." However, more frequently, respondents found the feedback in relation to audio recordings as "An arbitrary grading system on which everything is subjective as opposed to objective" and feeling that "Being forced to upload interview sessions and be 'graded' on a staff member's performance puts up walls and leads to staff not cooperating." Also noted was the difficulty in "Getting people to do recording [sic]," "A lot of time being spent on recordings," and that while they understood why tapes were used, "I hated the tapes . . .. but the tapes waste precious time of the Officers [sic]."

Respondents frequently noted that UCCI facilitators lacked knowledge of their populations or community supervision, despite not knowing the facilitator's backgrounds in full. For example, one respondent noted, "Academics who have not done the work are not always the best advocates for new practices," and another suggested, "It is important to ensure the presenter has hands on experience that will show participants how effective the tool can be when applied to Probation Work [sic]." Others indicated that the presenters or trainers were nice, ". . . but completely lacking a knowledge of Probation [sic] population we face." Overall, there was a desire for trainers to be individuals who were in-house/non-academics, had a good grasp of their population and organization, and limit what feels like subjectivity in the feedback forms.

Discussion

The qualitative findings from this study suggest that while some individuals find EPICS, or parts of it, useful, there are several limitations and barriers that remain, which hinder the implementation and individual use of the EPICS model with clients. Overall, respondents provided their own beliefs on the model and its components, suggesting they already engage in EPICS-related strategies and believe their experience is vital for conducting effective work. Furthermore, many respondents indicated a lack of planning and follow-through within their agencies related to EPICS implementation and sustainability, and a lack of input from line staff (e.g. POs, case managers) tasked with carrying out EPICS. This also includes staff's conflict between current policies, procedures, and daily duties and how EPICS is supposed to fit into their current, day-to-day role. This also includes resistance from staff and identified resistance from respondent co-workers, supervisors, and administrators. Finally, there were concerns of staff competencies and credentials in being able to or feeling like they can carry out the EPICS model.

These sentiments by survey respondents are supported by work in the area of implementation of EBPs. Not only is behavior change difficult for the clients served, but it is difficult among staff within organizations, especially without supervisor/managerial support, individual and co-worker attitudes that are non-supportive, and a lack of buy-in at multiple levels (Aarons and Palinkas, 2007; Makarios et al., 2016; Mitchell, 2011; Reding et al., 2014; Sheidow et al., 2007; Taxman et al., 2009). It is recommended that probation and parole agencies incorporate a planning period prior to implementation of programs or practices, especially because they impact the line staff—or those who must use these new programs and practices. This includes support and planning from the top—management and administration—with the inclusion of a cross-sectional cut of the agency to provide input and feedback; there needs to be more thought-out plans for long-term implementation. Without a plan regarding implementation or sustainability, a program or practice tends to decay, or go away over time, with agencies moving on to the next new training (Daly and Chrispeels, 2008; Fixsen et al., 2005; Lerch et al., 2009, 2011; Prendergast et al., 2016; Waters et al., 2003).

At the individual level, staff who feel supported by co-workers and their agency, feel they have sufficient resources to do their jobs, see follow-through when new trainings are required, are committed to the organization, have greater job satisfaction, and have the ability to provide feedback and input on trainings and practices related to their daily jobs may be more open to fully embracing organizational change and EBPs, creating fewer negative or skeptical attitudes toward trainings and EBPs more generally (Bourgon et al., 2010; Gleicher, 2018; Ostroff, 1992; Supplee and Metz, 2015). Furthermore, POs may be resistant and hesitant to trainings due to continual changes on top of already demanding daily responsibilities (Bourgon et al., 2012). Training concepts in the academic sphere to a more responsive learning and teaching style that resonates with staff can also be difficult (Bonta et al., 2011), particularly as community correctional personnel tend to indicate to trainers that they are already using skills they are being trained on, feeling that using some skills taught in training may seem to undermine their clients or be too difficult for clients (Bonta et al., 2011; Robinson et al., 2012; Taxman et al., 2008).

Moreover, staff perceptions of organizational factors may also be related to individual use of EBPs. Farrell and colleagues (2011) found that higher levels of cynicism and less

favorable perceptions of leadership resulted in a lower likelihood of staff to use EBPs for juvenile POs in their use of evidence-based referrals and case management practices. Similarly, Viglione and colleagues (2018) found organizational commitment was associated with POs' use of evidence-based referral practices; however, organizational factors analyzed did not have an association with case management practices. Organizational commitment and staff who value their employment within their respective agencies were more likely to engage in evidence-based referral practices to appropriate service and programs (Viglione et al., 2018; see also Fixsen et al., 2005).

In addition, it is important that the training organization and the agency being trained on EPICS consider what EPICS means in relation to correctional personnel's other job requirements. This includes how EPICS fit within their daily routines and consideration to aligning policies and procedures to be more evidence-based and incorporate the EPICS model (Lerch et al., 2011; Makarios et al., 2016). This could ease potential conflict between practitioners' individual attitudes/beliefs about their job responsibilities and roles (Walters et al., 2008; Taxman, 2008a). Policies and procedures should also consider staff turnover (and how to retain staff) and competency for implementing EPICS. This includes bringing staff up to par in the ability to master EPICS skills, as staff will be hired into a correctional agency with different levels of competencies, capabilities, and comprehension (Glisson and James, 2002; Lee et al., 2009; Makarios et al., 2016; Mowday et al., 1979; Pitts, 2007; Sheidow et al., 2007). Agency policies and procedure generally dictate what staff can and cannot do. Eliminating barriers related to conflicting policies and procedures can help facilitate practitioners' use of EBPs and the EPICS model (Fixsen et al., 2005).

Organizational culture and climate are also vital to successful implementation of EBPs and are particularly helpful when organizational contexts and environments are performance-oriented, create open learning environments, have a positive organizational climate, have access to quality training and resources, have good working relationships with other agencies, and have leaders who incorporate both adaptive and technical leadership styles, when appropriate (Aarons, 2006; Aarons and Sawitzky, 2006; Friedmann et al., 2007; Fulton et al., 1997; Glisson and Green, 2006; Glisson and James, 2002; Knudsen et al., 2008; Rudes et al., 2011). The shift from control-oriented practices to more rehabilitative-oriented approaches necessitates a shift in how correctional agencies operate and a shift in agency mentality (Joplin et al., 2004; Viglione et al., 2018).

Not only is this information from survey respondents important to how agencies implement EBPs, but it is also important for training agencies to take feedback and consider how EBPs—in this case, the EPICS model—can be more practically useful and appealing to community supervision practitioners. In particular, it is important for agencies and training organizations to consider how individual perceptions of training may conflict with internally held beliefs, resulting in skepticism and feelings of impracticality of the EBP in the real world (Mitchell, 2011; see also Aarons and Palinkas, 2007; Garland et al., 2006), and how training and implementation of the model may be best implemented to decrease potential negative attitudes moving forward. This also includes agency consideration for organizational readiness to take on change (Lerch et al., 2011) and leadership's ability to be adaptive (Daly and Chrispeels, 2008; Waters et al., 2003).

What agencies generally end up with are trainings paid for, received, and ultimately a decay or lack of uptake of these skills after training (Blasko et al., 2018; Miller and Maloney, 2013; Robinson et al., 2012; Viglione et al., 2015a, 2018). Because staff within an agency are vital to carrying out EBPs—whether it be line staff, supervisors or managers, or administrators—it may be prudent to understand their perceptions on trainings they receive and perceptions of implementation within their respective agencies. Findings from this qualitative analysis can help not only community supervision staff and agencies but also those who develop and train staff in these best practices.

Some limitations to the data are the low response rates to the open-ended questions. It is likely that those who find the EPICS model useful or had more positive attitudes toward EPICS and those who are more opposed to EBPs will respond to open-ended questions, with fewer neutral responses. This may result in non-representative information on staff perceptions of implementation of EBPs and specifically, the EPICS model. Furthermore, some responses to questions were vague, making it hard to code the responses in relation to the question and what they were referring to. In addition, responses to the first question asking what is most helpful for implementation of EBPs frequently had a response that fit more in line with what is least helpful for implementation or did not answer the question. For example, some respondents indicated what would be most helpful is, "We have EBP in our agency" or "Take away EPICS." Finally, the inability to access qualitative coding software limited the researchers to using Microsoft Word. While this is an acceptable method for coding, qualitative coding software could allow for more in-depth analysis on reliability of coding between researchers and running more rigorous analysis on qualitative findings.

Overall, the qualitative findings align with what research generally indicates as factors that help or hinder implementation of EBPS—individual attitudes and commitment, organizational elements including readiness for change, and leadership/administrative support. To that end, it is important for organizations that develop and train corrections agencies to consider feedback and input from line staff, incorporating it to create trainings, programs, and practices that are appealing and practical for correctional practitioners. Furthermore, it is important that correctional organizations consider their organizations' readiness for change, gaining staff input on changes and revision of policies and procedures to reduce conflict within practitioner roles and increase support in using EBPS.

Authors' Note

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Notes

1. UCCI is an institute out of the University of Cincinnati that engages in research, development, training, and implementation of evidence-based practices for correctional agencies.
2. Gleicher's (2018) survey comes from her dissertation research.

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