National Variations in Fieldwork Goals, Training, and Activities[1]

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PROBATION AND PAROLE agencies are tasked with maintaining public safety while intervening with offenders to address significant cognitive, substance use, and social needs—all with ever diminishing resources. Fieldwork (i.e., home visits and field contacts), long a cornerstone of corrective intervention in probation and parole (Lindner & Bonn, 1996; Ohlin, 1956), uses many of those limited resources. In addition, concerns about safety and other aspects of fieldwork can be primary sources of stress for line officers who do fieldwork, as well as for their supervisors and family members (Finn & Kuck, 2003). Yet the effectiveness of fieldwork in achieving community supervision's primary public safety mission is unknown. This research gap may be because fieldwork is part of a constellation of supervision practices that are applied according to client risk of recidivism and need for intervention, and studying fieldwork in isolation as a single component of this package of practices is difficult to do with rigor. However, this gap also means policymakers face great uncertainty when they try to weigh the benefits of fieldwork against the costs, such as officer stress, safety, and use of limited staffing resources.

Fieldwork in probation and parole was a core rehabilitative tool as early as the mid-19th century (Petersilia, 2003; Peterson, 1973). The ideal model of community supervision has oscillated between orientations of correction and surveillance/control since then (Patten, La Rue, Caudill, Thomas, & Messer, 2016; Ahlin, Antunes, & Tubman-Carbone, 2013; Skeem & Manchak, 2008), but the use of fieldwork has largely remained constant, perhaps because of its practical purposes: to check on living situations, ensure compliance with supervision conditions, verify employment, and make contact with family members or other social supports (Alarid, 2015). However, the application of fieldwork varies across agencies, and the catch-all term likely includes widely divergent policies and practices that reflect differing goals and expected outcomes for fieldwork.

Practitioners have little evidence of whether or how field contacts or home visits improve outcomes—let alone whether evidence-based supervision strategies can improve outcomes when delivered in conjunction with this fieldwork. Despite this lack of evidence, many risk-needs assessments and case management guidelines recommend frequent home and field contacts for the highest risk clients under community supervision. This recommendation may be in part because fieldwork does not have a standard definition as a stand-alone practice and is frequently not aligned with other aspects of risk-need-responsivity supervision. Also, fieldwork could be used for surveillance purposes for higher risk clients.

The way community supervision operates in a jurisdiction is likely to influence how fieldwork is conducted and helps shape an agency's implicit or explicit goals for fieldwork. For example, the extent of officers' ability to respond to observed supervision violations or criminogenic conditions during a field contact may vary according to state laws or district-level policy. Officers may also conduct fieldwork differently depending upon their agency's orientation (i.e., correction vs. surveillance): An officer in an agency that maintains a surveillance orientation toward fieldwork might be armed and might conduct visits with a police escort, or in teams. An agency's goals for fieldwork may be purely to ensure compliance with conditions of probation or parole (surveillance), or they could encourage establishing prosocial connections with family or community members of the client (correction).

The type and amount of training for officers who conduct fieldwork may also vary by agency orientation and influence how officers approach fieldwork. Studies of state and regional variation have shown that state-level policies and other factors that vary by region (e.g., urbanicity, organizational structure, community context) may have an impact on the way justice systems operate (Fearn, 2005; Kerbs, Jones, & Jolley, 2009; Lynch, 2009, 2011; Tiedt & Sabol, 2015; Ulmer & Kramer, 1996).

With the potential for such wide variation in the goals and practices of fieldwork, effective evaluation must begin with a clearer understanding of what fieldwork means to the

agencies that incorporate it as part of supervision. To better understand the variations in fieldwork policies and practices across the country, and to establish a framework for evaluating the effectiveness of fieldwork, our study team conducted a survey of state and local agencies that supervise offenders in the community. This article describes the results of the survey and examines how fieldwork motivations, training, and activities might be informed by an agency's operational orientation, structure, and mission, and how these vary by region of the country.

Data and Methodology

The survey, developed in partnership with the American Probation and Parole Association (APPA), was disseminated electronically, using Fluid Surveys, to administrators from departments of community corrections, parole authorities, and parallel probation agencies across the United States. Agency administrators and their contact information were identified using APPA's membership database. The survey questions covered the following topics: agency and respondent demographic information; agencies' supervision fieldwork contact standard policies; officer training related to fieldwork; peace officer status of community supervision officers; policies and practices for use of firearms, non-lethal weaponry, and other equipment; and whether community supervision officers conduct fieldwork on teams and with escorts from law enforcement agencies.

The study team received 301 responses to the survey that represent 181 local- and 120 state-level agencies; all 50 states are represented in the sample. Agencies that supervise offenders are organized differently in each state. In some states, policies may vary by region or district, whereas others are centralized at the state level. To get a complete picture of the variation within each state and across regional agencies within a state, we have included responses from state-level agencies as well as from regional or district executives. We have made efforts to present data that represent the breadth of policies within each jurisdiction rather than restrict responses to only the highest level respondent.

Statistical Analyses

Descriptive statistics (i.e., frequencies and percentages) were calculated to summarize the survey results. In addition to univariate statistics, measures of bivariate correlation were also used to examine the relationship between fieldwork motivations, training, and activities, and differences in fieldwork motivations, training, and activities by agency orientation and region of the country. Specifically, bivariate logistic regressions with robust standard error estimation were employed to analyze these relationships and odds ratios are reported. To assess differences across groups, Pearson's chi-squared tests were used to determine the statistical significance. Fischer's exact tests were used in cases of small cell sizes. All statistical analyses were conducted using the statistical programming software Stata (ICv14.2).

Findings

Our findings are presented under the following thematic topics: characteristics of the agencies conducting fieldwork; the locations where fieldwork is conducted; the motivations or reasons for conducting fieldwork; training provided by the agency to prepare officers for fieldwork; the activities conducted during fieldwork; the philosophical orientation of agencies (i.e., correction or surveillance); and regional variation in fieldwork motivations, training, and activities.

Agency Characteristics

Of the 301 agencies represented in the sample, 16 indicated that they do not conduct fieldwork. No significant differences were found between these agencies and those that do conduct fieldwork, with the exception that agencies that supervise parolees were more likely to report conducting fieldwork (p<0.01). The remaining analyses presented in this article are conducted using only the subsample of agencies that indicated they do conduct fieldwork (n=285).

Table 1 describes the sample of agencies that conduct fieldwork. The sample includes ample representation of both state and local agencies spread across all four United States Census Bureau statistical regions. Most of these agencies employ officers who are sworn officers as opposed to commissioned peace officers or a combination of both, and within these agencies, line officers are most often conducting field visits. Nearly all of these agencies supervise clients on probation, approximately half supervise clients on parole or under pretrial supervision, and only a quarter supervise clients under community corrections supervision. Finally, most of these agencies conduct fieldwork in groups, a little less than a quarter conduct them alone, and very few conduct them with law enforcement escorts.

Visit Locations

Table 2 presents the locations at which fieldwork occurs. Most agencies indicate that fieldwork occurs at a client's home or place of employment, and over three-quarters of agencies indicate that fieldwork may also occur at shelters or other group residences, jail or prison, or behavioral health treatment programs in the community. Fewer, but still a substantial portion of agencies, also indicate that fieldwork occurs at schools, another's residence, or in a public location.

Fieldwork Motivations, Training, and Activities

Agencies were asked to respond to a series of questions regarding the events or circumstances that determine, or motivate, the use of fieldwork, the training used to prepare staff for fieldwork, and the activities which most often occur during fieldwork. Findings are presented in this order.

Figure 1 displays the factors that agencies indicated were very important in motivating fieldwork. Some factors are important motivators for the majority of agencies, whereas others seem to be motivators for only a few agencies. A majority of agencies reported that fieldwork is motivated by client risk level (84.4 percent), intensive supervision standards (81.1 percent), judicially mandated conditions (75.2 percent), residential verification (65.4 percent), and regular supervision standards (64.6 percent). Less than half of all agencies indicated that a client's conviction offense (42.6 percent), checking client well-being (38.9 percent), a technical violation (28.8 percent), and checking on the well-being of the client's family (26.1 percent) are motivators for determining the use of fieldwork.
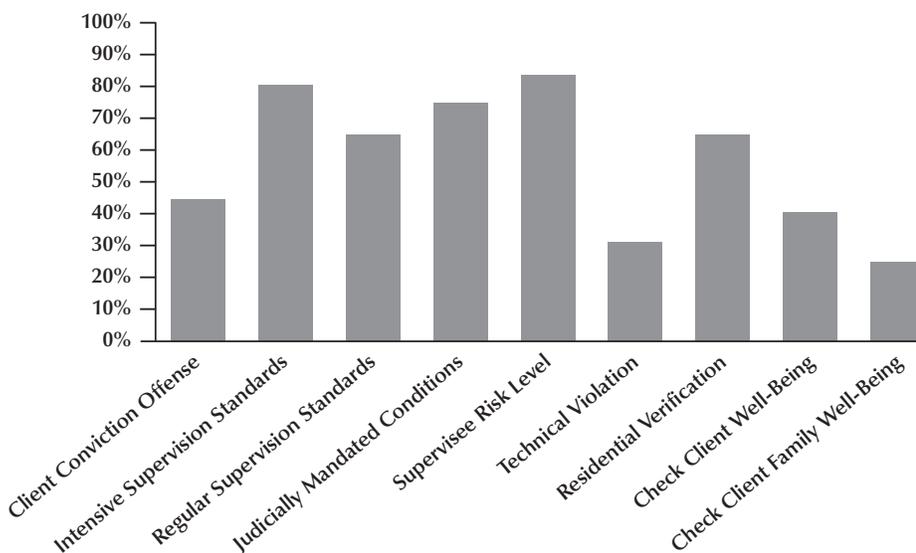
Figure 2 (page 18) shows the percentage of agencies that offer various types of training to prepare staff for conducting fieldwork. The most frequently offered trainings are awareness of one's surroundings (92.1 percent) and de-escalation techniques (86.2 percent). Training in search policy and procedures (80.6 percent), self-defense (77.5 percent), policy and procedures for responding to supervision violations (75.5 percent), procedures for securing backup (74.3 percent), indicators of criminal activity (72.7 percent), and seizure policy and procedure (72.3 percent) are also common. Trainings in recognizing mental illness (62.9 percent), crisis management techniques (60.5 percent), and firearms (56.5 percent) are less common, though still reported by more than half of all agencies.

TABLE 1
Agency Characteristics

	Percent (n)
Level of Government (n=285)	
State	40.0% (114)
Local	60.0% (171)
Region (n=285)	
Northeast	16.1% (46)
Midwest	34.4% (98)
South	21.4% (61)
West	28.1% (80)
Officer Type (n=199)	
Sworn	75.4% (150)
Commissioned	12.1% (24)
Both	12.6% (25)
Officers who Conduct Fieldwork (n=277)	
Line Officers Only	61.4% (170)
Other Staff Only	2.9% (8)
Both Line Officers and Other Staff	35.7% (99)
Clients Agency Supervises (n=285)[1]	
Probation	92.6% (264)
Pretrial	49.1% (140)
Parole/Post-Release Supervision	43.2% (123)
Community Corrections (In-Custody)	27.7% (79)
Other	17.2% (49)
How Agency Conducts Fieldwork (n=226)	
Always/Usually Alone	22.6% (51)
Always/Usually in Teams	72.6% (164)
Always/Usually with a Law Enforcement Escort	4.9% (11)

[1]*Values are not mutually exclusive.*

FIGURE 1
Field Work Motivations

Note: Percentages indicate the agencies that find each motivation "Very Important" in determining a field visit.

TABLE 2
Location of Visits (n=277)[1]

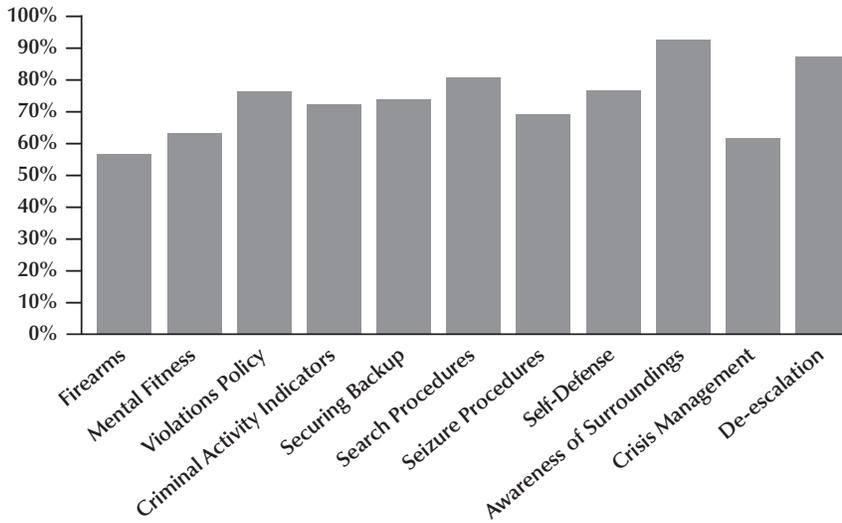| Location	Percent (n)
Client's Home or Residence	98.6% (273)
Client's Place of Employment	92.8% (257)
Shelter or Group Residence Where Client Lives	85.6% (237)
Jail or Prison	83.39% (231)
Behavioral Health Treatment Program	75.5% (212)
Client's School	71.8% (199)
Other Person's Home or Residence	64.6% (179)
Public/Neutral Location	56.7% (157)
Community Correction Center/Transitional or Pre-Release Center	49.8% (138)
Other	9.0% (25)

[1]*Values are not mutually exclusive.*

As shown in Figure 3 (next page), checks for compliance with supervision conditions (93.0 percent), reporting supervision violations (87.4 percent), and assessing living conditions (83.3 percent) are the most frequently reported activities conducted during fieldwork, followed by engaging a client's family or other prosocial supports (76.2 percent) and the use of responsive supervision techniques (64.1 percent), such as motivational interviewing or cognitive behavior therapy. Very few agencies indicated that they always or usually administer drug tests during fieldwork (18.1 percent).

The Relationship between Motivations, Training, and Activities
In addition to descriptive analyses, we explored the motivations behind the use of fieldwork, and whether the trainings provided to prepare staff for fieldwork are correlated with the activities that take place during fieldwork.
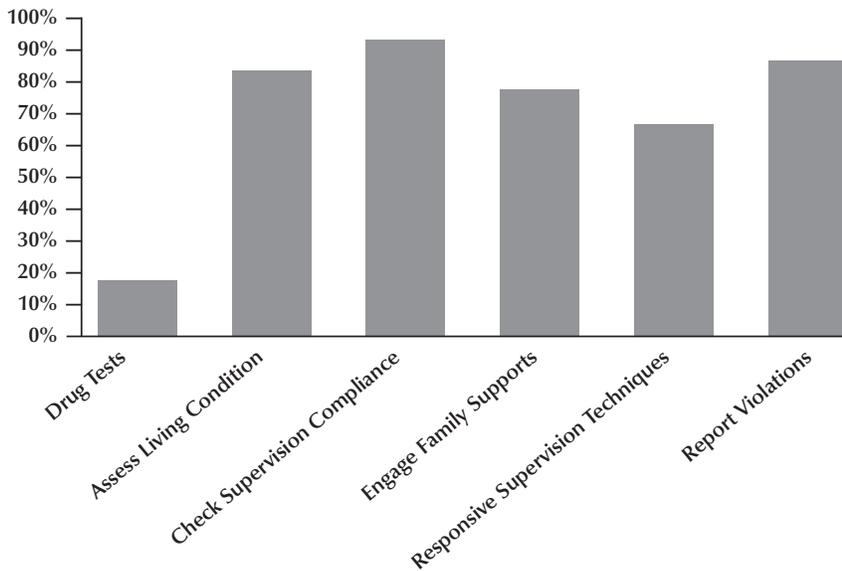
Client risk level and supervision contact standards appear to be correlated with the most fieldwork activities. Table 3 (page 19) presents the odds ratios for bivariate logit models, with each motivator predicting each activity. Client risk level significantly increased the odds of checking for compliance with supervision conditions (376 percent increased odds, p<.01); reporting supervision violations (286 percent, p<0.01); assessing living conditions (403 percent, p<0.001); engaging family members and other prosocial supports (177 percent, p<0.01); and using responsive supervision tactics (198 percent, p<.001). Supervision standards were

FIGURE 2
Field Work Training

Note: Percentages indicate the agencies that offer each training type.

FIGURE 3
Actions Conducted During Field Work

Note: Percentages indicate the agencies that either "Always" or "Usually" conduct each action.

not significantly correlated with compliance checks, but as with client risk level, supervision standards were significantly correlated with increased odds of reporting supervision violations (118 percent, p<.05); assessing living conditions (1.24 percent, p<.05); engaging family members and other prosocial supports (1.02 percent, p<0.05); and the use of responsive supervision tactics (97 percent, p<0.05). Residential verification as a motivator for fieldwork also significantly increased the odds of assessing a client's living conditions (1.19 percent, p<.05) and engaging family

members and other prosocial supports (84 percent, p<0.05). Conducting fieldwork in order to check on a client's family's well-being significantly increased the odds of engaging family members and other prosocial supports (283 percent, p<0.01).

Significant correlations between fieldwork training and activities were also found. Table 4 (next page) presents the odds ratios for bivariate logit models that test whether each training type is a predictor of each activity. All types of training included on the survey, except for firearms and de-escalation

training, significantly increased the odds of using responsive supervision techniques during fieldwork. Approximately half of all trainings were associated with increased odds of checking compliance with supervision standards or assessing living conditions. Specifically, violation policy training, training on indicators of criminal activity, and training in securing backup were associated with both activities; trainings on firearms, search, seizure, and crisis management were associated with increased odds of assessing living conditions; and trainings in mental illness recognition, awareness of surroundings, and de-escalation were associated with increased odds of checking compliance with supervision conditions. Trainings in firearms, securing backup, search, and seizure were also significantly associated with increased odds of engaging family or other prosocial supports. The only training associated with increased odds of reporting supervision violations was policies and procedures for responding to supervision violations.

Conducting drug tests was unique among the activities surveyed: No trainings were found to be significantly correlated with conducting drug tests as part of fieldwork and the only motivating factor associated with conducting drug tests (residential verification) significantly reduced the odds of engaging in that activity.

Agency Orientation
The survey included questions about an agency's use of firearms and less-than-lethal weaponry, other equipment, uniforms, agency vehicles, and contact standards. Combinations of responses to these questions can give us some indication as to whether the responding agency adopts an orientation toward community supervision that is more aligned with surveillance or corrections. We examined the possible combinations of responses to whether an agency always or usually brings firearms, body armor, less-than-lethal weapons, and/or radios when conducting fieldwork and found that about one-quarter of agencies indicated bringing all four types of equipment to fieldwork (illustrating a more surveillance-oriented approach to fieldwork) and just over one-quarter of agencies (26.6 percent) indicated not bringing any equipment (illustrating a more corrections-oriented approach to fieldwork). Of the former group of agencies (surveillance-oriented), 82.0 percent have contact standards for fieldwork, as opposed to only 58.5 percent of the latter

TABLE 3
Association between Motivations and Activities

Motivations	Drug Tests	Assess Living Conditions	Check Supervision Compliance	Engage Family/ Supports	Responsive Supervision Techniques	Report Violations
			Activities Odds Ratio (Standard Error)			
Client Conviction Offense	1.35 (0.44)	1.36 (0.48)	0.96 (0.50)	1.18(0.36)	1.42 (0.38)	1.50 (0.59)
Intensive Supervision Standards	0.62 (0.25)	2.24* (0.91)	2.13 (1.21)	1.44 (0.55)	1.97* (0.66)	1.73 (0.78)
Regular Supervision Standards	0.79 (0.26)	1.75 (0.60)	2.20 (1.11)	2.02* (0.62)	1.19 (0.32)	2.18*(0.82)
Judicially Mandated Conditions	0.97 (0.37)	1.20 (0.45)	1.20 (0.66)	1.56 (0.52)	0.99 (0.31)	1.08(0.48)
Supervisee Risk Level	0.76 (0.32)	5.03*** (1.90)	4.76** (2.39)	2.77** (0.99)	2.98**(1.04)	3.86**(1.58)
Technical Violation	0.68 (0.26)	1.90 (0.80)	2.13 (1.38)	1.38 (0.48)	1.51 (0.45)	0.94(0.40)
Residential Verification	0.45* (0.14)	2.19* (0.75)	1.77 (0.89)	1.84* (0.56)	1.63 (0.44)	1.82 (0.70)
Check Client Well-Being	0.83 (0.28)	1.47 (0.55)	1.72 (0.94)	1.79 (0.60)	1.33 (0.36)	1.07 (0.42)
Check Client Family Well-Being	0.70 (0.29)	1.94 (0.92)	5.33 (5.58)	3.83** (1.91)	1.53 (0.50)	0.64 (0.27)

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

TABLE 4
Association between Training and Activities

Training	Drug Tests	Assess Living Conditions	Check Supervision Compliance	Engage Family/ Supports	Responsive Supervision Techniques	Report Violations
			Activities Odds Ratio (Standard Error)			
Firearms	1.17 (0.38)	2.38* (0.85)	1.32 (0.73)	2.02* (0.62)	1.60 (0.43)	2.14 (0.5)
Mental Illness	0.76 (0.25)	1.99 (0.70)	3.26* (1.88)	1.23 (0.38)	2.11** (0.58)	1.82 (0.71)
Violation Policy	1.07 (0.41)	2.90** (1.06)	4.57** (2.57)	1.64 (0.55)	2.70** (0.82)	3.19** (1.28)
Criminal Activity Indicators	0.86 (0.31)	2.74** (0.99)	5.37** (3.11)	1.54 (0.50)	1.91* (0.56)	1.94 (0.78)
Securing Backup	0.68 (0.24)	4.51*** (1.64)	4.26* (2.39)	3.15*** (1.01)	2.20** (0.65)	1.81 (0.74)
Search Procedures	1.46 (0.65)	3.30** (1.26)	2.46 (1.43)	2.23* (0.78)	2.20* (0.71)	2.95 (0.85)
Seizure Procedures	1.31 (0.50)	3.92*** (1.42)	2.05 (1.15)	2.21* (0.71)	2.59** (0.75)	1.61 (0.66)
Self-defense	0.55 (0.20)	1.67 (0.64)	1.40 (0.86)	1.34 (0.47)	2.30** (0.71)	1.05 (0.49)
Awareness of Surroundings	0.66 (0.36)	2.60 (1.36)	8.30** (5.14)	2.19 (1.10)	2.57* (1.21)	1.99 (1.19)
Crisis Management	0.77 (0.25)	3.31** (1.20)	2.13 (1.19)	1.72 (0.53)	1.79* (0.49)	1.89 (0.74)
De-escalation	0.36* (0.15)	1.79 (0.80)	3.87* (2.29)	1.56 (0.64)	2.04 (0.75)	1.67 (0.83)

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

group (corrections-oriented) (p<0.01). Also among the surveillance-oriented group of agencies, 87.3 percent report always using agency vehicles and 64.1 percent report always wearing uniforms. Conversely, among the corrections-oriented group of agencies, 28.9 percent report always using agency vehicles (p<0.001) and only 15.2 percent report always wearing uniforms (p<0.001).

With respect to training, agencies that indicate a more surveillance-oriented approach to fieldwork are also more likely to engage in all types of training, except for de-escalation training. This finding is especially stark for firearms training (96.9 percent among surveillance-oriented agencies compared to 13.6 percent

among corrections-oriented agencies, p<.001); training in securing backup (89.1 percent compared to 53.0 percent, p<0.001); training in search policies and procedures (95.3 percent compared to 56.1 percent, p<0.001); training in seizure policies and procedures (93.8 percent compared to 43.9 percent, p<0.001); and self-defense training (93.8 percent compared to 50.0 percent, p<0.001).

Surveillance-oriented agencies are also more likely than corrections-oriented agencies to indicate that residential verification (77.1% compared to 53.2 percent, p<0.01) and client risk level are very important motivators for conducting fieldwork (95.3 percent compared to 74.2 percent, p<0.01), implying more of a

focus on surveillance as opposed to client rehabilitation in these agencies. Finally, we found that surveillance-oriented agencies were significantly more likely than corrections-oriented agencies to conduct all activities included on the survey during fieldwork, except for drug tests and compliance checks.

Regional Variation

In addition to analyzing variations in fieldwork motivations, training, and activities by agency orientation, we also explored whether there are differences in each of these by region of the country.

While the motivations for fieldwork are fairly consistent across regions, the need for

residential verification as a motivator was more commonly reported by agencies in the Northeast and the West (73.8 percent and 75.0 percent, respectively) than in the South (62.5 percent) and Midwest (54.7 percent) (p<0.05). Further, intensive supervision standards (p<0.01), regular supervision standards (p<0.001), and client risk-level (p<0.001) were all consistently reported as being very important motivators in the Northeast, South, and West, but far less likely to be reported as very important in the Midwest.

The most substantial regional variation exists around training (see Table 5). All training types are reported as being more frequently offered by agencies in the West. In addition, agencies in the South are significantly more likely than other regions to provide training in responding to violations of policy, indicators of criminal activity, and awareness of surroundings. The Midwest is more likely than other regions to provide crisis management and mental illness recognition training, and less likely to offer most other types of training. The Northeast is more likely than other regions to provide training in securing backup, search procedures, and seizure procedures.

Activities conducted during fieldwork also vary somewhat by region. Drug tests are less frequently reported by agencies in the Northeast and the South (p<0.05); engaging with family and other prosocial supports and using responsive supervision techniques are more frequently reported by agencies in the West (p<0.05).

Finally, while conducting fieldwork with a law enforcement escort is rare, the Midwest is more likely than any other region to conduct fieldwork with an escort, the Northeast is more likely to conduct fieldwork in teams, and the South is most likely to conduct fieldwork alone (p<0.01).

Conclusion

Overall, the results of the survey are generally consistent with our expectations based on what is known about community corrections in the United States: 1) the majority of agencies conducting community supervision incorporate fieldwork as part of supervision; 2) client risk level and agency standards and policies are primary drivers of fieldwork; 3) there is substantial variation in when, how, and why fieldwork occurs. Across the U.S., community supervision agencies vary widely in the range of clients with whom they conduct fieldwork, locations at which fieldwork is

TABLE 5
Training Usage by Region

Training	Region Percent (n)			
	Northeast	*Midwest*	*South*	*West*
Firearms***	60.9% (28)	27.6% (27)	50.8% (31)	71.3% (57)
Mental Illness**	45.7% (21)	53.1% (52)	47.5% (29)	71.3% (57)
Violation Policy**	58.7% (27)	56.1% (55)	73.8% (45)	80.0% (64)
Criminal Activity Indicators***	50.0% (23)	53.1% (52)	72.1% (44)	81.3% (65)
Securing Backup**	67.4% (31)	53.1% (52)	65.6% (40)	81.3% (65)
Search Procedures***	71.7% (33)	65.3% (36)	59.0% (36)	88.8% (71)
Seizure Procedures***	63.0% (29)	56.1% (55)	52.5% (32)	83.8% (67)
Self-defense***	52.2% (24)	61.2% (60)	68.9% (42)	87.5% (70)
Awareness of Surroundings**	73.9% (34)	74.5% (73)	85.3% (52)	92.5% (74)
Crisis Management*	43.5% (20)	51.0% (50)	47.5% (29)	67.5% (54)
De-escalation*	71.7% (33)	69.4% (68)	77.1% (47)	87.5% (70)

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

conducted, motivations for conducting fieldwork, training preparation for fieldwork, and activities that occur during fieldwork.

The results from the survey also reveal a few clear patterns that begin to fill the gap in knowledge around the nuances of and variations in fieldwork goals, training, and activities. The surveillance orientation of an agency seems to be accompanied by a greater emphasis on training, especially training with a law enforcement focus. This finding suggests different agency goals based on philosophical orientation, and although the type of fieldwork activities did not vary between agencies with a surveillance or corrections orientation, the frequency and manner in which they are conducted and their purpose varied, indicating the influence of agency orientation on the overall purpose of fieldwork. Our findings also suggest that the motivations and training for fieldwork vary notably by region, as do the activities conducted on visits. However, only a few motivating factors matter for determining what occurs on a field visit, even when they are strongly linked to the overall use of field visits. For example, judicially mandated conditions are linked to the use of visits in a majority of agencies, and yet they are not associated with any of the actions that occur on those visits.

These findings suggest that effective evaluation of fieldwork requires a nuanced understanding of the goals, training, and activities that make up fieldwork within any particular agency. While some aspects of fieldwork are somewhat consistent across the nation, with common motivations (e.g.,

risk levels) and activities (e.g., checking supervision compliance), our findings show that it is by no means a single, invariable concept. Before the research community can confidently test whether fieldwork is effective as part of community supervision, the variations in philosophy and practice need to be unpacked and explored in more detail. Understanding the fieldwork goals, training, and activities within any particular agency is essential for understanding what is being evaluated and how broadly the findings of that evaluation generalize. The findings from this survey provide a high-level overview of agency policies and practices across the country that can provide context for future research on the nuances and effectiveness of fieldwork.

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