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This Issue in Brief

Estimates of Drug Use in Intensive Supervision Probationers: Results from a Pilot Study.—Authors Eric D. Wish, Mary Cuadrado, and John A. Martorana present findings from a pilot study of drug use in probationers in the New York City Intensive Supervision Probation (ISP) Program, a study prompted by ISP staff need for on-site urine testing of ISP probationers. Confidential research interviews were conducted with 106 probationers in the Brooklyn ISP program, 71 percent of whom provided a urine specimen for analysis. The urine tests indicated a level of drug use strikingly higher than the level estimated by probation officers, who depended upon the probationers to tell them about their drug use. The authors contend that the costs of reincarcerating drug abusers who fail probation are substantial when compared with the costs of a urine testing program. They conclude that ISP programs, with their

small caseloads and emphasis on community supervision, provide a special opportunity for adopting systematic urine testing and for learning how best to intervene with drug abusing offenders.

Felony Probation and Recidivism: Replication and Response.—As a result of the Rand report on felony probation in California, probation supervision is attracting close attention. In the present study, author Gennaro F. Vito examines the recidivism rates of 317 felony probationers from three judicial districts in Kentucky and makes some direct comparisons to the Rand report. The general conclusion that felony probation supervision appears to be relatively effective in controlling recidivism rates is tempered by the limitations of both studies. The author stresses the need to closely examine the purpose and goals of probation supervision.

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Probation Officer Job Analysis: Rural-Urban Differences*

BY LORI L. COLLEY, ROBERT G. CULBERTSON, PH.D., AND EDWARD LATESSA, PH.D.**

Introduction

ONE GOAL of training activities is to prepare workers to achieve the legal and social objectives of the court or treatment goals of the institution (Gilman, 1966). However, goals and objectives are seldom reduced to precise procedures for training programs. Training programs often develop without consensus regarding the tasks performed by workers, without agreement as to the training required to adequately perform those tasks. This often reflects disagreement regarding the role and the function of many criminal justice professionals.

Adult and juvenile probation are part of this controversy. We are uncertain as to the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to function as a probation officer. Education received prior to employment as a probation officer often does not relate to day-to-day probation casework. Academic programs often fail to reconcile the principles of casework with the elements of law enforcement and surveillance required by the officer's daily functions (Eskridge, 1979). Furthermore, problems in traditional training arise when staff heterogeneity exists. When different professional backgrounds are brought to the same job, friction may arise as to the "right way" of doing the job. Training must reflect the differences among staff (Thompson and Fogel, 1980).

Additional problems encountered with probation officer training programs include the lack of trained trainers, time, funding for training, and administrative support. To overcome these difficulties, innovative training methods are needed. There have been few empirical attempts to determine the probation function or to quantitatively ascertain the frequency with which tasks are performed. Additionally, the relative importance of various skills in the successful performance of tasks is noticeably absent from the literature on probation and parole.

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Job/Task Analysis

The U.S. Department of Labor (1972) defined job analysis as the systematic study of the worker in terms of (1) what the worker does in relation to data, people, and things (worker functions); (2) the methodologies and techniques employed (work fields); (3) the machines, tools, equipment, and work aids used; (4) the materials, products, subject matter, or services which result; and (5) the traits required of the worker.

Ash, Levine, Sistrunk, and Smith (1978) noted five methods of job analysis: (1) task analysis, (2) job inventory, (3) position analysis questionnaire, (4) job elements method, and (5) the critical incidents method. Regardless of the procedure and the ultimate use of the analysis, Kohls, Berner, and Luke (1978) note that the goal of any job analysis is to "determine the basic component of work in terms of: (a) what is accomplished (the tasks performed); (b) what the worker does (the behaviors involved); (c) and the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed for successful performance (the required attributes of job incumbents)" (p. 235).

Job analysis is the major method used to study manpower in select areas of the criminal justice system. Extensive studies have involved the analysis of front-line policing occupations (State of Ohio, 1983; Dysinger, 1978; Nash, Rothenberger, and Tailey, 1978; Kohls, Berner, and Luke, 1978; Meyer, 1976; Stuart and Poole, 1976; Sciarrino, 1976; and Shavelson and Beckman, 1974). Job analysis has seldom been used to assess the tasks and duties performed by those employed in other areas of the criminal justice system.

The Role of the Probation Officer

While job analysis is widely recognized as a scientific method for understanding jobs, the process has seldom been used in probation. The contradictory demands made on probation officers by the organizational structure in which they work and the criminal justice system result in role conflict.

Practitioners entering the field of probation often begin their professional careers with idealistic visions of the "rehabilitative process." However, probation officers work in administrative bureaucracies that impose constraints on what they do, how they do it, and how effective they can be working with the persons they supervise. Probation systems also vary across

the United States. While most probation (and parole) systems are considered functions of the state, the system reviewed here is a function of county government.

In these uniquely structured county organizations, probation officers are appointed by the judiciary and serve at the pleasure of the chief judge of the county or the judicial circuit. Local politics often play an important role in determining who is hired and the person's job responsibilities. Client supervision strategies may be determined by the political philosophy of the judge rather than by professional standards accepted in the field. The political influence in most county-administered probation systems is minimal; however, a commonly held perception is that there are often tremendous variations between probation departments on the dimensions of effectiveness and professionalism.

For example, one department may employ officers who hold graduate degrees in the social sciences, with considerable experience in the "helping" professions, while a neighboring county may employ a part-time officer with a high school diploma who may be responsible for the supervision of several hundred cases. The roles adopted by probation officers, as they carry out their responsibilities, are determined by a variety of issues ranging from the personality of the officer to the political-social-legal philosophy of the agency administering probation services.

Probation work contains a wide array of responsibilities, some of which appear contradictory. Glaser (1969), Studt (1978), and McCleary (1978) have discussed two distinct missions probation (and parole) officers have: (1) to rehabilitate or treat the offenders who are amenable to treatment and (2) to protect society from those individuals who are a risk to the community. The problems encountered in the development of innovative training programs for probation personnel are meshed in the role conflict with which all probation officers must cope if they are to be successful in their careers.

The multiple role expectations and role conflict imposed on the probation officer present a dilemma for administrators charged with the responsibility of designing training programs. Almost every probation bureaucracy in the country offers some type of in-service program for newly employed probation staff. However, there is no universally accepted curriculum for training probation personnel. In one county, for example, it is not unusual to find numerous hours spent on the firing range and in self-defense training, while a neighboring county may emphasize training in family counseling and group therapy. The uniqueness of probation organizations is also reflected in the stated requirements of employment. Many probation departments have dual re-

quirements which allow persons who have relevant experience in the field, but who lack a college degree, to qualify for employment.

A special concern is the need to train all new officers entering the field. Those charged with the responsibility of developing in-service training programs for this diversified group are faced with the dilemma of providing training beyond the capabilities of some, while repeating previous training experiences for others. The system examined in this research presents some unique problems in this regard.

The present research attempts to identify the tasks that comprise the probation function and determine the skills necessary to perform the tasks associated with probation work. The development of relevant training curriculum for the profession is contingent upon gaining a thorough understanding of the work performed by the probation officer and the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to perform the job. "A competency-based training program is based on the actual tasks successful workers perform on the job rather than on textbooks, course outlines, or other such sources removed from the job itself. Basing a training program on the actual job tasks performed in the occupation will help insure that students will master the skills that will make them competent workers" (Blank, 1982: 56).

Methodology

The data collection process used in this study involved the development of a task and skill index that could be self-administered and appropriate for use with large groups of personnel. In the development of the instrument an extensive review of the literature was conducted. Included in this review were major topic areas of probation officer training needs, training methods, job analysis methodology, and pre-existing probation officer job descriptions. Utilizing the information obtained from the literature review, a preliminary list of tasks describing the duties of the adult probation officer was compiled.

Individual interviews were then conducted with a sample of job incumbents ($N = 18$) from various rural and urban counties to determine the principle tasks, duties, and responsibilities of the probation officer. Each interview was approximately 45 minutes. Job descriptions from each department were obtained prior to the interview process. Interview questions focused upon a brief description of each task, conditions under which the task was performed, and the frequency with which each task was performed. In addition, the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to perform the tasks were identified. Interview notes were assembled and categorized into carefully worded task and skill statements.

This initial task and skill index was reviewed by selected professionals, and a preliminary task and skill index was developed. Pilot tests of the preliminary instrument were completed by a small sample of probation officers. After the officers had completed the instrument, subsequent interviews were conducted to discuss any problems or difficulties encountered in completing the instrument. After reviewing the pilot sample's recommendations for modifications, the final index included 64 tasks and 61 skills which generally fell into three categories—client supervision, presentence investigation, and court work.

The instrument was printed in a booklet which included three parts. Part I included the Frequency Scale. Respondents were asked to assess task statements utilizing a scale printed at the top of each page. The Frequency Scale provided descriptors ranging from "I have never performed this task" = 0 to "I perform this task daily" = 6. The Frequency Scale included 26 task statements related to client supervision, 20 task statements related to presentence investigations, 10 task statements related to court work, and 8 task statements which could not be placed exclusively in one of the three categories—supervision, presentence investigation, and court work.

Part II included the Criticality Scale. Respondents were asked to assess skill items using a scale printed at the top of each page. The Criticality Scale provided descriptors ranging from "Of no importance" = 0 to "Of great importance" = 4. The Criticality Scale included 27 skill statements related to client supervision, 11 skill statements related to presentence investigations, 11 skill statements related to court work, and 12 skill statements which could not be placed exclusively in one of the three categories. Part III asked the respondent to provide general information about himself or herself including age, sex, race, experience, education, and caseload size.

The survey instrument was administered to a randomly selected group of approximately 50 percent of all Illinois adult probation officers (N = 240).

Results—Demographic Variables

The major characteristics of the 112 probation officers who responded to the survey are discussed below. The average age of the responding officers was 36.4 years; 53.3 percent were males; and 46.7 percent were females. Of those officers responding, 66.6 percent were Caucasian; 26.4 percent were black; 3.8 percent were Hispanic; and 3.8 percent were from other ethnic groups. Seventy-nine percent were employed in a department working exclusively with adult clients, while 21 percent were employed in departments serving both juvenile and adult probationers. In regard to department size, 7.8 percent were work-

ing in departments that employed 1 to 5 officers; 11.2 percent in departments with 6 to 10 officers; 15.9 percent in departments with 11 to 25 officers; 2.8 percent in departments with 26 to 50 officers; and 52.3 percent in departments with 51 or more officers.

Examination of the education variable revealed that 7.5 percent of the officers had earned some college credit, 9.4 percent had an associate's degree, 40.6 percent had earned a baccalaureate degree, 20.8 percent were working on a master's degree, 18.9 percent had earned a master's degree, 1.9 percent were working towards a Ph.D., and 0.9 percent had earned a Ph.D.

To compare rural and urban departments, the variable department size was dichotomized. After collapsing departments with 26-50 officers and departments with 51 or more officers, 55.1 percent of the total sample represented officers working in offices defined as urban. The remaining 45.9 percent of officers worked in departments with 25 or fewer officers, defined in this study as rural.

When comparing the rural and urban departments on demographic variables, no significant differences were found. This indicates that the difference in probation function between rural and urban departments is not due to differences in race, sex, age, education, or caseload size. The similarity between rural and urban adult probation officers reflects a greater uniformity in the probation function than was anticipated. Concerns regarding educational attainment of probation officers and the inability to attract college-educated individuals to probation work, especially in rural areas of the state, are not supported in this study. Rural departments are as capable as urban departments of attracting and retaining well-educated individuals to probation work.

The mean age for the probation officers in this study was 36.4 years. This may be indicative of a growing number of probation officers who have chosen probation work as a career. The probation system examined here has received considerable support from the state, resulting in an infusion of new staff and expanding programs. This has created new career opportunities for a system which previously offered little opportunity for upward mobility except for those who maintained strong political affiliation.

Results—Job Analysis Variables

Descriptive statistics and frequency distributions were computed for each task and skill rating. T-tests were conducted to compare responses for probation officers employed in departments with 25 or fewer officers, defined in this study as rural, with responses for officers employed in departments with more than 25 officers, defined in this study as urban.

Turning to the two scales used in this study, the Frequency Scale and the Criticality Scale, data from

the Frequency Scale revealed significant differences (.05 or greater) in the responses of rural and urban officers on 16 of the 26 task statements related to supervision, with responses from rural officers indicating that they performed 15 of the 26 tasks more often than did urban officers. The only supervision task which the urban officer performed more frequently was "refiles case and back to court if third visit is missed." We believe these differences are related to departmental size and specialization of function. That is, urban departments tend to delegate specialized functions to individual officers, whereas rural officers tend to perform more generalized roles and a greater variety of tasks as compared with urban officers. For example, some officers in urban departments may have the responsibility for conducting presentence investigations and may never be responsible for intake, referrals, supervision of clients, or other tasks frequently performed by officers working in rural departments.

For example, examination of the task statements revealed that an officer in a rural department completes "fills out risks and needs forms" more often than an officer in an urban department where this task is more likely to be performed in a specialized intake department by intake officers. The 14 other tasks performed more frequently by the rural officer than the urban officer support our argument that the rural officer performs a more generalized role than the urban officer. The rural officer more frequently "refers clients," "meets with clients," "verifies employment," "inquires as to drug or alcohol problems," "notes health of client," "verifies compliance with conditions," "updates field notes," "asks client about general problems," "determines emotional and mental stability," "visits client at his or her home," "sends letter to client if office visit missed," etc. Overall, the rural officer performs a greater variety of tasks and performs these tasks more frequently than the urban officer.

Examination of the Presentence Investigations section of the Frequency Scale revealed that rural and urban officers are much alike in the performance of this specialized function of the probation role. Significant differences appeared in only 5 of the 20 task statements related to presentence investigations, with the rural officers performing more frequently than their urban counterparts in all 5. However, it is important to note that when examining this specialized function, the differences reflect rural-urban probation officer role differences. For example, the rural officer has significantly greater contact with victims and insurance companies and similar interpersonal interaction that reflects the generalized nature of the rural officer's role. In the urban setting these functions are more likely to be

handled by a specialist within the probation department.

Examination of the Court Work section of the Frequency Scale revealed rural-urban differences on 5 of the 10 task statements, with the urban officer performing more frequently in all 5 areas. The urban officer more frequently "attends sentencing hearings, update hearings, hearings to modify conditions of probation," and "takes court notes on proceedings" and "reports weekly on hours spent in court." Thus it appears that court work takes up more time for the urban officer.

Finally, several additional tasks that were not classified resulted in two rural-urban differences. The urban officers indicated that they more frequently "document terminations" and "attend yearly mandated training sessions" than did the rural officers.

Examination of the second scale used in this study, the Criticality Scale, revealed significant differences for only 4 of the 27 task statements related to "Supervision: Knowledge, Skills and Abilities." These data are important in that they substantiate the importance (criticality) of a wide variety of tasks performed by both the rural and the urban officer when the task is cited. Again, the differences reflected role differentiation. For example, rural officers more often responded that it was more important to be "oriented toward people," "use resources wisely," and have "knowledge of community resources" than did the urban officers. The urban officers felt that "recognizing the true criminal" was more critical. The other categories in the Criticality Scale, "Presentence Investigations: Knowledge, Skills and Abilities" and "Court Work: Knowledge, Skills and Abilities," revealed virtually no significant differences between the rural and urban officer on Criticality Scale.

The differences between rural and urban officers on the Criticality Scale were minimal, and the similarities should be stressed. That is, while we found significant differences between rural and urban officers on the Frequency Scale, data from the Criticality Scale support the notion that there is a wide range of functions which all officers defined as critical, regardless of location, and that difference relates to the frequency of the task performed rather than an absence or presence of a task concern. These similarities, however, should not minimize the need for training which considers generalized and specialized role performances for rural and urban officers respectively.

Implications for Training

While the rural-urban dichotomy is somewhat artificial, there are important differences in role performance required of criminal justice practitioners.

The variety of role expectations is greater for rural officers simply because the same number of tasks that are critical to successful performance of the respective probation agency are performed by fewer officers in the rural agency. The rural officer, then, must have a greater variety of skills, knowledge, and training than the urban officer, particularly in the area of supervision and presentence investigation. That is, probation officer training in rural areas must reflect the generalized nature of the probation officer's role. Training the rural probation officer is similar to training the general practitioner in medicine who is responsible for providing a vast array of medical services to a generalized patient constituency. Likewise, the rural probation officer must be somewhat skilled in all areas of the probation process. The intensity of training will probably be less in rural areas; however, this is compensated for by increased breadth of training to perform the large variety of roles required of the rural probation officer. These findings do not minimize the importance of the rural probation officer's role in the probation process. To the contrary, the rural officer's role is probably more complex than the urban probation officer's role, and training should reflect the complexity of the role.

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