



Research Digest

Probation Workloads A Literature Review

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Introduction

The question of equitable workloads for Probation and Parole Officers has been the subject of continual friction, but of little detailed and constructive quantitative writing. The purpose of this paper is to briefly review the literature.

The 50 Unit Approach

The traditional approach is to measure caseload. Early recommendations centred on the desirability of a caseload maximum of 50.⁽¹⁾ However, as the *Attorney-General's Survey of Release Procedures* pointed out in 1939, a raw figure of this nature is a "mere average" and can be misleading:

1. Officers may be poorly trained or incompetent.
2. Officers may have investigative or other non-caseload duties.
3. Administration may be inefficient.
4. The degree of clerical back-up varies.
5. Some officers may serve in a purely administrative role, biasing the average figures.
6. Geographical features are ignored.⁽²⁾

For these sorts of reasons the Morison Committee reporting in Britain in 1962 found caseload formulae unsatisfactory. Their general conclusion was that:

"the need for a caseload index has been much reduced. Principal probation officers have, over the years, acquired experience of the total demands upon their staffs and their assessments of staffing needs should, if the relationship between the probation committee and its principle officer is the proper one of trust and confidence, count for more than mere figures."⁽³⁾

The committee did feel that caseload standards would have some utility if applied to groups of officers rather than to individuals.⁽⁴⁾

However, modified caseload figures are extensively used as indicators of workload. The most common system provides for a workload of 50 units with a probation or parole supervision case counting as 1 unit in any one month and a pre-sentence report as 5 units in any one month. Thus within a month an officer may undertake 10 pre-sentence reports or 50 supervision cases or some combination of the two calculated *pro rata*. This accords with the basis on which the N.S.W. Corrective Services Department originally recruited officers i.e. 40 supervision cases plus 2 pre-sentence reports per officer per month.⁽⁵⁾ The 50 unit standard, with a 5 unit

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Summary:—

The quest for equitable workloads for Probation and Parole Officers has led, broadly speaking, to two different measurement systems:

I In 1965 the U.S.A. adopted federally a 50 Unit per month workload standard. Each probation/parole supervision case counts as one unit. Each pre-sentence report counts as 5 units. Adjustment for particular circumstances and adoption by other countries result in some variation. *Major weakness: not enough work-factors accounted for.*

II British workload assessment systems were reviewed by the National Association of Probation Officers (N.A.P.O.) which designed its own tested, *comprehensive weighting system*. Its unit is the equivalent of one hour's work and includes a "responsibility" rating and consideration of many more factors than the U.S. system. *Major weakness: weightings may perpetuate existing, undesirable patterns of work.*

Possible Australian alternative: U.S. supervision-time standard incorporated into comprehensive N.A.P.O. system, modified for local requirements.

weighting for pre-sentence reports was officially adopted in America after the setting-up in November 1965 of a Special Task Force in Correctional Standards appointed by the staff of the President's Commission in Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice. The 50 case standard has been adopted by the Scottish Home Department and underlay the thinking of the Home Office and the Butterworth enquiry, but no quantitative weighting has been given to other tasks.

Variations on this scheme include recommendations that pre-parole reports should count as 3 units.⁽⁶⁾ The unit system was designed to allow a total of 3⁽⁷⁾ or 3½⁽⁸⁾ hours per supervision case per month, though only a fraction of this would involve personal contact.

Unfortunately little justification is given for the weightings described above: they are the results of broad judgments heavily qualified with observations of the need to judge the applicability of the standard to particular circumstances. The 5 or 3 unit weightings for investigative reports derive in some measure from time studies but this involves inherent dangers.

British Weighting Systems

The National Association of Probation Officers (N.A.P.O.), a British organization, produced a detailed examination

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of the problem in their 1972 publication, *Workloads in the Probation and Aftercare Service*.⁽⁹⁾ Initially they reviewed a number of previous small scale attempts to test point-scoring workload measurement scales.

These were:

I *Home Office Research Unit, Probation Officers' Work – A Time Study*. (1959) The following weighting system was suggested after a study of 10 officers judged to be competent:

Probation	5 points	} 8 points in first month
Supervision	7 points	
Borstal (Aftercare)	5 points	
App. Sch. (Aftercare)	5 points	
Money Payment	} 2 points	
Supervision Orders		
Voluntary Supervision	5 points	

The study suggested a maximum of 320 points per week which was calculated by allowing an average of less than one hour per month per individual case and deducting 8½ hours of the 38 hour week for matrimonial, court and social enquiry work. 64 Probation cases, with no other point-scoring duties, would total 320 points. N.B. The Parole System did not exist in U.K. until 1967.⁽¹⁰⁾

II *Devon Probation Service*. A typical probation case was given a unit weighting factor of one, and was presumed to occupy 40 minutes per 40 hour week. It comprised:

Face to face contact	15 minutes
Contact with family	7½ minutes
Contact with other agencies	2½ minutes
Clerical work	15 minutes

Other weightings were:

Travel (miles) in 40 minutes	1 unit
Probation, Supervision and Statutory Aftercare cases	1 unit
Voluntary Prison Aftercare	½ unit
Matrimonial and Divorce Court Welfare Supervision	¼ unit
Money Payment Supervision Orders	1/8 unit
Voluntary Supervision	¼ unit
Matrimonial Conciliation	¼ unit
Home Contacts	½ unit
Kindred Social Work and Other Matrimonials	1/20 unit
Enquiries re an offender	1/10 unit
Guardian ad Litem	1/6 unit
Divorce Welfare	1/3 unit
Case Committee Work	¼ unit
Supervision Groups etc. 2½ hr p.m.	4 units
Trainees – 1st placement	½ unit
– 2nd placement	Nil

The report is most unclear about the total unit loading to be adopted, but the weightings appear to be meant as proportions of a 60 unit *yearly* workload. Thus 1 unit equals 40 minutes per week for 52 weeks, or 35 hours.

III *Development Committee of N.A.P.O.* The Development Committee worked out a system where 1 unit equals 1 hour within a 40 hour working week or a 160 hour average working month. In allocating a weighting of 1½ units to supervision cases, the committee commented:

“American standards allow 3 hours per case per month. Clearly at the present time most Probation Officers do not come near to this standard. An allowance of 1½ hours per month, in present circumstances, may be more realistic as a measure, although it should not be thought that this implies any statement about what is desirable.”⁽¹¹⁾

Other allowances were:

Money Payment Supervision Orders	½ unit/month
Aftercare – Pre-release	1 unit/month
– First 4 weeks	4 units/month
– Subsequently	1½ unit/month
Social enquiries	4 units/month
Divorce Court enquiries	10 units/month
Matrimonial Proceedings enquiries	8 units
Guardian ad Litem	8 units
Matrimonial case	4 units at time
Kindred Social Work cases	2 units
Trainee	16 units/month
Non-Professional Student	7 units/month
Fixed allowance to cover meetings, supervision, escort duties etc.	12 units/month

N.A.P.O. Study. The N.A.P.O. study was designed as a more comprehensive weighting system, and was tested on 113 officers over 6 months in 1970.⁽¹²⁾ It arose out of dissatisfaction within the service at the expanding number of extra responsibilities which were being added without commensurate increases in resources. The aims were threefold:

- (i) to establish a more accurate method of assessing demands made on staff,
- (ii) to assist in allocating work more equitably among staff,
- (iii) to determine the need for additional resources.

An attempt of this type, as N.A.P.O. recognised, involves the twofold danger that either the weightings will perpetuate existing and undesirable patterns of work, in which case useful recommendations about needs for resources cannot be made, or an unrealistic ideal, giving no measure of actual workloads, will result. Therefore the weightings were chosen as a compromise.

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As with the N.A.P.O. Development Committee study, a 40 hour week or 160 hour month was assumed, and each unit was the equivalent of one hour's work.⁽¹³⁾ However, "the time factor is qualified by what might be called a 'responsibility' rating in items of training and life sentence and parole supervision"⁽¹⁴⁾ in order to reflect the demands made on an officer. The report suggests that this concept deserves further attention.

The weightings were as follows:

Probation and Supervision	1½ units
Divorce Court and Matrimonial Proceedings supervision	1 unit plus ½ unit per child
Money Payment Supervision Orders	1 unit
Life Sentence Licence and Parole	3 units
Aftercare — Voluntary	1½ units
— Pre-release	1 unit
Social Enquiries	4 units
Divorce Court Enquiries	10 units
Matrimonial Proceedings Report	8 units
Guardian ad Litem	7 units
Adoption — other enquiry	3 units
Matrimonial Work Access	4 units in the first month and ½ unit for others
Kindred Social Work (only cases where a file is opened)	1 unit
Training — first and second placement	12 units
Other Duties — fixed allowance (e.g. Staff meetings, discussion groups, case work supervision, escort duties, case committees, etc.)	12 units
Recording — fixed allowance	12 units
Travelling — 25 miles	1 unit
1 hour	1 unit
Court Duties 1 hour	1 unit
Tea Breaks — fixed allowance	10 units
Other allocations — 1 hour (intended for heavy commitments to other types of work not reasonably covered by the 12 unit "other duties — fixed allowance" category.)	1 unit
Means Enquiries	2 units
Local Review Committee/Parole Board	3 units
County Court Enquiry	4 units
Enquiries for Institutions	2 units

The weightings were formulated from the N.A.P.O. Development Committee paper, refined on the basis of comments made by Principal Probation Officers. A few minor changes were made after the completion of the six month study, again on the basis of the Principal Probation Officers' comments.

It can be seen that after deducting the fixed allocations of 34 units (= 34 hours) per month, 126 units remain. If no other work was done, this would allow a caseload of 83 probationers. However it is important to note the greater weighting given to parole or licence cases which would reduce a raw caseload figure. It is generally argued that parole cases are intrinsically more difficult because they consist of individuals judged by the court to be too involved in criminal activity to be put on probation.

Conclusion

Because the work of a Probation and Parole Officer involves a multiplicity of tasks, the approach adopted by N.A.P.O. and antecedent studies seems more promising than the simplistic 50 unit standard generally adopted in America. N.A.P.O. was confident that "the relationship between items we have established is about the best that can be achieved"⁽¹⁵⁾ However, the specific weightings were applicable to British practice, and could not be transferred unmodified to Australia. Moreover, the 1½ unit/month standard was seen as a short term realistic goal and a bare minimum rather than a desirable average. In this context it needs to be remembered that at the time of the N.A.P.O. report only 17 minutes per case per week could be allocated to the average client.⁽¹⁶⁾ The agency felt that it was unable to perform its primary function, supervising clients, and the system was designed to measure the degree to which additional fixed deadline commitments were squeezing out supervisory tasks. The American standard of 3 to 3½ hours per month, which would translate to 3½ units, might be relevant here.

NOTES:

- (1) U.S. Department of Justice, *Attorney-General's Survey of Release Procedures — Probation*, VII, (Washington, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1939), reprinted by Arno Press, New York, 1974, p. 310.
- (2) *Ibid.*, p. 308.
- (3) *Report of the Departmental Committee on the Probation Service*, (Chairman: Sir Ronald Morison, Q.C.) Dec. 29, 1961.
- (4) Haxby, David: *Probation — A Changing Service*. (London, Constable, 1978) p. 54.
- (5) Corrective Services N.S.W., Department of: *Workloads — Probation and Parole Officers*, (File No. 79/426).
- (6) American Correctional Association: *The Manual of Correctional Standards*, (1966).
- (7) Mattin, Mathew (ed): *Crime and Delinquency*, Vol. 13, (National Council on Crime and Delinquency).
- (8) National Council on Crime and Delinquency: *N.C.C.D. Standards and Guides for Adult Probation* (1962).
- (9) National Association of Probation Officers: *Workloads in the Probation and Aftercare Service* (London, N.A.P.O., 1972).

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(10) Employment, Department of: *Report of the Butterworth enquiry into the work and pay of Probation Officers and Social Workers.* (London, H.M.S.O., 1972).

(11) N.A.P.O.: *Op. cit.*, p.8.

(12) *Ibid.*, p. 9.

(13) *Ibid.*, p. 12.

(14) *Ibid.*, p. 9.

(15) *Ibid.*, p. 11.

(16) *Ibid.*, p. 8.

(17) Mattin, Mathew, *Op. cit.* National Council on Crime and Delinquency, *Op. cit.*

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