

Case Classification in Community Corrections: A National Survey of the State of the Art

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INTRODUCTION

As with prisons and jails, probation and parole agencies in the United States are dealing with a population crisis. One product of prison and jail crowding has been identified as larger community supervision populations which are comprised of offenders posing greater risk to community safety and more needs for services than traditional probationers and parolees (Guynes, 1988; Sluder, Sapp, and Langston., 1994; Hartman, 1997). The current movement towards “Truth in Sentencing” is likely to add to this shift in the community supervision population by diverting less serious, non-violent offenders from prisons into intermediate sanctions and community supervision on probation and parole (Zedlewski, 1997).

Over the past quarter century, probation and parole agencies across the United States have responded to changes in client population and criticisms of ineffectiveness (See, for example, Petersilia, Turner, Kahan, and Peterson, 1985) by increasing use of, and reliance upon, case classification technologies. Most case classification systems in use today rely on quantification of risk factors and service needs to produce risk and need scores used to determine levels of supervision intensity. There is widespread interest among probation and parole officials for information about available classification instruments and comparisons of the relative utility of alternative scoring systems. Unfortunately, there are no readily available data which describe the current “state of the art” of case classification in probation and parole. This report fills this gap by presenting the results of a national survey of probation and parole agencies regarding use of case classification instruments. The report will summarize the literature and the events

leading to the current study, present the findings, and conclude with a discussion of policy implications and recommendations for future research.

CASE CLASSIFICATION IN COMMUNITY CORRECTIONS

There is a general consensus in the literature that probation and parole supervision and management have changed in the past thirty years as a result of the development and proliferation of offender risk and needs assessment technology. As Harris and Smith (1996:219) put it, “A major reengineering of probation has occurred through proliferation of risk and needs assessment tools. This innovation...has enabled probation managers to adjust caseloads so that offenders who present the highest risk to public safety receive the greatest amount of attention, to rationalize budgets to demonstrate more precisely the level of funding needed by the department and to link offenders with services not provided directly by probation department.” The spread of risk/needs assessment in community supervision is the product of a variety of forces so that today, the majority of probation agencies use some sort of risk/needs classification system (McShane and Krause, 1993:98).

Growing out of earlier work designed to assist parole decision-makers with the release decision, the technology of risk assessment was rather quickly adapted to case classification and assignment to supervision levels in probation and parole (Travis, 1990; Schneider, Ervin, and Synder-Joy, 1996; Clear and Gallagher, 1985). Perhaps the most important impetus to widespread adoption of case classification in probation and parole was the National Institute of Corrections “Model Case Management Classification” initiative in the early 1980’s (National Institute of Corrections, 1981; Travis, 1990). In this program, the National Institute of Corrections provided training and technical

assistance to probation and parole agencies nationwide in the development and implementation of the “Wisconsin Model.” This model of classification used both a risk assessment and needs assessment instrument to classify cases into one of three levels of community supervision. The model included periodic re-assessments and procedures for developing supervision plans based on the offender’s risk and needs (Baird, Hines, and Bemus, 1979; Lerner, Arling, and Baird, 1986).

The promise of case classification was more fair, rational and effective use of community supervision resources. For example, Vito and Marshall (1983) reported on how a federal probation office used case classification to implement an “administrative caseload” of low risk and low needs offenders who did not require the investment of significant supervision resources. Officer time diverted from these cases was then used to provide more intensive surveillance and service to offenders posing higher levels of risk and service needs.

Critics of risk and needs assessment noted the potential for professional judgment and the “human” element of community supervision to be supplanted by quantitative scoring and automatic (if not automated) decision-making (Schneider, et al., 1996; Clear and Byrne, 1992; Travis, 1990). Nonetheless, interest in risk and needs assessment and “objective” case classification remains high. Contemporary observers note the requirement of effective classification processes for the design and delivery of effective correctional interventions (Bonta, 1996; Jones, 1996; DeComo, et al., 1995; Keiser, 1997; Carey, 1997). Indeed, among Oklahoma probation officers, Schneider and her colleagues (1996) found that those officers who felt themselves to be most effective in supervising clients were also most likely to support quantified risk and needs assessment.

There can be no doubt that case classification is a critical issue in community supervision today. The pressure on correctional agencies and officials to deal with increasingly large and complex populations, spurred by a movement to better match criminal sentences with offenders and fueled by an increasingly litigious environment compel probation and parole authorities to “rationalize” their decision-making processes. Schneider and her colleagues (1996) refer to this “movement” as a “flight from discretion.”

Probation and parole agencies across the United State are using different types of classification instruments for different purposes. These instruments have been developed through a variety of techniques on a number of different populations (Gottfredson, 1987). One of the most common risk classification techniques involves a multiple regression analysis of the correlates of new criminality or supervision failure. This analysis then informs the development of an additive scale which produces estimates of recidivism for offenders based on different risk scale scores.

This technology underlies the Federal Salient Factor Score (Hoffman and Beck, 1976), the Iowa risk assessment (Fisher, 1980), the Wisconsin risk assessment (Baird, et al, 1979), and several similar instruments. Other techniques include discriminant function analysis, logistic regression and survival analysis. These techniques may provide better guidance to decision-makers concerning not only chance of new criminality, but also estimates of the time to failure and/or the type of new offense (Visher, Lattimore, and Linster, 1991; Lattimore, Visher, and Linster, 1994).

In addition to risk assessment, there is increased emphasis on what Bonta (1996) calls “third generation” assessments. These assessments combine evaluations of offender

risk and criminogenic needs to produce a more complete picture of both the likelihood of recidivism and mechanisms to reduce chances of failure. James Bonta (1996) identifies the two most common and best-known “third generation” assessments as the Client Management Classification (CMC) System and the Level of Services Inventory (LSI).

Both of these classification systems are designed to improve correctional practice by focusing attention on important characteristics of offenders. The CMC is essentially designed to influence and control agency operations in probation and parole, while the LSI is aimed at controlling offender behavior by altering the criminogenic forces at work in the offender’s life. The original CMC was composed of separate risk and needs assessments, coupled with a case-planning process for probation and parole officers. A later development added a lengthy semi-structured interview which culminates in an offender typology relevant for supervision strategies, called Strategies for Case Supervision (Baird and Neuenfeldt, 1990). The LSI uses a semi-structured interview to assess static and dynamic characteristics into a single “risk” score, with sub-components of the total being indicative of areas where intervention can reduce risk.

Clear and O’Leary (1982) described the central role of case classification in community supervision. They suggest that combined risk and needs classification can be used to improve practice by individual officers, inform agency management and administration, and facilitate evaluation and development efforts. That is, uniform case classification can not only sort offenders into different categories relevant to supervision practice, but summed classification scores can be used to describe the client population, resource needs, allocation of resources, and effectiveness of agency-wide efforts at

community supervision. Unfortunately, few probation and parole agencies have made such widespread use of the potential of case classification.

Reasons given for the failure to fully utilize classification information include a lack of time required for case assessments, inability to automate and maintain classification data, inadequate staff training and similar concerns (Baird and Neuenfeldt, 1990; Clear and Byrne, 1992). Observers have criticized the use of classification procedures as well, citing a failure to validate instruments on target populations, a lack of reliability in scoring, and inadequate linkages between classification and intervention in practice (Wright, Clear and Dickson, 1984; Andrews and Bonta, 1994).

There have been few efforts to describe the current case classification procedures in community supervision reported in the literature. However, there have been a number of summary treatments of the risk prediction literature (Jones, 1996; Gottfredson, 1987; Farrington, 1987). These reviews critically assess much of the extant research on risk prediction, but often do not include risk prediction studies (construction and validation scales) completed in the development of community supervision risk classification instruments in distinct jurisdictions. Towberman (1992a) reported a survey of needs assessment practices with juvenile offenders in 48 states. Limited to “statewide” measures used for needs assessment with juvenile offenders, the information gathered is of limited utility, especially for local probation agencies. She also published the results of a national survey of risk assessment in juvenile justice in that same year which faces many of the same limitations (Towberman, 1992b). Similarly, the National Association of Criminal Justice Planners (Cunniff and Bergsmann, 1990) reported that the majority of probation agencies included in a 1988 study of probation administration used risk and

needs assessment scales. However, this study did not focus on the issue of case assessment and classification and it is not possible to identify specific assessment instruments or procedures, nor to compare their use or perceived effectiveness.

THE PRESENT STUDY

In 1998, the National Institute of Justice awarded a grant to the University of Cincinnati to conduct a survey of probation and parole agencies on their case classification procedures. Although it is known that many probation and parole agencies rely on these procedures, information about types of instruments and how they are used was lacking. The present study was designed to describe the current state of the art in case classification in community corrections.

This study extends previous research in several ways. First, although the literature has discussed the importance of case classification in probation and parole, at present, there is no single source of information about what if any, risk/need classification procedures are in place. Second, as probation, parole and other community correctional agencies scramble to implement improved classification and management practices to meet the challenges of a growing and increasingly troublesome population, there exists a need to take stock of the current state of the art in case classification.

Research Questions

The present study attempted to answer the broad question:

What is the contemporary state of the art in case classification in community corrections for adult offenders in the United States? The answer to this question required collecting data on a number of issues related to case classification including:

- How many agencies use standardized, objective classification instruments?

- What case classification instruments are being used?
- If agencies do not classify, why not?
- How important do agencies feel it is to classify offenders?
- What are the characteristics of agencies that classify?
- In what ways is classification linked to agency management?
- How has classification been implemented?
- What specialized classification instruments are being used?

METHODS

To answer the research questions above, we surveyed probation and parole agencies in the United States. A detailed questionnaire was sent to the director or administrator of each probation and parole agency (see Appendix). Respondents were asked to report their current case classification processes, and their perceptions of the value, strengths, and weaknesses of case classification for their agency. Similarly, we surveyed a sample of community based treatment programs, asking them similar questions.

Sample

Probation and parole agency administrators were identified from the American Correctional Association directory. In states where the local probation agencies were under the supervision of one central agency, only that agency was surveyed. In states in which the local agencies had autonomy from the central state agency, all local agencies were surveyed. In some states, such as Ohio, some local agencies are supervised by a central agency and others have autonomy. In these cases, both the state and the local agencies were surveyed. The directors/administrators of these agencies were sent a copy

of the survey/questionnaire and asked to respond. A total of 607 probation and parole agencies were contacted. They were also asked to provide a list of community treatment agencies they utilize as referrals. The probation and parole departments identified 1,548 referral agencies. We then randomly surveyed 500 about their use of case classification.

Table 1 reports the distribution of respondents. Most of those surveyed were local probation/parole departments, followed by community corrections agencies. A total of 385 probation and parole agencies (63.4%) and 133 community treatment agencies (26.6%) responded.

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents

	N	Response Rate
State Parole	13	68.4%
State Parole/Probation	26	83.8%
State Probation	7	77.0%
Local Probation/Parole	339	61.8%
Community Corrections	133	26.6%

Survey Instrument

The survey instrument was composed of three parts. The first part asked for information describing the characteristics of the responding agency such as the type of agency, population of jurisdiction, number of personnel, budget, number of offenders under supervision, and types of offenders supervised. This information was presented with regards to characteristics of the sample. This section also asked about whether the agency runs any specialized caseloads.

The second section of the survey instrument asked for information regarding the importance of case classification. Respondents were asked about the importance of classifying on risk, need, and responsivity factors and whether the agency currently or

plans to classify offenders using standardized, objective case classification instruments. Respondents who reported that they did not classify offenders were asked why.

The final part of the instrument asked respondents to discuss their current case classification procedures, such as what instruments are used, have they been validated, training requirements, when case classification is conducted, and the strengths and weaknesses of their system.

Data Collection

The questionnaire was piloted at a local probation department. After revisions were made the survey process followed the Dillman technique (Dillman, 1978; Dillman Carpenter, Christenson, and Brooks, 1974). After sending out the survey, a reminder postcard was sent, followed by a second and a third mailing to those non-respondents.

Analyses

The unit of analysis in this research was the agency. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the sample and the state of the art in case classification. Chi-square and One-way ANOVA analyses were also conducted to determine differences in responses by whether the agency classifies and the case classification instrument used. A content analysis was also conducted of the case classification instruments that were submitted by the agencies. Each instrument was reviewed to determine if it combined risk and needs evaluations in one assessment, and whether the instrument assessed dynamic factors.

RESULTS

Table 2 reports the characteristics of responding agencies. Not surprising, the state agencies tended to be much larger than the local agencies. They tended to serve the largest population (over 262,801), have the greatest number of employees (over 76), and

Table 2: Characteristics of Responding Agencies by Type of Agency

Characteristics	Type of Agency				All Agencies N=385
	State Parole n=13	State Probation n=7	State Parole/ Probation n=26	Local Parole/ Probation n=339	
Population of Jurisdiction Served*					
0-32,500	20.0%	0%	8.7%	25.9%	24.2%
32,501-76,000	0%	0%	0%	29.0%	25.8%
76,001-262,800	0%	0%	0%	28.1%	25.0%
262,801-20,000,000	80.0%	100%	91.3%	17.0%	25.0%
Number of Employees*					
1-7	0%	0%	0%	26.3%	23.2%
8-18	0%	0%	4.3%	28.9%	25.7%
19-75	23.1%	0%	8.7%	27.9%	26.0%
76-45,000	76.9%	100%	87.0%	16.8%	25.1%
Annual Budget*					
\$5,000-\$274,000	0%	0%	0%	28.4%	24.8%
\$274,001-\$901,366	0%	0%	4.3%	28.4%	25.0%
\$901,367-\$3,750,000	25.0%	14.3%	0%	27.3%	25.1%
\$3,750,001+	75.0%	85.7%	95.7%	15.9%	25.1%

*Categories were broken down into quartiles using N=385.

Table 2 Continued: Characteristics of Agencies Responding by Type of Agency

Characteristics	Type of Agency				
	State Parole n=13	State Probation n=7	State Parole/ Probation n=26	Local Parole/ Probation n=339	All Agencies N=385
Types of Offenders Supervised ¹					
Misdemeanants	15.4%	71.4%	69.2%	94.3%	89.6%
Juveniles	7.7%	57.1%	15.4%	59.3%	54.5%
Felony Probation	7.7%	100%	96.2%	93.2%	90.6%
Parolees	100%	0%	100%	24.2%	31.4%
Number of Offenders Under Supervision ²					
1-454	0%	0%	4.0%	28.0%	24.9%
455-993	7.7%	0%	0%	26.4%	23.6%
994-3000	15.4%	0%	0%	29.2%	26.3%
3001-153,725	76.9%	100%	96.0%	16.4%	25.2%

¹Categories were not mutually exclusive, respondents could check more than one category. Percentages will not add to 100 percent.

²Categories were broken down into quartiles using N=385.

have the largest annual budget (over \$3,750,001). The local probation/parole agencies tended to be equally divided among the categories. Most of the state agencies served more serious offenders than the local agencies and the number of offenders being served was higher in the state agencies. Overall, approximately 90 percent of all responding agencies supervised both misdemeanants and felony probationers. Over 54 percent served juveniles and 31.4 percent served parolees.

We also asked community corrections service providers about the populations they served. These results are reported in Table 3. Most of the agencies reported that they served misdemeanants (90.2%) and felony probationers (90.2%). Almost 80 percent served parolees and 62.4 percent reported that they served juveniles. These findings are not unlike the findings with regard to probation and parole agencies.

Table 3: Types of Offenders Served by Community Corrections Service Providers (N=133)

Type of Offender:	N	Percent
Misdemeanants	120	90.2%
Felony Probationers	120	90.2
Parolees	106	79.7
Juveniles	83	62.4
Pre-trial	97	72.9

Figure 1 indicates that most probation and parole agencies utilize case classification assessments. Almost 75 percent of the sample reported that they do classify using standardized, objective instruments (n=288). Two percent of the sample claim that they currently do not classify however, they plan to in the future (n=9). Approximately 23 percent of the sample reported that their agency does not classify offenders using standardized, objective instruments (n=88).

Figure 1: Classification by Responding Probation/Parole Agencies (N=385)

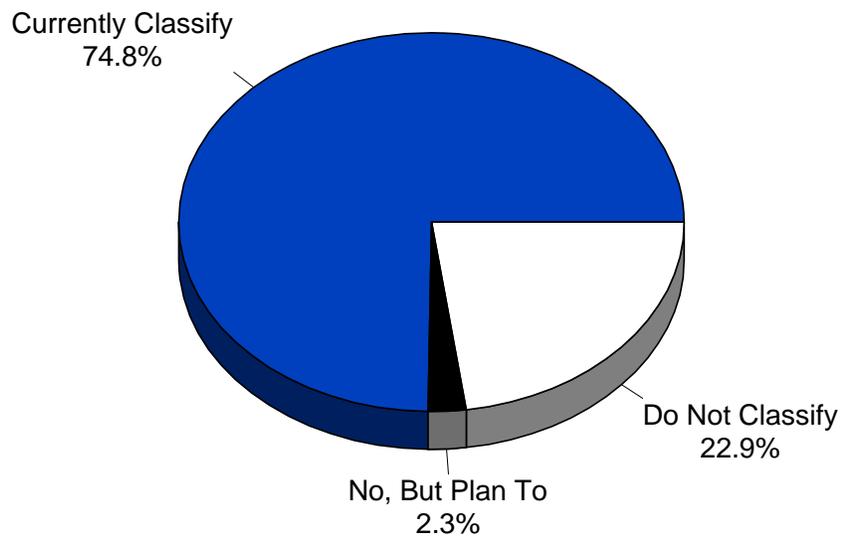


Figure 2 presents the results of the same questions proposed to the community correctional service providers. Whereas 74 percent of the probation/parole agencies classify, only 56.4 percent of the community corrections service providers classify using standardized, objective instruments. Nearly 10 percent of the community service providers claimed that they were planning on classifying in the future.

Figure 3 presents responses to the question, ‘Why don’t you classify?’ posed to those agencies that do not currently classify and do not plan to classify offenders using risk/need assessments (Probation/parole, n=88; Community service providers, n=45). Keeping in mind that the responses were not mutually exclusive, 37.5 percent of the sample of probation/parole agencies (n=33), and slightly over 20 percent of the community corrections service providers (n=10) that did not classify claimed that they were “too busy/not enough time.” Approximately 24 percent of probation/parole agencies (n=21) reported that their “professional opinion was adequate” followed by 19.3 percent (n=17) who claimed that classification “will add too much paperwork.” Unlike probation and parole agencies that claimed they were “too busy/not enough time,” the most common reason given by community corrections treatment providers for not classifying was that their “professional opinion was adequate” (28.8%, n=13). Approximately 10 percent (n=9) of the sample of probation/parole agencies reported that classification was “too costly” compared to over 20 percent (n=9) of the community corrections providers. Only 4.5 percent (n=4) of the probation and parole agencies and none of the community service providers claimed that it is “too hard to change what we do now.”

We were also interested in whether agency characteristics differed between those using or not using tools for case classification. Specifically, we examined type of agency

Figure 2: Classification by Responding Community Corrections Service Providers (N=133)

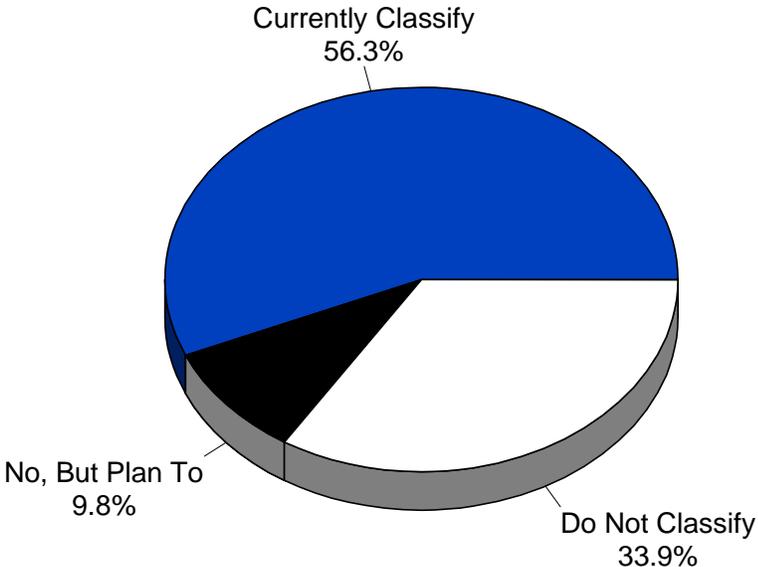
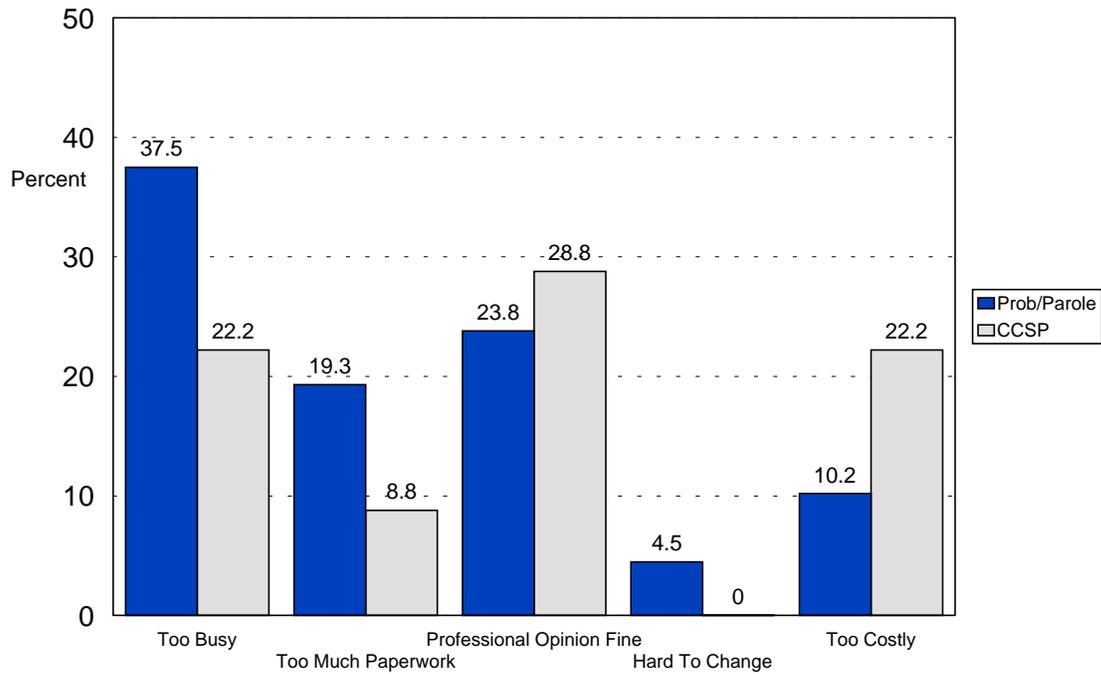


Figure 3: Reasons that Responding Agencies Do Not Classify



Categories are not mutually exclusive; Probation/Parole N=88; Community Corrections Service Providers N=45

(state or local) size of jurisdiction, annual budget, number of employees, and number of offenders served. Table 4 presents the result of a chi-square analysis. Large agencies (those with more employees and supervising more offenders) were more likely to classify. Agency type, jurisdiction size, and annual budget were not significantly related to the use of classification instruments.

In addition to asking the agencies whether they classify offenders using standardized, objective classification instruments, we also asked probation and parole agencies if they conducted any specialized assessments and whether they operated any specialized caseloads. Table 5 shows that nearly 41 percent of the probation/parole agencies reported that they conducted drug offender assessments, and over 38 percent operated drug offender caseloads. Nearly 37 percent of the probation/parole agencies reported assessing alcohol offenders, and 35 percent had specialized caseloads. Only 17.9 percent of these agencies conduct mental health assessments and have specialized mental health caseloads. Slightly over 31 percent of probation/parole agencies claimed to have domestic violence offender caseloads, yet only 24.7 percent reported conducting specialized assessments of domestic violence offenders. Slightly more than 39 percent of these agencies reported that they conducted sex offender assessments, and 41 have sex offender caseloads. Finally, 7.5 percent of the agencies conducted repeat offender assessments and 12 percent have formed repeat offender caseloads.

Community corrections service providers were also asked if they conduct specialized assessments. Table 6 illustrates the results. With the exception of sex offenders, community corrections service providers were more likely to conduct specialized assessments. The most common assessments were for drug offenders

Table 4: Respondent Characteristics by Whether the Agency Classifies

Characteristics	Currently Classifies
Type of Agency:	
State	82.6%
Local	73.7
Size of Jurisdiction:	
Up to 35,000	70.2%
35,001-100,000	73.5
100,001- 1 Million	74.8
Over 1 Million	90.2
Annual Budget:	
Under \$300,000	75.3%
\$300,001-1 Million	68.8%
\$1,000,001 – 5 Million	84.9
Over 5 Million	80.6
Agency Size by Employees:**	
1-10	66.4%
11-20	73.7
21-100	84.9
101+	81.3
Number of Offenders Served:***	
500 or less	68.2%
501-1,000	67.5
1,001-10,000	87.1
Over 10,000	70.5

Using Chi-Square Analysis:

** .01

***.001

Table 5: All Probation and Parole Agencies on Specialized Caseloads and Assessments (N=385)

Offender Type:	Operated Specialized Caseload		Conducts Specialized Assessment	
	%	N	%	N
Drug Offender	38.4	148	40.8	157
Alcohol Offender	35.3	136	36.6	141
Mental Health Offender	17.9	69	17.9	69
Domestic Violence Offender	31.7	122	24.7	95
Violent Offender	15.1	58	10.4	40
Sex Offender	41.3	159	39.5	152
Repeat Offender	12.2	47	7.5	29

(66.9%), alcohol offenders (66.9%), mental health offenders (39.8%), and domestic violence offenders (27.1%). Slightly over 21 percent conducted assessments of sex offenders, and 18.8 percent assessed violent offenders.

Table 6: Specialized Caseloads for Community Corrections Service Providers (N=133)

Community Corrections Service Provider		
Offender Type:	N	Percent
Drug Offender	89	66.9%
Alcohol Offender	89	66.9
Mental Health Offender	53	39.8
Domestic Violence Offender	36	27.1
Violent Offender	25	18.8
Sex Offender	28	21.1

For the most part, a minority of probation/parole agencies conduct specialized assessments and run specialized caseloads. The most common specialized assessment is for drug offenders and the most common specialized caseload is for sex offenders. Community corrections service providers appear to conduct more specialized assessments with drug/alcohol assessments occurring most frequently.

Probation and parole agencies were asked about the importance of classifying on risk, need, and responsivity. The agencies were asked to rate the importance using a scale of 1-10, with 1 being “not necessary at all,” and 10 being “absolutely necessary.” These answers were broken down into absolutely necessary, very necessary, somewhat necessary, not very necessary, and not necessary at all. Not surprisingly, respondents who reported using assessment instruments were significantly more likely to feel that these tools were necessary and important.

Table 7 indicates that the majority of the sample of probation and parole agencies claimed it was “absolutely necessary” to classify offenders on risk level. Only 8.2

percent reported that it was not necessary to classify on risk level. While the majority claimed it was necessary to classify on need also, most did not feel that it was absolutely necessary. Finally, only 20 percent of agencies claimed that it was “absolutely necessary” to classify on responsiveness factors.

Of the probation/parole agencies that currently classify offenders using standardized, risk/need assessments (n=288), the most widely used instrument is the Case Management Classification System (36.1%, n=104), which includes both the Wisconsin Risk and Needs instruments. As can be seen in Figure 4, approximately 28 percent (n=81) reported using another type of risk/needs classification instrument. These “other” types of instruments differed depending on which agency filled out the survey. We did ask the agencies to send us copies of their instruments, however, most agencies did not comply with this request. Of the agencies that did send us their instruments and reported using some “other” instrument, the most common was a version of the Wisconsin risk and need assessments. Many agencies reported using both the Wisconsin Risk and Need assessments, but not the CMC (26.3%, n=76). About 15 percent (n=44) of the probation/parole sample reported using the LSI. Finally, 2 percent (n=6) of the sample reported using the Wisconsin Risk assessment alone, and less than 1 percent (n=2) of the sample reported using the Wisconsin Need assessment alone. Less than one percent of the sample reported using either the Salient Factor Score or the Prison Likelihood Scale.

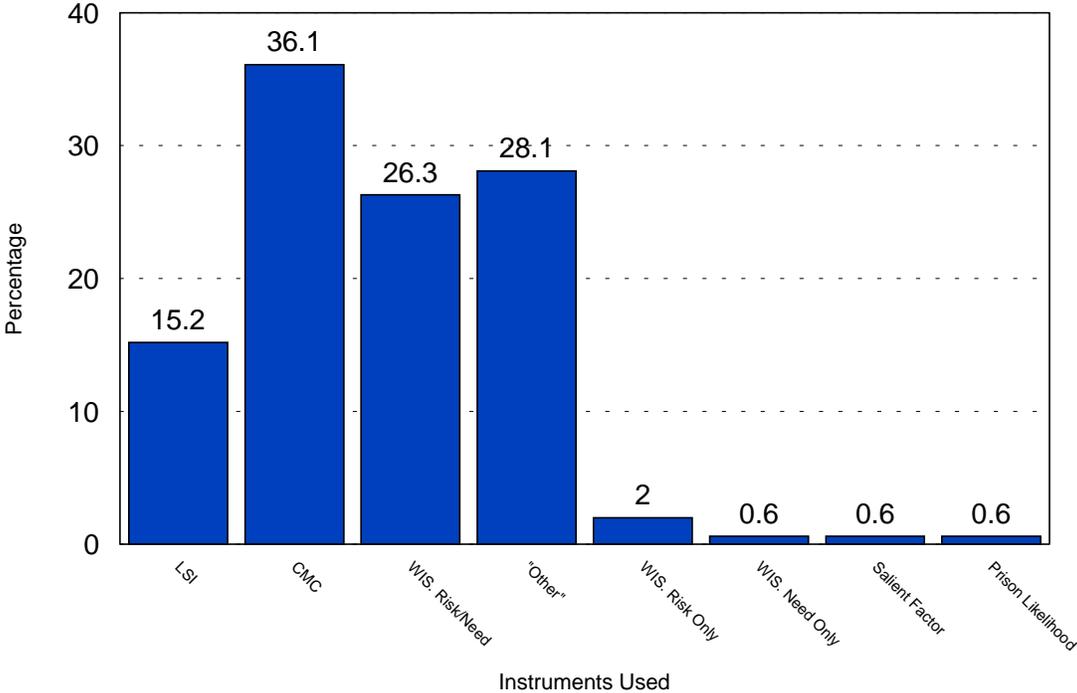
We were also interested in whether there were any differences in agency characteristics with regard to the instrument they employed to assess offenders. Table 8 reports the results. It appears as if the LSI is more likely to be used in State agencies (21.7%), than Local agencies (10%). State agencies were also more likely to use multiple

Table 7: Importance of Classifying Offenders on Risk, Need, and Responsivity

(Probation and Parole Agencies, N=385)

	N	%
Risk (N=372)		
Absolutely Necessary	143	57.2%
Very Necessary	95	25.5
Somewhat Necessary	33	8.8
Not Very Necessary	20	5.3
Not Necessary at All	11	2.9
Need (N=366)		
Absolutely Necessary	132	36.0%
Very Necessary	122	33.3
Somewhat Necessary	74	20.2
Not Very Necessary	24	6.5
Not Necessary at All	14	3.8
Responsivity (N=362)		
Absolutely Necessary	75	20.7%
Very Necessary	131	36.1
Somewhat Necessary	92	25.4
Not Very Necessary	30	8.2
Not Necessary at All	34	9.3

Figure 4: Assessment Instruments Used by Probation/Parole Agencies (N=288)



instruments than local agencies (17.3% versus 7%). The smaller the jurisdiction, budget, number of employees, and number of offenders served the more likely the agency to use the CMC. Agencies with a larger budget and more employees were also more likely to use the Wisconsin Risk/Needs instrument. There was also a significant difference with regard to the use of “other” and multiple instruments. Although the pattern was less clear, it appears that those agencies that served fewer than 500 offenders, and those that served over 10,000 offenders were more likely to use “other” instruments and multiple instruments.

Figure 5 presents the results of main instruments used. About one-third of agencies that classify use the CMC alone. The Wisconsin Risk/need assessments or some “other” instrument were each used by about 25 percent of respondents. A little over 11 percent of agencies reported using multiple instruments, and only 7.5 percent used the LSI alone.

Table 9 reports whether instrument used is related to specialized assessments or caseloads. Those agencies that utilize multiple instruments are more likely to operate drug offender caseloads than those agencies using the other instruments. Moreover, those agencies that utilize the LSI are less likely than those agencies that utilize the various other instruments to operate sex offender caseloads.

The data in Table 10 indicate that those agencies that conduct drug, alcohol, mental health, and domestic violence assessments are more likely to use multiple instruments. Those agencies that utilize the LSI however, are more likely than the agencies using other instruments to conduct repeat offender assessments.

Table 8: Agency Characteristics by Type of Instrument Used (N=288)¹

Characteristics	LSI	CMC	Wisconsin R/N	Other	Multiple
Type of Agency:					
State	21.7%*	19.5%	26.0%	26.0%	17.3%*
Local	10.0	28.0	18.8	20.3	7.0
Size of Jurisdiction:					
Up to 35,000	16.4%	47.7%**	20.8%	23.8%	10.4%
35,001-100,000	13.3	44.0	22.6	26.6	8.0
100,001- 1 Million	11.3	27.3	30.6	30.6	9.0
Over 1 Million	18.9	21.6	29.7	45.9	24.3
Annual Budget:					
Under \$300,000	13.9%	47.6%**	19.7%*	26.7%	10.4%
\$300,001-1 Million	14.6	43.9	14.6	26.8	2.4
\$1,000,001 – 5 Million	13.9	31.6	35.4	25.3	11.3
Over 5 Million	18.4	21.5	27.6	38.4	16.9
Agency Size by Employees:					
1-10	13.9%	47.6%**	19.7%*	26.7%	10.4%
11-20	14.6	43.9	14.6	26.8	2.4
21-101	13.9	31.6	35.4	25.3	11.3
Over 100	18.4	21.5	27.6	38.4	16.9
Number of Offenders Served:					
500 or less	16.4%	45.2%*	17.8%	31.5%*	12.3%*
501-1,000	21.4	42.8	21.4	17.8	7.1
1,001-10,000	9.9	33.0	33.0	24.7	9.0
Over 10,000	25.8	25.8	25.8	48.3	25.8

Using Chi-Square Analysis: *.05, **.01.

¹ Percentages may exceed 100% dues to agencies utilizing more than one instrument

Figure 5: Main Instruments (N=280)

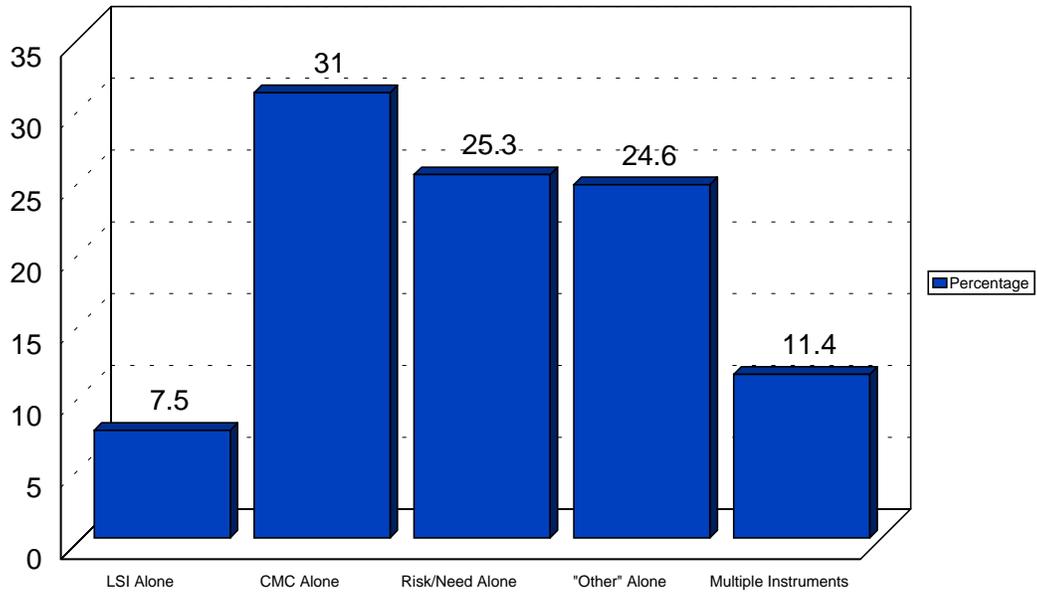


Table 9: Which Instrument¹ by Specialized Caseloads (N=280)

Offender Type:	“Other” (N=69)		CMC (N=87)		LSI (N=21)		Risk/Need ² (N=71)		Multiple (N=32)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
	Drug Offender	20	29.0	33	37.9	5	23.8	31	43.7	17
Alcohol Offender	21	30.4	29	33.3	4	19.0	26	36.3	16	50.0
Mental Health Offender	10	14.5	13	14.9	1	4.8	12	16.9	9	28.1
Domestic Violence Offender	23	33.3	20	23.0	4	19.0	27	38.0	13	40.6
Violent Offender	10	14.5	11	12.6	2	9.5	13	18.3	7	2.9
Sex Offender*	30	43.5	32	36.8	3	14.3	34	47.9	17	53.1
Repeat Offender	9	13.0	10	11.5	4	19.0	9	12.7	4	12.5

¹These instrument categories are mutually exclusive. Each of the instruments listed are used by the agencies alone. The multiple category includes those agencies that use more than one standardized, objective instrument.

²These agencies utilize both the Wisconsin Risk and Need assessment together.

*Significant at .001 level.

Table 10: Which Instrument¹ by Specialized Assessment (N=280)

Offender Type:	“Other” (N=69)		CMC (N=87)		LSI (N=21)		Risk/Need ² (N=71)		Multiple (N=32)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Drug Assessment**	26	37.7	31	35.6	10	47.6	24	33.8	23	71.9
Alcohol Assessment**	26	37.7	29	33.3	9	42.9	16	22.5	20	62.5
Mental Health Assessment**	8	11.6	12	13.8	6	28.6	9	12.7	13	40.6
Domestic Violence Assessment	10	14.5	20	23.0	6	28.6	18	25.4	13	40.6
Violent Assessment	4	5.8	7	2.5	5	23.8	9	12.7	5	15.6
Sex Offender Assessment	30	43.5	28	32.2	11	52.4	24	33.8	16	50.0
Repeat Offender Assessment***	3	4.3	4	4.6	6	28.6	4	5.6	5	15.6

¹These instrument categories are mutually exclusive. Each of the instruments listed are used by the agencies alone. The multiple category includes those agencies that use more than one standardized, objective instrument.

²These agencies utilize both the Wisconsin Risk and Need assessment together.

** .01 level of significance

*** .001 level of significance

Table 11 presents the results with regards to the importance of classifying on risk, need, and responsivity. All agencies gave similar ratings on the importance of classifying on risk and need, with the mean being approximately 8 on a scale of 1-10 with 10 being “absolutely necessary.” In terms of classifying on responsivity, those agencies using multiple instruments were more likely to rate this as being “absolutely necessary.”

Respondents that classify were also asked to rate several statements about their case classification procedures. Table 12 displays the results of the answers to these questions by type of instrument used. Respondents were asked on a scale of 1-10, with 1 being disagree, and 10 being agree. There were no significant differences in respondents to these questions based on type of instrument used. All agreed that case classification makes their job easier, benefits the client, creates a more professional environment, helps staff make better decisions, increases effectiveness of delivery of services, and enhances fairness in decision making.

Agencies were asked if classification data were used to facilitate agency management. As shown in Table 13, approximately 75 percent of the agencies utilize case classification data in the assessment of officer workloads. This did not differ depending on which instrument the agency utilized. Fifty-four percent of the agencies utilize case classification data in staff deployment, while 47 percent of the agencies also utilize case classification in the development of specialized caseloads. Finally, nearly 20 percent of the agencies use classification in sentencing decisions made by the judge, and this does not differ significantly by the type of instrument used.

Table 14 shows the findings with regard to implementation issues for the various case classification instruments. Of the 44 probation/parole agencies that reported using

Table 11: Importance of Classifying by Instrument Used¹ (N=280)

	“Other”		CMC		LSI		Risk/Need ²		Multiple		
	Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	F
Risk (N=277)	8.74	1.34	8.54	1.80	8.43	1.36	8.83	1.61	8.63	1.66	.468
Need (N=274)	7.78	1.94	7.58	2.04	7.57	1.91	7.86	2.07	8.42	1.78	1.108
Responsivity (N=270)*	6.44	2.21	6.76	2.42	6.86	1.96	6.72	2.59	8.03	1.56	2.641

¹These instrument categories are mutually exclusive. Each of the instruments listed are used by the agencies alone. The multiple category includes those agencies that use more than one standardized, objective instrument.

²These agencies utilize both the Wisconsin Risk and Need assessment together.

*.05

Table 12: Statements about Importance of Classifying by Type of Instrument (N=280)

	“Other”		CMC		LSI		Risk/Need ²		Multiple		
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	F
Case Classification:											
Makes my job easier	7.26	2.45	7.00	2.62	6.76	2.62	7.66	1.88	6.94	2.31	1.111
Benefits the client	7.75	1.78	7.13	2.46	7.38	2.16	7.54	1.83	7.25	2.08	.930
Creates a more professional Environment	7.85	1.89	7.48	2.35	7.95	2.01	7.90	1.74	7.72	2.13	.550
Helps my staff make better decisions	7.99	2.12	7.39	2.44	7.62	2.09	7.58	2.05	7.59	2.09	.699
Increases effectiveness of delivery of services	7.71	2.03	7.20	2.48	7.95	1.60	7.56	2.02	7.47	2.17	.796
Enhances fairness in decision making	8.06	1.93	7.45	2.12	7.95	1.99	7.77	1.92	7.47	2.30	1.031

¹These instrument categories are mutually exclusive. Each of the instruments listed are used by the agencies alone. The multiple category includes those agencies that use more than one standardized, objective instrument.

²These agencies utilize both the Wisconsin Risk and Need assessment together.

Table 13: Agency Management by Type of Instrument (N=280)

	“Other” % (n)	CMC % (n)	LSI % (n)	Risk/Need % (n)	Multiple % (n)	Total % (n)
Are Case Classification Data Used:						
In the Assessment of Officer Workloads	72.1 (49)	71.4 (60)	75.0 (15)	79.7 (55)	76.7 (23)	74.5 (202)
In Staff Deployment	52.5 (35)	50.6 (41)	63.2 (12)	60.9 (42)	53.6 (15)	54.0 (145)
In the Development of Specialized Caseloads	50.0 (34)	41.3 (33)	38.9 (7)	46.4 (32)	64.3 (18)	47.1 (124)
In the Assessment of Supervision levels	30.9 (21)	46.8 (37)	47.4 (9)	31.9 (22)	65.5 (19)	40.9 (108)
In the Evaluation of Treatment Referral Sources	23.9 (16)	31.3 (25)	31.6 (6)	21.7 (15)	57.1 (16)	29.7 (78)
In Sentencing Decisions Made By Sentencing Judge	13.6 (9)	21.0 (17)	36.8 (7)	15.9 (11)	24.1 (7)	19.3 (51)

the LSI to classify offenders, 83 percent began using it fairly recently (within the last 10 years). A few of the agencies (17.6%) began using the instrument in the 1980's.

Contrary to these findings, the Wisconsin Risk and the Wisconsin Need instruments were introduced to the agencies in the majority of cases in the 1980's (74.6%). A much smaller percentage of agencies have recently implemented the Wisconsin Risk/Need instruments than compared with the LSI. Nearly 57 percent of the agencies that reported using the CMC, began using the instrument in 1990's. Moreover, 54.8 percent of the agencies that report using some "other" instruments, began using the instrument within the last decade.

We also were interested if the probation/parole agencies have validated the instruments on their local population and whether the instrument was automated. In terms of both validation and automation, there was not much variation. Approximately 30 percent of agencies that utilize case classification instruments reported that these instruments have been validated on their local population. We found similar findings for the question of whether these instruments were automated; 30 percent of the agencies that utilize these instruments reported that their instruments are automated. Over 40 percent of the agencies that reported using the CMC also reported that this instrument was automated.

The agencies were asked if they used the instrument to determine risk level and to determine the services the offender would receive. While the majority of agencies that utilize each instrument use it to determine risk level and the services the offender will receive, there do appear to be differences. Almost 100 percent of the agencies using the Wisconsin risk and need assessments use the instrument to determine the level of risk of

Table 14: Implementation Issues by Classification Instruments

	LSI (N=44)		Wisconsin Risk/Need (N=76)		CMC (N=104)		Other (N=81)	
	%	(n)	%	(n)	%	(n)	%	(n)
Implementation Issues:								
Date Began Using Instrument:								
1970's	0.0	(0)	8.9	(6)	3.6	(3)	8.0	(5)
1980's	17.6	(6)	74.6	(50)	39.7	(33)	37.0	(23)
1990's	82.3	(28)	16.4	(11)	56.5	(47)	54.8	(34)
Validated On Local Population	27.2	(12)	32.8	(25)	26.9	(28)	33.3	(27)
Automated	25.0	(11)	26.3	(20)	41.3	(43)	37.0	(30)
Use Instrument to:								
Determine Risk Level	79.5	(35)	98.6	(75)	88.4	(92)	93.8	(76)
Determine Services	72.7	(32)	71.0	(54)	62.5	(65)	58.0	(47)
Use it to Assess 100% of Offenders	43.1	(19)	61.8	(47)	71.1	(74)	69.1	(56)
Use it to Reassess	72.7	(32)	85.5	(65)	80.7	(84)	79.0	(64)
Training Required	84.0	(37)	86.8	(66)	76.9	(80)	74.0	(60)
Who Conducted Training?								
In house	34.6	(9)	55.9	(59)	54.5	(36)	70.3	(38)
Consultant	65.3	(17)	44.0	(26)	45.4	(30)	29.6	(16)

Bivariate Analysis was not conducted due to non-mutually exclusive instrument categories.

the offender. Only approximately 80 percent of those who use the LSI, use the instrument to determine an offender's level of risk. Whereas approximately 70 percent of the agencies that use the LSI and/or Wisconsin Risk/Need assessments use it to determine the services that the offender will receive. Finally, 60 percent of the agencies that use the CMC and "other" instrument use the instruments in this way.

Fewer than half of the agencies that use the LSI use it on 100 percent of the offenders, while 70 percent of the agencies utilizing the various other instruments assess 100 percent of the offenders. Close to 80 percent of the agencies reported using the various instruments to reassess offenders. Training was required in the majority of agencies that use any of the instruments. Moreover, except for the LSI, the majority of the agencies were trained in the various other instruments by an in-house trainer.

We asked the probation and parole administrators to send us their case classification assessment instruments. Out of the 385 probation/parole agencies that responded, only 83 (21.5%) complied with our request. We were interested in the number of agencies that combined their risk/need assessments or kept them separate. We already know that the Wisconsin Risk instrument includes static factors such as criminal history, while the Wisconsin Need instrument includes more dynamic factors such as attitudes and employment. Most of the instruments (60%) we received were a version of the Wisconsin Risk and the Wisconsin Need Instruments. These instruments were characterized by two different forms; a risk assessment and a need assessment. The risk assessments usually included static factors such as age, offense, and prior criminal history. The need assessments on the other hand included dynamic factors such as marital relationship, associations, educational achievement, and alcohol/drug use. A little

less than 40 percent of the instruments combined both risk and need factors to create one risk/need score. Overall, despite the limited number of instruments received, most of the instruments being used tend to separate risk and need assessments. Many agencies that created their own version of a risk/need assessment have combined the risk and need factors to create one score.

DISCUSSION

Limitations

There are several limitations to the current study. First and foremost, the sample was more complex and smaller than anticipated. With regard to complexity, it is difficult to separate probation and parole on a local level. Moreover, many states operate a state probation authority, while other states allow local probation departments. In some states such as Ohio, some counties are under state authority and others have been left up to their own discretion. This made sorting out the use of case classification instruments difficult. With regard to the response rate, despite repeated efforts to contact the agencies and ask them to participate, many agencies chose not to respond. Despite the sample limitations we managed to achieve over a 60 percent response rate with probation and parole agencies. Another limitation is that relatively few agencies complied with our request for copies of classification instruments. This made it difficult to determine what type of instrument was actually used.

Conclusions

The findings from this national survey suggest that classification and assessment of offenders is an important and valued aspect of community corrections. Overall, the vast majority of agencies use some form of standardized and objective tool to assess risks

and need. Most rate the use of these instruments as very important to their work, and the larger the agency the more likely it is to employ these instruments. The Wisconsin or some variation is the most widely used tool, undoubtedly due to the wide availability and nonproprietary nature of the instrument. On the other hand, the LSI has clearly gained a foothold in probation and parole, and was cited as the instrument most likely to be considered for future adoption.

Management issues include training, cost of the instrument, and ease of use. The Wisconsin instruments in general are more easily and quickly scored than either the CMC or LSI, and staff training requirements are not as rigorous or costly. Relatively few of these agencies have validated their instruments on local populations, this despite some evidence that they have made modifications to the instruments. Relatedly, only about one-third of these agencies have automated their classification process. These two issues are important because automation facilitates validation. Most agencies reassess offenders, few assess responsivity factors, and many do not link assessment to service delivery. As a result it appears that standardized and objective classification and assessment instruments are not being used to their full potential in community corrections.

This survey has provided some baseline information about the use of objective classification instruments in community corrections. Future research should attempt to trace and understand changes in the use of classification. So too, additional research into the links between specialized caseloads/services and the availability and use of classification instruments is needed. Finally, future research should explore the factors

that explain why, when, and how community correctional agencies adopt, implement, and change case classification instruments and processes.

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