IACFP Bulletin
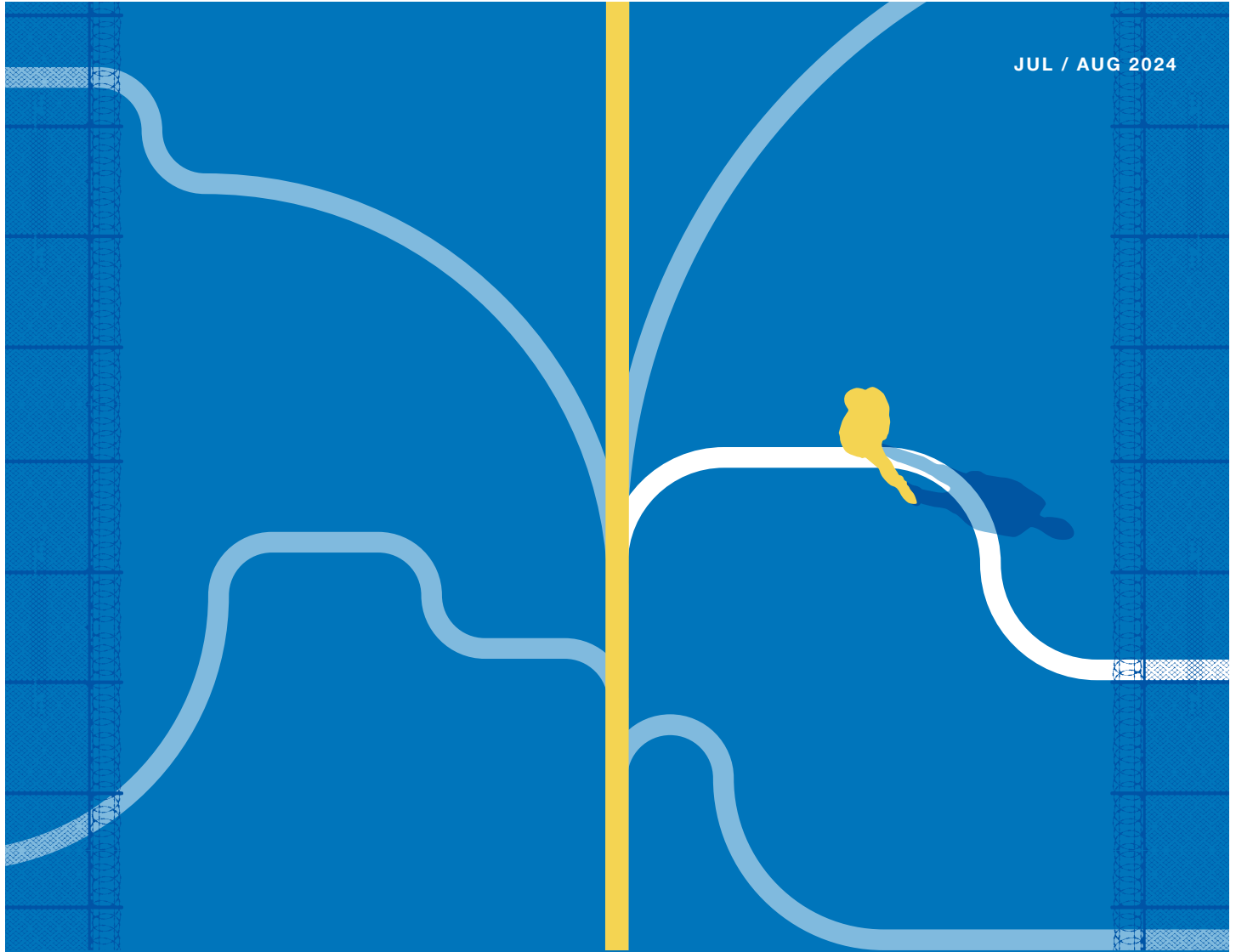
RESEARCH PRACTICE POLICY

from The International Association for Correctional and Forensic Psychology

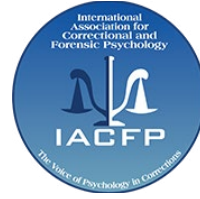## FEATURED ARTICLES IN THIS ISSUE

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The International Association for Correctional and Forensic Psychology (IACFP)

The International Association for Correctional and Forensic Psychology (IACFP) is an organization of behavioral scientists and practitioners who are concerned with the delivery of high-quality mental health services to justice-involved individuals, and with promoting and disseminating research on the etiology, prevention, assessment, and treatment of criminal behavior.

IACFP members are not all psychologists and are not all active in the practice of forensic evaluations or correctional mental health. However, they typically have advanced degrees in behavioral sciences and engage in the administration, practice, teaching or research relating to incarcerated populations and those under community supervision. We have been promoting evidence-based and practitioner-informed practices and research to support correctional and forensic psychologists and other helping professionals who work with justice-involved individuals since 1954. Our goals are to:

→ Promote the development of psychological practice in criminal justice and law enforcement settings.

→ Contribute toward appropriate teaching of the psychology of crime, delinquency and criminal justice.

→ Support the development and application of effective treatment approaches for individuals in the care of the criminal justice system.

→ Stimulate research into the nature of criminal behavior, to exchange such scientific information, and to publish the reports of scholarly studies of criminal behavior.

→ Concern ourselves with relevant public, professional and institutional issues which affect or are affected by the practice of psychology in the criminal justice system.

Our current areas of focus for funded projects are:

→ Professional development

→ International practice and an international leadership network, and

→ Community corrections.

We are now accepting submissions.

The *IACFP Bulletin* has six issues per year, and is now accepting submissions. To inquire how to submit, please email **executivedirectoriacfp@gmail.com** with your proposed article topic.

Summary: Umbrella review and commentary on an updated evidence synthesis of the Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) model

BILAL DARDAI / AUG 2024

A review of the evidence base for Risk-Need-Responsivity principles was recently conducted by a team of researchers from the University of Oxford (UK), University of Konstanz (Germany), and Iowa State University (US). The article, "An updated evidence synthesis on the Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) model: Umbrella review and commentary" was written by Seena Fazel, Connie Hurton, Matthias Burghart, Matt DeLisi, and Rongqin Yu, and published in the *Journal of Criminal Justice* (Vol. 92, May – June 2024). The authors indicate that RNR may lack adequate support for its viability, citing mixed-quality evidence that lacks transparency and shows authorship bias, and prior reviews of the evidence being rated low quality.

Background and Research Purposes

First articulated as a formal model for managing incarcerated individuals in 1990 — and having since become a widely accepted model in correctional settings throughout the world — RNR is built upon three key principles:

1. **Risk:** This forms the basis of the "treatment matching" or "targeting" approach to intervention, stating that those at higher risk of re-offending should receive more intensive treatment.

2. **Need:** This principle looks at criminogenic needs to determine an offender's risk of recidivism.

3. **Responsivity:** Having assessed an offender's risk of recidivism based on their needs, the model articulates two components for reducing that risk: general responsivity (which relies on cognitive-social learning methods) or specific responsivity (which attempts to tailor treatment to an individual).

The RNR model is considered to have a solid evidence base built on primary studies, systematic reviews, and meta-analyses across its three principles, which has led to its popularity in comparison to other models. In this Journal of Criminal Justice article, however, the researchers observe that this reputation is in conflict with certain characteristics of the evidence base, including how its level of dispersal creates challenges for proper assessment, or that many existing published syntheses are focused on a single principle rather than the model in total, and are also now more than a decade old.

To answer these concerns, the researchers have conducted an "umbrella review" that collects the distinct segments of the evidence base and reviews their overall quality and consistency.

> "Umbrella reviews are increasingly used as a validated, systematic and transparent approach to provide information to researchers and practitioners in areas where there is a large body of evidence of varying quality and displaying mixed results."

Methodology

The researchers' methodology followed a five-step process, outlined as follows:

Data Search

The researchers employed a multifaceted approach to gathering the different studies and reviews that are part of the RNR evidence base. This included tailored keyword searches of electronic databases PubMed, PsycNet, and Scopus, as well as a search for literature produced outside of traditional publishing via Eldis, Google Scholar, and FindPolicy.

Eligibility Assessment

While no studies were excluded on the basis of language (ie, English or non-English) or publication type, the researchers did adopt specific criteria in terms of determining eligibility of reviews for each principle, as follows:

→ Studies of **risk** were deemed eligible if they "compared post-treatment recidivism outcomes for high and low-risk populations."

→ Studies of **need** were deemed eligible if they "assessed the predictive accuracy of one or more risk assessment tools for recidivism outcomes or…directly assessed a treatment program reflecting the need principle."

→ Studies of **responsivity** were deemed eligible within the distinct general and specific categories: General responsivity studies needed to "compare recidivism outcomes for treatment/intervention adhering to general responsivity with those not adhering to the principle," while specific responsivity studies needed to review "the association between one of the model's eight specific responsivity factors and either treatment completion rates or recidivism outcomes."

Study Selection

Studies accessible through database searches underwent a title check, abstract screening, and full-text review, while inaccessible studies were evaluated through direct contact with their author or institution. The researchers ultimately identified 26 separate meta-analyses published between 2002 – 2023 that encompassed over 450 different studies. These included 7 studies on risk, 6 on need, 15 on general responsivity, and 4 on specific responsivity.

Data Extraction

Relevant research data was gathered from the selected studies with a standardized form, and efforts were made to gather information on these particular variables within each study:

→ Demographics

→ Sample

→ Methods

→ Effect size and metric, and upper/lower confidence intervals

→ Measures of heterogeneity and variation between different studies

Quality Assessment

The researchers adopted an existing approach to umbrella reviews, in which they scored the quality of each study on a seven-point scale, each point corresponding to an existing assessment tool or other validated measure:

1. A score of at least 8/16 on the Assessing Methodological Quality of Systematic Reviews-2 (AMSTAR) tool

2. A lower-risk score of at least 2/4 on the Bias in Systematic Reviews (ROBIS) tool.

3. Excess significance bias ratio of <1 (comparing a meta-analysis' pooled overall effect size and the effect size of its largest included study)

4. Between-study heterogeneity of <50%

5. Sample size of ≥1000

6. A prediction interval of 95% (not including those that include the null effect)

7. A score of no more than 5% on Egger's regression asymmetry test, which looks at evidence for publication bias

Studies of the Need principle were exempt from assessment in the AMSTAR tool, and were therefore only scored to a maximum of six points. The researchers' quality scale classified studies rated 0-2 as low, 3-4 as moderate, and 5-7 as high.

Findings and Interpretations

Risk

Among the seven studies identified for the Risk principle, the researchers found that none achieved a quality score greater than 2/7, indicating that all were rated low quality. These results came from low methodological quality scores in AMSTAR and ROBIS, as well as missing information on factors such as publication bias. A majority of these studies showed lower confidence intervals, and most had overlapping samples, with one of those samples that did not overlap showing potential authorship bias.

Need

The six selected studies for the Need principle included those that evaluated treatment programs directly answering the identified need and those that evaluated risk assessment tools. Within the latter, some data had to be excluded for bias, as the tools had been developed by the study's author(s). Overall, the quality of these studies was considered mixed; the studies that

directly addressed need achieved scores of 0-2, while those studies that examined risk assessment tools held moderate-to-high (3-7) quality scores.

General Responsivity

The 15 studies examined by the researchers were determined to be mixed in quality — while only 4 studies out of 15 received AMSTAR scores lower than 8 or ROBIS scores lower than 3, other factors such as overlapping samples and potential authorship bias needed consideration. Overall, the assessment indicated eight studies of low quality, two of moderate quality, and five of high quality.

Specific Responsivity

Specific responsivity has received significantly fewer meta-analyses that the researchers deemed eligible for inclusion. The four included in their review reported on outcomes that ranged from characteristics affecting attrition in treatment programs, whether such programs had shown an effect on recidivism rates, and whether treatments employing specific responsivity principles caused lower recidivism. The nature of this data meant that the researchers needed to rely on AMSTAR and ROBIS scoring to assess quality, and they found that these four meta-analyses were of low-to-moderate quality.

Conclusions

The final assessment of the researchers was that there was inconsistency within the evidence base to support the validity of RNR principles, and that the underlying systematic reviews showed poor quality and significant gaps in data. They further outlined five crucial challenges identified within the reviewed studies:

→ Authorship bias

→ A lack of transparency and accessibility

→ Primary studies of poor quality

The Eight Criminogenic Risk/Need Factors of the RNR Model

| Criminal history | Anti-social personality pattern | Pro-criminal attitudes | Pro-criminal associates |
| Marital/family status | Leisure activity habits | School/work participation | Substance abuse disorders |

→ Flaws in subgroup analysis methodology

→ The conflation of prediction with causality

> "In light of the documented allegiance effects in intervention and prediction research, it is notable that many of the included reviews did not address or disclose potential conflicts of interest. This is particularly important when there are potential financial conflicts of interest."

The concerns raised by this umbrella review call into question the reliability of the studies that were testing the RNR model, and therefore the conclusions reached about the model's effectiveness in correctional settings. Until higher quality research is presented to confirm the impact of RNR and dispel doubts about its theoretical validity, the researchers feel that the model should no longer be introduced to additional jurisdictions.

Discussion: An Expert Panel Responds to Conclusions in the Umbrella Review of the Risk-Need-Responsivity Model by Seena Fazel, et al.

The recently published study "An updated evidence synthesis on the Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) model: Umbrella review and commentary" by Seena Fazel, Connie Hurton, Matthias Burghart, Matt DeLisi, and Rongqin Yu — summarized within this issue of the *IACFP Bulletin* — takes a critical look at the RNR model, which has become a widely accepted model for managing justice involved individuals in both custody and community correctional settings throughout the world. Due to the findings expressed by the researchers, IACFP received several inquiries asking for guidance regarding the article's content. The approach we have taken is three-fold:

1. Summarize the article and its main points.
2. Ask a group of experts to respond directly to the research and conclusions of the authors.
3. Provide a supplementary article on model pluralism that is reprinted, with permission, from *Justice Trends* magazine and the author.

The perspectives from Jim Bonta (Canada), Joel Dvoskin (USA), Paul Gendreau (Canada), Mark Olver (Canada), Devon Polaschek (New Zealand), and Frank Porporino (Canada) were articulated through an informal group conversation, with highlights from that conversation shared below. Several of these individuals intend to offer a more formal response via an academic publication. The group identified the following common issues and unique considerations:

→ Misunderstanding and misrepresentation of the RNR model

→ Inappropriate operationalization of RNR principles

→ Author bias test not meeting current practice

→ Naïve focus of randomized control trials in corrections

→ Missing key studies in the meta-analysis selection for the umbrella review

→ An unsubstantiated conclusion to not introduce RNR into new jurisdictions

→ Viable alternatives to RNR are not offered

→ Knowledge destruction

We appreciate them taking the time to offer their thoughts based on their experience with RNR and with the issues raised in the summarized article. We share their questions, insight, and criticisms here so that our readers may gain a more complete understanding of RNR as well as the model's strengths and weaknesses from a research perspective. For practitioners, this series of responses offers thoughts about how they might best meet the needs of the individuals they work with.

After reading "An updated evidence synthesis on the Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) model: Umbrella review and commentary," **Jim Bonta** offered these direct rebuttals:

1. "You mistakenly identify the Central Eight as the basis to fourth-generation risk assessment. Alas, this forms the basis to *third* generation (p. 1).

2. I am not sure how closely you read the RNR model. You cannot evaluate the risk principle by simply looking at outcomes for low- and high-risk clients who attend treatment. You need to also know the *intensity* of treatment and if it is matched to client risk.

3. Your interpretation of the need principle is completely wrong. On page 2 you write: "For need, studies were included *if they assessed the predictive accuracy* (italics added) of one or more risk assessment tools for recidivism outcomes or if a study directly assessed a treatment program reflecting the need principle." The predictive accuracy of criminogenic needs is important, but it does not form a test of the need principle. We must assess if the treatment targets criminogenic needs, and if successful targeting of criminogenic needs is associated with reduced recidivism. Calculated AUCs are a predictive accuracy statistic, not a measure of the effects of treatment. There are plenty of meta-analyses on the predictive accuracy of the Central Eight and this review adds nothing to them. Finally, with respect to specific responsivity: Why is treatment completion an outcome measure? This is confounded with risk. All in all, if RNR is not accurately conceptualized then everything that follows is meaningless.

4. You engage in Knowledge Destruction (as described by Technical Note 10.1 of *PCC 7th edition*) by suggesting ambiguity and setting almost unattainable goals that no one study or review can achieve (i.e., covering all the principles, methodologies, and theoretical perspectives). As you write on page 2: "RNR is *reported* (emphasis mine) to have a broad existing literature base, including primary studies, systematic reviews, and meta-analyses across the principles. However, the evidence base is also quite dispersed, making it difficult to assess the model, particularly as many of the systematic reviews in the area present *conflicting* findings. Existing syntheses, such as Polaschek (2012); Ward, Melser, and Yates (2007); and Ogloff and Davis (2004), tend to *focus either on a single principle or to cover the model only conceptually, with little methodological assessment or critique."* Can any review meet these standards?

5. The ultimate knowledge destruction technique: "remind the readers that studies that report positively…are based upon the conclusions of the authors of the reports themselves." You make a valiant effort to express that your motivation in excluding reports written by the RNR developers and their colleagues is based on science (the allegiance effect, p. 7). You could have at the very least identified what 'authorship bias' studies were excluded and maybe provide the effect size for them so the reader can compare (e.g., in Figure 2 you go from seven studies reported in the text to four studies in the figure). It is also noteworthy that only your work is described in Figure 4 and they are all prediction studies (where is Olver et al., 2014?).

6. You complained, in part, that previous reviews focused on a single principle. And yet you did the same. Adherence to only one principle is a good first step but, as we have 'reported' on many occasions, adhering to two and three principles is even better.

7. Your conclusion is truly astounding: 'Without this [higher quality research], introducing RNR into new jurisdictions should not be recommended' (p. 8). RNR has guided program development for decades and have positively impacted the lives of thousands of criminal justice-involved clients. Are we to discard all of this?"

Paul Gendreau will be co-authoring a formal response with Jim Bonta. His brief comments are:

"In the more formal expert group response, Jim and I will address author bias in one way by using the CPAI, which is a powerful tool to separate author bias from program therapeutic integrity (TI). This is done by scoring the method section and any other related information regarding a publication on a treatment programs effectiveness.

It is plausible that Jim's and other Canadian-led RNR studies will have higher CPAI scores — maybe even higher than others not done by the Canadian school — because we will have information on what was exactly done with regards to TI (e.g. the classic Rideau prison study and Jim's P/P studies). Note that Fazel displays no awareness of anything about TI, only about research design, which says little if anything about how well treatment is provided. He just resorts to cheap shots such as financial conflicts (p.7) and ultimate dismissals that RNR doesn't work, redolent of the initial ad hominem primitive debates from the Martinson 'nothing works' era. In addition, there is a second way of demonstrating the validity of research findings, which is by way of replication. To this end, Jim and I have produced evidence of the RNR model being replicated by independent researchers.

Lastly, attention is drawn to the unfortunate fact that Fazel, et al do not report the results of RNR studies in a transparent manner that is easily understood by practitioners and policy makers, let alone by researchers. It has been demonstrated that the

Fazel outcome measure, the ratio of two ratios, is incomprehensible to all but the mathematically inclined. Rather, the results fom the RNR studies are of a magnitude (in % terms) that are cost effective."

Mark Olver comments further about the problems he identified in this manuscript after a brief review:

"At first glance, I have a number of concerns with the review. I saw missing key works, idiosyncratic interpretation and criteria for study methodology and findings, and overstated conclusions. I would also note that they offer no viable alternatives to RNR for correctional systems to administer, treat, manage, and reintegrate correctional populations. I'm not sure what else they would suggest.

As a case in point, our LSI meta-analysis published in 2014 in *Psychological Assessment* — containing almost 400 citations — didn't get picked up in this umbrella review, which is a notable omission (even if the study authors would have chosen to discount it since Steve Wormith was a co-author, which I would object to, as I was lead author and Steve did not insert any agenda or undue influence). Or even dozens of meta-analyses of other forensic/risk measures. Even if the findings, which are actually pretty decent, are taken at face value, the conclusion to not introduce RNR into new jurisdictions is unsubstantiated. I could be mistaken but I also don't believe anybody in the author team has a mental health or human service delivery background, such as forensic clinical psychology; this matters as training and practice in criminal justice and correctional psychology enables one to contextualize their interpretation of data, refine clinical research questions, and to draw practical conclusions on the applications of findings to correctional, criminal justice, and forensic settings. The interpretation of effect sizes seems to be selective (including an idiosyncratic metric for AUCs, what is their basis for low, medium, or high?), they overstate author bias, and seem to place too much weight on RTCs,
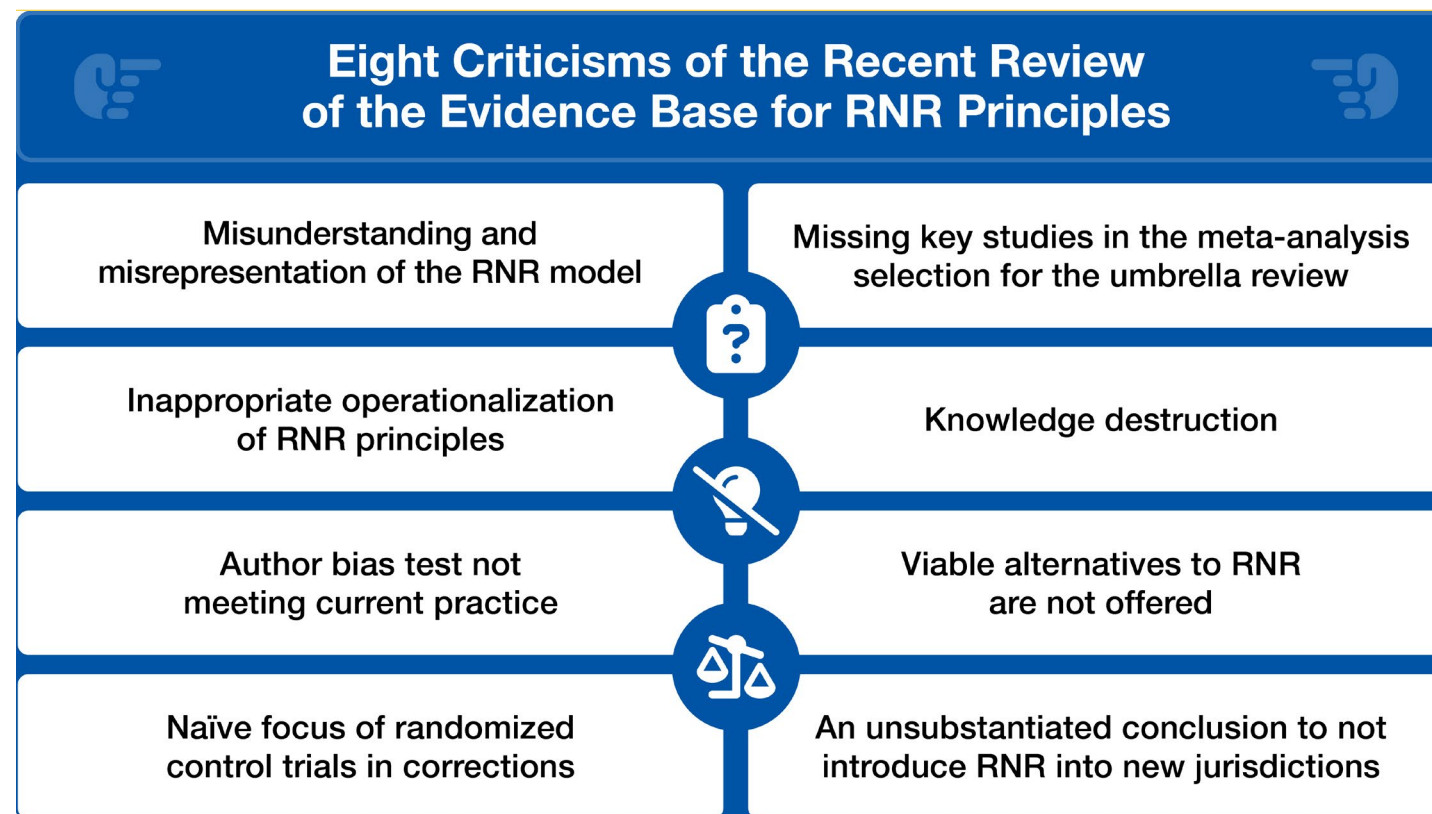
which have poor external validity and, for ethical reasons, I would argue often cannot be done with correctional populations. It is hard to place much weight or confidence in the conclusions from this review. There are probably close to 1,000 replications of RNR in some form over the last 35 years from around the world.

In addition to considering model pluralism, I think there would be value in more formally rebutting the assertions of Fazel, et al backed by supporting data and sharpened operationalizations of RNR as we know it. This could be akin to the Good Lives Model (GLM) and RNR exchanges. The Fazel, et al paper is troublingly misleading and its conclusions — which appear to be based on an unrepresentative and partisan examination of a group of studies with inaccurate and oversimplified operationalizations of RNR — are irresponsible. A rebuttal to set the record straight and to identify errors, omissions, and caveats of this study by an expert RNR group is needed, particularly for the benefit of those who might be less well informed."

Frank Porporino, responding to Mark, said:

"I agree completely with Mark's observations regarding the Fazel, et al. paper…but I have to say that I disagree with the idea that there are no 'viable alternatives' to RNR. Though the Good Lives Model may not have the strong empirical grounding of RNR, Tony Ward has been one of the most insightful critics of some aspects of RNR…and his work on GLM is being increasingly respected and implemented. For example, I chaired a session at the last ICPA Conference where GLM was being used as the underlying framework in Belgium for developing the regime in what they refer to as 'small detention houses.' I really don't see the point of pitting one paradigm against another…good evidence should be respected regardless of the particular paradigm it supports.

My own view is that we need 'model pluralism.' It's a notion I developed for a keynote I gave to the 5th World Congress on Probation in 2022 and for a piece that the editors of *Justice Trends* magazine

Eight Criticisms of the Recent Review of the Evidence Base for RNR Principles

Misunderstanding and misrepresentation of the RNR model	Missing key studies in the meta-analysis selection for the umbrella review
Inappropriate operationalization of RNR principles	Knowledge destruction
Author bias test not meeting current practice	Viable alternatives to RNR are not offered
Naïve focus of randomized control trials in corrections	An unsubstantiated conclusion to not introduce RNR into new jurisdictions

recently asked me to write on the state of Evidence-Based Practice. (Note: This article is also included in this edition of the *IACFP Bulletin*.)

Readers might also be interested in this new initiative from Ioan Durnescu in Romania (also well known in Europe for his Core Correctional Skills workshops). It's what he calls ReHub, a digital app that features interviews with experts in the field. Shadd Maruna's 50-some minute interview was perhaps the clearest and most compelling explanation of the desistance paradigm that I've ever heard."

Joel Dvoskin responded:

"In my opinion, the idea that these models are competitors might have relevance to academia, but to offenders and the people who manage, serve, teach, and train them, the things that matter are tactics, strategies, interventions, and skills — in other words, the things we do and say to people. If an intervention is helpful to someone who is desisting from crime, who cares whether it emerged from one academic model or another, or both, or no particular model at all?

I have nothing against these models. I find much to admire about almost all of them. What offends me is the idea that they are in competition with each other.

Frank's article on model pluralism is a thing of beauty. I enthusiastically support this concept and hope others will consider it thoughtfully."

Devon Polaschek identified similar issues and focused on the authors' interpretations:

"I doubt any expert in RNR was involved with the review process of this article.

In addition to the points made by Jim and Paul — particularly around NHST, odds ratios, etc. — and even whether this is really a legitimate umbrella review, I'd add that there are some disturbingly wonky conceptual angles too, though some of it is subtle.

Perhaps someone can tell me why I can't make sense of how Fazel has operationalised the principles. For instance, 'This aims to translate the risk principle into practice — that the risk level is judged according to criminogenic needs.' (p. 1) This seems a rather simplistic and reductionist view of the need principle. And in the same paragraph: If ethnic minorities have higher dropout rates from a particular treatment programme, instead of adapting it to be more engaging for them, the take is that we should instead make the programme shorter, so it will end before they have dropped out?

Regarding studies that examine the need principle empirically Fazel wrote: 'For need, studies were included if they assessed the predictive accuracy of one or more risk assessment tools for recidivism outcomes.' So, he sees validating the predictive accuracy of a third-generation dynamic risk instrument as a test of the need principle, without indicating anything about whether treatment of CNs leads to better outcomes than otherwise? And how would the Static-99 or PCL-R AUCs be a test of the need principle when they are static-factor based?

All the way through his interpretation is just a bit 'off', indicating to me not just intentional knowledge destruction, but that he really doesn't 'get' the model.

As for author 'bias' his approach here seems to be simply ad hominem. Other people test for author bias by comparing the 'biased' authors' work with that of those deemed not to be biased. That way we could have an empirically-based discussion about bias.

Finally, the understanding he conveys of RCTs is, to say the least, naïve, given how difficult it is to meet many of the assumptions that make them superior in any setting where double blinding is not possible, where selective attrition and contamination across conditions can and does occur, failing to create equivalence, and given findings suggesting the results of existing RCTs are not necessarily too far from the much more numerous high-quality, quasi-experimental designs in offending-related intervention evaluations.

As far as overall social context is concerned, I'd be interested to see him present a series of figures like he has in this paper, showing as they do almost exclusively positive effects, to a cancer conference, and then to suggest that we stop implementing the treatment of said cancer until we 'know more.' That would immediately raise the important 'compared to what?'' question (i.e., what are the effects of returning to the status quo while we wait?)."

Beyond Implementing Evidence-Based Practice: Creating Rehabilitative Experience

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This article was originally published in Justice Trends *magazine (Edition #12) and is reprinted here with permission. It has been copyedited for error correction and style purposes only.*

In the last several decades, correctional services around the world have marched steadily towards greater acceptance of evidence-based practice (EBP). The pessimism of "nothing works" has been pretty much abandoned and most correctional jurisdictions would claim that they are at least trying to implement EBP. Of course, there are continuing challenges in some regions of the world where resources are stretched to meet even very basic needs (PRI, 2023). Yet even in some of these parts of the world, we see serious attempts to embrace EBP (Nafuka & Kake, 2015).

Much of what we now accept as EBP flows from an elaboration of the risk-need-responsivity (RNR) paradigm, a well-researched framework that has guided the design of rehabilitative efforts for the last 30 years. In simple terms, the model tells us that we should assess the right kinds of things (i.e., risk factors and criminogenic needs), do the right kinds of things to address these criminogenic factors (i.e., deliver well designed, mostly CBT-type interventions), do those things with the right people (i.e., the higher risk), and do those things in the right way (i.e., engagingly so that individuals will respond).

Undeniably, the RNR paradigm has helped corrections become more structured, organized, and focused in attempting to reduce reoffending. At the same time, however, the success we've had in implementing EBPs, either in the prison context or in the community with individuals under supervision, can at best be given a mixed score card. We know that correctional agencies face significant challenges when trying to provide "rehabilitation" in environments or under circumstances that often act to mitigate the impact of their efforts. In many ways, the influence of regime factors in prisons and some modes or styles of supervision in the community can easily block or undo the influence of our EBPs. There is considerable evidence, for example, that the experience of imprisonment can actually increase the likelihood of re-offending (Loeffler & Nagin, 2022), as can the experience of community supervision (McNeill, 2018). Correctional agencies may be able to point to various EBPs they have introduced, but the package of tools and practices they have implemented may still have failed to create an overall "rehabilitative" experience.

Efforts have been made to describe the experience of "correctional control" we impose on individuals (e.g., Crewe, 2011 and his metaphors of depth, weight and tightness), but identifying the precise mechanisms at play that allow some individuals to become more pro-social while in prison or during the course of their community sentence remains very difficult to do (Crewe & Ievins, 2020; Maier & Ricciardelli, 2022; Maruna & Lebel, 2012; Mears et al., 2015). The overriding and still unanswered puzzle is: "how can we run a prison or manage a community sentence as a process of "'assisted desistance'" (De Vel-Palumbo et al., 2023; Villeneuve et al., 2021), where how we treat individuals and respond to their issues and concerns leads to a positive lived experience that can help them choose to rebuild their lives. Evolving our understanding of EBPs entails going beyond their formulaic application (e.g., assess, prescribe, intervene). It should compel us to consider all of the possible 'mechanisms of influence' that can encourage and support desistance (e.g., not just interventions but social-interpersonal factors, activities, environmental features, family engagement, etc.).

Over the last several decades, probation in many parts of the world has moved steadily (even if unwillingly) towards a risk-focused, surveillance approach that has generally made probation less effective (Porporino, 2023). Probation leaders and scholars are now calling for a shift that would see probation move instead towards its original intent of giving disadvantaged and disaffected individuals a chance to reframe their lives (i.e., "advise, befriend and assist"). A new advocacy group of probation leaders in the US has summarized that aspiration nicely: *"…we call for probation and parole to be substantially downsized, less punitive, and more hopeful, equitable and restorative."*[1] Similarly, in arguing for how we can make the prison experience more rehabilitative, the focus is now increasingly on how to go about creating 'rehabilitative cultures' rather than just introducing rehabilitative practices. The late Dr. Ruth Mann, a highly respected UK prison scholar and practitioner, describes this kind of culture as *"not necessarily the same thing as a happy culture, and certainly not a soft culture. It is more than the prison's social culture; it includes the prison's 'philosophy and fitness for purpose in relation to reducing reoffending'"* (Mann 2019). Mann describes seven key features of rehabilitative cultures, including the overarching importance of "rehabilitative leadership" to ensure that those features are well developed and sustained (see Diagram #1).

And so all this brings us to "how do we get there… how do we make our methods of 'correctional control' (i.e., prison and probation/parole) not just effective at controlling (to serve public safety) but also effective in nudging and supporting individuals towards desistance (which also serves public safety)?" What are some of the central issues that need to be dealt with?
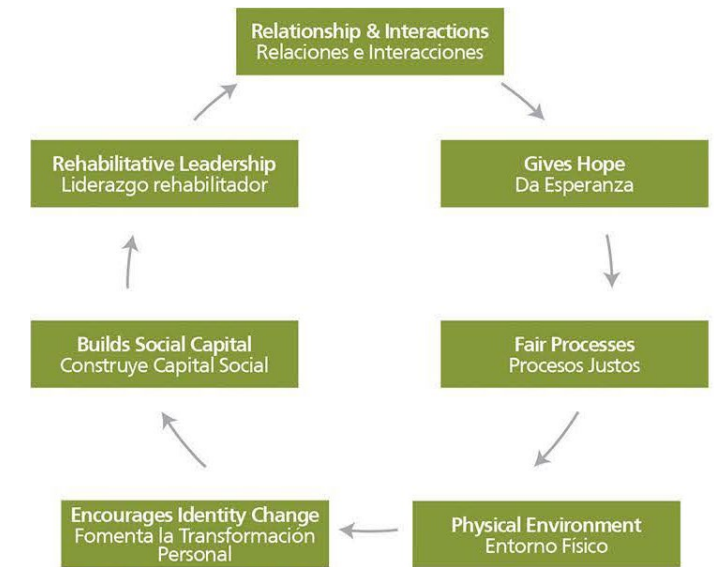

Diagram 1: Features of rehabilitative culture, according to Mann (2019).

Rising to first in importance, in my view, is that corrections needs to take better care of its staff if we want those staff in turn to adopt a more caring and supportive ethos. Evidence shows convincingly that both community and institutional corrections staff can fall easily into compassion fatigue, feeling overextended, exhausted, unappreciated, and unnecessarily burdened and confused by the heavily monitored managerialist and accountability cultures we've created (Norman & Ricciardelli, 2022). There are serious consequences for mental and emotional well-being and there is evidence that the longer the staff tenure in the job, the worse it gets. Even in Canada, where our staffing ratios are more reasonable, rates of reported mental health concerns have been shown to be worrisomely high for both community corrections staff and those working in custody settings (Ricciardelli et al., 2019).

Correctional work has become a career path that may no longer be seen as especially rewarding for individuals with any semblance of human-service orientation. It may attract instead individuals with a punitive bent. Attending to staff well-being and morale has become a critical

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1. See https://www.exitprobationparole.org/

issue in the correctional world and we need to start making serious effort in responding to the emotional toll of working in our field…understanding and rooting out its causes and giving this work the respect it deserves as a demanding, multi-layered, multi-tasking human-service avocation, not just a job to cope with! Incidentally, I believe this applies whether we are talking about the probation or parole officer in the community, the social worker or psychologist working in our prisons, or the teacher, shop instructor, nurse, case manager, or prison officer. In a true EBP world, they should all be committed to the same mission of helping to turn around the disengaged and disaffected.

Part of giving correctional work the respect it deserves entails giving staff a meaningful say in how we manage and change the nature of their work. It shouldn't be at all surprising that front-line staff will naturally interpret and modify policy and practice in their own "real world" according to their own personal values and assumptions. We need to learn how to manage the fact that many of our current EBPs can be easily misapplied, superficially applied, or even counter-productively applied. The elements may be there but the substance is often missing. For example:

→ Risk/Needs Assessments may be completed, but are only perfunctorily and not used motivationally to engage individuals; are not used appropriately for referrals; or are often getting overridden, especially for lower risk cases (where these assessments are actually most accurate).

→ Confirmatory bias can enter easily into correctional work where staff will tend to select and weigh information that confirms their particular views of risk, and with misperception of causality leading to simplistic solutions for managing risk.

→ Assessment that is not carefully attuned and calibrated to the social/cultural context can perpetuate bias and disadvantage instead of correcting it.

→ Limited available programs and services can become a "catch-all"…often used to punish non-compliance rather than addressing a real need.

→ Program delivery can fall into becoming lackadaisical and uninspiring without significant facilitator skills.

→ Case planning can evolve into being neither collaborative nor especially rich in substance or focus or linked with assessment.

→ Since paperwork is what is typically monitored…a "CYA" mentality prevails instead of a focus on quality of relationships; interactions end up occurring mostly around procedural issues, rule enforcement, paperwork completion and data entry.

→ Practice can become easily 'routinised', habitual and bureaucratic.

→ Practice paralysis can easily emerge where even well-trained staff lose faith in the relevance of EBP for the defiant, resistant, or indifferent individual who needs a "short leash"…and so staff revert quickly to a directive, authoritarian style to regain control.

Now of course organizations will often collude in letting this lack of stick-to-itiveness to EBPs persist; through unsound policies and procedures, poor oversight and supervision of staff, lack of quality assurance for critical decision making, and an unhelpful value base with a tendency towards over-precaution and blame, etc. (Viglione, 2019). But another underpinning culprit in my view is how we have bounded and oversimplified our core

"Attending to staff well-being and morale has become a critical issue in the correctional world and we need to start making serious effort in responding to the emotional toll of working in our field…understanding and rooting out its causes and giving this work the respect it deserves as a demanding, multi-layered, multi-tasking human-service avocation, not just a job to cope with!"

concept of **risk**. There is a prevailing delusion in our field that because we can predict risk of reoffending to some degree better than chance, we therefore understand risk. In reality, assessing risk, and understanding what can elevate or mitigate risk for a given individual, is a continuously complex process. It requires ongoing observation and **good judgment** that is balanced, reasoned, unbiased, remains well informed of subtle change in circumstances, and can integrate multiple, probabilistic, and potentially conflicting cues to arrive at an understanding of the person at a given moment in time. A desistance-focused perspective also needs to consider aspirations, obstacles (including needs not directly "criminogenic"), motivation, and protective factors that can help people choose not to offend, understand how all of these elements might work together and interact, and the extent of their protective quality.

There is no simple formula that can "fix" individuals so that risk is reduced (Porporino, 2010). It depends on helping individuals unravel, and finding different ways of dealing with, a complex web of factors that can underpin risk. One of the key problems in our approach to introducing EBPs in my view is that we have turned our staff in many ways into technicians, asking them to accept the results of the tools we've instructed them to use, oversimplifying analysis of individual risk as captured by a limited and fairly vaguely defined set of risk factors (and more recently by asking them to accept the results of increasingly sophisticated AI algorithms even though no one really knows how they work). If we want our staff to truly embrace EBP then I would argue we need to focus instead on creating a culture of curiosity and commitment to continuous improvement in how they

can conceptualize and contextualize risk, and how they can then share that understanding with individuals under their care to support disentangling their personal and particular ways out of risk (Creavin et al., 2022). Applying EBP, in essence, has to become what correctional professionals themselves define as occupational professionalism, not just what the agency asks them to do.

I would argue as well that we need to go beyond training staff in core competencies and skills and work more deliberately in attracting and developing a workforce with the attitudes and values that can coalesce rather than keep colliding with a desistance-supportive ethos. Training staff to add structure and focus can make a difference, but in the end it's the ability of staff to develop and sustain a **therapeutic correctional relationship** with individuals that will matter most…what Sarah Lewis (2016) in the UK has narrowed in as encompassing: acceptance, respect, support, empathy, and belief. Adroitness in enabling and sustaining a positive relational climate, both in prisons and in the community, is at the core of effective practice. Importantly, I believe, is the fact that these relational and dispositional qualities of individuals can perhaps be developed and refined to a degree, but they are not easily **trainable** if they're not there. If we want to imbue corrections with a different ethos of care and support, then we need to find ways to recruit more of the people who can do it. Incidentally, there is evidence that staff with high levels of these personal, relational qualities can have considerable impact on reoffending, as much if not more than structured interventions (Raynor et al., 2014).
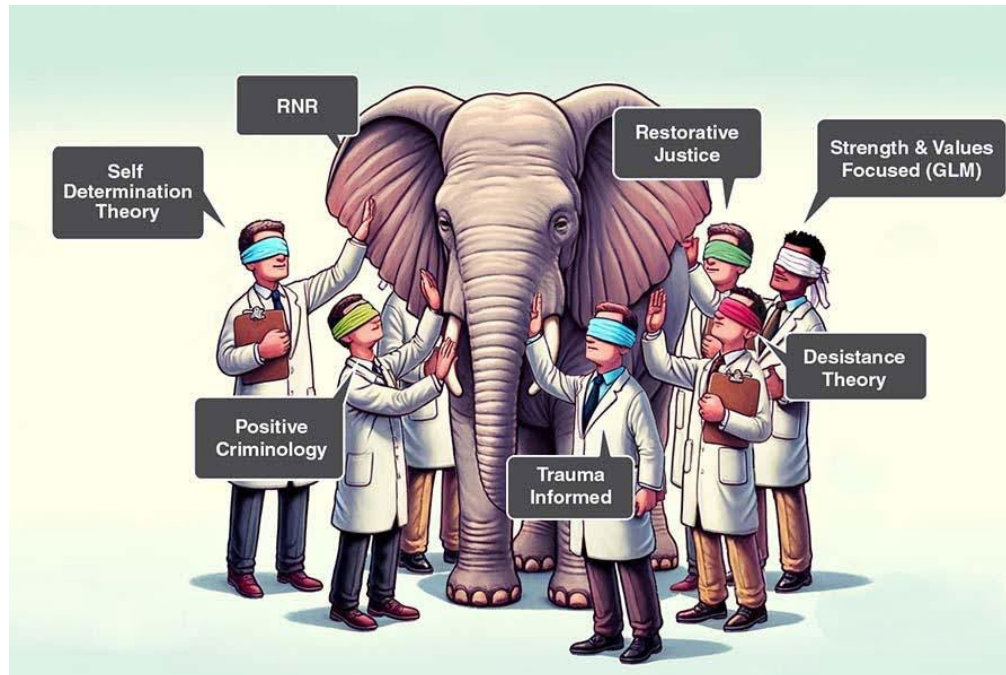
Offending and the Parable of the Blind Men and the Elephant — Illustration by JUSTICE TRENDS according to information provided by the author.

I'm certainly not suggesting that we shouldn't pursue efforts to structure practice through training, but we have to accept that staff will be typically resistant to change they didn't ask for; implementation will be difficult and usually strain organizational capacity to monitor and correct; staff will invariably differ in how well they can learn new skills or become committed to applying them; change in how staff begin relating with offenders may emerge but unfortunately often doesn't last; and there will always be some drift back to preferred ways when the new ways are perceived as not working. Rapid transformation isn't possible. Welcoming staff in co-designing incremental evidence-informed change may be more successful, but what will ultimately buttress the development of a stronger rehabilitative ethos is the quality of our staff, with the attitudes, values, beliefs, and interpersonal styles that suit correctional work.

And that brings me to my last point: the importance of giving both our line staff and our managers and leaders a much more nuanced, integrated, and less confined (restricted) theoretical understanding of desistance from offending. When we cut to the chase, our work in corrections is about helping people to **change** and **grow** within a social context where they previously had difficulty adjusting and adapting. In my view, to do that means that we should embrace and apply all that we know about the human change process, not just what we might have learned from one perspective. In "the Parable of the Blind Men and the Elephant," each of the blind men is concluding something different because they are touching only one part of the elephant. Similarly, in our struggle to understand offending, if we use only one theoretical perspective, we will miss seeing the entire picture.

Each practice framework I show as one part of the elephant has its own particular focus and features but there really is no need to see these frameworks as working in competition. Integration means that a one-size-fits-all approach is resisted, and in its place, **model pluralism** is adopted to enable change to happen, and to understand what might initiate it, direct it, sustain it, and finally consolidate it. To quickly illustrate what I mean, **RNR** certainly offers us a straightforward and

compelling explanation of what key dynamic risk factors need to change, but it doesn't really give us much specificity or clarity about the "how" of change. **Self-Determination Theory** is considered foundational in psychology in explaining what underlies motivation to change, where a sense of competence, autonomy, and relatedness is both what fuels the change process and then supports persistence. This is fully consistent with the principles of **Positive Criminology** that suggest we should focus more on what may be emotionally uplifting for individuals rather than deflating. There is evidence, for example, that the influence of criminogenic risk begins to diminish with the emergence of positive emotions like optimism, hope, self-efficacy, and psychological flexibility (Woldgabreal et al., 2016). Strength and values-oriented paradigms like the **Good Lives Model (GLM)** similarly emphasize agency and a collaborative relationship with the individual that can encourage them to strive towards primary goals that give all of us some sense of life satisfaction and well-being. **Desistance** theory reminds us that the path to finding reasons for change is individualized, identity change is not a linear process, some setbacks are inevitable, and trying to force change is counterproductive. **Restorative Justice** argues for moral reparation as a key factor in supporting desistance, what the desistance paradigm refers to as satisfying the need for redemption. And finally, there is now growing recognition of what's been referred to as our **residual obligation** in corrections to address inequalities, marginalization, and the impact of trauma, all of which entails a particularly specialized, knowledge-informed practice framework.

Practice frameworks operate as conceptual maps offering distinct but complementary perspectives (Ward & McDonald, 2022). Each has its own set of core values and principles, and multiple frameworks may apply for any given individual in addressing the complexities and challenges of their particular way out of crime. But at the end of the day, how we pursue EBP should mean that all of our processes, procedures, policies, programs,

community links, agency values, and modes of interaction with individuals should be consistent with all that we know about the human change process…and about desistance from offending in particular.

Correctional practice should of course be grounded in evidence, but it should also rely on sense and sensitivity; sense in how we incorporate a broad range of evidence into the design and delivery of our services to offenders, and sensitivity in how we go about nudging change gradually but steadily rather than forcing and shaping it within time-limited interventions (Porporino, 2010). This isn't easy to do for either correctional agencies or individual staff, but good correctional work isn't easy to do and if we try to make it easier it won't work.

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IACFP International News, Research, and Resources for Jul/Aug 2024

CHERYLN TOWNSEND / AUG 2024

We've compiled top highlights from recent research, policy, and practice resources across the world for our latest IACFP International News summary. Our topics for July and August, 2024 include IACFP updates; recent research, policy, and practice; and upcoming conferences.

1 IACFP Updates

IACFP 2024 Distinguished Scholar is Professor Mark Halsey

Professor Mark Halsey from Flinders University in Australia will deliver the IACFP 2024 Distinguished Scholar Lecture at the upcoming ICPA annual conference in Singapore. The theme of the conference is "Enabling Desistance: Beyond Recidivism." Professor Halsey has done significant research on desistance, including the causes and consequences of intergenerational incarceration, and his lecture promises to be enlightening and thought provoking for conference attendees. We are excited to learn more about the strength-based desistance approach described in his most recent work.

IACFP 2024 Student Research Award

Last month IACFP announced one of the winners of the 2024 Student Research Award! This $2500 grant to support continuing education in criminal justice and psychology disciplines has been decided by the IACFP board after carefully considering the merits of all submitted research proposals.

Cooper Sparks is a third-year doctoral student in Southern Illinois University's Clinical Psychology Ph.D. program. Her research interests include justice-involved persons with mental illness, justice-involved women, and correctional mental health treatment. After completing her graduate work, Cooper hopes to continue both her research and clinical work to provide effective services and further our understanding of justice-involved populations. We're excited to recognize Cooper's research and wish her great success in her career ahead!

2 Research

Criminological Highlights

Criminological Highlights is published several times each year by the University of Toronto Criminology Department. Each issue looks at eight compelling criminological questions, offering both summaries and conclusions based on reviews of new research. The periodical scans approximately 120 journals to identify interesting criminological studies, and IACFP members may find this a welcome support for keeping up with recent thoughts and discussion within the field. The most recent issue of *Criminological Highlights* (Volume 21, No. 4 – June 2024) addresses the following questions:

1. How do police networks affect police misconduct?
2. Do Black Americans want to reduce police funding?

The response to question #3 regarding prison design and how it can affect prisoner self-harm, violent tendencies, and overall well-being may be particularly interesting to readers of the IACFP Bulletin:

> "…the rate of occurrences of prisoner self-harm, prisoner-on-prisoner violence and violence toward prison staff — was negatively correlated with the amount of vegetated landcover within the prison walls even when other factors were controlled statistically. Greenspace 'exercises a significant and dampening effect on both self-harm and violence…supporting the notion that greenspace is important for well-being in the prison system of England & Wales' (p. 310)."

The presence of greenspace in prisons is not a luxury; it's a critical component and may be a matter of life and death.

Council of Europe Annual Penal Statistics-SPACE II – 2023

The 2023 SPACE II Report, written by Marcelo F. Aebi and Lorena Molnar on behalf of the Council for Penological Co-operation (PC-CP) of the Council of Europe, was updated on 15 June 2024. The report can be accessed here. It provides data on non-custodial sanctions and measures in 41 out of 51 probation agencies in the Council of Europe's 46 Member States. It also provides information on the individuals under supervision as well as about the staff employed by probation agencies. Researchers should find this helpful in comparing data from different agencies and terms of supervision that are provided before and after custodial sanctions. The notes to each of the tables provide context and additional information.

3 Practice

Justice Trends Magazine, Edition #12

Justice Trends magazine, *Edition #12*, is available . This edition covers several topics, including leading transformation, modernising correctional services, change complexity, and the crucial role of partnerships. It is an excellent collection of interviews of heads of service from around the world as well as of experts who are informing future practice through their research and experience, articles, and current projects.

BC Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services: The UNITE Project – Disrupting Stigma for Better Care

The BC Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services provides a wealth of resources that readers may find helpful. One of those is the UNITE Project, which explores the journey of individuals and their families as they experience both the societal stigma and personal shame of mental illness. The videos that have been produced — such as the "Stories of Stigma" and

"Family Partner" series — are creative, informative, and impactful. The resources for understanding and facilitating dialogue will be helpful to communities and organizations that seek to learn, understand, and improve the healthcare we provide to individuals. This may be applicable not only within the community but also within secure settings.
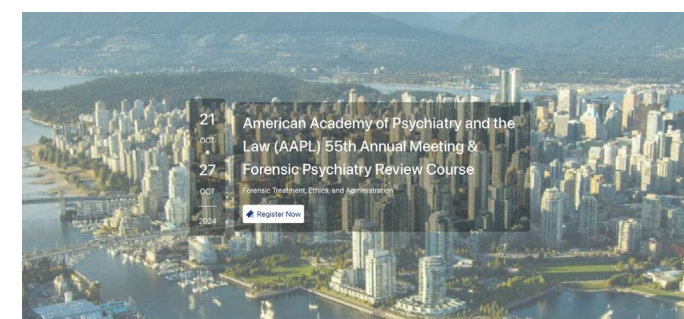
More information can be found here.

4 Conferences

ICPA 2024 Annual Conference, September 1-6, 2024

Make plans now to attend the ICPA Annual Conference in Singapore, and to participate in the special 20th Anniversary events for the Yellow Ribbon Project.

More information can be found here.

American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law (AAPL) 55th Annual Meeting, October 24-27, 2024

The AAPL 55th Annual Meeting is the largest annual gathering for Forensic Psychiatrists, offering practitioners the opportunity to network and learn about advances in the field. The 2024 theme for the 55th Annual Meeting is "Forensic Treatment, Ethics, and Administration," and will be taking place in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

More information on the AAPL annual meeting can be found here.

American Society of Criminology (ASC) Annual Meeting, November 13-16, 2024

This year's annual meeting of the ASC will be held in San Francisco, CA, and features the theme "Criminological Research and Education Matters: People, Policy, and Practice in Tumultuous Times." Hear from some of the foremost scholars and practitioners in the field as they deliver new ideas and research. Early-bird registration rates are available until October 1st!

More information on the ASC annual meeting can be found here.

Workshop on Mental Health in Probation
26-27 November 2024
Venue: *Centre for Legal Studies and Specialized Training*
Carrer de Pau Claris, 158, 08009 Barcelona (Catalonia – Spain)

Confederation of European Probation Workshop on Mental Health in Probation, November 26-27, 2024

This two-day event in Barcelona, Spain, includes a welcome reception for attendees followed by a rigorous day of presentations that include the Council of Europe's whitepaper on mental health in prison and probation systems, discussions of gender-responsive approaches in criminal justice settings, and more.

Click here to register.

International Association for Correctional and Forensic Psychology (IACFP)

Promoting evidence-based and practitioner-informed practices and research to support correctional and forensic psychologists and other helping professionals who work with justice-involved individuals since 1954.

Learn more about IACFP or become a member at **www.myiacfp.org**.