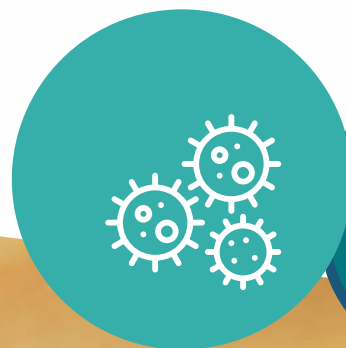


PERSPECTIVES

THE JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN PROBATION AND PAROLE ASSOCIATION

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VOLUME 44, NUMBER 4



THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON COMMUNITY CORRECTIONS

president's message

This issue of Perspectives is our final issue for the year. 2020 is a year that has gone by so quickly, but it has been a painful year for many of us. For me, it's a year I would like to forget. The coronavirus has affected all of us, and all our businesses and organizations, in ways we never expected.

It has greatly affected the field of Community Justice. We've all developed different ways of doing business to adapt to the "new normal." Populations in juvenile detention centers and adult jails were drastically reduced to deal with the virus. We have had to learn to deal with staff shortages due to the pandemic. Some agencies went to a "work from home" status, while others did a split work week. Still, many officers and staff have been expected to work their normal shifts as if nothing was even going on. This caused burnout in an already over-worked profession.

I have talked to many leaders of criminal justice agencies and we all agree that we're expected to provide a safe work environment for our staff. However, we have no control over how safe staff are in the community. Many of us have been directly affected by this virus, and some of us have lost loved ones or close friends. The wearing of masks and social distancing used to be a controversial issue but, for many of us, it is now just a way of life.

To be honest, I'm old school and I had never really used Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Go-to-Meeting, or other virtual meeting sites, but now I'm used to it. So, getting back to face-to-face meetings may be a little difficult. As I sit here today, I'm looking forward to a Thanksgiving and being with loved ones, but I wonder how you eat turkey with a mask on?

I wish everyone a safe Holiday Season. Let's hope 2021 is a safe and prosperous year. I look forward to getting back to some type of normalcy and hope to see many of you at the APPA annual training institute in Boston in the summer of 2021.



TIM HARDY
PRESIDENT

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tim D. Hardy". The signature is stylized with a cursive-like flow.

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from the executive director

As we draw close to the end of the year, we also approach the one-year anniversary of the emergence of the “novel” coronavirus which has changed our lives so dramatically. I’m sure that, like me, many of you have been reflecting on what your life was like when we were all unmasked, free to gather in groups, and free to shake hands. You may currently be dealing with increased frustration and a sense of loss due to the limitations we all face during this holiday season. I hope you don’t have the added stress of lost income and financial insecurity in your immediate family. I especially hope that you don’t have the deeper, sharper sorrow of having lost a family member or friend.

This Perspectives issue, focusing on the impact of COVID-19 on community supervision, is certainly timely and of great interest. We include interviews with those working in the field as well as data collected by numerous researchers. Both types of articles allow greater understanding of the new procedures implemented by community corrections agencies when faced with the urgent need to prevent COVID-19 from spreading among personnel and clients. By reading them, you will get a sense of the marked and widespread changes wrought in our “workplace.”



VERONICA CUNNINGHAM
APPA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

As community supervision professionals we can stand tall and take credit for our ability to adapt. Challenge issued; challenge met. Who would have imagined the extent to which front line staff could telecommute and yet keep in contact with those on their caseloads? Using phone calls, texts, and emails has been a boon, and agencies have particularly credited videoconferencing for enabling them to compensate for the strict limitations on face-to-face home and office visits. Some agencies had rarely or never used videoconferencing before and had to scramble to utilize it for both supervision and training.

As the authors point out, being forced to rapidly alter supervision strategies in the face of the pandemic has been a complicated process, and we must focus on some serious challenges that remain. How can those under supervision be held accountable when there is more limited access to courts and less ability to process violations? How can we still detect and treat substance use when drug testing is difficult and treatment options are reduced? And how will we deal with the potential of major funding shortfalls?

On the other hand, it is gratifying to learn about positive outcomes, such as reducing the reporting barriers faced by individuals on supervision. Some of the procedural changes of 2020, as well as the use of videoconferencing and other technology, may produce greater efficiencies and constructive long-term changes in the way we do our work.

What comes next? The coming vaccines are often referred to as the light at the end of the tunnel. However, we are still in the tunnel. We must continue to carry out our mission using our creativity and dedication, trying to not get burned out or overwhelmed. The pandemic will hopefully wane within months in the face of renewed safety practices and vaccine administration. For now, I urge everyone to begin anew and re-commit to following the strictest of precautionary guidelines. Keep yourself and those around you safe!

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Veronica Cunningham".



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ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, SCHOOL OF
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The last nine months of 2020 have been characterized by terms like “unprecedented,” “trying times,” “new normal,” and “worst pandemic in a century.”¹ Just as everyone’s daily life has been upended in a myriad ways, COVID-19 has also critically disrupted the lives of community corrections clients and the professionals responsible for supervising them. In the face of this unique adversity, there have been countless stories of adaptability and dynamic responses that have made it possible to continue to provide for the clients in our care as well as support staff through these long months. In our final Perspectives issue of 2020, we present to you important research as well as testimony from people on the frontlines that may shed some light on the ways in which probation and parole agencies across the United States have pivoted in the face of this worldwide crisis.

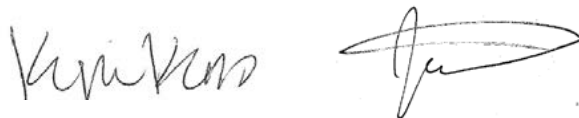
After conducting some of the first nationwide surveys of agencies regarding adaptation and resiliency in the face of COVID-19, Dr. Debra Koetzle, Dr. Craig Schwalbe, and Dr. Jill Viglione and her colleagues at the University of Central Florida present critical information about how community corrections has handled rapid shifts from in-person to remote supervision, altered responses to violations, and made crucial innovations in policy and technology. These studies are instructive for staff at every level who are coping with and responding to the ever-changing landscape of the pandemic.

¹ Faust et al. (2020). Comparison of Estimated Excess Deaths in New York City During the COVID-19 and 1918 Influenza Pandemics. *JAMA Netw Open*. 2020; 3(8):e2017527. doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2020.17527

Similarly, in a survey of frontline staff and administrators across adult and juvenile Texas county probation agencies, Dr. Kelli Martin and Dr. Zoe Hettler have gathered information on how officers have been impacted by COVID-19 changes and have adapted their practices to suit the needs of their clients in the face of ongoing challenges. They also discuss how administrators are approaching the financial shortfall presented by the economic downturn.

This issue of Perspectives also benefits from the expertise of two contributors who engaged in APPA's COVID-19 roundtable discussions. First, in an interview with Dr. Beth Skinner, the Director of the Iowa Department of Corrections, we discuss how shifts to remote supervision have resulted in innovations in telehealth and supervision practice, as well as reductions in technical revocations. In an interview with Alicia Hitt, a Juvenile Field Probation Officer in Harris County, Texas, the discussion centers on the realities of youth probation supervision in the face of school closures. We learn how Ms. Hitt and her colleagues have transformed virtual supervision into a space that helps young supervisees be more successful academically, comply with programs, and become more engaged in their communities. These interviews offer a glimpse behind the curtain to uncover the real work of probation and parole at this critical time.

We hope the realities, innovations, and resilience of community supervision staff demonstrated in this issue will resonate with you as we end this unconventional year and enter into 2021 with hope and optimism for the continued health, safety, and wellness of professionals and clients alike.



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Perspectives disseminates information to the American Probation and Parole Association's members on relevant policy and program issues and provides updates on activities of the Association. The membership represents adult and juvenile probation, parole, and community corrections agencies throughout the United States and abroad. Articles submitted for publication are screened by an editorial committee and, on occasion, selected reviewers, to determine acceptability based on relevance to the field of criminal justice, clarity of presentation, or research methodology. *Perspectives* does not reflect unsupported personal opinions. Articles must be emailed to perspectives@csg.org in accordance with the following deadlines:

Unless previously discussed with the editors, submissions should not exceed 12 typed pages, numbered consecutively, and double-spaced. All charts, graphs, tables, and photographs must be of reproduction quality. Optional titles may be submitted and selected after review with the editors.

All submissions must be in English and in American Psychological Association (APA) Style. Authors should provide a one-paragraph biography, along with contact information. Notes should be used only for clarification or substantive comments, and should appear at the end of the text. References to source documents should appear in the body of the text with the author's surname and the year of publication in parentheses, e.g., to (Mattson, 2015, p. 73). Alphabetize each reference at the end of the text using the following format:

Mattson, B. (2015). Technology supports decision making in health and justice. *Perspectives*, 39(4), 70-79.

Hanser, R. D. (2014). *Community corrections* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

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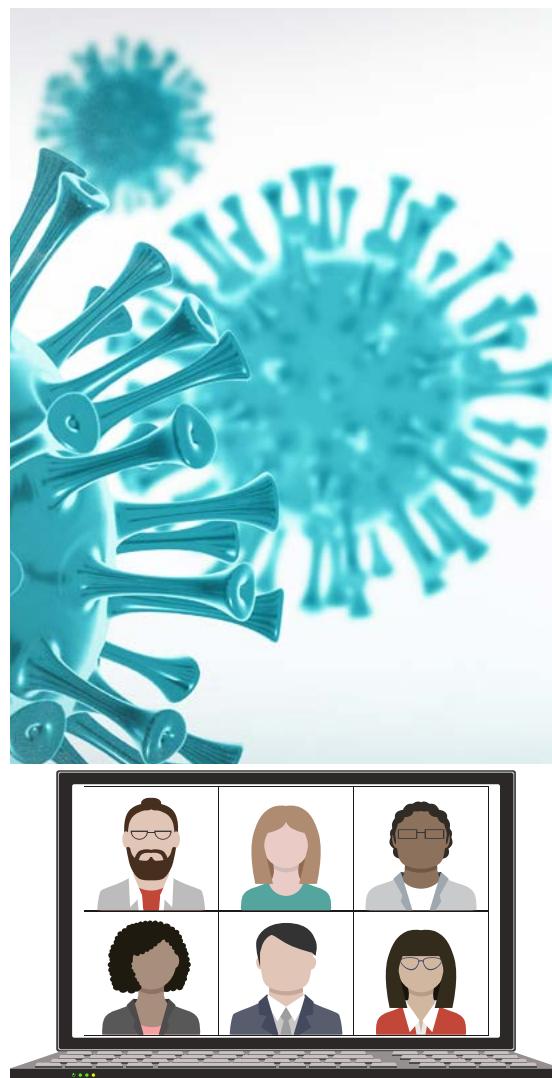
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PANDEMIC PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE AMONG COMMUNITY SUPERVISION AGENCIES

BY: HOLLY SWAN, PH.D., WALTER CAMPBELL, PH.D., NATHAN LOWE, PH.D.





THE IMPACT OF THE COVID - 19 PANDEMIC ON COMMUNITY CORRECTIONS



The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on community corrections—from policing to reentry—has been profound (Chapman, Irazola, & Swan, 2020). Appropriately, much of the focus in media and scholarly outlets has been on the impact of the pandemic on prisons and incarcerated populations (Akiyama, Spaulding, & Rich, 2020; Busanksy, 2020; Burki, 2020; Kinner, et al., 2020; Liebrezn, Bhugra, Buadze, & Schleifer, 2020; Nadel & Campbell, 2020; Yang & Thompson, 2020). However, the pandemic has also had direct impact on community supervision agencies and populations. Any changes at other points along the justice continuum will also directly or indirectly impact community supervision. In this paper, we discuss those impacts, how agencies have responded, and factors that have influenced agency responses.

The Impact of the Coronavirus Pandemic on Community Supervision

With the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, community supervision agencies had to rapidly adapt their practices to accommodate the widespread “stay-in-place” and social distancing directives from all levels of government. In essence, the “community” aspect of community supervision abruptly halted. In this context, across society and around the world, increased uptake and use of technology has been critical for conducting operations in all social sectors. However, the ability of community supervision agencies to adopt or scale technological solutions varies widely depending on capabilities within the agencies as well as the community within which they are operating.

While already strained community supervision agencies have to adapt to the pandemic, they are bearing the consequences of adaptations at other points along the

justice system continuum. For example, efforts by prisons and jails to reduce overcrowding, such as speeding up and increasing releases of individuals in their custody, shift the responsibility of oversight of those individuals to community supervision agencies (Nadel & Campbell, 2020). Many courts have also implemented limitations on the types and frequency of cases they will see to limit their own exposure to the virus and to minimize incarcerations (Chapman et al., 2020). Such changes may be reducing the number of people incarcerated, but individuals are being sentenced to community supervision instead. Similarly, in many jurisdictions, courts are suspending hearings for probation/parole technical violations. Changes to court procedures have limited the availability of such mechanisms for community supervision officers to use when maintaining public safety (Simmons, 2020; Nadel & Campbell, 2020). Likewise, some of the tools that community supervision officers have to promote rehabilitation among their supervisees (e.g., referrals to treatment or other social services) have been impacted by reductions in already limited capacity and capabilities among community treatment and service providers.

In addition to how the agency operates, social responses to the pandemic have disproportionate impacts on the community supervision population. For example, the state of the economy due to the pandemic further restricts the already limited ability of adults on community supervision to obtain employment (Betesh, 2020). When they do get jobs, they often face a disproportionate risk of infection given their higher prevalence of employment in jobs that have continued during the pandemic (e.g., manufacturing, janitorial, and food industries) (Lindquist et al., 2018). Social responses to the pandemic

have also produced changes in patterns of criminal activity, such as increases in domestic violence (Marbach, 2020), and heightened existing vulnerabilities among individuals who have or are susceptible to substance use disorder (Volkow, 2020). These changes have implications for the role and capacity of community supervision officers who manage domestic violence and other specialized cases within the strained community and agency contexts.

Community Supervision Agency Preparedness and Response

To understand how community supervision agencies across the country are responding to these impacts, the American Probation and Parole Association (APPA) developed a short survey that was administered to its membership through the APPA members portal on March 25, 2020. The survey asked how agencies have responded to the crisis, how prepared they were for the crisis, and the perceived effectiveness of their response. The survey closed on April 24, 2020. Staff at APPA compiled the collected survey results into an Excel file, de-identified the data, and sent the data to Abt for analysis.

Survey Data and Analytic Approach

A total of 339 individuals responded to the survey. To obtain accurate information related to agency preparedness and response, it was important to identify respondents from the same agency. The survey asked respondents for the name of their agency and state, and we used this information to identify agencies. When responses to these questions left doubt as to whether two agencies were the same, we erred on the side of assuming responses were for separate agencies. We excluded 21 respondents who indicated they worked for a non-profit or private organization

(e.g., provider of electronic monitoring devices), which left a sample of 318 individual respondents.

We identified 203 unique agencies from 43 states and the District of Columbia. The responding agencies came from across the United States, with 10.34% of agencies from the Northeast, 39.09% from the Midwest, 21.67% from the South, and 28.08% from the West. Most agencies had local jurisdiction (67.98%), with about a quarter having statewide jurisdiction (26.11%). A few were federal (5.42%), and one respondent had tribal jurisdiction. The respondents themselves were mostly line staff (50.31%), executive management (20.75%), or mid-level management (18.24%), with a few respondents who were administrative (3.46%), program or policy (4.72%), or some other type of staff (2.49%).

When responses to a question differed within an agency, we used the most common response when possible and otherwise used the affirmative response. For example, we assumed that when asked whether an agency had implemented Policy Y, and Respondent 1 said “No” or “I Don’t Know” but Respondent 2 said “Yes,” the correct answer for that agency was “Yes.” We believe it is more likely that Respondent 1 either didn’t know about the policy or completed the survey before the policy was in place than that Respondent 2 was falsely reporting implementation of a policy the agency had not implemented. Our analysis consisted of calculating frequencies of survey responses.

Agency Preparedness

In 2009, APPA published guidelines for community corrections to be prepared for and respond to an influenza pandemic and other emergency crises, such as bioterrorist attacks and natural disasters. The guidelines focused



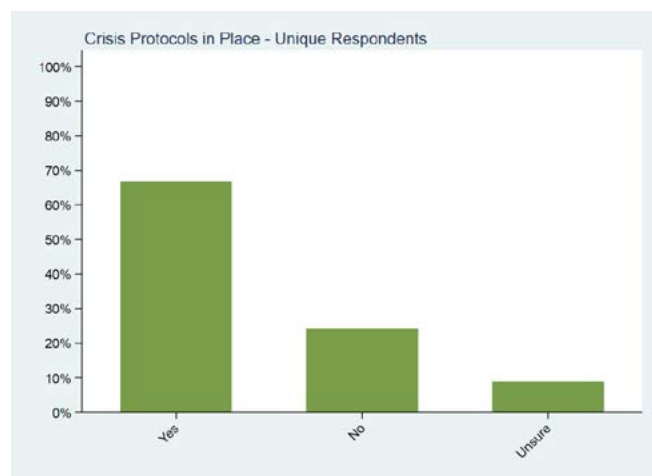
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on five areas: planning and decision-making, prevention and detection, human resources, communication, and offender supervision strategies. APPA intended for community corrections agencies, regardless of size and location, to use the guidelines to develop comprehensive plans to effectively respond to pandemics, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Unfortunately, there has been little research about the extent to which agencies used the guidelines over the past decade to develop such plans; some of the survey questions were created with these guidelines in mind to provide some data on their use.

As shown in Figure 1, while many agencies had crisis protocols in place before this pandemic, a quarter of them (24%) did not, and respondents from nearly a tenth of agencies (9%) did not know if their agency had crisis protocols in place.

Figure 1. Were Crisis Protocols in Place Before this Pandemic?



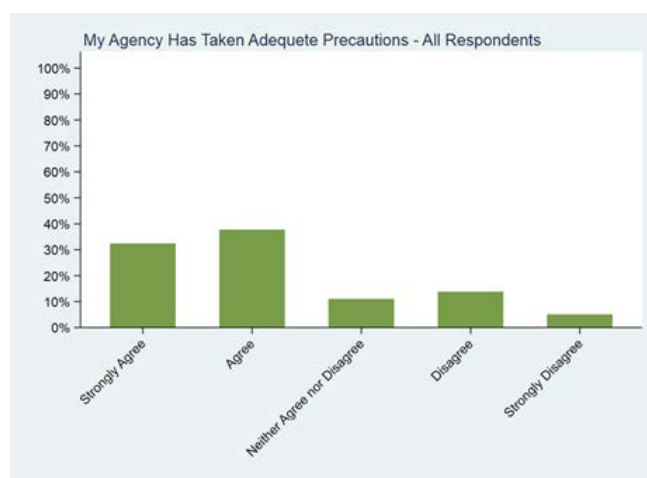
The survey also asked participants to provide open-ended feedback on agency preparedness. Most notably, respondents indicated a lack of personal protective equipment (PPE), which officers need when conducting face-to-face contacts. Respondents

also indicated feeling particularly vulnerable and felt their agency took a long time to respond to the crisis, which suggests they were not prepared. While many community supervision agencies exhibited some level of preparedness, this pandemic warrants revisiting preparedness guidelines. One respondent noted that their “agency was not ready for this sort of public health crisis. Moving forward, I see leadership focusing on implementing policies to address any future public health pandemics.” Based on the survey data, it seems reasonable to conclude that APPA’s pandemic influenza guidelines were not widely applied by community corrections agencies.

Agency Response

Agencies responded to this crisis by making a number of changes. Most respondents (70%) felt their agency took adequate precautions, as illustrated in Figure 2.

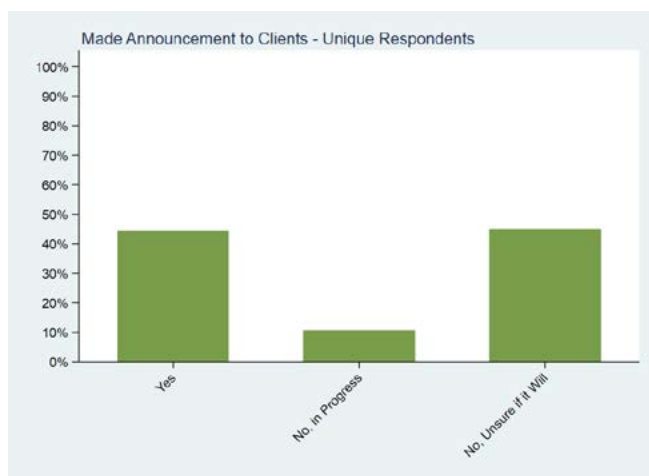
Figure 2. To What Extent Do You Agree that Your Agency Took Adequate Precautions?



Nearly all agencies (90%) had some form of teleworking in place; only about half

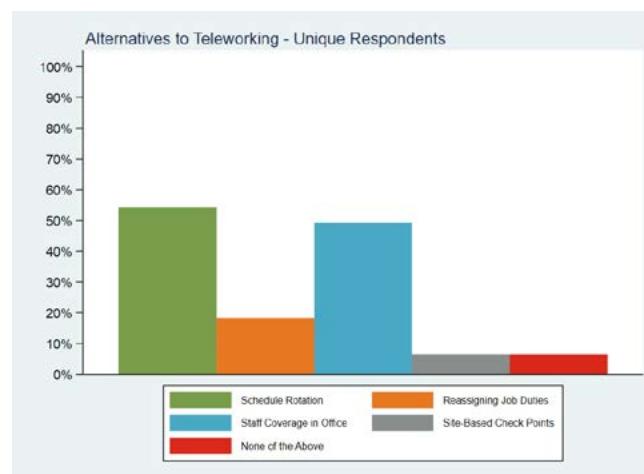
(46%) indicated they had adequate resources to do so. A majority of agencies suspended in-office reporting (95%), in-person group activities (87%), and home or field contacts (73%). In addition, many agencies suspended arrests for technical violations (66%) and reported that courts in their jurisdiction suspended hearings (77%). Fewer sites encouraged clients to report off site (59%), and despite the magnitude of these changes, respondents indicated that less than half of the agencies had made any sort of announcement to their clients about the changes or the pandemic (43%) (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Did Your Agency Make an Announcement to Your Clients?



Many agencies implemented strategies other than or instead of teleworking to minimize spread within the workplace (see Figure 4). The most common strategies included schedule rotations (54%) and staff coverage in the office (49%). Less common were reassigning job duties (18%) and site-based check points (i.e., identified locations for staff to report in at selected dates/times) (6%). Many agencies implemented more than one strategy.

Figure 4. What Alternatives to Teleworking has Your Agency Implemented?



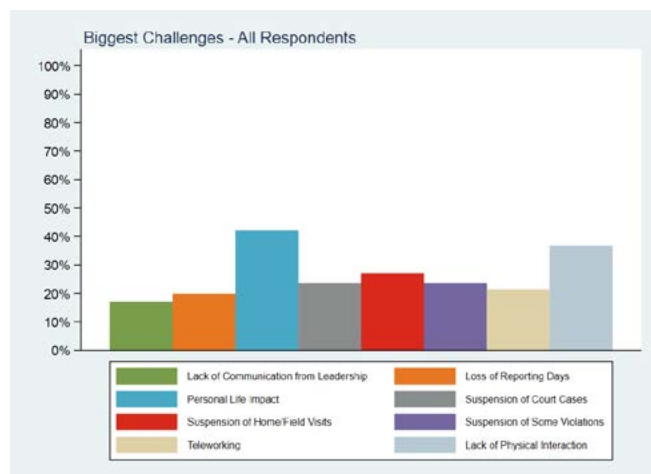
Respondents found the implementation of many of these changes challenging (see Figure 5). The most noted challenges are not unique to community supervision (personal life impact: 42%; a lack of physical interaction: 37%). However, about a quarter of respondents found the suspension of home and field contacts (27%), suspension of court cases (24%), or the suspension of some violations (24%) to be among their biggest challenges. About a fifth of all respondents reported the lack of communication from agency leadership (17%) and a loss in reporting days (20%) as challenging. In addition, many respondents noted the lack of PPE for community supervision officers and the increased workload as stressors. Many of the actions taken to minimize the spread of the virus in prisons and jails increase the burden on, or even endanger, community supervision officers. As one respondent noted, "mandates for keeping the virus out of the facility come at a cost to us as [front line] employees."



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Figure 5. What are Some of the Biggest Challenges of This Pandemic?



It is not surprising that respondents find these changes challenging. These necessary changes have altered the very core of community supervision. As noted earlier, in-person contact, especially during field work, is a core component of community supervision for many officers that has been suspended as a result of the pandemic. Indeed, among the challenges unique to community supervision, the loss of home and field contacts is the most commonly cited challenge. One respondent noted that before this crisis, face-to-face contact was “85% of our job.” Further, through the suspension of arrests for technical violations and court hearings, one of the key tools of the profession has been removed, as officers can no longer use these deterrents in response to negative client behavior. Another key tool of the profession, referral to or practicing group therapeutic activities, has also ceased in many agencies. As one respondent noted, the two biggest challenges of the pandemic are being “unable to hold offenders accountable for their behavior and not able to provide treatment programming.”

One other major outcome of this

pandemic is the increased use of technology, not only as a virtual office space where meetings can occur but also as a way in which to stay in contact with clients. As a respondent said, “The current situation has caused us to implement technology that had been available previously but not implemented.” One respondent noted that, in the rural area where the person works, this change may be beneficial for clients who previously had to drive long distances to report but can now do so virtually. A few respondents said they believe that their clients feel more supported because of the telephone and virtual contacts, as it allows officers to check in more often.

Conclusion

Unfortunately, current research provides us with only a limited understanding of what the short- and long-term impacts of these changes might be on community corrections. Home and field contacts are an understudied area of community supervision, but the few studies that do exist suggest there are benefits to their use (Abt Associates, 2019; Alarid & Rangel, 2018; Meredith, Hawk, Johnson, Prevost, & Braucht, 2020). Thus, the lack of field contacts may hinder success for current supervisees. There has been little research about the impact of reducing arrests for technical violations. Revocations for technical violations, such as violating a curfew, make up a large share of the revocations within community supervision. However, very little research speaks to the impact of the use of revocations for technical violations on other important outcomes, such as recommitment of crime (Grattet & Lin, 2016; Osterman, Hyatt, & DeWitt, 2019). Similarly, little is known about the relative effectiveness of virtual contacts when compared with more traditional office or field contacts. While some research

suggests that tele-therapy and other forms of virtual therapy can be effective, research has not yet tested this within a community supervision population (Turgoose, Ashwick, & Murphy, 2018).

The coronavirus pandemic required rapid and substantial adaptation by agencies in every social sector. By evaluating how community supervision agencies responded and what practices work best, why, and for whom, we can harness data-driven lessons from this pandemic to inform guidelines for future preparedness. We will all be better prepared for future pandemics and other large-scale crises, as well as for the daily challenges faced by community supervision agencies, if we work together to produce and implement effective day-to-day practices and feasible contingency plans.

Bios

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A CORRECTIONS DIRECTOR'S EXPERIENCE WITH THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

The following is an interview between Dr. Kimberly Kras (KK), co-editor of Perspectives, and Dr. Beth Skinner (BS) about her experience as a corrections director during the coronavirus pandemic. Dr. Skinner is the Director of the Iowa Department of Corrections. Her career with the department started in 2002. Prior to being Director, Dr. Skinner served as the Recidivism Reduction Coordinator for the department. She also previously worked for the CSG Justice Center on emerging trends within reentry and recidivism reduction. She has an M.S.W. and a Ph.D. in Social Work from the University of Iowa with an emphasis in criminology.





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KK: What's the greatest change in service supervision practices that your agency has experienced?

BS: The pandemic has changed how we review technical revocations. Our recidivism rate is about 39%, and half of our recidivism numbers are for technical revocations. That's a big number, so understanding how to better handle such violations has been our top priority in terms of criminal justice reform. COVID showed us that we need to start addressing this right now, because we have to manage our prison population. We met with judicial districts and community-based corrections, asking them to run any technical type of violation through the central office first, where we would either approve or disapprove it. We really wanted to scrutinize these cases, assess the violators, and ask, "Can we manage them safely in the community without sending them back to prison?" And we found that, between just last year and this year, we have an 11% reduction in prison admissions for revocations, so that has been a significant success for us. We hadn't had a reduction that sharp before, so that drop really reflects how we changed our practices.

We have also seen an increase in our electronic monitoring, given that we don't have eyes on individuals like we normally do because of COVID and social distancing and things like that. That means we have more individuals on electronic monitoring than we did last year. For some individuals we can't see on a regular basis because of COVID, we want to at least be able to monitor their whereabouts.

Another change is needing to be able to provide our districts with more opportunities for tele-health and tele-psychiatry, because for a lot of the supervised population—of not just Iowa, but across the country—there are mental

health issues that need to be addressed. And so this is something that we've been working to especially build up during COVID.

We also developed a housing voucher program. Some individuals who are on supervision rely on transitional housing, and during this time a lot of those transitional housing providers weren't accepting anyone. So we worked with the Office of Drug Control Policy and put in a voucher program that we can use to support those people who would normally go to the transitional housing which wasn't available. The voucher program allowed them to go to more stable housing, which I thought was pretty cool.

The other area I would say we are focusing on is the increased use of technology for client contacts. Instead of coming into the office, clients are checking in by using text messages, FaceTime, and Google Meet. They're "coming to the office" via technology. Anecdotally, what we've heard so far from the probation officers is that they feel like clients have been more engaged and are actually willing to share more if they're struggling. That is interesting because they're using technology, even if just a phone, instead of the traditional face-to-face setting, and yet they're more engaged. I don't know the explanation. Perhaps it's not having to walk into the infrastructure of a probation office, or perhaps it feels more collaborative when you're on the phone with someone and talking with them versus sitting across the desk from them. But that's been very interesting for us and has been very positive.

We are also progressing toward holding group meetings via online technology. We're working on the process of changing curriculum over to make sure it's user friendly and effective via Zoom or whatever platform we decide to use. All in all, we're moving to

more technology for group-facilitated treatment, which also benefits us because we're a very rural state.

KK: What were some of the primary concerns of the clients?

BS: One of the biggest lessons I think that we've learned through this pandemic is that communication is the key. Whether you're an administrator, frontline officer, probation officer, residential officer, or in a work release facility, it's important to know what's going on. What is being planned, and how are we going to manage during COVID and moving forward? Are we going to meet in person? Are we going to do calls? Am I going to meet you at your house and stand outside on your sidewalk? It has been just so important to be able to communicate, and you can never do that enough, especially when everyone is concerned regarding what comes next and what the process is going to look like. For example, some staff members have kids and didn't want to come into the office and have that exposure risk. So, we adjusted, and then we communicated clearly to the clients that, "Hey, we're going to move to more remote supervision strategies." That's part of keeping them in the loop about what's going to happen.

Another big challenge has been figuring out how clients could complete programming, because with COVID we aren't in the classroom. So, the goal was getting clients treatment, and that's what we've been working on. I think this was one of the biggest concerns for clients during all this time of change, raising many questions for them. What happens now? What's my responsibility as someone under supervision? I don't want to violate, and I want to know what my responsibilities are.

KK: What are some lingering issues for staff or for clients as we go forward?

BS: I think for us it's finding the resources to expand use of technology and making sure that we can effectively do tele-supervision—if that's even a name. Also, we must ensure treatment for those who have significant mental health issues. We have a way to go in working out how we build a truly solid framework for tele-supervision. What will that look like? What are the standards? What are the expectations? It's the same thing with the changes we've made regarding revocations. Can we take successful new practices we've adopted during the COVID time period and really keep them in play as we go forward, with a more structured and established process that everyone is aware of? With COVID, many policies and procedures have seemed to change on a daily basis, and this lack of consistency and underlying planning can cause problems. So, again, I think the "lingering" overall issue for us is figuring out how to develop an optimal tele-supervision infrastructure that outlines what that supervision will look like going forward, including expectations, roles, and processes.

KK: What has the feedback been from staff about changing the model?

BS: I think at first there was a little resistance to it. One positive factor is that they were provided a response matrix. We'd been developing one for some time, but we actually started implementing it during COVID, and that gave the officers options based on the risk level and the type of violation. Thus, officers had a tool set to help make more informed decisions, and there were some added benefits, I think. Instead of feeling like they were working in a silo or individually, staff had this matrix to look at. They were asked to consider what options could be used to keep these individuals safely in the community, and then they would be able to staff the case with their supervisor. There are more steps involved, but I think everyone agrees that



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prison isn't always the answer—that we can keep people safely in their communities and get them the additional treatment or resources they need so they don't pose a risk. It really does benefit the system overall, because that way people can keep their jobs. Also, if they're in school or if they have good, pro-social families, you can keep those protective factors in place. I think our new model has really moved us in a positive direction where people see that it's working.

KK: There have been many negatives that have come with changing the way we do business. What change has turned out to be beneficial that perhaps you never would have tried without a pandemic?

BS: That's great question. What comes to mind is moving to have revocation decisions approved by central office. It's not likely we would have done that without these special circumstances, though we might have gotten there eventually with criminal justice reform. So, yes, I'd point to the difference made by having centralized vetting of revocation cases—having them come through the Deputy Director of Community-Based Corrections, undergoing a review, and not signed off by me unless we concur that “Yes, these are the ones that we will approve to send back to prison as a revocation.” That policy was probably one of the biggest changes made, and, as you know, it resulted in some great benefits.

I also think a change that's here to stay is increased tele-supervision and tele-health. In addition to benefits I discussed earlier, these technologies also impact how we look at admissions and releases as we work closely with the Board of Parole. We have a separate releasing agency here, so we need to make sure that there is constant communication between the prison counselors, the parole officers, and the Board for approval in terms of having the

best-laid plans for giving people the greatest chance of success. We now have had an opportunity to sharpen the saw, if you will, in terms of reentry plans—to really fine tune them. Our counselors are working very closely and more collaboratively with the parole officers on the Community-Based Corrections side.

Another great aspect of the change in our revocation process is that it appears our agents are shifting their perspective in terms of how to view the individuals that we serve and how we supervise them. This includes greater recognition of those who have substance abuse and mental health issues, with staff working more closely and collaboratively with public health, mental health, and substance abuse providers to get treatment services provided where appropriate. So, I think there's also been a philosophical shift. I know accountability is still important—and there always should be an emphasis on accountability—but there's also a balance between accountability and treatment and really getting these people what they need.

We have some places in some of our offices that can be used for meeting spots if a client needs to come in and meet with an officer. To clarify, these designated areas are not necessarily offices—sometimes just a space, and sometimes in other places in the community. What is important is that we've ensured availability of such spaces, since seeing an officer in person may sometimes be needed.

The last thing I'll mention is training of our staff. For a long time, we've done considerable in-person training, and we are having to adjust that practice, just like we're having to restrict in-person contact with those under supervision. If we can develop and improve online treatment services, we can surely develop and improve online staff training. That means focusing on technologic tools to train our folks, including pre-service education, with

options including E-learning, Zoom sessions, Google Meets, and more. The good news, given that we're very rural, is that training is often getting to staff sooner. We're starting to make that shift now, and these training changes are probably going to be around for some time.

KK: What would you tell others who are either in your position or are working in other capacities in community-based corrections? What should they do, what's going to happen next, and how can we cope?

BS: First and foremost, one of the most important pieces of dealing with a pandemic of this size is good leadership. If you have the right people in the right seats making the right decisions, it's very collaborative. It is important that you don't make decisions in a vacuum. Instead, you should bring in your frontline staff, bring in your mid-level managers, and bring in people with boots on the ground to help make decisions. I think it's so important to have that collaborative aspect and to have good leadership during this time.

As stated before, another thing I cannot over-emphasize is communication. You cannot communicate enough. Make sure that you're messaging not only to staff, but also to those that are under supervision, letting them know what's going on.

What are we going to do? Well, in the next couple of months I think people need to be patient. There are times recently when I've both been forgiving and been forgiven, because there is no playbook for this, and people are doing their best. However, this also is truly a time for opportunity as well—an opportunity to look at practice differently and to consider how the pandemic may have a silver lining in producing beneficial innovation. What we need to do is to take that silver lining and run with it.

The pandemic is not great. We're not loving its impact on our lives, and it has produced some terrible losses. However, it also doesn't have to be the worst thing ever. I mean, it's time to embrace the lessons it has given us and not make the mistake of losing this opportunity to leap forward in our professional practices. We should consider all that we have learned about communication, leadership and decision making, technical revocations, using remote classrooms, and online training and run with it. Some of our new approaches appear to be pretty successful, so let's make sure we keep the momentum. I wouldn't necessarily call what we now have "the new normal," but I'd definitely say COVID has forced us into looking at our business differently, and I think a lot of positives have come out of that.

Every day under the threat of COVID feels like Groundhog Day, and each day we have an opportunity to see that we can really do things differently. I strongly feel that when you have a crisis of this size that brings this much uncertainty, it also brings people together. It certainly seems to have brought those working with corrections in prisons, community-based corrections, and other state agencies closer, knowing that we are working elbow to elbow as one team, looking out for each other. I think one message that has come out crystal clear is we are now more cohesive. We're a better team, and that's a huge plus. When we come out of COVID, we will be war tested. We're going to get through this.



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PRELIMINARY RESULTS OF THE COVID-19 IMPACT SURVEY FOR ADULT AND JUVENILE PROBATION IN TEXAS

BY: KELLI D. MARTIN, PH.D. AND HALEY ZETTLER, PH.D.





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As the COVID-19 health crisis swept across the globe in early 2020, every societal institution was affected, including probation agencies in Texas. Basically, the “normal” way of life changed dramatically. For researchers, it was critical to conduct timely studies to gather information about this unique phenomenon. This article highlights preliminary findings from one of these studies, the COVID-19 Impact Survey for Probation in Texas. This survey was designed to gather information regarding the impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on probation department work environments and staff. Probation administrators (directors, deputy directors, unit managers/supervisors), probation officers (e.g., specialized caseload officers, regular caseload officers, court officers), and information technology (IT) personnel were targeted to complete the survey.¹ Probation officer questions were designed to measure constructs including officers’ stress and workload issues, changes in relationships with clients, changes in officer attitudes, work environments, and clients’ issues. Questions for administrators mainly gathered information about financial concerns and tele-work issues.

Probation in Texas

Adult and juvenile Texas probation agencies operate at the county level with oversight at the state level through the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, Community Justice Assistance Division for adult probation and the Texas Juvenile Justice Division for juvenile probation. Adult probation agencies in Texas are primarily funded through the collection of fees from those on supervision. Although probation operates at the county level, counties generally do not appropriate

monies for staff salaries and benefits or monies for client programs. Depending on county size, some larger departments may receive money from the county for pre-trial programs. Due to the nature of funding streams, Texas probation has been especially impacted by COVID-19. It is estimated that through August 2020 the collection of supervision fees has been reduced by over \$8 million statewide compared to the previous year.

Study Methods

A link for the voluntary and anonymous survey was distributed via email to directors of all adult and juvenile probation agencies in the entire state of Texas in June 2020, along with instructions, a project overview, and information about confidentiality. Approximately 123 adult probation agencies (also referred to as community supervision and corrections departments [CSCDs]) and 161 juvenile agencies were emailed the survey. Researchers then asked directors to distribute the survey to the targeted staff according to instructions. There was a 77% response rate out of 123 adult probation departments (N=95). The response rate for juvenile probation departments was much lower, with only 65 agencies out of 161 responding, for a 40% response rate. See Table 1 for details of the demographics for the 1,353 respondents who completed the survey.²

Table 1. Survey Respondent Demographics

Gender Female Male Prefer not to answer Answered^a	(N) 614 372 54 1,040	(%) 60 35 5 100%	Agency Type Adult Juvenile Answered	(N) 1,045 308 1,353	(%) 77 23 100%
Age 18-24 25-34 35-44 45-54 55-64 65+ Answered	(N) 33 244 290 337 117 19 1,040	(%) 3 24 28 32 11 2 100%	Size of Agency <30 employees >30, <70 employees >70, <150 employees >150, <250 employees >250, <350 employees >350 total employees Answered	(N) 297 289 319 112 104 187 1,308	(%) 23 22 25 8 8 14 100%
Race White/Caucasian Black/African American Hispanic/Latino Asian American Indian/Alaska Native Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander Other Prefer not to answer Answered	(N) 557 91 309 3 8 1 5 66 1,040	(%) 54 8 30 .30 .77 .10 48 6.35 100%	Years of Service Less than 1 yr. 1 yr. less than 3 yrs. 3 yrs. less than 5 yrs. Between 5 and 10 yrs. More than 10 but less than 15 yrs. More than 15 yrs. less than 20 yrs. 20 or more yrs. Answered	(N) 54 96 102 175 182 125 306 1,040	(%) 5 9 10 17 17 12 30 100%
Level of Education High School Diploma Some college, no degree Associate's Degree Bachelor's Degree Master's Degree Doctorate Answered	(N) 6 11 14 800 196 13 1,040	(%) .58 1 1.42 77 19 1 100%	Staff Type Director Deputy Director Operations Manager/Director Unit Manager/Supervisor Probation Officer Technology Staff Other Answered	(N) 128 41 18 155 687 62 60 1,151	(%) 11 3 2 14 60 5 5 100%
Ethnicity Non-Hispanic Hispanic Answered	(N) 676 364 1,040	(%) 65 35 100%			

^a The total N for each question is unequal due to respondents skipping questions.

Results

Respondents were asked questions about operational and procedural changes and for certain questions were asked to check **all** situations that applied as this crisis continued to unfold over the months, and thus percentages did not total 100%. As laid out in Table 2, one can see how severely COVID-19 impacted day-to-day operations of probation departments as they strived to comply with safety guidelines, various city and county rule changes, and statewide changes mandated by gubernatorial Executive Orders, especially the one issued on March 29 specifically addressing detention in county and municipal jails during the COVID-19 disaster (Texas Executive Order No. GA-13, 2020).

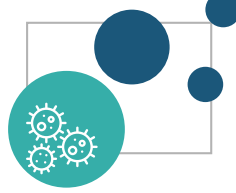


Table 2. Operational Changes

Operational Activity	Percentage %	Operational Activity	Percentage %
Court Proceedings	%	Drug Testing	%
Temporarily suspended new probation placements	56.48	Temporarily suspended "in-person" testing	56.39
Experienced a significant decrease in new probations	65.41	Still submit, but social distance	42.58
Continued "in-person" proceedings but followed social distancing, etc.	19.83	Reviewed on a case-by-case basis	25.75
Used videoconferencing	67.96	No observation of submitted drug tests	5.49
Did not really change much	.86	Alternative testing (i.e. patch, SCRAM, hair)	8.50
Unsure	8.24	Did not really change much	6.87
Other	3.78	Unsure	9.70
Filing Motions to Revoke/Adjudicate	%	Outpatient Treatment	%
Temporarily suspended submitting all violation reports, filing or request	10.47	Temporarily suspended all programming.	61.37
Only filed motions or requested on serious offenders	44.03	Switched from in-person to telephone sessions.	58.28
Reviewed on a case-by-case basis	43.09	Switched from in-person activities to video sessions	61.46
Did not really change much	24.29	Provided other online options, webinars, online assignments, etc.	32.53
Unsure	14.16	Reviewed on a case-by-case basis.	11.07
Other	4.55	Waived remaining hours left to complete	2.32
		Did not really change much	.52
		Unsure	10.04
Community Service Restitution (CSR)	%	Education Classes	%
Temporarily suspended all CSR	59.06	Temporarily suspended all programming.	54.16
Opportunities conducive to social distancing	17.17	Switched from in-person to telephone sessions.	20.52
Reviewed on a case-by-case basis	18.97	Switched from in-person activities to video sessions	38.28
Waived remaining hours	15.02	Provided other online options, webinars, online assignments, etc.	31.16
Allowed offenders to find their own opportunities	6.52	Reviewed on a case-by-case basis.	8.15
Allowed money or goods to be donated	34.25	Continued in-person but social distanced	8.33
Did not really change much	3	Waived remaining hours left to complete	2.23
Unsure	12.27	Did not really change much	1.89
Other	6.01	Unsure	16.31
		Other	3.61

Table 3 presents the results of a question regarding offender contact procedures during the pandemic. Some examples of “other” measures that people reported using included reporting in the parking lot using social distancing, conducting visits through the glass door of the department, and field visits in offenders’ yards using social distancing.

Table 3. Offender Contact Reporting Alternatives

Alternative Reporting Measures	%	N
Telephone reporting	99.40	330
Videoconferencing	45.18	150
Report by mail	48.80	162
Web report/web check-in	45.78	152
Temporary reduction in reporting requirements	28.31	94
Drive-through or drive-by reporting	6.93	23
Other (please specify)	3.01	10
Answered		332
Skipped		1021

Perceptions Regarding Operational Changes

Respondents were asked how they felt about staff being allowed to continue to work from home as an option in the future, even after the COVID-19 crisis subsides, to help alleviate burnout among probation professionals; nearly 65% of respondents agreed this would be helpful. Table 4 depicts the safety protocols implemented by departments.

Table 4. Safety Protocols Implemented

Safety Protocols	%	N
Social distancing measures	94	312
Reduced staff/skeleton crew in the office	93	306
Paid leave time/Time off	47	155
Sent out information about Coronavirus (symptoms/testing, treatments)	82	271
Work from home/tele-commute	78	257
Implemented telephone or videoconferencing for clients in lieu of reporting in person	88	290
Provided hand sanitizer	89	294
Required all staff to check their temperature	38	126
Provided thermometers at the office for use if needed	38	126
Instructed any and all staff to stay home if not feeling well	96	318
Suspended home visits/change in how home visits	84	278
Provided personal protective equipment (e.g., masks)	87	288
Other (please specify)	3	9
Answered		332
Skipped		1021

Many respondents (50%) felt that other disciplines (medicine, education, finance, etc.) were more progressive with the use of technology in serving their clients compared to the criminal justice system. Respondents were



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asked about the various types of technologies they would like to use in their jobs going forward from the pandemic. The great majority (87%) indicated they wanted to continue using videoconferencing for contact with clients and for other work-related activities, 75% wanted to use tablets for more mobility in carrying out their duties, and close to 60% wanted to have a paperless offender file system. Moreover, 77% indicated they would like to use an electronic signature technology such as DocuSign, and 52% wanted to have voice-to-text capability for entering chronological case notes and other tasks. Kiosks (64%) and online offender portals (69%) were also supported, and 55% wanted a better department website that would be more helpful for offenders, with downloadable forms, FAQs, etc.

Probation Officer Questions

Of the respondents, 687 self-identified as either adult or juvenile probation officers. Officers were asked a series of questions about work environment, workload issues and stress, attitudes, their relationship with their clients, and issues their clients had throughout the crisis.

Work environment, workload, and stress

Around 30% of probation officer respondents agreed they felt more productive working from home, and in response to a question about distractions nearly 40% reported fewer distractions while working at home.³ Officers who reported working from home agreed that communication with their supervisor was very good during that time.

Perhaps not surprisingly, 80% of probation officer respondents were worried about themselves or their family members

contracting the virus. A smaller but sizeable number (30%) agreed they felt less productive than usual because of the stress from frequent changes that occurred. Nearly two-thirds (62%) were concerned about public safety due to offenders violating supervision, without the officers knowing, because of changes in operational procedures (i.e., no drug testing and no field visits). Only 24% were worried about being “overwhelmed” with work when normal business operations resumed, and 30% were currently overwhelmed with their workload.

Officer attitudes about offender supervision

Around 26% of probation officer respondents found they were “less punitive” towards their clients during the pandemic. Nearly 40% of respondents agreed they found themselves being more helpful than usual to their clients during the pandemic. Nearly 50% agreed they found themselves helping their clients with things they normally did not discuss. Examples of topics discussed included learning more about or applying for unemployment (58%), finding a food pantry/getting help with groceries (55%), getting set up for teleconferencing (46%), financial assistance for bills/utilities/rent (41%), allaying fears about the pandemic (57%), medical or health care issues (38%), stress or anxiety levels (67%), school issues/homeschooling (32%), and finding an online 12-step program (49%). Examples of “other” topics officers discussed included providing information about COVID testing sites and other virus-related information, future plans for offenders (such as possibly going to college), basic needs like food and clothing, housing, childcare options, and employment. To put this last topic in context, unemployment rates in

Texas skyrocketed from around 3-4% in early March to 13.5% in April, a 237% increase, before dropping down to 8.6% in June 2020 (DiFurio, 2020).

Relationships with probationers and client issues

Nearly 30% of officers agreed with the statement that the crisis changed the way they viewed their role as a probation officer. Half of officer respondents reported their clients seemed to feel more relaxed and open during telephone/video “visits.” Around 25% felt they will have better relationships with their clients as a result of this crisis. Nearly 70% of probation officer respondents agreed that videoconferencing could help offenders be more successful on probation under certain circumstances. Officers know there are offenders with no driver’s license, unstable or no transportation, and other such problems. In these instances, videoconferencing would help offenders, but certainly never replace face-to-face contacts.⁴ However, many agencies, 56%, were not even able to use videoconferencing with those on supervision. Sometimes this was because they did not have the capability/technology in place to do so, and in other cases there were reasons that clients were not able to use this technology.

Administrator Questions

A total of 342 administrators (directors, deputy directors, operations managers, and supervisors) responded to questions focused on gathering information and understanding perceptions about various operational changes and the financial impact of COVID-19.

Operational changes

The initial series of questions for

administrators asked about operational changes. Eighty-two percent (82%) of respondents agreed with the question: “Since the pandemic and forced changes in operational areas, do you think the use of technology in more operational areas of the department is ideal?” When asked about support, respondents agreed overwhelmingly that their judiciary, local officials, and state oversight agencies were supportive during the crisis.

A majority of respondents reported that there are opportunities for positive changes in the field of probation due to the COVID-19 crisis. A majority of respondents, 60%, would like to use (or continue using) alternative reporting methods for offenders with transportation problems, those in substantial compliance (69%), those assessed as low risk (75%), or on a case-by-case basis (81%). Managerial respondents were asked what groups they thought might be opposed to the continued use of videoconferencing with offenders. While approximately 40% reported they did not think anyone would be opposed to videoconferencing, 34% believed the community would not be receptive to videoconferencing.

Around 72% of administrators indicated they did not allow staff to work from home prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, but the pandemic resulted in a shift in attitude on this subject, as 44% agreed their agency is considering (or might consider) allowing staff to work from home after the COVID-19 crisis subsides under appropriate circumstances. Moreover, 55% of administrative respondents agreed that allowing staff to continue working from home after the COVID-19 crisis (under appropriate circumstances) would help



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improve employee retention rates. Some reasons administrators oppose staff working from home include the inability to monitor what staff are doing while they are logged in (27%), need to purchase extra equipment (21%), lack of funds (13%), and cyber security concerns (15%).

Financial impact

Next, administrators were asked about the financial impact of COVID-19, and 63% of respondents agreed COVID-19 has severely impacted their department's budget. Nearly 20% of respondents reported they may have to permanently lay off personnel because of the pandemic, and others have had to (or may have to) temporarily furlough staff. Nearly 74% of administrators are concerned about their department's budget.

The overwhelming majority of respondents (86%) agreed with the following statement: "The Legislature needed to provide more funding to community supervision agencies prior to the COVID-19 crisis, but especially now." Next, 82% of management respondents agreed the pandemic has highlighted the need to revise the way probation in Texas is funded. When asked if the state should consider allowing departments to keep surplus funding instead of returning it at the end of the fiscal year, 100% of management respondents agreed.

The majority of management respondents (66%) agreed the COVID-19 crisis will continue to affect department budgets long after the crisis "is over," because arrest rates significantly decreased during the pandemic, which means fewer probation placements, added to the fact that many offenders lost their

jobs during the pandemic and are unable to pay their fees (which for adult probation departments is a major contributor to their budgets).

Administrators were asked to rank in order of severity which items had the most negative impact on their departments, with the following overall rankings:

- Reduction in probation placements (44%)
- Offenders unable to pay probation fees (27%)
- Providing cell phones, laptops and other equipment to staff during the crisis (7%)
- Community concerns about offenders (7%)
- Getting the technology set up at home for staff to work from home (5%)
- Tracking employee productivity (4%)
- Political concerns (3%)

In a separate question, administrators were asked what their most significant concern was at the moment, and 55% percent answered that it was funding/financial.

Conclusion

The results of this survey revealed several salient issues for probation in Texas, and many, if not all, of these presumably may apply to probation agencies in other states: (1) Need for review and updating of planning documents and emergency management-

contingency plans for continued operations; (2) dealing with financial impact and need for sustainability in funding structures; and, (3) the need for more flexible and innovative approaches in supervision efforts.

Emergency Management-Contingency Plans

Generally, emergency management issues are not something probation directors think about on any given day. Since the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, however, major emergencies have been at the forefront of day-to-day concerns. Collaborative networks proved to be imperative during the pandemic, as state oversight agencies and local government officials' flexibility and support of probation agencies helped to minimize interruptions in necessary continuous operations. Communication from oversight agencies was frequent, as agency waivers of standards and requirements were granted, Executive Orders from the Governor's office were released, and local public health and government officials released their own changes in policies, rules, and ordinances.

Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for probation agencies to have updated emergency contingency plans, or at the very least to be knowledgeable about county government emergency management plans already in place. The purpose of an emergency operational contingency plan is to outline "systematic responses to emergencies that may threaten an organization and the records and information necessary for continuing operations" (Murray & McCutcheon, 1999). These plans should account for potential natural, technological, and man-made threats, and, as we have learned recently, public health

threats. Agencies should conduct a hazard vulnerability assessment to screen for risk and plan for the strategic use of limited resources (Cagliuso, Leahy, & Sandoval, 2010). One example of strategic use of limited resources offered by a survey respondent was to replace all desktop computers with laptops so that operations can "go mobile" at any time—a step which could also assist agencies in times of non-emergency situations so that laptops are available for timely documentation, note taking, and critical email communications in situations such as conducting field visits, going to court, or attending meetings.

The survival of an agency is not just about getting through the immediate threat, but also about considering the financial stability of an organization immediately following and continuing long after an emergency. The results of this survey reveal concerns about the financial impact COVID-19 has had on probation agencies, as these agencies may well have to deal with negative long-term effects on their operations and their ability to fulfill their missions.

Financial Impact

This survey project showed budgets and financial uncertainty were the top concerns of probation administrators. Total shut-down of daily life led to skyrocketing unemployment rates, fewer arrests, and fewer future probation placements, which have ultimately affected both adult and juvenile probation budgets.⁵ About one-third of respondents indicated they may have to "lay off" personnel and others may need to "temporarily furlough" staff. Departments' budget dollars are stretched thin and the majority of administrator survey respondents agreed change in legislative appropriations for probation is necessary,



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indicating that this was true even before the pandemic but is especially true now. A resounding majority of supervisory respondents (86%) agreed departments should be allowed to keep any “surplus” funding at the end of the fiscal year instead of returning it to the state. Unusual times call for creative and “outside the norm” type of responses.

The oversight agency for probation departments in Texas has two funding sources that have been potentially impacted by COVID-19 to a degree that might have a long-term financial effect. First, some funding is calculated per capita based on the number of misdemeanor placements and direct felony cases in the previous calendar year. Second, funding comes from Community Corrections Programs based on (1) the percentage of the state’s population residing in the counties served by the department and (2) the percentage of all felony defendants in the state under supervision by the department. Since courts throughout Texas have not been in full operation since the pandemic, potentially major shortfalls can be predicted.

Furthermore, the financial deficit created by COVID-19 will undoubtedly affect some departments’ ability to provide raises in the future and retain quality staff, as probation generally has lower salaries compared to other jobs in the criminal justice field (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). Probation agencies often compete against federal probation, law enforcement, public schools, and other industries who can offer more attractive salaries. Retention and salary problems present prior to the COVID-19 crisis are now only exacerbated, while probation departments are still responsible for more offenders in the criminal justice system compared to penal institutions (Texas Commission on

Jail Standards, 2020; Texas Department of Criminal Justice, 2019; Texas Juvenile Justice Department, 2019).

Flexibility and Innovations in Supervision

The COVID-19 health crisis forced probation agencies to make major changes in operational procedures overnight, the main one being suspending face-to-face contacts with offenders. While virtual visits may be convenient, probation officers overall agreed that face-to-face interaction with their clients is critical, especially regarding community safety and being agents of change. Although, low-risk offenders, offenders with mental health issues, and offenders with transportation issues could benefit from occasional virtual reporting opportunities, high-risk offenders need to be supervised more intensely, and virtual visits are not appropriate for all clients.

Operational changes such as drug testing, court proceedings, counseling and treatment sessions, and home visits were suspended at one point or another for many agencies. Some jurisdictions were able to use videoconferencing for treatment sessions, and this was helpful, especially for offenders with transportation issues. There is a possibility of using this going forward to help offenders be more successful on probation. Some agencies reported they subcontract to a laboratory for substance abuse testing, so drug testing was not affected for them. There are many advances in technology for drug/alcohol monitoring that could replace the traditional collection of urine specimens and possibly save departments money.

Probation administrators agreed there are opportunities for positive changes in the

field of probation due to the COVID-19 crisis, with many advocating for the continuing use of videoconferencing in select situations—albeit not totally replacing face-to-face interactions between officers and offenders. It has been realized that some offenders may be over-supervised and that changes are needed to truly supervise offenders appropriately by risk level. A majority of administrator survey respondents agreed that utilizing technology more in various areas of departmental operations is necessary going forward, but budget constraints are hampering these efforts. Some jurisdictions have already begun utilizing advanced technologies in daily operations. Some have paperless offender file systems, which many respondents find desirable. Electronic signature systems, kiosks, a “probation app” for smartphones, and many other types of technologies could streamline operations. Furthermore, regarding teleworking, about 45% of probation administrators may possibly consider allowing staff to work from home on occasion to help improve morale and staff retention rates. This could be used as a job perk, especially since some jurisdictions are not able to offer salary increases at all and others not consistently.

In sum, the findings of the survey are highly informative and encouraging because adaptability and resilience of adult and juvenile probation agencies in the face of a global pandemic were evident. Also, the consensus among survey respondents was that telework can be used in certain situations and may help with agency retention rates and staff burnout, and videoconferencing with offenders may be used in certain circumstances as long face-to-face interactions with clients also continue, especially with higher risk clients.

Probation staff understand that having rapport with clients is critical to quality supervision and would not forego in-person interactions simply for their own convenience or benefit. The pandemic led some officers to become more helpful than before to their clients, while some had the simple realization during this crisis that we are all just human beings trying to make it through this unprecedented crisis. Clients have the same fears as probation staff about contracting COVID-19; they are just trying to provide for their families and to remain healthy.

Bios

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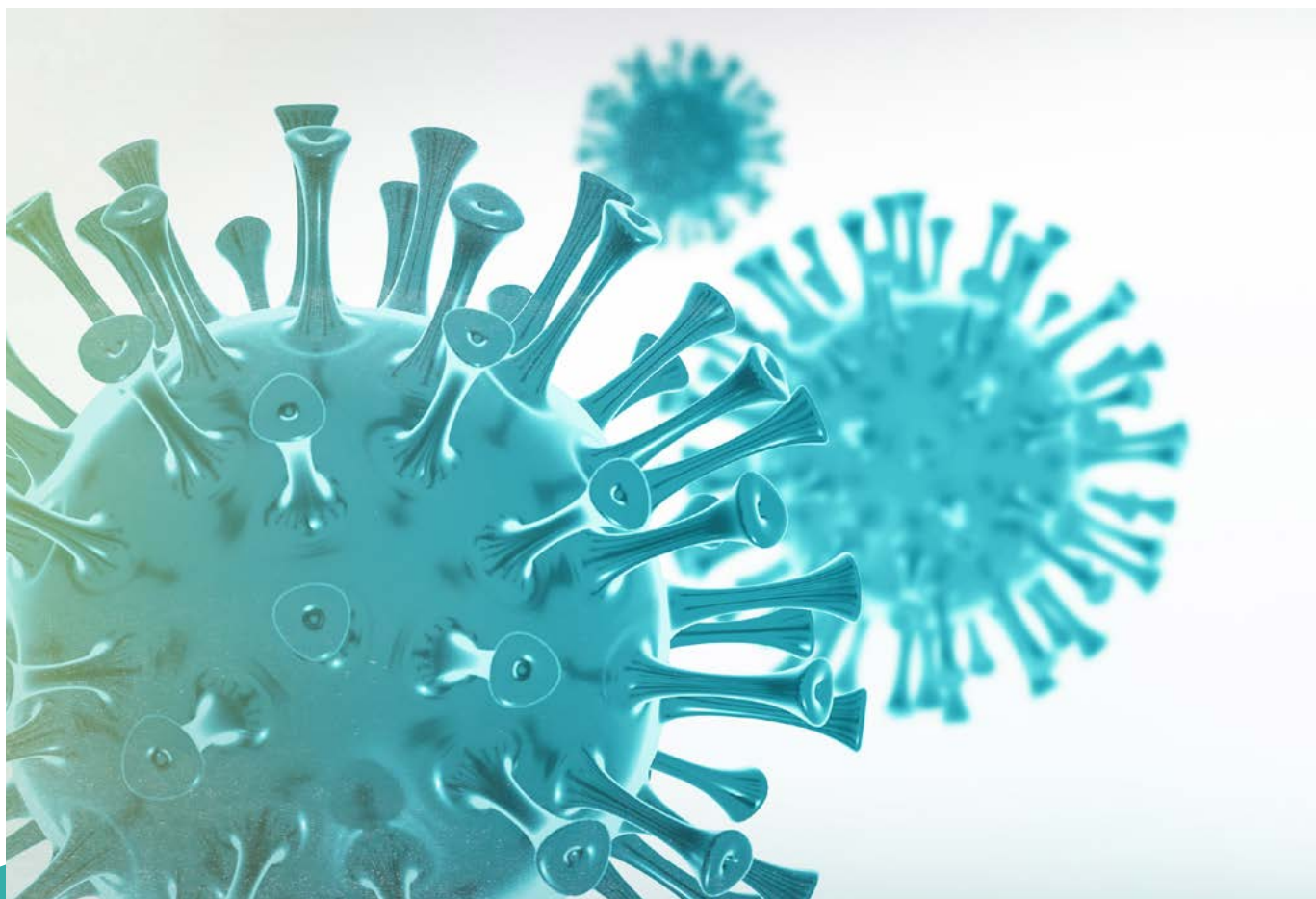
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Endnotes

- 1 Probation agency clerical and support staff were excluded, as this project focused on issues pertaining to probation officers and management of agency operations and probation officer units; however, it is recognized that such staff were critical to the continued operation of departments during the pandemic. It is further noted that the survey responses from IT personnel are not presented here, although these are available upon request. Those working in residential facilities were not surveyed, as this study was designed to explore issues only partially applicable to such facilities.
- 2 An individual response rate was unable to be calculated due to being unable to track how many total staff received the survey from their director.
- 3 Figures are based on the number of respondents who answered each question; thus, the number of respondents reflected in the stated percentages vary from question to question and section to section.
- 4 This survey question sought to elicit information on probation staff perceptions about the use of videoconferencing, both currently and in the future, without advocating a position one way or another in regard to videoconferencing.
- 5 According to Texas Juvenile Justice Department, 75% of juvenile probation departments are funded by local counties.

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON COMMUNITY CORRECTIONS IN THE UNITED STATES

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THE IMPACT OF THE COVID - 19 PANDEMIC ON COMMUNITY CORRECTIONS



Much of the experience of traditional community supervision relies on face-to-face interactions between the supervision officer and individual on supervision (Andrews & Bonta, 2010). However, the global COVID-19 pandemic introduced significant challenges to this supervision process. With many states instituting stay-at-home orders in the first several months, and with the need to follow safety guidelines such as those presented by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), community corrections agencies were forced to quickly rethink how they do business. Given the obvious lack of pre-existing research on how to change supervision protocols in the midst of a global pandemic, working out the best solutions has not been easy.

Accurate and comprehensive information on the prevalence of COVID-19 outbreaks among clients and community supervision staff is scant as yet. Individuals with a lower socioeconomic status and without access to health care are most vulnerable during the current pandemic (Ahmed, Ahmed, Pissarides, & Stiglitz, 2020), suggesting possible risk factors for community supervision populations. These populations are already medically vulnerable, having increased risk of contracting infectious diseases due to the prevalence of preexisting medical risk factors (e.g., asthma, hepatitis, and sexually transmitted diseases) (Clark et al., 2013; Vaughn, DeLisi, Beaver, Perron, & Abdon, 2012) as well as disproportionate levels of social and economic disadvantage (Vaughn et al., 2012), behavioral risk factors such as substance use (Fearn et al., 2016), and mental illness (James & Glaze, 2006) compared to the general population. The pandemic has also brought other hardships, including

increased unemployment and housing and food instability, all of which have created significant challenges for correctional agencies and the populations they supervise.

COVID-19 Guidelines for Corrections

In an attempt to spearhead agency response to COVID-19, Executives Transforming Probation & Parole (EXiT), a coalition consisting of current and former community supervision executives and the Vera Institute of Justice (Vera, 2020) released statements with recommendations for community supervision agencies across the United States. These guidelines included prevention strategies such as placing immediate limits on office visits for those on parole and probation, suspending or limiting the processing of technical violations, reducing intake to only those with an absolute need to be on probation and parole, reducing probation and parole terms, and providing training for staff and guidance for probationers and parolees. Vera also recommended sharing of educational information on COVID-19 with individuals on community supervision and utilizing CDC-informed screening tools.¹ Lastly, the Vera guidelines provided specific guidance on responding to COVID-19 that included creating medical care plans, training staff, and implementing policies to protect staff who become ill.

Taken together, the Vera guidelines present transformations for the field of community supervision, especially regarding changes to methods of responding to noncompliance and integration of public health strategies. Community corrections agencies will likely need to continue with such altered supervision practices for the foreseeable future, given there have been

Directors reported the use of videoconferencing and other technologies was the single most beneficial change made in response to COVID-19.

Directors reported the biggest challenge currently facing the field of community supervision was the inability to hold individuals accountable.

nearly 5.5 million confirmed cases and over 170,000 deaths in the United States as of August 2020 (Dong, Du, & Gardner, 2020).

The aim of the current study is to shed light on how community corrections agencies have implemented changes to prevent, contain, and respond to COVID-19 to date. The data collected here provides a timely picture of what has been happening in community supervision agencies, including the various efforts they have made to prevent, contain, and respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and the new policies and procedures they had to implement to succeed.

Methods

Data for this study are part of an ongoing, longitudinal, mixed method study to examine how community supervision agencies are adapting to the COVID-19 pandemic. The information reported here was collected by administering surveys to community supervision administrators across the United States during June through August 2020. To start, we collected contact information for community supervision agencies across the United States. The make-up of each state's contact list varied depending on the structure of its community corrections system. For example, eight states were organized by regions and had a regional director complete the survey for multiple counties, while two states operated at the state level and had one representative respond to the survey. An e-mail was also distributed through the Center for Advancing Correctional Excellence! (ACE!) list-serve. Twelve states required approval from a centralized review board. Two states approved participation, two declined to participate, and eight had not yet approved participation. Electronic surveys were distributed to all identified administrators using Qualtrics (Snow & Mann, 2013). See Viglione and colleagues (2020) for a full description of the methods.

Sample

A total of 1,295 community supervision administrators (chiefs, supervisors, directors) were invited to participate in the study. Of those individuals invited to complete the survey, 337 responded (31%), while an additional 10 completed the survey via the ACE! list-serve e-mail. Agencies from 42 states were represented². Characteristics of participating agencies are presented in Table 1.

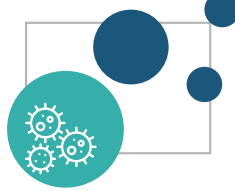


Table 1: Sample characteristics (N = 347)

Variable	% (n)	M (SD)	Minimum	Maximum
Regions Served				
Rural	75.5% (197)			
Suburban	27.7% (33)			
Urban	23.1% (32)			
Rural/Suburban	21.7% (27)			
Rural/Urban	16.0 % (12)			
Suburban/Urban	14.5% (6)			
Rural/Suburban/Urban	12.2% (38)			
Region of U.S.				
Northeast	14.9% (52)			
Midwest	33.7% (117)			
West	22.7% (79)			
South	28.5% (99)			
Populations Served				
Adults	90.8% (315)			
Youth	45.8% (159)			
Felony	83.9% (291)			
Misdemeanor	77.5% (269)			
Type of Supervision				
County Probation	63.1% (219)			
State Probation	38.3% (133)			
Federal Probation	1.0% (3)			
State Parole	24.5% (85)			
County Parole	11.8% (41)			
Caseload		89.3 (52.05)	1	450
Total Supervision Population		4324 (19609)	1	250000
20-499	35.5% (120)			
500-999	21.1% (70)			
1000-4999	31.3% (104)			
5000+	12.0% (40)			
Officers with Caseloads		51 (231)	1	3500
Office Status				
Open	99.1% (344)			
Closed	0.9% (3)			

Measures

The survey contained a variety of questions designed to identify changes agencies have made in response to COVID-19 (Table 2). Questions focused on prevention, containment, and response strategies, as well as changes agencies have made to supervision practices.

Table 2: Survey Measures

Variable	Measure
<i>Prevention Strategies</i>	<i>Meeting locations (face-to-face; in office; in field), frequency of meetings</i>
<i>Use of Technology</i>	<i>Technology used for supervision (e.g., "telephone calls," "texting," "e-mail," "postcards," "video conferencing"); frequency of technology use</i>
<i>Responses to Behaviors</i>	<i>Frequency of various strategies used (e.g., "technical violations," "revocations," "drug testing"); frequency violations issued (e.g., "failing a drug/alcohol test," "pay fines").</i>
<i>Agency Policies</i>	<i>Collection of supervision fees; early terminations; percentage of terminated cases</i>
<i>Containment Strategies</i>	<i>Use of a screening tool to identify exposure to and risk for COVID-19 infection, sharing information and guidance about prevention</i>
<i>Response Strategies</i>	<i>Medical care plans; COVID-19 training; paid sick leave</i>
<i>Impact of COVID-19</i>	<i>Percentage of officers furloughed or laid off; estimates of positive COVID-19 cases among clients and staff</i>
<i>Director Perceptions</i>	<i>Perceptions of most beneficial strategy implemented and most pressing issue</i>

Analytic Plan

All survey data were exported to Qualtrics and uploaded to SPSS version 26 for analysis. Because the focus of this study is to examine the landscape of community corrections during the COVID-19 pandemic, a series of descriptive analyses were conducted. Given that the focus of this study is exploratory in nature, inferential analyses were not conducted.

Results

Prevention Strategies

Of the 347 agencies participating in the survey to date, over half reported they were supervising individuals face-to-face in the office, while 50% reported supervising individuals face-to-face in the field. Only 15% of agencies reported they were not seeing any individuals, in any capacity, face to face (Table 3). Of those meeting in the office, less than half reported they met somewhere other than usual office space such as the lobby or a classroom where there was more space to social distance. Of those meeting in the field, nearly three-quarters reported officers met with individuals outside of their homes while less than half reported they met somewhere else, such as a community park or place of employment.



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**Table 3: Face-to-Face Contact Strategies
(N = 347)**

	% (n)
In office	63.4% (220)
In office, somewhere other than usual office space	46.4% (102)
In office, no change	23.3% (58)
In office, designated place (e.g., lobby, classroom)	37.0% (50)
Outside office, parking lot, curbside	22.1% (30)
In office, behind barrier/plexiglass	11.0% (15)
In field	50.1% (174)
In field, outside home	89.1% (155)
In field, park, place of employment	11.0% (15)
In field, no change	11.5% (20)
No face-to-face meetings occurring	15.3% (53)

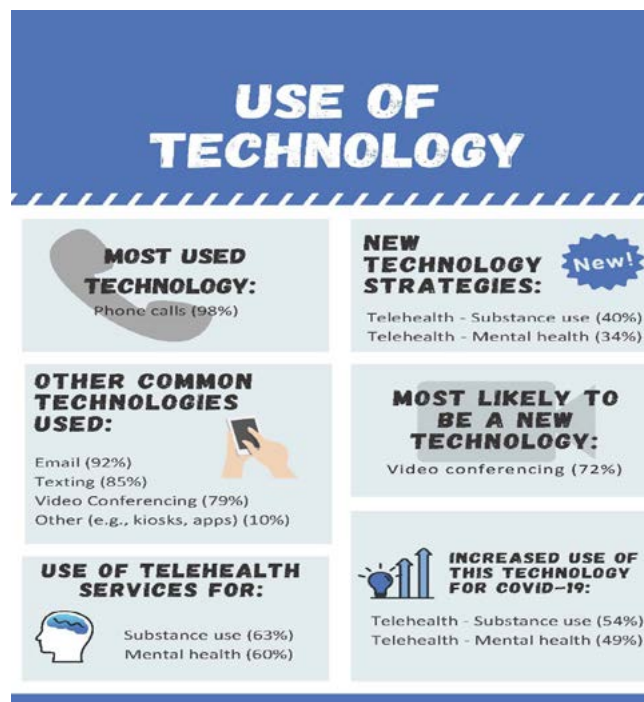
Of the 294 agencies who reported some face-to-face contact (office or field), 27% reported they met with all individuals on their caseloads as they normally would. However, 56% reported they met with high-risk individuals, with fewer reporting meeting with those considered moderate risk (35%) or low risk (10%). Additionally, 41% of directors reported they saw individuals who needed to be drug tested while 48% of agencies saw new clients. Approximately 48% of directors reported officers were seeing individuals with substance use issues less frequently, while 43% reported officers were

seeing those with mental health issues less frequently. The only group more likely to be seen at the same frequency were individuals convicted of sex offenses (66%).

Use of Technology

The most used technology to continue active supervision of individuals during the COVID-19 pandemic was telephone calls. A large percentage of agencies reported their officers were also using texting, e-mail, and videoconferencing (Figure 1). Approximately 10% of directors reported use of other technology, including smartphone applications, website reporting, kiosks, electronic monitoring, and social media. Of all strategies, videoconferencing was most likely to be an entirely new technology implemented in response to COVID-19. Most directors reported individuals were using telehealth services for mental health and substance use, with less than half noting these were new technologies in their office.

Figure 1: Agency Use of Technology



Responses to Behavior

The largest increase in use of supervision and case management strategies was reported for electronic monitoring/GPS (Figure 2). The majority of directors reported decreased use of drug testing, community service requirements, revocations, and technical violations. Most directors reported their office processed fewer violations for all non-compliance, except for commission of a new crime and possession of a firearm.

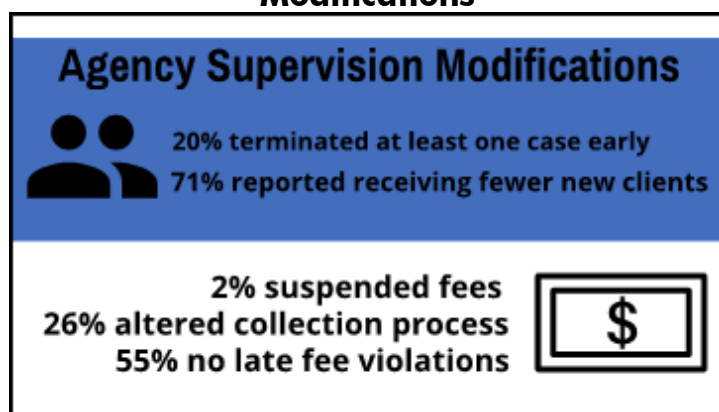
Figure 2: Response to Behaviors



Agency Policies

Over half of agencies reported they were collecting supervision fees but were not issuing violations for late fees (Figure 3). Roughly a quarter of agencies reported they made alterations in their collection process, such as permitting online, mail-in, or phone payments, while 2.4% of agencies halted collection of fees altogether. Less than a quarter of agencies reported they had terminated supervision terms early because of COVID-19 (Table 4). The majority reported these individuals were those in full compliance with all conditions of probation or were considered low risk. Most agencies reported they received fewer new clients referred for supervision, with the majority of those reporting a 21% to 40% decline in caseloads. Just over a quarter of agencies reported receiving increased referrals since the start of the pandemic, with the majority reporting a 1% to 10% increase in caseloads.

Figure 3: Agency Supervision Modifications





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Table 4: Supervision Terminations and Change of Client Referrals

Early termination of supervision (n = 330)	% (n)
Yes	20.3% (67)
No	67.3% (222)
Not sure	12.4% (41)
Agency plans to terminate supervision terms in the future (N = 328)	% (n)
Yes	3.7% (12)
Maybe	28.0% (92)
No	68.3% (224)
New Client Referrals (n = 329)	% (n)
Decrease in new clients	71.4% (235)
Increase in new clients	7.9% (26)

Nearly three-quarters required staffs to wear masks, while 68% required masks for individuals on supervision (Figure 4). The majority of agencies provided face masks for staff and over half provided masks for individuals on supervision. Additional strategies implemented included temperature screenings of all individuals prior to entering the building, increased sanitization of office spaces, enforced social distancing, and installation of plexiglass barriers.

Containment Strategies

Over half of participating agencies reported implementing a screening tool to identify individuals who may have been exposed to COVID-19 (Figure 5). Roughly 73% of directors shared guidance about prevention with their staff, while 55% shared guidance with individuals on supervision. Other less common strategies reported were requiring clients to sign a form stating they do not have COVID-19 and/or do not currently have

symptoms, requiring staff to report symptoms each day before coming to work, posting a sign with common symptoms on the front door, and requiring staff to log all contacts.

Response Strategies

Nine percent of directors reported creating medical care plans with guidance on accessing emergency care, a transportation plan, and medical insurance (Figure 5). Less than half of participating agencies reported providing training to their staff on procedures to respond to COVID-19 (38%). However, 63% of directors implemented a paid sick leave policy while 25% reported having a plan for staffing substitutions and/or agency operations if staff were to fall ill. Approximately 25% of agencies had not yet implemented any policies to support staff who became ill with COVID-19.

Figure 4: Agency Use of Prevention Strategies

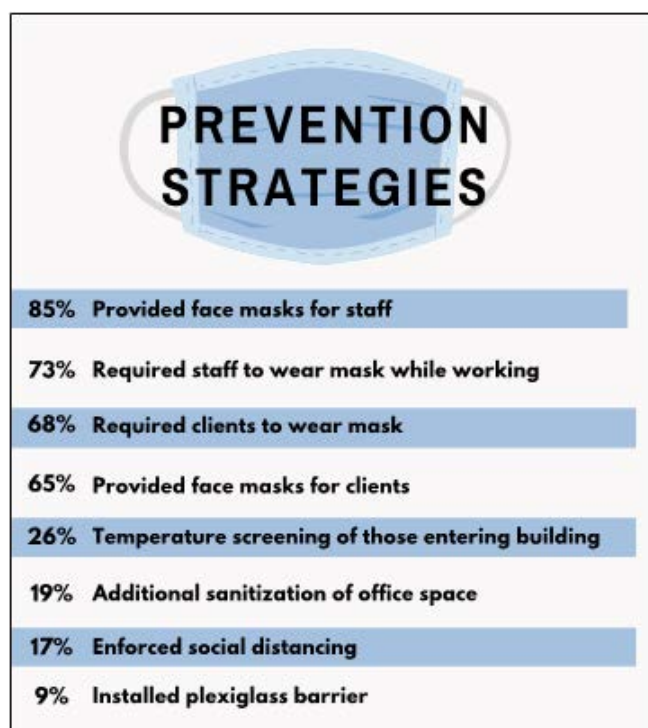
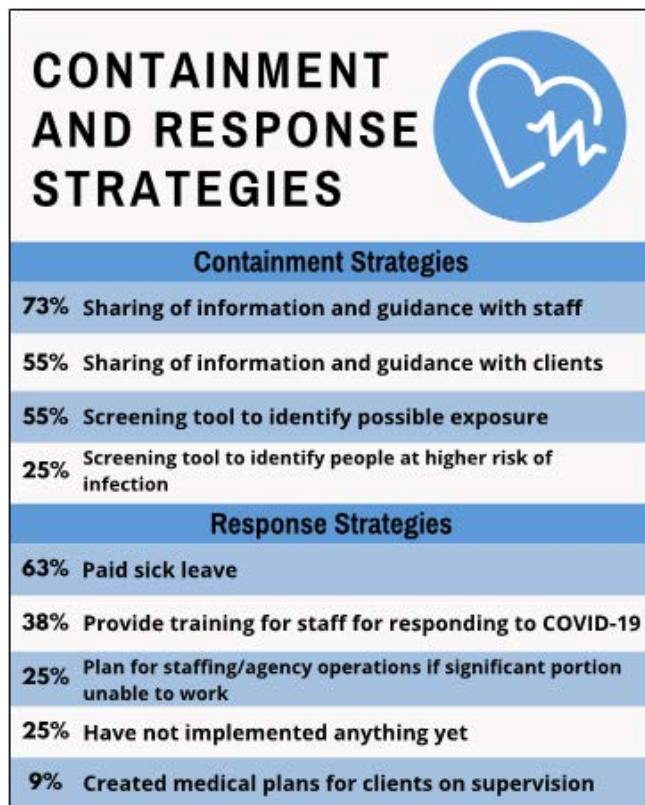


Figure 5: Agency Containment and Response Strategies



Impact of COVID-19

Approximately 40% of offices reported at least one confirmed case of COVID-19 among individuals on supervision, while 16% reported at least one confirmed case among officers. In these offices, the majority reported fewer than 10 positive cases (Table 5). In offices where a client tested positive, 32% placed the individual on remote supervision until either they tested negative or 14 days had passed. In offices where a staff member tested positive, 55% increased cleaning protocols and/or hired a cleaning service, 50% required the officer to quarantine until they tested negative, 40% conducted contact tracing, 21% required any other staff who came into contact with the individual to quarantine until they tested negative, and 17% closed the office temporarily.

Table 5: COVID-19 Cases in Office and Agency Response to Testing

Confirmed cases of COVID-19 in office (n = 262)	%
Yes	
Clients	40.1%
Staff	16.1%
No	
Clients	35.5%
Staff	82.4%
Not sure	
Clients	24.4%
Staff	1.5%

Director Perceptions

Directors were asked to report the most beneficial policy implemented in their agency in response to COVID-19 to date (Figure 6). Of the 347 directors who responded, the most reported beneficial policy was the use of remote supervision and technology to continue supervising individuals (49%). The next most frequent responses were mask requirements/ use of PPE (18.4%), rotating schedules/ skeleton crews (7.8%), and reducing/limiting face-to-face contacts (4.9%).

Figure 6: Most Beneficial Strategy Reported (N = 347)



Directors were also asked to report the most pressing issue for community corrections agencies currently (Figure 7). The most common issue directors reported was the limited ability to conduct drug tests (14.7%).

in another outdoor location (e.g., community park, place of employment) rather than enter the home as they normally would. In place of this face-to-face contact, agencies reported a large increase in the use of technology (e.g., telephone calls, videoconferencing, e-mail, and texting) to supervise caseloads. For most agencies, the use of videoconferencing was an entirely new technology.

Directors reported the use of videoconferencing and other technologies was the single most beneficial change made in response to COVID-19. The use of technology not only allowed agencies to prioritize the health and safety of their staff and clients, but it also removed some traditional barriers for individuals on supervision. For example, with the increased flexibility allowed by technology, it became easier to accommodate work schedules when arranging a meeting with an officer, and the need to arrange transportation was also eliminated. A critical path forward for future research is to examine the implementation of technologies to supervise individuals and provide support and a range of services.

**Figure 7: Most Pressing Issue Reported
(N = 347)**



The largest, and perhaps most obvious, change reported across community corrections agencies was the decrease in face-to-face supervision practices. Less than three-quarters of agencies surveyed reported they were still meeting with individuals in the office, and of those who were, agencies largely prioritized individuals assessed as higher risk followed by those who were new clients. Agencies instructed officers who conducted field visits to do so either outside the individual's home or

incremental responses to noncompliance while reserving formal violations for the most serious behaviors (Burke, 1997; Taxman, Soule, & Gelb, 1999). Examples of incremental responses include those aligned with a rehabilitation goal (e.g., drug court, treatment) or punitive goals (e.g., increased reporting requirements, electronic monitoring, increased drug testing) (Burke, 1997). However, the pandemic presents challenges to many of these options due to limited resources (e.g., limited availability of treatment, inability to drug test). This suggests the need for creativity in developing alternatives to violations and for individual agencies to identify feasible alternatives in their jurisdiction.

The inability to administer drug tests to individuals on supervision was also reported as a major challenge during the pandemic. Directors reported significant concern that individuals were likely relapsing and/or using substances at an increased rate. Additionally, directors reported concerns over the safety of conducting drug tests during the pandemic. Some had switched to mouth swabs for drug testing, the use of patch testing for alcohol use, or had added a window to their bathrooms so officers could supervise drug tests from a different room.

The challenge of ensuring safe drug testing presents a direct need for community supervision agencies to partner with public health experts, as drug testing does involve risks that are directly relevant in the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, research on COVID-19 finds that viral RNA may be present in urine, although little evidence suggests this viral RNA is infectious (Nomoto et al., 2020). However, infectious viral RNA is known to be found in saliva

(To et al., 2020), which suggests the use of mouth swabs may be riskier than traditional urine screens. Officer supervision of a urine screen in an enclosed space without proper ventilation (e.g., a bathroom) is also risky for COVID-19 transmission (Morawska et al., 2020). With either strategy, appropriate PPE would be required to reduce risk of transmission, which requires acquisition of resources that have been difficult across the country. Safer alternatives may include a bathroom window observation of drug screens or perhaps, when proper PPE is available, the use of curbside mouth swab testing. However, creating alternatives to procedures such as drug testing requires careful consideration of the medical and infectious disease research on COVID-19 and should be done in consultation with experts to best protect the safety of staff and clients. Continued shut-downs, lack of resources/staff, and backlogs in labs are likely to persist, which will require the development of protocols that are safe and feasible for community supervision agencies to implement.

Lastly, financial and budgetary concerns are likely to challenge community supervision agencies for the foreseeable future. While many directors reported current budget crises already, others reported the expectation of financial crises to come. With the inability to collect supervision fees and reduction in the numbers of individuals on supervision, directors have had to lay off staff or anticipate doing so in the future. This is particularly troubling, as budget strain may be present for years to come even though a reduction in caseloads is not expected to last indefinitely.

The next steps of this study include two additional waves of data collection to examine how responses to COVID-19 and the



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challenges presented to community supervision agencies are changing over the course of the pandemic. Immediate work is needed to support directors and probation staff in addressing noncompliance using alternatives to violations and jail-based sanctions, the monitoring and detection of substance use, and to develop and advance technologies to support supervision efforts during the ongoing pandemic and beyond. This ongoing project sets a foundation for additional inquiry in understanding how agencies response to COVID-19 will shape the future of community corrections.

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Bios

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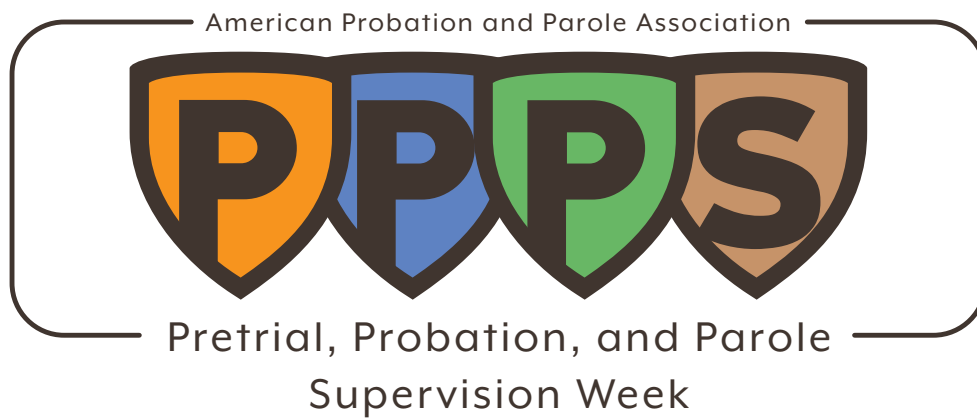
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Endnotes

1. See the following websites for some CDC-informed screening tools: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/appendix-1-hcw-risk-assessment-tool.pdf> ; <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/appendix-2-monitoring-form-templates.pdf>; <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/hcp/flowchart-risk-assessment.pdf>
2. The states represented in the sample are as follows: Northeast: Connecticut, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Vermont; Midwest: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Missouri, North Dakota, South Dakota, Kansas, Michigan, Nebraska, Ohio; West: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington; South: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, South Carolina, Texas, Virginia



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A JUVENILE PROBATION OFFICER'S EXPERIENCE WITH THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

The following is an interview between Dr. Kimberly Kras (KK), co-editor of Perspectives, and Alicia Hitt (AH) regarding her experience as a community corrections practitioner during the coronavirus pandemic. Ms. Hitt is a Field Supervision Officer for the Harris County Juvenile Probation Department in Houston, Texas. She also serves as a School-Based Probation Officer for Westside High School in the community. Her purpose is to improve probationers' attendance and academic performance, reduce school code of conduct infractions, and improve student support. She is currently a doctoral student at Texas Southern University in Administration of Justice and Education. She has a master's degree in criminal justice with a concentration in juvenile justice and restorative justice from Toledo University.





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KK: Since the pandemic has started, what is the greatest change that you've experienced related to your supervision practices?

AH: The greatest change is not having physical contact with the youth I am supervising. Before COVID-19, I spent a lot of time engaged with them because I am a school-based officer. I supervise those who attend Westside High School and the two middle schools that feed into the high school. I have an office at Westside High School. I report there four days a week, so I've been seeing my youth daily in passing, and in scheduled and unscheduled office visits. I've assisted with everything from probation to school issues, so I had a lot of interaction. School going virtual was very drastic and difficult to navigate. I had to figure out how to advocate and support my youth at their educational institutions from a distance. It got a little chaotic at times but, in the end, I believe I can truthfully say I was successful.

KK: What does it look like now, since you can't be in physical contact with them?

AH: Last week Houston Independent School District started face-to-face instruction, so I started back reporting to the school four days a week. Students have the option of remaining virtual or receiving face-to-face instruction. Many of the youth on my caseload and the student body as a whole have chosen to remain virtual learners. The school has a population of about 5,000 students. However, only about 450 of them decided to return, so it's like a ghost town. Nevertheless, starting to work again in person has allowed me to engage directly with the deans, counselors, social workers and wraparound specialists, and get back to addressing my youth's needs in a familiar environment versus over the phone and Zoom.

KK: What are remaining concerns for your clients?

AH: My remaining concerns are how to prevent my clients from getting left behind academically and having their essential needs going unmet. Virtual learning takes a lot of discipline and support, and, unfortunately, a lot of my youth don't have either of those. The majority of my clients are trying to navigate this virtual educational platform independently, and that's a huge concern for me with so many of them having 504 plans or special educational needs. I'm really concerned that they will get behind, become frustrated and discouraged, and give up. I also have concerns regarding whether or not my youth are receiving regular meals or if they're in a safe environment. So, in an effort to bridge the gap, I have weekly check-ins with all of my clients to see if they need any assistance. Even with me making myself available, it is still challenging to provide tutoring services and academic accommodations while also scheduling meal delivery and pick up for those who are learning from home. All in all, my clients being virtual learners is definitely a huge concern.

KK: It sounds like a lot of your focus now has shifted--maybe is shifting away from your prior duties to really encompassing a lot of educational engagement and attainment.

AH: It really has. Shifting the focus towards education and academic achievement has improved my youth's compliance with their rules of supervision. Most of my youth are involved in school extracurricular activities. As they become more involved in clubs and organizations, their self-esteem and confidence has improved, and they are starting to gain a sense of purpose and direction for their lives. That also means my youth have less idle time, and as a result they are not getting into trouble and their peer association groups have improved. During the COVID-19 stay-at-home order, I was very proactive in making sure that my youth completed

their court-ordered requirements so that they could really just focus on school once it started. I understood that this was going to be a non-traditional school year full of unique challenges and that my youth did not need any additional distractions.

KK: How did they respond to you engaging them in their community service and other court-ordered applications?

AH: Initially, they were like, “Oh man, we really still have to do this?” However, once they got into their virtual service-learning, therapy, and decision-making sessions, they expressed that they’d rather complete their services virtually than face-to-face. I would deliver service-learning material to my youth at their homes via “curbside delivery,” and they knew that they were required to log on and participate in every scheduled session to receive credit. I would also log in during service-learning sessions and decision-making workshops to check for attendance. Honestly, I never had an issue with participation, because the youth came to love the flexibility of being able to complete their court-ordered services virtually. Many told me that in the past their lack of involvement and engagement in court-ordered programming was because they did not have transportation or parental support. The youth would be left with the challenge and responsibility of getting themselves to programs, and it was just not feasible. They would be sanctioned for not fulfilling court-ordered requirements and never get needed services. However, with virtual services, the youth are able to use their phones or school-issued laptops to participate, making it much easier to stay in compliance.

KK: It sounds like they’re experiencing more success than they would have otherwise.

A: Yes, they are. I have successfully terminated many youths since March, some of whom I have had for years. All of them have expressed a level of relief, excitement, and sense of accomplishment that they are finally off probation. It is such a joy to see.

KK: What a bright spot in this pandemic world. So, what are the lingering issues for staff?

AH: The lingering issues for staff are the reduction in the size of their caseload and the need to remain productive with their extra time. So many of our youth have successfully terminated since the start of COVID-19 that our caseload numbers have dropped drastically. Previously our caseload average was between 15 and 20 cases. and now our average is seven. The challenge for staff is simply trying to remain productive. In some cases, officers have indicated that they do not have enough to do. I don’t have that issue. Nevertheless, our department has incorporated a full and half day of office duty once a week to assist officers in remaining productive. Officers have also been asked to volunteer in the department or the community or organize a virtual group activity with their youth once a week. I host a weekly roundtable with my youth. We select a topic, create a PowerPoint, and have a discussion on Zoom.

KK: How did you come up with that idea?

AH: A couple of officers in my unit were doing town hall meetings prior to COVID-19 as a means of helping youth complete their community service hours. I took what they were doing and revamped it to work for my demographic. I decided that I would ask the youth what topics they would like to explore or what topics were trending amongst their peers. The youth responded with topics



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such as voting, COVID-19, racial injustice, and employment opportunities for youth. The roundtables have been very successful, and my youth are present every week. The majority of those on my caseload are 17 years old, and they are very interested in voting issues such as voter eligibility, how to register to vote, and understanding the Electoral College. We extensively talk about COVID-19 and the effect it is having on their lives. We talk about employment, job opportunities, college and trade schools, resume building and preparing for the workforce. We talk about racial disparities in this country, race riots, how interacting with the police makes them feel, and preparing for life beyond probation.

KK: With all of the negatives in how we've had to change the way we do business, what is a change that you feel has turned out to be beneficial that you would have never tried or would have never had to do or confront without the pandemic?

AH: The change that has proven to be the most beneficial is working from home. In this line of work, working from home was unheard of. Probation officers lived by the school of thought that field officers can only be successful if they are in the field and immersed in the community. However, with COVID-19, as a department we had to step out of our comfort zone and take a new approach. I love my department's openness to change and how flexible and supportive they have been throughout this transition. I thank them for trusting us with such a huge responsibility, letting us do our jobs and not micromanaging. I appreciate them for supplying us with the new equipment and remote access we need to be successful working from home. It shows that they have a clear direction for the department and that they recognize our current

practices may become a permanent staple in how we function as an organization.

KK: Is there a practice or policy change that you think is going to be here to stay?

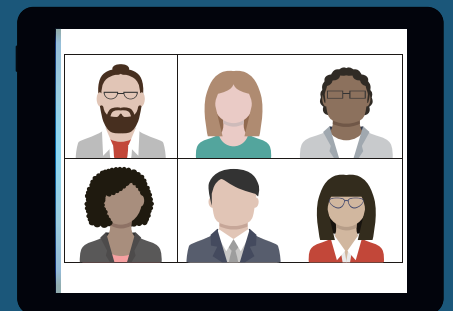
AH: I think that working from home, conducting curbside home visits, and offering virtual services are here to stay. I honestly do not think we will be returning to the office, well at least not in the capacity that we knew. I think we will continue to work remotely, only reporting to the office when necessary. I also think that we will continue to conduct curbside home visits. We started conducting curbside home visits in May. Curbside visits do not require officers to enter the home. Instead we drive up in our vehicle, the youth comes outside, and we have a brief conversation. I think that this practice, along with offering virtual services, will continue because of how compliant and receptive families have been.

KK: Is there anything else that you feel the field would benefit from knowing about your experience?

AH: Be open minded, be flexible, and be adaptable. Know that you are not the only one going through this. It is not just your department. We are all experiencing some version of the same thing, and we will get through this. Take care of yourself. We have to make time for self-care, because this job itself can weigh on your heart, spirit, and mind. Before COVID-19, we could leave work at work. Now we have literally taken work home, so it is extremely important to create a healthy mental space where you can debrief and decompress.

COVID-19 AND COMMUNITY CORRECTIONS: STABILITY AND CHANGE IN SUPERVISION PRACTICES

BY: DEBORAH KOETZLE, PH.D. AND CRAIG S. J. SCHWALBE, PH.D.





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The COVID-19 pandemic that emerged in early 2020 disrupted nearly all aspects of life in the United States, as stay-at-home orders were issued, and individuals were advised to practice social distancing. As a result of these early public health efforts, many businesses and agencies closed, and there was a shift towards working from home in an effort to limit spread of the novel coronavirus. The criminal justice system was not immune to these changes. Police were advised to reduce arrests in an effort to prevent jail overcrowding; courts were closed or began operating at reduced capacity; and low-risk and vulnerable individuals were released from incarceration because of the infectious nature of the virus and the need for social distancing (Buchanan, Castro, Kushner, & Krohn 2020; Jennings & Perez, 2020; Marcum, 2020). As of October 20, 2020, there were over 8 million confirmed cases of COVID-19 and over 200,000 deaths in the United States (Dong, Du, & Gardner, 2020), and it appears that at least some social distancing restrictions will remain in place for a long time to come.

Though much has been written about the impact of COVID-19 on secure correctional facilities, relatively little is known about the impact on probation and parole practices and on individuals being supervised in the community. Yet, with nearly 4.5 million people under some form of community supervision (Maruschak & Minton, 2020), an exploration of probation and parole practices in the current context can provide guidance to community supervision agencies moving forward. In the current study, we examine the impact of COVID-19 on community supervision officers and their clients and how supervision practices changed in the early days of the pandemic. Using a national survey of

probation and parole officers, we specifically examined differences in perceptions of client compliance, supervision contacts, and the types of supervision strategies employed by officers.

Methods

Invitations to participate in the survey were sent to probation and parole officers via the American Probation and Parole Association (APPA) and the University of Cincinnati Corrections Institute (UCCI) list-serve. Two emails were sent to each email list, and three invitations were sent to APPA members via APPA Connect, an in-house social networking platform. Participation in the survey was voluntary and anonymous and was incentivized through a drawing for gift cards. The sample consists of 1,054 probation officers and parole officers who were supervising a caseload of people under community supervision orders at the time of the survey.

Respondents were asked questions about their education and experience, their caseload, and personal COVID-19 impacts. Next, they were asked to select an index case from among individuals who had been on their caseload for at least three months before COVID-19, using a semi-random process (for details see Schwalbe & Koetzle, 2020). Because a random selection process was used, index cases are thought to be representative of caseloads. Respondents were asked to report on the index case characteristics, client COVID-19 impacts, client compliance, and supervision practices. Client compliance was measured along three dimensions: percent compliant with reporting requirements, percent confidence that the client was truthful and forthcoming, and percent confident that the client was abiding by supervision conditions.

Respondents were asked to rate compliance for the month prior to COVID-19 (“pre-COVID”) and for the first month following the onset of COVID-19 (“post-COVID”).

Supervision practices consisted of multiple measures. As with compliance, respondents were asked to report on the pre-COVID month and the post-COVID month. Contact frequency was measured on a six-point scale ranging from less than monthly to more than weekly for a variety of contact types (e.g., text, phone, video). Four subscales of the Probation Practices Assessment Survey (PPAS; Schwalbe & Maschi, 2011) were adapted for the current study to measure interpersonal strategies and case management strategies. Interpersonal strategies included a five-item behavioral scale (e.g., “How often did you offer incentives?” $\alpha = .84$) and a three-item confrontation subscale (e.g., “How often did you remind the client about the consequences of non-compliance?” $\alpha = .84$). Case management strategies included a five-item treatment-oriented scale (e.g., “How often did you arrange or monitor mental health services, substance abuse services, family-based services, or other treatment services?” $\alpha = .77$) and a three-item accountability-oriented scale (e.g., “How often did you impose jail/detention placement, home detention or electronic monitoring, curfew restrictions, or other restrictive intervention?” $\alpha = .62$). The frequency of each PPAS item was measured on a six-point scale ranging from “never” to “every contact.”

Data were collected between May 27 and June 24, 2020, using Qualtrics, an online survey platform, and analyses were conducted using SPSS and STATA. All procedures were approved by the Institutional Review Boards at Columbia University and John Jay College of Criminal Justice.

Findings

The majority of respondents in the sample were female (65%), White (77%), in their early 20s (mean=23.8, standard deviation=10.1), and served as probation officers (66%). Seventy percent of the respondents reported having a bachelor’s degree and 27% had a graduate degree. Caseload sizes ranged from one to 3,000 (median=55). Two-thirds of the respondents supervised a general caseload, 31% supervised juveniles, and 85% reported having a mix of cases. Over 40% of the respondents worked in agencies in urban or suburban locations while 26.5% reported working in rural settings. Respondents were also asked to report on the characteristics of the randomly selected index case clients. The majority of these clients were White (55%), male (73%), and had been on community supervision for an average of 12 months (mean=23 months). Well over half were identified as medium- or high-risk (42% and 37%, respectively). The median level of case compliance was 80% (mean=72.6%, standard deviation=26.3).

COVID-19 Impacts

As illustrated in Table 1, probation and parole officers enjoyed relative stability in the early days of the pandemic. Fewer than 11% of officers reported problems with job loss, housing instability, food insecurity, or having someone move in or out of the home as a result of the pandemic. Like many households across the country, almost half of the respondents reported that they had been impacted by school or daycare closures. Despite the limited direct impact of the pandemic, over a third of the sample reported that they had increased anxiety or mental health problems during this time. Relatively few (9%), however, reported increases in drug



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or alcohol use, and less than 5% reported any type of medical emergency. Only 13% reported having a confirmed or possible COVID-19 diagnosis. Latino/a officers were significantly more likely to report a suspected or confirmed COVID-19 infection (20%) than White (14%) or Black (7%) officers ($\chi^2 = 5.88$, $p < .05$).

Table 1. COVID-19 Impacts on Officers and Clients

Impact	Officer (%)	Client (%)
Job loss	11.4	39.2
Food insecurity	6.1	25.5
Lost housing	0.2	7.6
Fell behind on rent/ mortgage	4.3	25.5
School/daycare closure	45.6	34.5
Change in household members	7.1	13.7
Increased drug/ alcohol use	8.9	28.6
Anxiety/mental health concerns	38.3	50.9
Medical emergency	2.5	7.8
Confirmed/possible COVID-19	13.4	29.7

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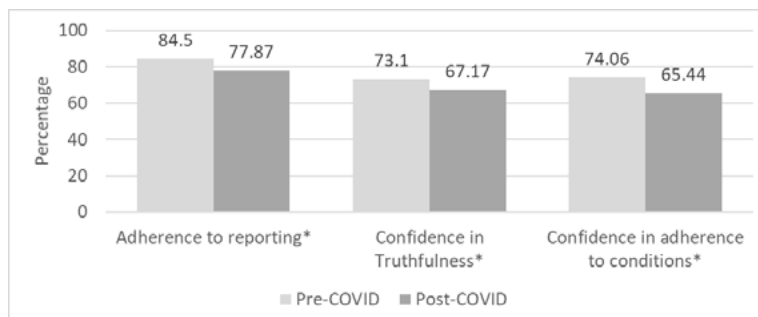
Supervision Contacts

Implicit in the use of remote supervision strategies is the need for technology that allows for remote contact. The majority (97%) of clients were reported to have access to multiple methods of communication. Close to 90% were reported to have a telephone and 70% were reported to have a smartphone. All but 3% had some type of phone access. Eighty-five percent were able to send and receive text messages and almost 70% had email access, although less than half (42%) were reported to have a home computer with internet access. Only 40% were reported to have the ability to engage in videoconferencing. However, since over 75% were reported to have either a smartphone or home computer with internet access, additional research is needed to assess barriers to videoconferencing. Access to communication did not differ by race, gender, or risk level, though juvenile clients were significantly more likely to have access to videoconferencing compared to adult clients (49% and 36%, respectively, $\chi^2 = 13.77$, $p < .001$).

Perceptions of Compliance

An important aspect of community supervision is to ensure public safety while facilitating behavioral change. Officers reported less confidence in compliance among index cases following the pandemic onset. As reported in Figure 1, index clients were, on average, 85% compliant with reporting requirements prior to COVID; this decreased to 73% following COVID. On average, officers were 73% confident in the truthfulness of index clients prior to the move to remote supervision and 67% confident following the switch. Finally, officers rated their level of confidence with index clients following the conditions of supervision. Prior to COVID-19, officers were 74% confident; following the onset, officers rated their level of confidence at 65%. There were no significant differences by gender or race. Juveniles had higher rates of missed appointments both pre- and post-COVID compared to adults, and the rate of missed appointments post-COVID increased at a significantly higher rate for juveniles than adults (19% and 13% respectively, $F=5.108$, $p<.05$). Similarly, higher risk clients had overall lower rates of compliance both pre- and post-COVID. Missed appointments increased at a greater rate for moderate (15%) and high risk (17%) clients than for low risk clients (7%; $F=4.952$, $p<.01$). This pattern held true for compliance with probation conditions, with greater stability for lower risk clients compared to moderate and high-risk clients (4% change, 13%, and 14%, respectively, $F=5.700$, $p<.01$).

Figure 1. Client Compliance



* $p<.001$

Supervision Practices

Of primary interest was whether the pandemic changed the nature of supervision practices. To test this, we examined changes in the nature and frequency of supervision contacts and the type of strategies utilized during contacts. Though the nature of the contacts changed, the frequency remained stable. A summative score indicated an average of 6.4 contacts in the month prior to COVID-19 and 6.7 monthly contacts following the pandemic onset. This type of stability was facilitated by the use of remote strategies (see Table 2). As expected, face-to-face contacts decreased substantially in the early months of the pandemic. In the month prior to COVID-19, officers met with index clients in person an average of two to three times a month. Following the onset of the pandemic, they decreased to less than once per month for both types of contacts. As expected, remote contact strategies increased. In the month prior to the pandemic, officers reported one to two phone calls per month; this increased to two to three calls per month following the pandemic onset. Similarly, text messaging increased from monthly to twice a month. Kiosk reporting was used infrequently both prior to and following the onset of the pandemic. Of particular



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interest is the change with videoconferencing, which was nearly non-existent prior to the pandemic. Pre-COVID, videoconferencing was not used with any degree of regularity whereas respondents reporting using videoconferencing an average of one time a month with index clients during the post-COVID period.

Table 2. Pre- and Post-COVID-19 Mean Frequency^a of Contact by Type

Contact Type	Pre-COVID	Post-COVID	T-Statistic
Office	1.98	.60	29.291**
Field	1.55	.55	23.045**
Telephone	1.77	2.86	-21.652**
Text messaging	1.21	1.95	-16.260**
Video-conferencing	.13	.93	-17.903**
Kiosk	.13	.10	1.557

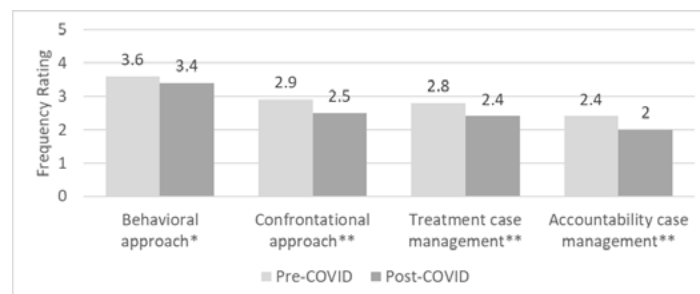
^aFrequency ranged from 0 to 5, with 0=less than once per month and 5= more than once per week

**p<.000

Finally, we examined differences in supervision strategies before and after the onset of COVID-19 using four PPAS subscales. Results indicate the mean frequency for each type of strategy, with higher numbers indicating more frequent use. As illustrated in Figure 2, there were small but significant changes in the nature of supervision practices during the early days of the pandemic. The use of confrontational approaches, treatment-oriented case management, and

accountability-oriented case management techniques all decreased following COVID whereas behavioral approaches decreased slightly. Prior to COVID, officers favored behavioral approaches to supervision over confrontational approaches; and treatment-oriented case management practices over accountability-oriented case management. These patterns held true following COVID-19.

Figure 2. Mean PPAS Scores



*p=.001, **p<.000

Further analysis, however, revealed that videoconferencing shifted these patterns. Table 3 presents average levels for each of the post-COVID-19 supervision strategies for clients who were not seen via videoconferencing (N=583) and clients who were seen at least once per month via videoconferencing (N=400). Levels of all supervision strategies were higher when clients were seen in videoconferencing, and all differences were statistically significant ($p < .001$). Moreover, the use of videoconferencing was also associated with two indicators of compliance: perceptions of client truthfulness ($t = 2.49$, $p < .05$) and of condition compliance ($t = 3.07$, $p < .01$). In addition to facilitating the use of effective supervision strategies, these findings suggest that videoconferencing is also positively related to important supervision outcomes.

Table 3. Mean Supervision Practices^a by Videoconferencing

Supervision Practice	No Video	Video	T-Statistic
Accountability-oriented			
case management	1.78	2.28	5.35**
Treatment-oriented			
case management	2.09	2.87	8.12**
Confrontational tactics	2.52	3.02	3.47*
Behavioral tactics	3.18	3.84	6.51**

^aItems were measured on a 6-point scale ranging from 0 to 5, with 0=never and 5=every contact

* $p < .001$, ** $p < .000$

Discussion and Conclusion

This study was conducted to explore how probation and parole supervision changed in the period immediately following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Not surprisingly, findings of this study affirm the vulnerabilities of community corrections clients to health problems like the pandemic. Overall, this population faces a substantial burden of social impacts and strains. Moreover, the burdens are not experienced equally across this population. Mirroring community research, people of color served in community corrections had higher levels of COVID-19 infections than White clients.

The generalizability of these findings must be considered within the context of methodological limitations. First, we utilized a convenience sample of probation and parole officers drawn from APPA and UCCI email

list-serves. Both organizations emphasize the need for evidence-based practices; the sample may represent officers who have had greater exposure to these practices than the general population of probation and parole officers. Second, our measure of supervision practices represents a measure of officers' perceptions of their self-report practices rather than a direct measure. They may be susceptible to bias as a function of memory and social desirability. Finally, the survey was conducted in the early days of the pandemic shortly after stay-at-home restrictions were imposed, and in some cases, lifted. It is possible that supervision strategies may change in additional ways not captured in the current study.

Despite these limitations, the current study demonstrates the resiliency and flexibility of probation and parole officers, and the findings bear witness to the efforts of probation and parole officers to serve clients under difficult circumstances. Many officers shifted away from in-person contacts to remote contacts, essentially holding constant the overall frequency of monthly contacts. Moreover, the stability in supervision strategies over the period measured is striking. Research has accumulated to support an approach to community corrections that blends accountability-based strategies with treatment-oriented, behavioral change strategies. Overall patterns suggest that officers strived to sustain this pattern.

The study results also indicated the potential of videoconferencing as a supervisory tool. Videoconferencing appeared to sustain a balanced approach to supervision and was associated with positive outcomes on client compliance. These findings suggest a role for videoconferencing in long-term reform of community corrections systems.



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Current reform efforts aim to increase the use of evidence-based supervision strategies, while at the same time minimizing the footprint of probation and parole in clients' lives. Ordinarily, this has been explored through an increase in the use of diversion, the use of kiosk reporting for low-risk offenders, and shorter periods of supervision. To this we may be able to add the viability of videoconferencing. Videoconferencing may support a balanced approach to supervision while having the advantage of minimizing the disruption that in-person reporting creates for clients in the form of travel and time in a waiting room. That over three quarters of people under community supervision orders have smartphones or internet-connected computers bodes well for the feasibility of videoconferencing in routine supervision practice. Studies are now underway to explore best practices in the use of videoconferencing as an alternative to in-person reporting. Future research should examine the effectiveness of videoconferencing relative to traditional modes of supervision.

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Bios

Deborah Koetzle, Ph.D., is an associate professor in the Department of Criminal Justice at John Jay College. Her scholarship centers on correctional rehabilitation, including problem-solving courts and risk/need assessments. For over 20 years she has served

as a consultant to local, state, and federal agencies on the topic of assessment, treatment interventions, and quality assurance, and she is an author of *What Works (and Doesn't) in Reducing Recidivism*. She can be reached at dkoetzle@jjay.cuny.edu.

Craig Schwalbe, Ph.D., is a professor in the School of Social Work at Columbia University. He has over a decade of experience in direct practice and administration in public and private agencies. His scholarship focuses on minimizing the use of detention and incarceration for justice-involved youth. Dr. Schwalbe is a recipient of the William T. Grant Scholars Award and is a contributing author for the 10th edition of the text *Direct Social Work Practice: Theory and Skills*. He can be reached at css2109@columbia.edu.

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