

Evaluating Treatment Heterogeneity in the Community Mediation Maryland Re-Entry Program – Summary of Thesis Findings

Lisa M. Pierotte is a doctoral candidate at the University of Maryland and as part of completing her Master's of Arts, she performed an evaluation for the Community Mediation Maryland (CMM) Prison Re-Entry Mediation program. This summary provides the results of her thesis, which evaluated potential treatment heterogeneity (i.e., whether the impact of treatment varies) in the CMM program.

The data used in this project were collected by Choice Research Associates and used in the first of two prior evaluations authored by Shawn M. Flower. This thesis uses quasi-experimental methods to determine if success—in terms of recidivism—is maintained across subjects (n=166) regardless of their differing experiences with the re-entry mediation process.

The idea behind investigating treatment heterogeneity in the CMM is due to its innovative and flexible design. Essentially, those that participate in this program have the ability to tailor the mediation services to their own needs, by choosing the individuals they attend mediation with, the topics discussed, and when they decide to discontinue services (e.g., before or after resolving an issue). The prior evaluations of the CMM program demonstrate its beneficial influence on the subjects' recidivism, among other outcomes. However, it remained undetermined if selection into different mediation formats pays important dividends with regard to successful re-entry (e.g., Does it matter whom subjects choose to mediate with? Is the program more effective when subjects focus on certain topics?).

Building off of the work of the prior investigations, this study tested if the varied nature of the treatment (i.e., participation in the program) differentially affected subjects. The results of this study suggest no difference in the treatment effect based on the selection of outside participants, topic focus (i.e., emotional support) during mediation sessions, or reaching agreement before discontinuing services. Considered within the context of the prior evaluations, the null results reflect that the CMM is a generally effective program and its' participant-driven design works well for those involved. Essentially, the program works well for the subjects, and their decisions regarding the mediation services seem to be well suited for their individual needs.

More specific information is detailed below:

- Four potential types of treatment heterogeneity were tested, all of which showed null results in the propensity score and Cox proportional hazard models; For example:
 - o The hypothesis stating that subjects who select a spouse/partner as a mediation participant will have a lower probability of re-arrest was unsupported;
 - o In addition, there was no evidence to support that selecting a family member as mediation participant led to a lower probability of re-arrest;
 - o Thus, it appears that CMM subjects make good decisions about which pro-social participants matter to their return home;
- Furthermore, the supplemental analyses found no evidence of treatment heterogeneity for the varied nature of the program;

- For instance, there was no demonstrable difference in the recidivism outcomes for the individuals who mediated with a romantic partner versus those that did not (e.g., those choosing a friend or sponsor);
- Overall, the consistent lack of evidence for treatment heterogeneity suggests that subjects know how to best use the services provided by the CMM to address their specific needs and this program's ability to be flexible/accommodating is likely crucial to the program's success.