

# Trust and Trauma Disclosure: A Mixed-method Analysis of Men's and Women's Decisions to Disclose Trauma to Probation and Parole Agents

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## **The Importance of Client Disclosure of Trauma to Probation and Parole Agents**

Women and men entangled in the criminal legal system have a high prevalence of trauma, and research has documented the relationship between trauma and deviant behavior. Trauma disclosure is important in gaining support for trauma, facilitating posttraumatic growth, and improving one's well-being. Probation and parole agents have an opportunity to connect their clients with needed trauma-focused services.

## **The Research**

This study analyzed the trauma disclosure decisions of 135 individuals on felony probation and parole in Michigan. Available quantitative data was used to test models that include hypothesized predictors of 85 men and 50 women's trauma disclosure to the supervising agent. Qualitative analyses were conducted for interviews with 50 men and 29 women who also were part of the quantitative analyses, to develop an explanation of clients' trauma disclosure to agents, explore a range of potential influences on participants' disclosure decisions and the immediate outcomes of disclosure (e.g., agent response).

## **The Findings**

- Trust in an agent predicted trauma disclosure to an agent, but insignificant relationships between all other covariates and disclosure.
- Receipt of support to cope with trauma (from sources alternative to the agent) was connected to decisions to disclose trauma to agents or not.
- Barriers to disclosure included perceptions it would be inappropriate to disclose trauma or mental health information in the supervision context, distrust of the agent or the criminal legal system, discomfort divulging trauma to others, negative prior disclosure experiences, and feeling too overwhelmed by the harmful effects of trauma.
- Facilitators to disclosure included perceived trustworthiness of the agent, belief that agent should know about the trauma, and for a few disclosers, feeling pressured, required, or coerced to disclose trauma to the agent.
- Agents responded to trauma disclosure by providing emotional support, informational support, or tangible support; unsupportive responses included dismissive, unhelpful, and rarely, punitive responses.

## **Implications**

Agents can encourage disclosure of trauma for the purposes of providing support and referrals by establishing relationships in which people on probation and parole trust them. They can encourage disclosure by providing emotional, informational and tangible support for coping with trauma and can make it clear that disclosure would be appropriate in the supervisory relationship.

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