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The Long-Term Impacts of Probation Supervision: Is Impact Detectable After 15 Years?

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Outline

- Headlines news from earlier sweeps of interviewing.
- Brief case studies of what PRs said about supervision. Link this to other life changes.
- Try to peer inside the ‘black box’ of supervision.
- Draw some wider lessons.



Tracking Progress On/After Probation

- 199 'daily traffic' probationers recruited into the study (aged 17-35) Autumn '97-Spring '98.
- They and their POs interviewed at the start of their orders, six months later and at end of order (1997-1999).
- Quarter sample follow-up (2003-2004).
- 5th sweep fieldwork (2010-2011). 103 int's.
- 1,154 interviews (611 probationers, 543 POs).



What did PRs say during/soon after probation supervision? (SWPs1-3)

- By and large they felt that they had not got a lot from their supervision.
- 1/3 said that their POs had done 'little' or 'nothing' to assist them in tackling an obstacle to desistance. (Farrall, 2002: 92).
- PO/PR: <50% of obstacles were resolved
- Desistance was 'all my own work'.
- Generally dismissive of probation. All rather depressing.



What did PRs say during/soon after probation supervision? (SWPs1-3)

- Looking at data from POs generated similar conclusions:
- For family/employment obstacles it appeared that POs felt that the PRs had taken the lead (and were more successful than POs, Farrall, 2002: 161, Table 9.2a).
- Yet: when POs did get involved, success rates went up (Table 9.2b; 58% to 72%).



What did PRs say during/soon after probation supervision? (SWPs1-3)

- So disappointing findings ...
- ... but some glimmers of hope in that POs did appear to be able to enhance chances of change.
- In that they could assist PRs to successfully tackle an obstacle to desistance.



What did PRs say during/soon after probation supervision? (SWPs4)

- Now 2003-4 (so 5yrs on).
- Overall picture still rather depressing; few PRs suggested that they had taken much from probation (Farrall & Calverley, 2006).
- But there were the first signs from some of the PRs that they *had* taken something from probation.



What did PRs say during/soon after probation supervision? (SWPs1-3)

- **Anthony:** Started 1yr order for violence.
- Typical: male, aged in late 20s/early 30s, intermittent manual worker, drinking heavily, using 'soft' drugs + pills, poor educational attainment (but clearly bright).
- Got on well with PO. Order ended early in breach (failure to attend anger man' course). Drunken violence at weekends.



What did PRs say during/soon after probation supervision? (SWPs1-3)

- Continued to offend, but growing less frequent over time.
- Move away from town centre to suburbs also associated with reduction in episodes of drunken violence.
- ‘Settles down’ with new partner; ‘blended family’. Working on and off.



What did PRs say during/soon after probation supervision? (SWPs1-3)

“If I was in a club and I was pissed up I wouldn’t think ‘ummm, I’d better not get in a fight ‘cos I’m on probation and I don’t want to go to prison no more’. It wouldn’t enter my head.” Anthony, SWP2

“It [anger management] was a load of bollocks. You sit there with eight or nine other kiddies, just discussing stupid things, like I just said. Like stupid questions. Or like, they give you a form, you go there every week, they give you a form, you have to tick the box ‘how you feel today’ and all that kind of thing, ‘what’s wound you up that week’ and stuff like that. Stupid things really. Anthony, SWP3



What did PRs say during/soon after probation supervision? (SWP4)

“I wouldn’t say anything’s [that probation officer said] stuck with me but it chipped away if you know what I mean, it sort of chips away at you. [SF: Right]. They don’t stick in your head but occasionally you’ll get that little thought of ‘maybe I shouldn’t do this because I’ve...’. And maybe he told me about this or ... you know what I mean? It chips away at you I suppose”. Anthony, SWP4



What did PRs say during/soon after probation supervision? (SWP5)

“I suppose anger management did help a little bit when I got that through probation and that, cause I’d be seeing this stupid [PO], and she’d be telling me stuff I don’t really want to hear and then a couple of days later I’d just go and see [PO] and he’d say “how did anger management go” and we’d talk about anger management. So I suppose, and from that respect it makes you analyse what you’ve done, who you’ve done it to, how you can change it. It gives you them tools, it tells you the tools, whether you want to bring them onboard is up to you”. Anthony, SWP5



What did PRs say during/soon after probation supervision? (SWPs1-5)

- Summarising:
- Probation appeared to offer little whilst on probation.
- Started using insights from probation after having been on probation.
- So ‘impact’ of probation sometime after probation and related to other life changes too.



Exploring this Quantitatively

- **Sweeps 2-5 we asked:**

Did you learn anything as a result of being on probation?

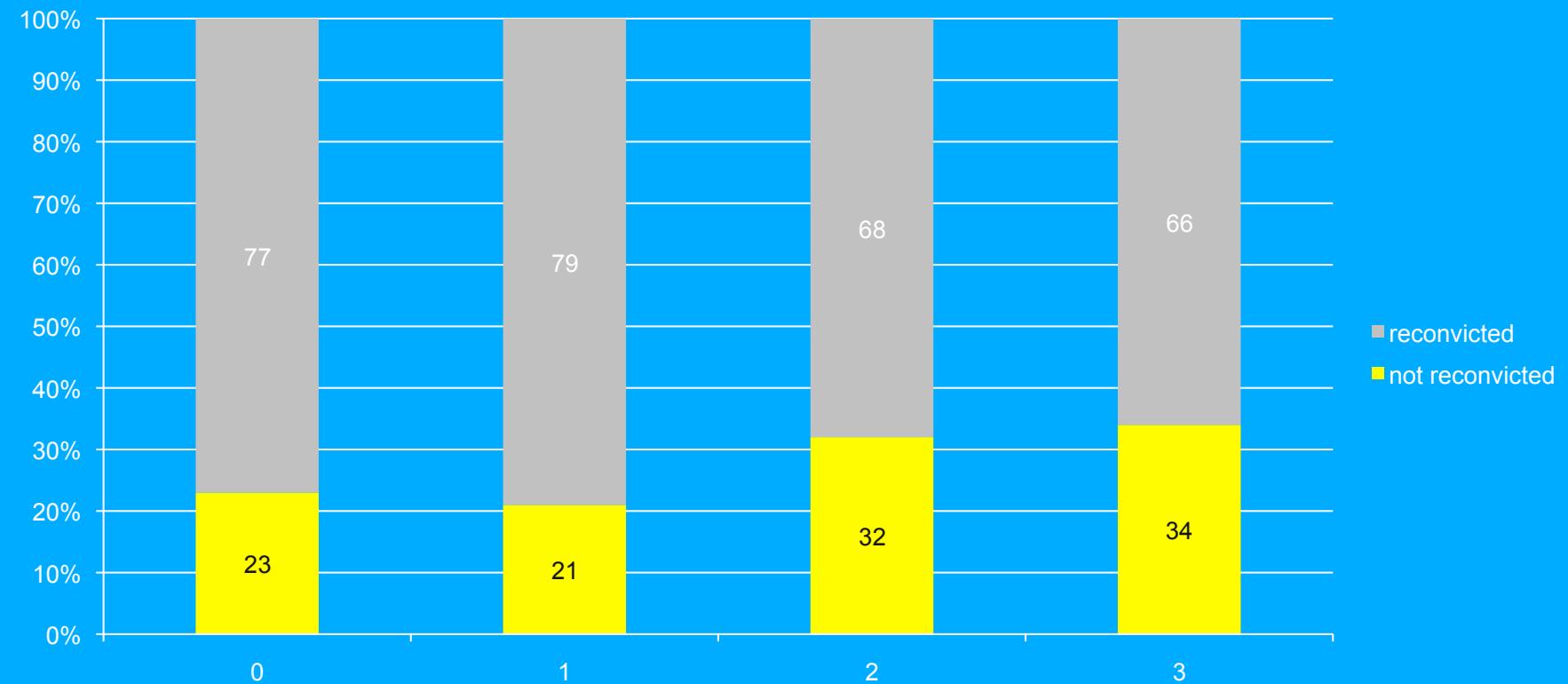
Did PO say/do anything that will help you stay out of trouble in the future?

Did you get helpful advice from your Officer?

Each Q scores 1 for a positive answer, 0 for a negative. Summed this creates a scale of probation impact (0-3).

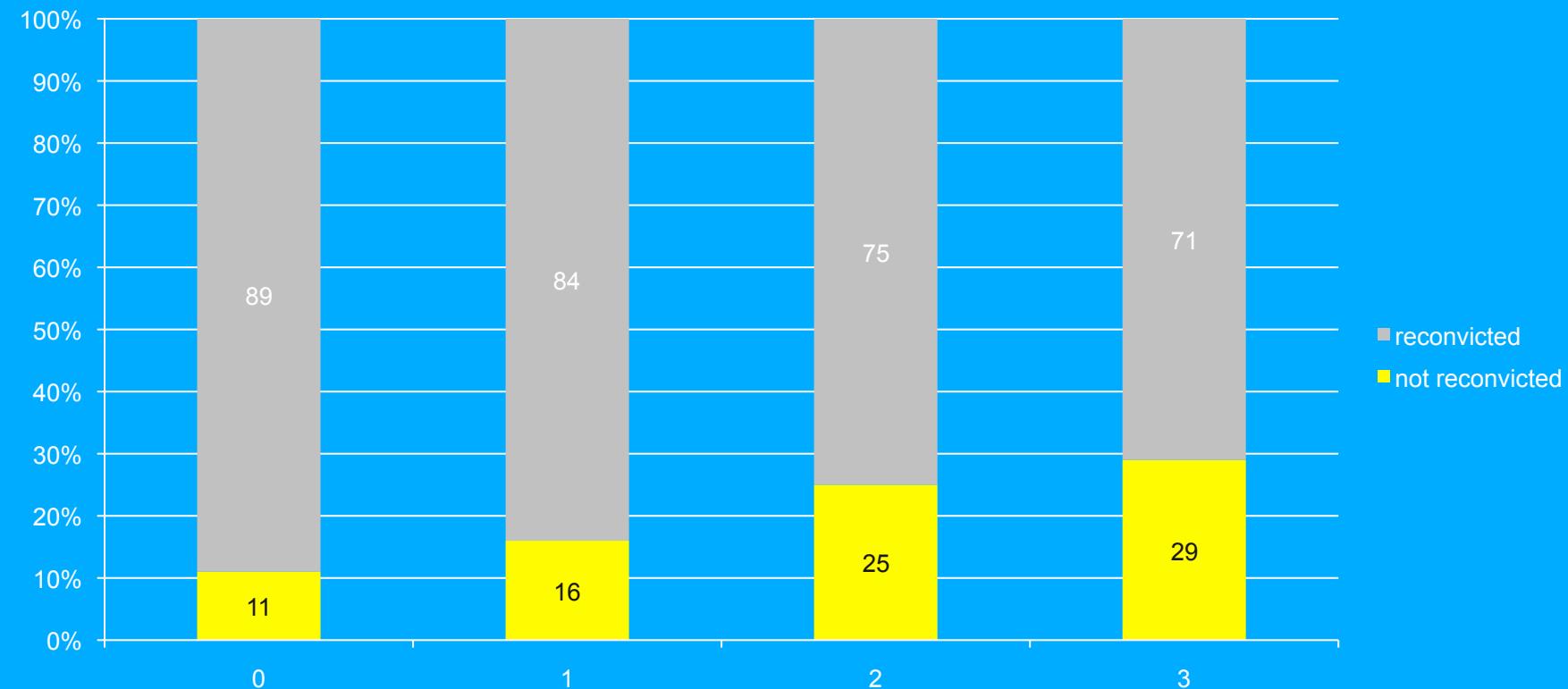


Percentage Reconvicted to April 2010 by Prob. Impact Scale (SWP2) [n=119]





Percentage Reconvicted to April 2010 by Prob. Impact Scale (SWP5) [n = 97]





Evidence of Impact?

- Some evidence but not over-whelming:
- (None of this reaches statistical significance).
- Percentage point difference between 0 and 3 *is* interesting:
 - at SWP2 = 11 (34-23).
 - at SWP5 = 18 (29-11).
- Suggests that over time differences (in terms of reconvictions) start to emerge.



Opening the ‘Black Box’

- How is impact produced over time?
- Can we relate staying out of trouble back to probation supervision?
- What does not appear to help?
- What lessons about ‘assisted desistance’ can we extract?
- Case studies from SWP5 ...



Case 011: drink-related offending

All data from SWP5

BH: Did PO say or do anything to try and help you stay out of trouble?

011: Yeah, well she – she told – told me what she was – for the best but the alcohol, she just says, “You’ve got to can it, it’s obvious that’s the root, that is the be all and end all of what’s happening, if that,” you know, she put everything I’d done, “Were you drunk when you did this, were you drunk when you did that?” “yes” to every single thing, everything, there wasn’t even one that it wasn’t, it was, it was literally – and so we worked on that ...



Case 011: drink-related offending

All data from SWP5

BH: I guess what I was wondering, sort of did you – you know, did you learn anything while you were on probation with PO?

011: Yes, yeah I did because also we – we went across what it [alcohol] does to your body for one thing, and what units are and all that lot, you know, and how many and – and so on and so forth. So that side of things, yeah, I didn't learn – and I was quite surprised about how much of a poison it is really.



Case 011: drink-related offending

011: But it's hard to – it's like leading a horse to water, you can't make it drink type thing, although I did learn that I wasn't fully committed to stop so my fault, nobody else's, you know.

.....

BH: Did she give you any advice on managing the drinking?

011: Yeah, I had a scale of what I drank, I had to write down what I drunk, how I felt, blah blah blah, which I lied about, I'll admit now [both laugh], yeah, but again she can only do so much, I mean I only saw her, what an hour or 2 every week, so that's not really going to solve much. It was good to have somebody to talk to though about it.



Case 011: drink-related offending

011: It – when I started to see my son growing up I thought, I don't want him to know – I mean he's – chances are he'll find out about what I've done, what I've been – been doing, drinking wise and everything else, he'll hear it off, I don't know, off his mam probably because, you know [laughs], I'm not her best – best person in the world at the minute, but fair enough he'll find out, he'll – it's up to him how he deals with it. I'm – I won't deny things, I won't lie to him, but I thought I've got a little man here and, you know, that's a big eye-opener.

Son born 2006; last conviction 2008 (but some trouble into 2009); reports walking away from fights in 2010.



059: injecting user

- 059 injecting since early 1995 (on and off). Stopped 2004-08. Went back to injecting late 2008 (family death). Not used since early 2009.

SWP5 interview:

059: I was talking not long back about the criminal offences and a lot of the things I did, I didn't actually do it out of being calculated, I just did it because I did it, it was just spur of the moment, dependant on the particular scenario and who I was with, and I just did and I never really thought about the consequences of it and all the ins and outs, I just got on and did it. And in that sense I've changed a lot, because I do think a lot more about the consequences of things and how it affects other people. And **funnily enough, the root of that started on probation.**



059: injecting user

SWP5 interview:

059: And it kind of planted a seed, and it took a few years before I really started to act on it, but I think yeah, probation probably started all that off. Perspective and seeing things from a different angle, instead of thinking from my point of view or thinking it from somebody else's.

PO SWP2 interview:

Has anything that you've said or done been helpful in keeping [059] out of trouble?

“I doubt it. I don't think other than reminding him that he is on probation we achieved anything else. Sometimes when you say something that sticks in the mind [it] comes out only a long time after the event. Sometimes people remind you of something you said 5yrs ago”.



Mode of Delivery as Important as Content

“I was seeing one [a counselor], the one I was seeing was great and I thought “Ah, she, she’s alright her” but then [PO] stared sending me to like fucking stupid classes and, and I can’t do things like that me, I can’t, I’m alright talking to someone but I can’t sit there in a classroom kinda thing and stand up and like that’s how it come about with the thing first. I couldn’t …, I told him I said “I cannot stand in a room” I said “I couldn’t do in school” I said, you know what I mean, I said “it’s like you’re sending me back to school” I said “and I can’t do things like that, you can’t send me to stupid classes.” Anger this and anger that …”

John (SWP4)



Mode of Delivery as Important as Content

“And I breached it cause I wouldn’t go on this Think First scheme. [...] She’d give you little cards with emotions wrote on them and you had to act out the emotion, and this kid couldn’t read it. And she made him feel proper stupid, and he walked out. And then I got one and I turned round, put it on the desk and I said “I’m not doing it”. And she said “Why?”, I said “What the fuck has us standing up, looking like dickheads, acting emotions out, got to do with why I commit crime?”. I said “Me doing this isn’t making me think about why I commit crime”, I said “you want to know why we all commit crime, ask us”. And she went “Well that’s coming later”, I said “Well I’m not acting fuck all out”, I said “I’m not doing this”, I said “You’re making me look stupid”. And then later on you come out with, why do you commit crime, and the majority of them said, “cause we need the money”. And that’s what they said, they said “Its simple as...”, [one guy] said, “I was fucked”, he said “I fucked up in school”, he said “I got kicked out of school, not been able to get a job so I turned to crime.”.”

John (SWP5)



Lessons

- How is impact produced over time?
- Explaining very basic things to PRs.
- Talking things through with PRs.
- The interaction of the above with naturally occurring changes in social/personal lives.



Lessons

- Can we relate staying out of trouble back to probation supervision?
- I would say so; numerous references to supervision as a ‘seed’/‘starting point’ for change. Quant’ data also suggests impact.
- Advice given (even if NOT used at the time of ‘delivery’) IS used as circumstances change. The advice is ‘stored’/drawn upon later.



Lessons

- What does not appear to help?
- Group programmes reminded some of past failures (at school).
- Unclear to PRs why they were doing some things.
- Learnt things, but again needed other changes in wider life for what was imparted to ‘make sense’.



Lessons

- What lessons about ‘assisted desistance’ can we extract?
- People are future orientated; but for some probation felt too concerned with the past:



Mickey (SWP3)

“Something to do with self progression. Something to show people what they are capable of doing. I thought that that was what [PO] should be about. It’s finding people’s abilities and nourishing and making them work for those things. Not very consistent with going back on what they have done wrong and trying to work out why – ‘cause it’s all going around on what’s *happened* – what you’ve already been punished for – why not go forward into something ... For instance, you might be good at writing - push that forward, progress that, rather than saying ‘Well look, why did you kick that bloke’s head in? Do you think we should go back into anger management courses?’ when all you want to be is a writer. Does that make any sense to you at all? [SF: Yeah, yeah. To sum it up, you’re saying you should look forwards not back]. Yeah. I know that you do have to look back to a certain extent to make sure that you don’t end up like that [again]. The whole order seems to be about going back and back and back. There doesn’t seem to be much ‘forward’”.

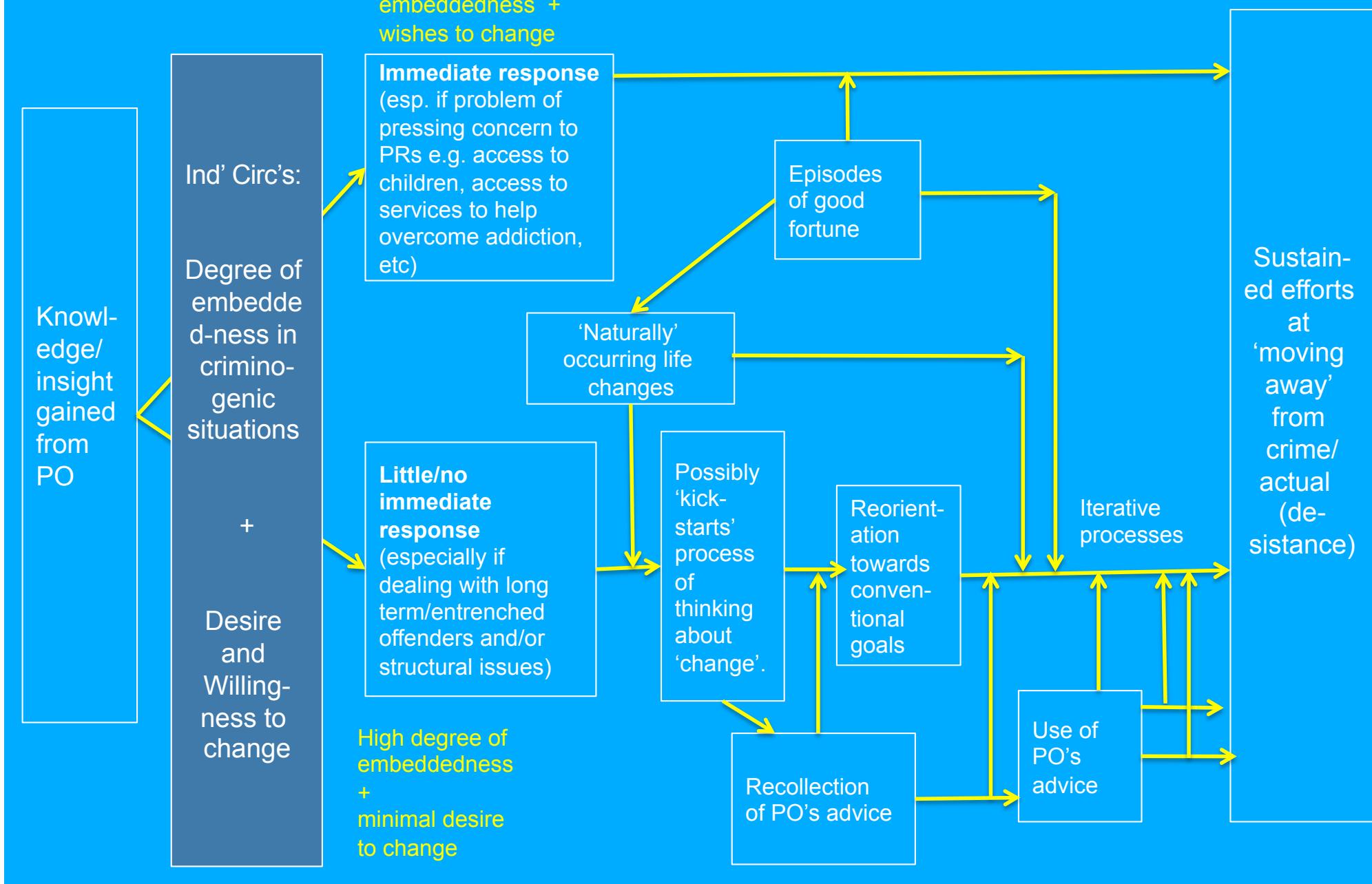


Lessons

- What lessons about ‘assisted desistance’ can we extract?
- At this stage I’d like to propose a model of how OMs assist in the production of desistance.
- Tentative; would appreciate your insights.



Possible Model of Impact of Probation Supervision





Implications?

- Need longer assessment periods (>2yrs. 10yrs?).
- Need to accept periods of low/no impact.
- Need to recognise that other social/personal factors play a mediating role in probation work.
- More (and more rigorously designed) qual' data.
- Need to accept that some drivers to change operate very mundanely.
- ‘User Surveys’ may contain flaws as they don’t address long term impacts.



Discovering Desistance (ESRC funded film)

- Film about how people stop offending.
- Made with desisters, probation staff.
- Stakeholder Seminars to watch/discuss film in Sheffield, Glasgow, Belfast. Apr-May.
- Please do visit the blog:

<http://blogs.iriss.org.uk/discoveringdesistance>