Incorporating Supervision Terms and Timing of Arrests into Parolee Recidivism Rates

Why Was the Study Done?

Prior studies have examined the impact of parole supervision by analyzing the reoffense patterns of those released to either parole or no supervision. Findings generally have shown that parole's impact on recidivism is small, but research has typically not considered whether a reoffense occurred during active parole supervision. An approach to measuring recidivism for parolees that incorporates the time of active supervision may have significant impacts upon the measured rates of failure for supervised groups. This study explores the variability in rates of failure according to different measurement approaches related to the timing of rearrest and the period of active parole supervision.

What Did the Study Do?

This study examined three years of postrelease recidivism data from former inmates who were released from a large Northeastern state's prisons from 2005 to 2007 (n = 28,869) to address four research questions:

1. What proportion of rearrested parolees are rearrested during parole supervision as opposed to after parole completion? The researchers incorporated the date on which an individual's supervision term expired into the follow-up time and compared this to the date on which the first rearrest after release occurred.

2. How do parolees who recidivate during parole supervision differ from those who successfully complete supervision and then later fail? Results from t-test and chi-square analyses were used to investigate between-group differences for supervised and unsupervised former inmates, parolees who were or were not rearrested during the follow-up period, and for those parolees who were rearrested, differences between those who failed during and those who failed after the expiration of the parole term.

3. How are measures of parolee recidivism rates affected if we identify parole failure only during the course of active supervision? The researchers present different recidivism rates using different definitions of parole failure depending upon whether the failure occurred during the course of active supervision. Definitions for failure include: 1) a rearrest that occurs during the follow-up time regardless of the timing of active supervision; 2) a definition that replicates definition (1) but also includes parole violations as failures; 3) a rearrest that occurs between the release date and the date of parole completion; and 4) a definition that replicates definition (3) but also considers parole revocations as failures.

4. How is the impact of parole supervision affected if we identify parole failure only during the course of active supervision? To explore question 4, as well as further explore question 3, the researchers constructed a series of Cox proportional hazards regressions that isolate the impact of parole release from several other established predictors of recidivism. The models incorporate the various failure definitions, above, and allow for parolees who complete parole without experiencing failure to be removed from additional analysis.

What Did the Study Find?

Results were presented for all unconditionally released inmates (n = 9,925) and parolees (n = 18,944) in the study. The parole group was further broken down by whether parolees were (n = 10,181) or were not (n = 8,763) rearrested during the three-year follow-up period, and for those who were rearrested, whether the arrest happened during (n = 4,477) or after (n = 5,704) the parolee's discharge from supervision.

On average, parolees were approximately 35 years of age, about 90% were male, and about 61% were black. Unconditionally released inmates significantly differed from

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parolees, with an average age of about 36, and about 93% being male, and 57% being black. Parolees were classified as significantly lower risk, and, on average, had been arrested about eight times prior to their release compared to about 10 times for unconditional releases. Parolees were supervised for about 1.4 years upon their release from prison.

Within one year of release, 41.6% of unconditional releases and 25.5% of those who were released to parole were rearrested; these rates increased to 56.3% and 42.5% after two years, and 63.3% and 53.7% after three years. If a parole violation or a rearrest is considered failure, parolees fail at rates of 33.8%, 50.3%, and 60.2% within one, two, and three years, respectively, of release from prison. If parolees are only considered as parole failures when they are actively being supervised, these rates fall drastically: within one year 17.0% of parolees fail, within two years, 21.8%, and within three years, 23.6%. If parole revocations are also considered failures, 26.5%, 33.1%, and 36.2%, respectively, of parolees fail during the course of their active supervision.

When comparing rates with similar criteria for failure by whether the event occurs during the course of active supervision or not, the rate differences are very high. Within one year of follow-up time, the rate of parole failure differs by about 8.5% for rearrests that either do or do not occur during the course of active supervision. After three years, this rate difference is approximately 30%. When considering both rearrests and parole revocations as failures, the rate difference within one year of follow-up time is about 7.4% when taking the timing of the failure event into account. Within three years, this rate difference is approximately 24%.

What Are the Implications of the Study for Policy Making?

This study found that a substantial proportion of the reintegrating population that is released to parole is rearrested within three years of release, but most of these rearrested parolees are no longer under parole supervision. These findings indicate an apparent mismatch between follow-up periods used in studies that attempt to explore the impact of parole supervision and the actual periods of supervision to which parolees are assigned. While three years is a common follow-up time within this literature, parolees in this study were supervised for an average 1.4 years. About 20% was supervised for less than six months and about 40% for less than a year. Only

11% of the parole population was assigned active supervision periods that met or exceeded three years.

The study results point to some potential policy directions that should be explored. First, studies that endeavor to examine recidivism rates for returning offenders or the impact that parole has upon reoffense patterns should incorporate the time of active supervision into their analyses. When active supervision is not considered, many former inmates who were at one time released to parole and failed in the community would have been considered parole "failures" if the active supervision term was not considered. This is an important finding and future research should investigate these issues in different jurisdictions. Future national-level recidivism studies should attempt to gather data about active supervision periods for parolees if one of the goals of the research is to contrast parole reoffense patterns with those of inmates who are unconditionally released.

The underlying policies and practices of parole boards as they attach parolees to residential community programs as well as the programs that render services to parolees should be further investigated and audited. Only considering parole failures to be valid if the case is under active parole supervision likely paints a more accurate picture of the impacts of parole, but it also presents ample opportunities for parole boards to inflate success rates if these are the standards to which they are held. They must be held to a higher standard that includes long-term impacts upon the reoffense patterns of those they previously supervised. This will potentially ensure that parole boards work towards using their resources to attempt to solve the problem of criminal behavior rather than shifting cases into and out of services in order to meet a discharge date.

The parole board in this study regularly audits the community programs under contract to ensure compliance with the contract, but not to ensure the services provided are effective in reducing further offending. To that end, contracts between parole boards and community service providers should be investigated and augmented so that they incorporate requirements for vendors that are in line with evidence-based findings from the criminological literature. Correctional Program Assessment Inventory or Correctional Program Checklist assessments provide the capacity to conduct empirically based assessments of the services offered and a program's capacity to deliver these services effectively. If the results from these sorts of assessments are accepted by parole boards and acted

upon, active supervision can be more meaningful for former inmates released to parole and have a more positive long-term effect on rates of recidivism.

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NIBRS Reliability in Reporting of Substance Use in Intimate Partner Violence

Why Was the Study Done?

The National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) is the first official source of domestic violence data available across law enforcement jurisdictions. Information is collected for each offense recorded by police and captures incident, victim, and offender characteristics, which allow for the study of how these factors impact the likelihood of arrest. Prior research has identified substance use as an important factor that influences police behavior in domestic violence cases, but there are some concerns about the validity and reliability of the NIBRS substance use variable. Studies using NIBRS data have found a low rate of substance use in domestic violence incidents, less than half that found in other domestic violence studies that used data sources such as local police reports or victim and offender self-reports. In addition, missing values appear to be common. These concerns suggest that researchers should be cautious when using this variable, but few studies have examined either the reliability or validity of NIBRS substance use data. This article conducts such an examination using a sample of intimate partner violence incidents.

What Did the Study Do?

The sample for this study comprises 2,441 incidents of intimate partner violence involving intimidation, simple assault, and aggravated assault submitted to the FBI in the year 2000 from 25 agencies across four states. These data were part of a larger study that required additional information to be collected from the original police reports in those jurisdictions. To gather those data, the study employed an alternate, but similar, form to the one NIBRS uses. This presents a unique opportunity to examine how well the FBI NIBRS data compared to those gathered through the independent study data collection process.

The primary criterion for selecting states for this study was the legislative framework under which police de-

partments operated. Of the four states chosen, two are mandatory arrest states, one is a preferred arrest state, and one is a discretionary arrest state. The primary criteria for selecting jurisdictions within the states were the number of domestic violence cases, arrest rates, and the extent and quality of the police data that were available. In each state two medium to large core agencies (100,000 population or more) were selected and smaller satellite agencies close to the core agencies.

There was considerable variation in form and content of the police incident reports provided by the selected police departments. Two groups were created based on how closely elements on each agency's reporting form aligned with the NIBRS substance use reporting element: Group 1) incident forms were designed to collect incident details consistent with NIBRS reporting elements and categories; they included check-offs for incident details, and had a specific indicator of substance use; Group 2) incident forms were less consistent with NIBRS, had few or no check-off options, and had no specific indicator for substance use. Where there was no direct collection of substance use status, report narratives were used.

In the first part of the study, analysis was done to determine if information collected on police incidents via an alternate form is consistent with what is reported for these same incidents in NIBRS. Results obtained from coding information directly from the jurisdiction's police reports were compared with those from the same incidents that were submitted electronically to the FBI NIBRS data program. In addition to the substance use indicator, variables that have been used in prior research on the police response to domestic violence, including police action (arrest/no arrest), incident location, victim injury, nature of offense, victim race and sex, and offender race and sex, were included in the reliability analysis.

What Did the Study Find?

Comparing the independent data collection effort with the NIBRS dataset showed that substance use in incidents of domestic violence occurred more often than was reported in NIBRS. It was also found that in agencies that had low reliability in their reporting of substance use information, substance use exerted a positive, significant impact on the likelihood of arrest in incidents, but in agencies with high reliability, the positive effect of substance use on arrest was significantly weaker.

The authors suggest several possible explanations for these findings. How the information from reported incidents is translated into automated form may be important. Having check-off boxes should make reporting on this measure more consistent; the authors found that agencies with these types of forms showed greater reliability than those without them. It was also found that some agencies reported no variation on the substance use variable, i.e., "no" or "not applicable" was entered for substance use. This suggests that data entry practices should be carefully reviewed. Findings also suggest that some variation could be a function of differences in agency standards for recording detailed information about incidents, including the presence of substance use. There also may be a greater focus on reporting incident details when an arrest is made, and in general, police subjectivity in assessing substance use could affect reporting.

What Are the Implications of the Study for Policy Making?

This study found that the substance use variable recorded in the federal NIBRS system suffers from measurement issues. Although substance use increases the chances of an arrest, the strength of the association may be weaker than current evidence suggests when one takes reliability of police recording into account. This finding, coupled with the result that shows the NIBRS substance use measure recorded less substance use than a measure based on an independent data collection effort, suggests that this measure should be evaluated further by local, state, and federal agencies responsible for incident reporting. To improve our understanding of law enforcement reporting and response to intimate partner violence—and violence in general—agencies should strive to improve the reliability of the data they generate. To improve consistency in form content, agencies may want to consider modifying reporting forms to more explicitly include measures of drug and alcohol use.

The authors make several specific recommendations based on the findings. First, researchers must continue to investigate the role that drugs and alcohol have in the commission of intimate partner violence and the police response to those incidents. Second, police agencies must take measures to enhance the overall reliability of the data they generate. Third, the authors found that while the FBI does a good job of assessing the internal consistency of data received from local agencies, little is done to ensure that the information that appears in NIBRS corresponds with the information actually recorded in local police records. More must be done to correct this deficiency. Reliable data are needed to inform sound policy.

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Student Bullying Victimization and Reporting Behavior

Hart, T. C., Hart, J. L., Miethe, T. D. (2013). Situational context of student bullying victimization and reporting behavior: A conjunctive analysis of case configurations. Justice Research and Policy, 15(2), 3–73.

Why Was the Study Done?

Figures from the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) and the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) show that during the 2007–08 school year, a quarter of all public schools surveyed reported that bullying occurred among their students on a daily or weekly basis. About one third of all students surveyed between the ages of 12 and 18 reported that they were bullied, including 7% who indicated that they were bullied every day. The figures from the BJS/NCES survey represent a 400% increase over those reported in the 1992–93 school year, and while some of this increase may be a product of growing awareness or reporting, it also reflects a real problem for students, parents, teachers, and school administrators.

While many studies have focused on school bullying over the past several decades, no large-scale investigation of the situational context of bullying victimization has been conducted. The current study uses data collected from the School Crime Supplement (SCS) of the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), combined with an innovative analytic technique, to explore three research questions: (1) Is school bullying characterized by situational clustering or is it uniformly distributed across different contexts; (2) how much variability in contexts is associated with the dominant situational profiles of school bullying; and (3) what are the particular individual and contextual factors most commonly found within these dominant situational contexts?

What Did the Study Do?

The current study uses data from SCS interviews completed by 6th through 12th graders during the 2005, 2007, and 2009 school years (N = 16,244) to analyze student bullying victimization using conjunctive analysis of case configurations. This approach allowed the researchers to identify the relative prevalence of different

situational contexts for student bullying and the relative importance of particular sets of factors that are unique and common to these incidents.

The primary variables in the study involved measures of student bullying victimization and both individual (demographic and behavior characteristics) as well as contextual (school climate, safety, and extracurricular involvement) risk factors associated with these incidents. Combined, the nine dichotomous individual and contextual risk factors (gender, grade, race, involved in a fight, avoids places, academic performance, rules are applied fairly, school is safe, extracurricular involvement) included in the current study represent a total of 512 possible distinct situational contexts for student bullying victimization ($2^9 = 512$). The analysis was confined to more frequently occurring, or "dominant," case configurations to focus on the empirical identification and analysis of the most commonly observed situational contexts of school bullying incidents.

Of the 512 possible situational contexts for bullying, a total of 401 distinct contexts were observed in the data. However, bullying incidents clustered within 156 "dominant" situational contexts (i.e., profiles that met the threshold of containing at least 10 cases). A data matrix for the 156 dominant bullying profiles was constructed to visually display (1) all situational contexts for bullying that are formed by the joint distribution of the individual and contextual factors used in the study, and (2) the relative rank ordering of these situational contexts based on their mean prevalence levels.

What Did the Study Find?

Examination of the 156 dominant bullying profiles displayed in a data matrix revealed important patterns about the prevalence of school bullying across different situational contexts. Given that approximately 28% of the students in the current sample indicated they were bullied at school, one would expect a similar proportion of bullying across all situational contexts if the risk of bullying victimization was contextually invariant. On the contrary, the data matrix showed considerable contextual variability in the likelihood of being a bully victim, ranging from 100% certainty when the bullying scenario involved a white, female high school student who was reportedly involved in a fight at school during the previous academic year, does not avoid places while on the way to/from or at school, believes that school rules are "fair" and the school is safe, and who is involved in extracurricular activities, to a low of 7% for students in other contexts.

Among all of the 156 dominant bullying profiles, the average rate of bullying was 40%. Visual inspection of the data matrix shows numerous profiles that are associated with a relative prevalence of bullying that is considerably higher and lower than this average rate.

In general, findings of this study support the existing literature that suggests context matters when it comes to understanding bullying risk. The fact that school bullying clustered among 156 dominant situational profiles out of a possible 512 combinations of risk factors considered, and that the variation of risk across profiles is extreme, ranging from 7% to 100%, provide answers to the first two research questions posed in this study: (1) school bullying is characterized by situational clustering; and (2) there is wide contextual variability associated with the dominant situational profiles of school bullying. A closer inspection of the specific risk factors that comprise the dominant situational bullying profiles, however, reveals mixed support for many aspects of the contemporary literature.

Findings support past research that demonstrates a relationship between race and increased risk of bullying victimization as well as scholarship that suggests school security measures such as metal detectors, locker checks, and school police do not effectively deter school bullying. However, these findings suggest other individual risk factors such as gender, grade, externalizing/internalizing behaviors, and academic achievement, as well as other contextual factors such as fairness in the application of school rules and a student's involvement in extracurricular activities—when considered in conjunction with all factors simultaneously—are not consistent determinants of higher than average bullying outcomes. Unlike the high-risk quartile of bullying contexts, the low-risk quartile of profiles show stronger direct effects for certain risk factors used to predict bullying victimization. These findings provide an answer to our third and final research question: Students who do not externalize behavior and almost never internalize behavior or believe their school treats students unfairly exemplify the particular individual and contextual factors most commonly found within the dominant situational contexts associated with the lowest risk of school bullying victimization.

What Are the Implications of the Findings for Policy Making?

Collectively, the findings of this study provide two important conclusions. First, the number of distinct profiles in which a bullying incident occurred (i.e., 156 of

a possible 512 bullying scenarios) suggests that bullying victimization is an incredibly diverse social phenomenon. Paradoxically, it is also highly clustered within a smaller number of dominant situational profiles. As a result, findings suggest that traditional models (i.e., main effects models or models that include a small number of interaction terms) used to predict school bullying victimization do not account for the contextual diversity and clustering that was identified by the model used in this study (i.e., conjunctive analysis).

Second, results show that the effect of many individual and contextual predictor variables associated with school bullying victimization and used in traditional analytic models is context specific. That is, some factors are consistently found to be associated with higher than average risk of bullying (i.e., race and perceived safety of the student's school), but not associated with situational profiles that define the dominant context of lower than average bullying risk. In other words, the current study

adds to the existing body of literature by quantifying the contextual effect of established factors believed to be causally related to school bullying victimization.

The method of conjunctive analysis is a relatively new approach for examining school bullying and its situational context. Future research should consider how application of this technique and other, nontraditional analytic techniques could enhance existing scholarship, and apply these approaches whenever possible and appropriate.

For school policy, the results of the conjunctive analysis illustrate the wide variability in the prevalence of student bullying victimization across contexts. In particular, these findings suggest that the likelihood of these incidents depends on complex social situations that are not easily summarized in terms of a single variable(s) that holds across all contexts. Instead, to understand when bullying occurs, policy analysts must explore the nature of the different situational contexts that underlie them.

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