

Understanding Juvenile Probation Officers

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network's Justice Consortium

The court system is a common entry point for youth who have experienced trauma, and probation is the most common court order for first-time juvenile offenders. The U.S. Office of Juvenile Justice Delinquency and Prevention refers to juvenile probation as the “work horse of the juvenile justice system.” Thus, it is crucial to support juvenile probation officers (JPOs) using sound trauma-informed practices.

To best support our JPOs, we need to understand what they already know about trauma, how we can best work with them, and what tools would be most useful to them.

Recently the National Child Traumatic Stress Network's Justice Consortium Juvenile Probation Officer Subcommittee developed a survey and delivered it to more than 1700 JPOs nationwide. There were a number of interesting and useful findings, including the following:

- Reducing recidivism and improving youth functioning were the most frequently endorsed goals of probation as reported by JPOs, reflecting that JPOs view their roles as both protecting the public and addressing the needs of the youth.
- Though a majority of officers indicated having received formal training in trauma through a workshop and other informal means, many respondents indicated wanting more training on specific trauma topics, including identifying trauma-related needs, survival strategies of

traumatized youth, the impact of trauma on youth, developing an effective case plan, and how to engage in self-care.

- Self-care was identified as an important training element; about half of the sample identified one or more job stressors related to managing their caseloads.
- While more than half of the respondents indicated that their office routinely screens for trauma, fewer than 40% indicated that this screening occurs through a standard trauma screening tool. Instead, a variety of structured and unstructured methods are used to identify traumatic stress with youth on their caseloads.

Juvenile probation officers have widespread interest in understanding the impact of trauma on the youth they supervise. Those who work with children can support JPOs by helping them access information about trauma and youth in formats they use.

To read the full survey summary results, see: http://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/assets/pdfs/po_survey.pdf

About the Author

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network's Justice Consortium strives to work with judges, attorneys, probation officers, and other professionals in the family, dependency, and juvenile justice court systems, and with staff of juvenile correctional facilities and programs, to improve assessment practices, create more trauma-informed court environments, inform decision making, and help create more trauma-informed treatment and placement options for children, adolescents, and their caregivers. Contact: Learn more at <http://nctsn.org>.