

Caseload Standards: APPA Issues Committee Report

This report on "Caseload Standards" describes the history and problems associated with the concept of caseload and the benefits associated with the more current workload methodology. Based on the report the Committee recommends that:

1. APPA *not* adopt or support a position based on a caseload concept. Since supervision efforts vary due to offender type and organizational policy, APPA should suggest that agencies avoid the use of undifferentiated caseload terminology.

2. APPA should, however, support an educational effort which describes the benefits of workload methods of case assignment and accounting. The following report could serve as an initial draft for such an effort.

APPA INVITES RESPONSES AND WELCOMES FEEDBACK FROM ITS CONSTITUENCY ON THIS REPORT.

Please send all comments to:

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Introduction

In the spring of 1990, APPA member William J. Hughes raised the issue of whether the Association should develop standards for the size of supervision caseloads for probation and parole officers. Mr. Hughes noted that there are currently no national standards, and stated that he would like to see APPA take an active role in establishing standards.

This request was sent to Association President Donald Evans, who referred it to the Issues Committee. This report sets forth the preliminary recommendations of the Committee. It is by no means the final word on the subject, and the Committee invites the membership to add their reactions and comments.

Background

The issue of the ideal size for a probation or parole caseload has been discussed for as long as there have been professionals in the field. National organizations and commissions have addressed the subject with regularity, if not with great success, in achieving compliance with those recommendations.

In the early days of the debate over the optimum caseload size, the number of 50 was suggested. Charles L. Chute of the National Probation and Parole Association is credited with establishing this number. A caseload of 50 survived as the accepted wisdom until the 1967 report of the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice. In the *Corrections* report, caseload size of 35 was put forth as the new "best" size.

While organizations and national commissions were debating the wisdom of one or another caseload size, there was a good deal of research going on in probation and parole to empirically assess the effectiveness of various caseload sizes. Much of this research was conducted in California, and much of it was inconclusive. None of it definitively answered the question: "What is the ideal caseload size?"

Why is This Question So Hard to Answer?

To the casual observer, this would seem to be a rather straightforward question. Why can't the professionals in a well established field, assisted by capable researchers, provide a definitive answer to the question of how many

offenders a caseload officer should carry?

As with so many things, it is not so simple. Probation and parole may be a profession in North America, but this profession certainly does not represent a unified, coordinated service providing supervision of offenders under an accepted and comprehensive model of policy and procedure. On the contrary, probation and parole is a pluralistic, highly decentralized enterprise engaged in by hundreds of departments at the federal, provincial, state, county and municipal level across North America. The diversity among these service providers is substantial. It is, therefore, very difficult to simply state, with any degree of confidence, anything which will apply uniformly to all (or even most) probation and parole agencies.

This variation among agencies is the result of locally determined policies and procedures, which are driven by statutes, court decisions, resources and other factors unique to a particular jurisdiction. Nonetheless, there are commonalities in issues and concerns which link the agencies together. These form the basis for efforts such as those addressed here: to develop and issue standards which will be responsive to

the needs of the field, while reflecting and accommodating the need for individualization by the agencies.

What Are the Key Elements of This Discussion?

It will be helpful to identify and briefly discuss the key elements involved in the determination of the optimal caseload size.

1. Successful Supervision Strategies

While the field of probation and parole is still looking for reliable supervision models, research has identified several key strategies which have proven effective in supervising offenders.

The most basic of these is differentiation of supervision. Simply stated, not every offender needs the same type or amount of supervision to achieve the goals of probation or parole. There are a number of proven and accepted methods for determining the type and amount of supervision, but the key is that in order to be most effective and efficient, there must be varying amounts of supervision provided to offenders.

This concept is crucial to the discussion of ideal caseload size because it states as a given that cases (probationers/parolees) will be treated differently in terms of the amount and type of supervision they will receive. This means that the caseload officer will be expected to give differing amounts of time and types of attention to different cases.

In practice, this translates into different types of frequencies of personal contacts for the caseload officer. Generally speaking, the more serious or higher priority cases are assigned a greater level of supervision, meaning that officers will be expected to have more frequent contact with that offender (and others involved in the case). More frequent contact results in more time being spent on a higher priority case. The converse is also true: lower priority cases demand less time of the caseload officer.

It thus becomes clear that in counting cases under this approach, it is necessary to factor in the priority of the case: that will determine the amount of time the officer is required to spend

Cases cannot be counted as equal, because they are assigned differing priorities, and and require differing amounts of caseload officer time.

2. *The Workload Concept in Supervision* — Over the past decade, a revolution of sorts has occurred in probation and parole supervision. A significant proportion of the agencies (including most of the largest) have adopted classification and case management systems for their supervision operations.

While these innovations have their roots in research and operations in many jurisdictions, it is clear that the greatest impetus for these changes was the work done in the Wisconsin Bureau of Community Corrections in the mid 1970s. The system developed was adopted by the National Institute of Corrections (NIC) as part of their Model System and was implemented by dozens of jurisdictions as part of the NIC efforts.

The Model System incorporates the differentiation in case priorities described earlier (known as classification) and complements that with a method of accounting for cases known as the "workload" model.

Like classification, the workload model is based on differentiation among cases. The classification is based on the amount of time required to supervise a particular case up to standards. Since cases are assigned to different levels of supervision, they will require varying amounts of time for the officer to supervise up to standards. The workload concept factors time into the weight that a case receives in assigning it to an officer and for accounting for its contribution to the officer's total responsibilities.

Under a workload approach, individual supervision cases are not all equal. Some are worth more because they have greater requirements for the type and frequency of contact required. Others are worth less, because less is required.

Workload vs. Caseload

It is important for work to be assessed and recorded in a manner that reflects

the priorities of the agency. Thus, if probation and parole agencies are adopting case management strategies which are based on differentiation of case supervision, then the method for assigning and accounting for those cases must accommodate that approach. It does not make sense to count every case as equal in assigning and accounting for total caseload if the basic supervision strategy is to purposely supervise cases differentially. The accounting scheme must also count cases differentially.

The workload concept does that, and thus is a more accurate and fair way to describe officer caseloads. It also, however, makes it more difficult to define an ideal caseload in numbers. This is because it is possible (and very likely) to have caseloads which are made up of different numbers of the various case types. An example is shown below:

Supervision Caseload

<u>Case Priority</u>	<u>Hours Per Month</u>	<u>Total Caseload</u>
High	4 hours	30 Cases
Medium	2 hours	60 Cases
Low	1 hour	120 Cases

If the maximum number of hours available to the caseload officer is 120 per month, the caseload can be made up of 30 high priority cases, 60 medium priority cases, or 120 low priority cases. In all three instances, the officer would have a full workload, i.e., one where the number of hours needed to fulfill the minimum requirements on all the cases (demand) is equal to the amount of hours available to the officer (supply).

As the table illustrates, there are three caseloads where the total number of cases is very different, but the total workload is equal. When there is a mixture of all three priority level cases in one caseload, there are almost endless possibilities (between 30 and 120 in the example) as to the total number of cases in a given caseload that would constitute a full workload.

Difficulties in Developing National Standards

The process for developing a workload model for a given supervision agency is fairly straightforward, and has been well refined. The difficulty comes in the diversity and pluralistic nature of the probation and parole field. The process of setting priorities, and developing and implementing policy and procedures is primarily controlled by the individual agency. There is little that is done in all (or even most) probation and parole agencies with enough consistency of practice to support national workload standards. Among the points on which agency policies vary are:

- basis for classification (risk, needs, offense);
- contact standards (type and frequency);

- hours of work, leave policies; and
- collateral duties.

With all these points of variance, it would not be feasible to develop national workload standards.

What Should APPA Do?

It is clear that APPA's potential actions in this area are constrained by several factors.

1. The search for the single "magic number" for the optimal caseload size is futile and counterproductive. It runs contrary to the current knowledge and practice in the field, and establishes an unrealistic expectation that such a standard can be set, achieved, and produce desirable results.

2. The current (and foreseeable future) state of professional practice in probation and parole is such that na-

tional standards based on a workload model could not be achieved. There is too much diversity in practice to enable the basic research and development to be completed. It is not realistic (or desirable) to attempt to force a national model on agencies to facilitate compliance with a national standard.

3. The need for national standards is real and urgent. No group has spoken effectively to this dilemma, and APPA is the only organization with both the resources and a vested interest. Probation and parole agencies are facing increasing workload demands, static or decreasing resources and greater demands for accountability.

Recommendation to the APPA Executive Committee:

The Executive Committee should adopt a policy statement addressing the issue of national caseload size standards. The policy should:

- Encourage agencies to adopt a workload model for case assignment and accounting.
- Explain the workload model in brief, highlighting its advantages.
- Recommend that agencies avoid, wherever possible, the use of undifferentiated caseload terminology. □

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