

Colorado Probation Research in Brief

The Supervision of Low-Risk Federal Offenders: How Low-risk Policy Has Changed Federal Supervision Practices Without Compromising Community Safety

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Key Words: Risk Need Responsivity, Low-risk, Supervision, Time management

Summary/Conclusions

The current article examines the impact of a low-risk supervision policy on Federal Pretrial and Probation supervision. Analyzing assessment and case management data before and after the adoption of a low-risk supervision policy, researchers determined if the policy had any impact on recidivism, number of contacts (personal and collateral), and collection of fines and restitution. A review of data discovered that the low-risk supervision policy did not increase recidivism, decreased contacts for low-risk, increased total monthly contacts for high-risk, and resulted in fewer restitution payments.

Limitations of Information

The data originates from Federal Pretrial and Probation, which may differ from the population of Colorado probation. United State Probation does not utilize the LSI to determine risk. It is unclear how the low-risk policy influenced supervision practices such as monitoring and brokering of services. Recidivism was measured 1-year post-sentence. Recidivism rates may fluctuate past 1 year. The study did not control for individual level risk scores, recidivism was grouped by risk levels.

Caveat: The information presented here is intended to summarize and inform readers of research and information relevant to probation work. It can provide a framework for carrying out the business of probation as well as suggestions for practical application of the material. While it may, in some instances, lead to further exploration and result in *future* decisions, it is not intended to prescribe policy and is not necessarily conclusive in its findings. Some of its limitations are described above.

Minimize Time Spent on Low-Risk Cases

The Risk-Need-Responsivity model of supervision emphasizes the concept that officers should prioritize time and resources on higher-risk populations. Recognizing the importance of adherence to this tenant, in 2012 the United States Probation and Pretrial Office created a low-risk supervision policy. The policy recommends officers apply the minimum level of supervision to low-risk offenders. Officers may still override in cases of sex offenders, those manifesting persistent violent behavior, individuals severe mental health issues, or serious youthful offenders. Researchers were interested in how the policy change impacted the number of supervision contacts, recidivism rates, and payments on court fines and restitution.

In order to analyze the impact of the supervision policy, researchers pulled data (assessments scores, contacts, and financial payments) from June 28, 2009 to June 26, 2012 and June 27, 2012 to August 2015. The data was examined for any trends before, during, and after the low-risk policy change took effect. The policy was credited for reducing personal contact with low-risk by 29%, 17% for low/moderate, 10% for moderate, and 0% for high-risk offenders. Collateral contacts dropped for low-risk by 40%, 13% for low/moderate, no change in moderate, and increased by 31% for high-risk offenders. Recidivism rates (1-year post-supervision re-arrest) for low-risk offenders remained unchanged between pre- and post-implementation groups. When researchers merged offenders supervised

through the implementation, recidivism rates decreased from 6% pre-policy to 4% post-policy. Repayment decreased on both fines and restitution under post-policy.

Practical Applications

- ✓ Track time spent on different risk levels, this may help identify if you are over supervising low-risk cases.
- ✓ Pull up your minimum cases and count the number of face-to-face contacts to ensure that probationers are being supervised at the appropriate level.
- ✓ Review prior narratives on low-risk probationers to see if some appointments could be done by phone.
- ✓ As reductions in risk level occur at reassessment, remember to change the frequency of contact with the probationer in accordance with his or her risk level.
- ✓ Utilize early terminations for individuals who are minimum risk and have completed their terms and conditions of probation.
- ✓ Probation supervisors: review the narratives of random low-risk cases to provide feedback on supervision practices with this population.
- ✓ Consider calling low-risk probationers with reminders about payments.
- ✓ Ask treatment providers if group therapy sessions are separated according to risk level. Ideally attempts should be made to not mix high and low-risk probationers in group settings.

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