

Women Parolees' Perception of Treatment by Police and Courts

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Research Question

How do women in trouble with the law -- including the probation and parole population that we have been studying -- perceive their treatment by police and court officials? What treatment leaves them feeling they have been treated fairly or unfairly? These are important questions. Research has affirmed that the perception of fair treatment is likely to result in a sense that the law and its agents are legitimate and fair

Our Sample

Women on parole who have had extensive experience with police and courts, because most of them have been apprehended and taken to court multiple times. Thus we focused on 92 female parolees to understand their perceptions of treatment they received by police and judges and the reasons for such perceptions.

Women who reported fair treatment by Police (74%)

Most women felt they had been treated fairly by the police at some point. (Some described unfair treatment during another encounter.) The primary reasons they felt treatment was fair were –

- Police respect
 - “they were very professional; they were nothing but gentlemen and matter of fact.”
- Follow protocol
 - “they did everything by the book.”
- Not being abusive
 - “there wasn’t any abuse or anything . . . they weren’t negative or, you know, nasty or anything.”

Women who reported unfair treatment by Police (33%)

A third of the women described unfair treatment by police in encounters with the police for two reasons.

- Rights were violated
 - “[police went] into my house illegally, without a search warrant.”
- Verbal/physical assault
 - “[the officers] treated [me] really rude, and I found it very hard to digest.”

Women who reported fair treatment by Judges (73%)

Most women also believed they had been treated fairly by judges.

- Received an appropriate prison sentence
 - “[the judge] stayed within the [sentencing] guidelines and I felt I got the time for what I did.”
- Administered an intermediate sanction
 - “[the judge] should have sent me to prison [but] he decided to give me a shot in a treatment center.”
- Respectful nature of judge

Women who reported unfair treatment by Judges (27%)

Some did describe their reasons for considering the way judges treated them as unfair.

- Over-sentenced
 - “[my judge] was the worst judge we had. He sent everybody to prison, nobody got jail time, nobody, period.”
- Disrespectful nature of judge
 - “[the judge] just didn’t care to hear what I had to say [and he said] ‘I’m not dealing with you today’”
 - “[the judge] was not a condemning, super-critical man [but] . . . actually like really compassionate.”

Conclusion

Criminal justice personnel, including police, judges, and probation and parole agents, may reduce women's hostility towards the system and obtain compliance by emphasizing procedural justice. For the women in this research, procedural justice was signified when they felt their rights were upheld, they were treated with respect and equitably, and they had the opportunity to tell their side of the story.