

UROP Paper

Grand Challenges Program

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Research Site: Hennepin County Medical Center/University of Minnesota

Topic: Probation, Scoping Review

There is little information about the relationship between health and probation. Probation is the release of an individual from detention, subject to a period of supervision in the community where a set of conditions must be met. Although Minnesota has a low incarceration rate, especially compared to other states in the United States, Minnesota has a very large population of people on probation. In 2018 there were roughly 95,000 Minnesotans serving a probation sentence, compared to the 21,000 Minnesotans serving criminal sentences in detention facilities. In 2018, there were 2.3 million people serving sentences in detention facilities across the United States, while 4.5 million adults were serving probation sentences. Another way of looking at this is that 6.7 million people in the United States in 2018 were under correctional control on any given day. Although there is a substantial body of work that examines the relationship between health and incarceration, there is scant evidence about the relationship between probation and health.

In the beginning stages of developing a research question, we had numerous meetings. Dr. Winkelman had me write an abstract for our research before we got started. The question we aimed to solve was changed and tweaked multiple times before we chose our final question. This process allowed me to understand how rigorous and complicated research is. It took about 4 weeks alone to fine tune the abstract. To answer the research question, we ultimately decided to conduct a scoping review on the topic of probation and health.

One of our initial research ideas was to investigate how race influences probation sentencing related to substance use. African Americans face much stricter sentencing than those of their white counterparts for charges related to marijuana use. We discussed potentially identifying

whether this was a common theme for all drugs, including opioids, which is more often used by whites. Probation sentencing of parents was another variable we discussed investigating. Are parents more likely to receive probation sentencing than non-parents for similar charges? Among parents on probation, how do their health profiles compare to adults on probation who are not parents? After discussing a variety of potential research questions, we realized that the area of probation and health was filled with question marks, and unopened doors. We decided that what was really needed was a more global account of the state of the field so that we could document what was known and where key gaps in knowledge existed.

To generate an overview of the state of research focused on probation and health, we decided to conduct a scoping review. Scoping reviews help researchers get a “lay of the land”. Research that has focused on the health of individuals on probation spans a variety of disciplines, including sociology, public health, medicine, law, and psychology. Because of this diverse approach to this topic, we concluded a robust scoping review of multiple databases available through University Libraries would be an appropriate approach. We aim to identify what is currently known about probation and the health of people on probation, as well as identify where there are large gaps in the current understanding of health needs for individuals on probation and health’s influence on probation outcomes, as well as the impact of probation on health outcomes. Our goal for performing this scoping review is to identify critical findings from previous research pertaining to probation and health. We want to see what health topics have major gaps in the understanding of probation so we can further down the line look to answer some of these health gaps associated with probation. We are not looking to solve a specific research question with our scoping review, but rather look for all articles related to health and probation, broadly.

Dr. Winkelman and I collaborated with Rebecca Shlafer, an assistant professor in the department of pediatrics, and with health sciences librarian Caitlin Bakker for this project. We met frequently throughout the semester. Meeting discussions were primarily focused on how to best code research articles. While working with the librarian I was able to learn how to use a browser-based, metadata-driven EDC (Electronic Data Capture) software called REDCap.

During the beginning stages of familiarizing myself with the software I experienced a lot of trial and error. Our research team read the same articles together and discussed how we coded the articles and why we coded them the way we did. During these meetings we discussed different ways to fine tune our use of REDCap. We later narrowed down parameters we deemed most useful to optimize our ability to find gaps of research on probation.

We utilized REDCap as the process of conducting a scoping review. As mentioned above there is a large lack of knowledge pertaining to probation in American society. REDCap allowed us to code research articles into a categorized fashion. We concluded to categorize articles by study type, and by key findings like physical health, mental health, infectious diseases, substance use, etc.. These codings will further down the line will allow us to conduct studies where key health gaps lie pertaining to probation.

Dr. Winkelman and I also have conducted multiple meetings during this semester about graduate school. I was unaware about all the possibilities there are with pursuing higher education in public health. He explained the timetable for taking the GRE exam, the key differences between MPH and PhDs, and their role in the research world, as well as helping me take my interests into account when looking for different public health graduate school programs. Through our meetings, I now understand that when looking towards my future now is the time for me to think about what I want to do in the future, and now I need to work back from that. I want to be a researcher in the public health field. I need to think about how people become qualified for that, what university programs will lead me to this future, what job, or internship experiences will allow me to gain the necessary experiences to accomplish my goal. Overall Dr. Winkelman's talks have allowed me to further understand the importance of self-assessing, and he has caused me to possess a more purposeful approach to career choices.

Reflecting on my experience with the project I learned how to become a much more analytical thinker. I've learned that there is almost always some way methods can be tweaked for further optimization. I learned a lot about scoping reviews, and the amount of hard work that goes into a

research project like this. This was an invaluable experience, and Dr. Winkelman was a wonderful resource to help me set my projectury for future study plans.