

Colorado Probation Research in Brief

Probation and Parole Officers' Compliance With Case Management Tools: Professional Discretion and Override

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Key Words: Probation, parole, case management, assessment, tools, professional override

Summary/Conclusions

The current study sought to examine how self-reported traits such as job title, tenure, stress, burnout, and supervision strategy influence probation and parole officers' non-compliance with assessments. The survey identified that staff engage in several different forms of non-compliance from completing the tool carelessly to failure to target criminogenic needs identified by the tool. Officers who identified their style as surveillance or rehabilitative were less likely to deviate from assessment protocols. Emotional exhaustion and depersonalization of offenders resulted in a higher degree of assessment non-compliance.

Limitations of Information

The data for the study consists of a small number of voluntary respondents from Australia. Survey responses were self-report, which may not be accurate of actual behaviors and attitudes. While self-report data is not the most rigorous research, it can provide useful information for practitioners. The study was examining compliance, which may have influenced some staff's participation in the survey. It is possible that other traits that influenced officer behavior were not included in the survey.

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.

Staff Characteristics Influence Assessment Behaviors

Prior research has established the importance of standardized assessments in evidence-based practices. Many corrections agencies still struggle to effectively integrate assessments into their organization. The current research sought to examine how different staff attributes influence compliance with assessment completion and how assessments were used.

Researchers emailed 125 Australian probation and parole staff a survey asking questions about case management tools, professional characteristics, job burnout, stress, and supervision strategies. There was a 60% (75) response rate from staff. About 33% of respondents reported completing assessments carelessly. A quarter (25%) of the staff indicated they minimized, exaggerated, or manipulated assessment information. Over 50% of the staff reportedly decided upon more or less restrictive decisions than what the assessment tool recommends. Seventy-eight percent (78%) of staff admitted to frequently targeting criminogenic needs not identified in assessments and 44% reported sometimes disregarding criminogenic needs identified in the assessment.

When the researchers analyzed the information through different models, they discovered that noncompliance with assessments corresponded to longer tenured senior case managers, staff who reported depersonalizing individuals, and staff who scored higher on measures of emotional exhaustion. Staff that were emotionally exhausted were 2.5 times more likely to not use the as-

essment tools properly. Staff who identified with either surveillance or rehabilitative supervisory tactics reported lower inclination to deviate from assessment processes and results. If staff reported feeling personal accomplishment, the odds of manipulating assessment data was cut nearly in half; however, it also increased the likelihood of staff making decisions regarding criminogenic needs without consulting the assessment.

Practical Applications:

- ✓ To increase fidelity remember to use your manual completing assessment scoring.
- ✓ Before meeting with probationers, review assessment results to note criminogenic needs that should be discussed and addressed during supervision.
- ✓ Examine overrides to ensure the level of supervision matches risk.
- ✓ Be mindful of stress and burnout. These were found to influence decision-making related to assessments.
- ✓ Incorporate wellness and stress relief into your daily and weekly routines to ensure continued high levels of performance.
- ✓ Be proactive regarding assessment accuracy. Ask for assessment coaching and discuss ways to maintain or improve.
- ✓ Consider utilizing the Assessment Rubric on your case narratives to determine if you are targeting the probationer's criminogenic needs. You may find the rubric on [Judicialnet>Probation>QA/CQI>QA/CQI Tools>Assessment](#)