



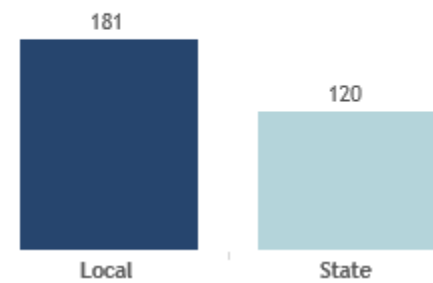
Key Findings from a National Survey on Home and Field Visits Policies and Practices

In 2014, Abt Associates, in partnership with the American Probation and Parole Association (APPA), began working on a grant from the National Institute of Justice to evaluate the effectiveness of home and field visits in community supervision. To better understand and document variation in home and field visit policies in the United States, a web-based survey was disseminated to various departments of community correction, parole authorities, and parallel probation agencies across the country. The survey asked questions about supervision contact standard policies, firearms policy and practices, peace officer status of community supervision officers, and whether community supervision officers conduct home and field visits with escorts from other law enforcement agencies. This brief focuses on key findings from the survey and implications of these findings on policy and practice.

Description of Survey Sample

All 50 states are represented in the sample and, in total, the survey received 301 responses. Of those, 181 were local-level agencies, while 120 were state-level agencies. Agencies can differ in organization of their supervised populations in each state. To capture a complete picture of variations in agency organization, the survey included responses from state-level, as well as regional- or district-level executives.

Do the respondents work in state or local government?

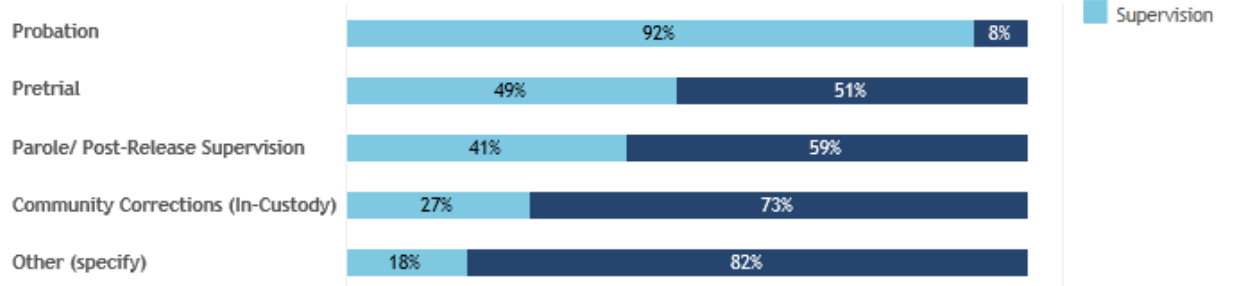


Key Findings

With respect to supervision standards, 70% of agencies reported having contact standards that determine whether a supervisee receives a home or field visit. Most agencies indicated a handful of factors as very important in determining whether a home or field visit is conducted: risk level of the supervisee (81%), intensive supervision contact standards (72%), judicially mandated conditions (65%), and a need for residential verification and evaluation (61%).

Where home and field visits occur was another data interest point. The study found that 95% of agencies conduct visits at home, 89% percent at place of employment, 82% jail or prison, and 81% at a shelter or group residence.

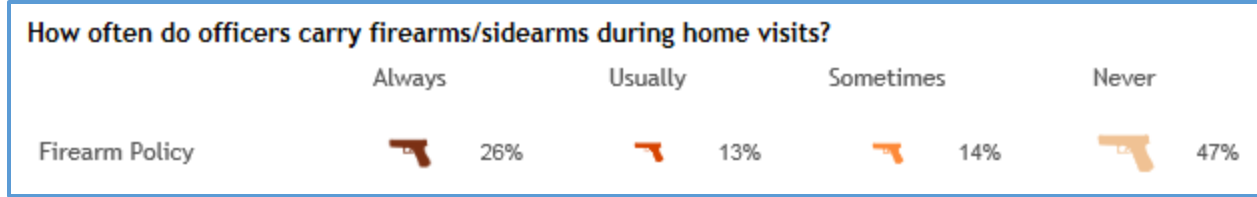
Type of Offenders Supervised



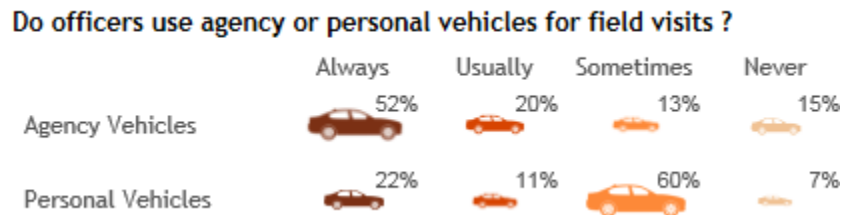
When executing a home or field visit it is important that officers have adequate training. The survey found that 90% of agencies train officers in awareness of surroundings and exit alternatives. A majority (59%) of agencies also indicated having trained officers in crisis management.

Home or field visits may also include accompaniment from a partnering law enforcement agency. The survey found that 38% of agencies report usually conducting home and field visits in pairs of teams, while 79% of agencies reported that officers sometimes conduct home and field visits with a law enforcement escort.

Personal protection was also asked about on the survey. Almost half of the agencies reported that officers never carry firearms during home and field visits. However, 91% of agencies reported that officers usually carry non-lethal weaponry. About one-third (34%) of agencies reported that officers never wear body armor and about another third (31%) of agencies reported that officers always wear body armor.



When conducting home and field visits, agencies reported that 93% of officers use their personal vehicles at least some of the time.



Implications

The survey found that 94% of agencies conduct home and field visits. This finding is not surprising, as home and field visits have been a part of community supervision practices from the outset. Given this level of frequency, it is also not surprising that many respondents indicated officers receive training from their respective agencies to prepare them for conducting home and field visits. From this survey, it seems most agencies address important topics, like awareness of surroundings and exit alternatives, self-defense, securing back up assistance, and mental illness recognition, as part of the training. However, not all agencies provide such trainings to their officers and not all trainings cover the same topics. Based on these findings, there appears to be a need for a centralized training curriculum involving a focus on the various aspects of home and field visits.

In addition, contact standards vary across agencies. It seems imperative for agencies to use the results of actuarial risk assessments to guide their home visitation practices with offenders. The use of such assessments can help create more uniformity for agencies in how often certain offenders are seen at their homes.

One concern taken from the survey was that only 38% of agencies conduct home and field visits in pairs of teams. Increasing home and field visits with the accompaniment of a fellow probation or parole officer reduces the risk of a safety incident. The “buddy system” in a home or field visit can help the probation and parole officers monitor and help each other if a dangerous situation arises. The data also show that almost all home and field visits are done with personal vehicles. This is not an ideal situation for officers. It exposes personal information to a potentially dangerous individual. Unfortunately, both are rooted in budgetary challenges for agencies.

The data also conclude only 6% of agencies have a policy regarding body armor, though body armor is always worn on visits among 31% of agencies. These data, on top of the use of personal vehicles and lack of paired officers on home and field visits, emphasizes how budgetary issues have impacted field practices in probation and parole. Agencies need to have the resources to be able to increase training, equipment, and staff.

Conclusion

The national survey findings show that most jurisdictions have several requirements and safety regulations for probation and parole officers regarding home and field visits. Most agencies use a risk level in determining a visit, have some form of training in surroundings and exit alternatives or crisis management, and almost all officers carry some form of non-lethal protection. However, to improve officer safety to the maximum, all jurisdictions need to have training procedures, contact standards, and effective equipment to execute safe field visits.

Please visit <http://www.appa-net.org/Home-Visit-Study/> for an interactive comprehensive data visualization of the findings. Contact Holly Swan, Project Director, at holly_swan@abtassoc.com for more information about the study.