

Re-entry Mediation: Testing the Impact of Choice of Mediation Participants, Topics Discussed, and Agreement on Recidivism

This document summarizes the research “*Evaluating Treatment Heterogeneity in the Community Mediation Maryland Re-Entry Program*” by Lisa Pierotte, University of Maryland, College Park

Background

Previous evaluations show an overall reduction in recidivism for releasees who participate in the Community Mediation Maryland (CMM) Re-entry Mediation program. The program design allows for incarcerated individuals to select the person with whom they want to mediate, and the participants to jointly determine what topics to discuss. While participants are able to reach a written agreement in mediation, the mediators allow participants to take as much time as needed and sometimes no written agreement is reached before the incarcerated person is released.

This evaluation compared recidivism outcomes for program participants that are related to differences within specific components of the mediation process. The analysis explored the risk of recidivism and time to re-arrest after release for program participants given the following circumstances:

1. The mediation co-participant is reported to be a spouse, committed partner, or romantic partner who may or may not live with the releasee;
2. The mediation co-participant is reported to be a parent, sibling, child, spouse, aunt, uncle, or grandparent;
3. Participants address “emotional support” topics such as communication, friends, and relationships in mediation; and,
4. Participants reach a mediation agreement.

Is the relationship of the selected participant to the releasee related to recidivism?

The analysis did not find a statistically significant difference between measures of recidivism for incarcerated individuals who had a spouse or partner as their co-participant and those who mediated with someone other than a spouse or partner co-participant. The analysis also did not find a statistically significant difference between measures of recidivism for incarcerated individuals who had a parent, sibling, child, spouse, aunt, uncle, or grandparent as their co-participant and those who had some other relation to the co-participant.

- This suggests that the improvements in recidivism related to participation in the re-entry mediation program are associated with the process rather than specific relationships.
- While the CMM program may facilitate pro-social relationships, its success does not rely on the availability of specific social ties.
- Further analysis showed no statistically significant difference in recidivism given specific details around the spouse/partner relationship, like living together and level of commitment in the relationship.

Does the type of topic selected for discussion by participant affect recidivism outcomes?

The analysis did not find a statistically significant difference between measures of recidivism for incarcerated individuals who focused on “emotional support” topics like communication, friends, and

relationships and those who focused on “instrumental support” topics like employment, housing, education, finances, and transportation.

- For releasees who participate in the CMM program, the effectiveness of re-entry mediation does not rely on the types of topics the participants choose to address.
- This finding supports the self-determination approach, in which participants select which topics to address.
- Further analysis showed no statistically significant difference in recidivism outcomes regardless of whether topics around children are categorized as emotional support topics or instrumental support topics.

Is reaching a mediation agreement between participants related to recidivism?

The analysis did not find a statistically significant difference between measures of recidivism for incarcerated individuals who reached a mediation agreement and those who did not reach a mediation agreement.

- This demonstrates that recidivism outcomes for releasees are equally positive for releasees who reach mediation agreements and those who were not able to reach an agreement before release.
- Agreements can give inmates more certainty around expectations of life after release but are not shown to have any bearing on the effectiveness of the CMM program.

Conclusions

Overall, this evaluation bolsters the self-determination standard at the heart of the CMM Re-entry Mediation program. Participants select with whom they want to mediate and what topics they discuss. Furthermore, mediators facilitate a process at a pace determined by the needs of the participants. Sometimes they are able to reach an agreement at this pace, before the incarcerated person is released, and other times they are not. This research suggests that following the pace of participants rather than rushing to agreement is also appropriate.

The findings generally suggest that it is inappropriate to make changes to the participant-driven design (e.g. guiding participants toward certain co-participants, topics, or agreements). Looking at the results in the context of prior evaluations—which find positive impacts on recidivism outcomes—indicates that the re-entry mediation works well for releasees, regardless of the relationship to the selected co-participant, topics, or reaching agreement. Moving forward, it would be powerful to focus on understanding how the mediation process itself is impactful for inmates re-entering the community and how an incarcerated individual’s self-determination around their own mediation experience may affect their agency to avoid re-offense after release.