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What have we learned about the supervision of probation officers in connection with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Abstract: During the COVID-19 pandemic, professional probation officers faced numerous difficulties in fulfilling their professional duties. They often faced the need to quickly adapt to new procedures while responding to the needs of the charges and fulfilling the tasks entrusted to them.

The subject of the article and the presented changes focus on the educational potential of the COVID-19 pandemic. Its purpose is to present the experiences of respondents in conducting supervision during the COVID-19 pandemic and to indicate the changes in their performance that took place during that time. The article is empirical.

The study was qualitative in nature. It involved 216 professional probation officers, including 109 family and juvenile probation officers and 107 probation officers from the penal division. The study used a questionnaire consisting of open-ended questions, constructed on the basis of unfinished sentences.

The results show that the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way probation officers function professionally and socially. As indicated by the statements of the surveyed probation officers, it was a difficult experience that had a significant impact on various spheres of their personal and professional life, both in the context of obstacles to overcome and stimulating the development of challenges. Therefore, it is worthwhile to investigate the circumstances that have arisen during a pandemic.

Key words: probation officers, COVID-19, probation officer work, minors, probation, on-line work.

Introduction

Typically, the incorporation of innovations into existing systems occurs gradually and necessitates assessing their readiness for change implementation. Unfortunately, aid institutions had limited time to prepare for the abrupt onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. When implementing innovations, the goal is often optimization. Therefore, the environmental conditions interacting with the innovations should closely match, and the measures taken should be logical, feasible, and relevant to the needs of the judicial and social rehabilitation system. Properly prepared and implemented innovations can endure as long as they remain functional (Weisbord, 1992).

The introduction of new strategies usually requires collaboration among those responsible for innovation, institution managers, core rehabilitation staff, and external stakeholders. During the COVID-19 pandemic, probation officers faced challenging tasks. They directly adapted to the newly implemented orders in their work activities, striving to meet the needs of those under their supervision while simultaneously fulfilling their own tasks and responsibilities in the workplace. Implementing new procedures required a skillful division of responsibilities, systematic negotiation, and confidence in the ability to carry it out successfully (Corbett and Marx, 1992). The COVID-19 pandemic, akin to any critical event, can be viewed within probation supervision as either presenting obstacles to goal achievement or as challenges that stimulate the development of the judicial and social rehabilitation system.

Methodology of the research undertaken

The research aims to explore the changes in supervision/custody exercised by professional probation officers during the COVID-19 pandemic and to identify the difficulties experienced by probation officers during this period and how they addressed them. The research is qualitative and complements the quantitative research presented in a publication by Robert Opora and Łukasz Wirkus (2021), available online as Open Access.

In alignment with the research goal, the following research questions were formulated:

1. What did probation officers miss during the pandemic period?
2. What changes do probation officers wish to make in their supervision during the COVID-19 pandemic?
3. What aspects of working during the pandemic do probation officers appreciate the most?
4. What aspects do probation officers hope to retain in their work after the pandemic?

5. What aspects would probation officers like to see persist in their work after the pandemic?

Research procedure, methods and tools

The premise of the research presented below was to enable the subjects to provide spontaneous responses, limited only by the task format, in the form of completing sentences that relate to the research questions. A questionnaire was completed by 216 professional probation officers, 109 of whom were family and juvenile probation officers and the remaining 107 were probation officers from the criminal division. Thus, both specialties were represented in a similar number, comprising almost half of the surveyed population.

The research was carried out through district court presidents and district probation officers. The questionnaire with unfinished sentences was distributed electronically, and the link to the questionnaire was prepared using the MS Forms application provided by the University of Gdańsk. The research was anonymous and voluntary, conducted in 12 randomly selected judicial districts in Poland. The link to the online questionnaire was also shared in the online community group: probation.info – for probation officers.

Probation officers were asked to respond to five open-ended questions constructed on the basis of unfinished sentences. They were also given the opportunity enter their own statements referring to various aspects of their professional activities. This allowed for the collection of qualitative data, subsequent identification of categories, and interpretation of the gathered research material in the form of content entered independently by the participating probation officers.

Each unfinished sentence corresponds to a specific thematic category and facilitates obtaining answers to the research questions. Additionally, we considered that the formulated unfinished sentences relate to essential and potentially interesting themes for the respondents themselves. Survey participants could complete the remaining parts of the unfinished sentences in any way they wished. The provided unfinished sentences were as follows:

1. When I recall supervision before the pandemic, what I miss the most is...
2. If I could change one thing during supervision in the pandemic period, it would be...
3. Due to the pandemic, the most significant change in the execution of supervision over my charges is...
4. In the work of a probation officer during the pandemic, what I like the most is...
5. What I would like to see maintained after the pandemic is...

The gathered material was utilized to construct a concept map for each unfinished sentence. The extracted concepts facilitated the identification of

pertinent issues and a preliminary interpretation of them. This, in turn, enabled a more in-depth analysis of the statements based on the emerging categories. The generated categories facilitated a thorough examination of the respondents' statements, seeking examples of various activities, judgments, and evaluations of the situations and actions that transpired.

However, it is important to note that, owing to the qualitative nature of the research results, while they address significant issues, they do not permit the drawing of conclusions and generalizations beyond the surveyed group of individuals.

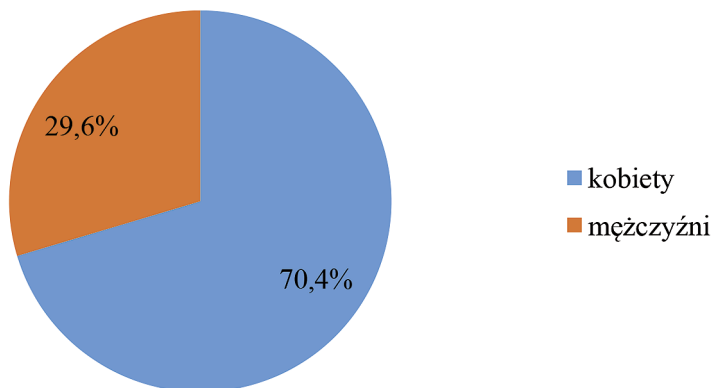
Characteristics of survey participants

The survey participants were probation officers with varying levels of seniority. The majority of probation officers surveyed had three years of experience in their role, constituting the largest group at 22.22%, while those who had been probation officers for seven years formed the smallest group at 5.09%. Participants with more than seven years of service did not take part in the survey. Therefore, when interpreting the obtained results, it is essential to consider that they primarily pertain to individuals working in the Probation Service for a relatively short period. In this profession, seniority typically correlates with the age of individuals, implying that the respondents were likely to be predominantly young workers. These individuals are closer to new information and communication technologies, belonging to the so-called digital generation, for whom information and communication technologies are integral to life and serve as a fundamental factor in social rehabilitation (Pyżalski, 2011).

Table 1. Seniority of the probation officers participating in the survey

Seniority	N	%
Year	34	15.74
2 years	21	9.72
3 years	48	22.22
4 years	31	14.35
5 years	33	15.28
6 years	38	17.59
7 years	11	5.09
Total	216	100

Source: author's own research



key: kobiety – women; mężczyźni – men

Chart 1. Number of women and men participating in the survey

Source: The author's own study.

Given that the probation profession is predominantly practiced by women, accounting for almost 80% of the total cadre, this gender distribution was reflected in the studies undertaken (Piotrowski and Wirkus, 2022). The majority of respondents were women, constituting 70%, while men comprised 30%.

Presentation and interpretation of the results obtained

What did probation officers miss during the pandemic period?

The first area explored concerned yearning for aspects from before the pandemic. Analysis of the collected material allowed for the identification of several categories related to the execution of supervision by probation officers during the pandemic period. Most notably, probation officers participating in the survey expressed a longing for personal contact with other people in their real-life environment. The pandemic significantly impacted the interpersonal interactions of probation officers, particularly in the relationships between probation officers and clients, probation officers and representatives of other institutions, and probation officers with their colleagues.

Insufficient direct contact with clients

Probation officers participating in the survey lacked more frequent face-to-face conversations with their mentees and their families. They missed casual visits, closer relationships, meaningful conversations, and the freedom to interact during meetings. Personal contact at the client's place of residence allows probation officers

to understand the family dynamics, housing conditions, and gather insights from neighbors—information that is crucial for a comprehensive understanding of the client (Paszkiwicz, 2012). This is particularly important in the case of environmental inquiries conducted by probation officers.

Gathering information from various sources contributes to a more accurate and reliable diagnosis and assistance for the client and their family (Wysocka, 2008). Respondents indicated that, due to the limited activities of social institutions during the pandemic, their knowledge became insufficient to assess the actual situations of their clients, especially those facing issues such as alcohol abuse, domestic violence, or educational challenges.

Diagnostic activities conducted by probation officers, largely through inquiries, where the contact with the diagnosed person and their milieu is necessary, were disrupted by the pandemic, shifting much of the face-to-face contact to technology-mediated remote communication. Consequently, probation officers yearned for the naturalness of in-person interactions and visible reactions on their clients' faces during conversations. Direct contact with clients allows probation officers to more reliably verify personal identification data.

Also, telephone contact was not always easy. Not all clients of probation officers provide their or immediate family members' phone numbers, which during the pandemic period complicated the performance of probation officers. One of the participating probation officers stated in his statement that: "in the orders to conduct environmental inquiries (especially those ordered from prisons – in a conversation with an educator from the prison, I was informed that due to GDPR, Central Board of Prison Service [CZSW] issued an order not to provide phone numbers to probation officers!!!".

Personal contact and conversation with the client facilitate probation officers' assessment of the situation and help them formulate a work plan more efficiently, thus achieving faster results in their work with the client. From the statements of survey participants, it appears that the reduction of direct contact with the clients has reduced the possibility of using one of the most important methods of educational and social rehabilitation work, the personal technique based on personal influence (Czapów, 1978). The use of the personal influence method presupposes the existence of a bond with the client, expressed in concern for their welfare and showing interest in them (Czapów and Jedlewski, 1971). The constraints caused by the COVID-19 pandemic were definitely not conducive to building or sustaining such a relationship with the client.

Longing for normalcy and a work organization without onerous sanitation regimes

In their work, probation officers are at high risk of contracting infectious diseases (Janus-Dębska and Gronkiewicz-Ostaszewska, 2019). Not surprisingly, there are also themes in the respondents' statements about longing to enter places freely without so much health concern and to check quarantine information in advan-

ce. The amount of time spent in direct contact with the clients and the manner of contact was conditioned by whether the person would expose themselves to infection by staying too long in the room with the clients. Difficulties in contact with the clients were also related to the clients, their family members, and the probation officers themselves falling ill at various times. The lack of regular contact between the probation officer and the clients, according to those surveyed, causes slackness on the part of the clients, resulting in them not seeing the need for contact and supervision.

A number of statements by probation officers referred to a longing for a sense of security about their health and the freedom to perform their professional tasks and duties without sanitary regimes and fear of contracting the virus. One of the respondents, in her statement, particularly emphasizes that in this regard she misses the most: “freedom of contact in places where it is clean – no masks, normally, as masks make glasses get fogged up, I can’t see anything, I’m saving money for eye surgery to make my life easier, for now I’m trying to ease up things using lenses, making records of the inquiry sitting down, as doing it standing up so as not to touch anything, is tiring both physically and mentally, I’ve already made the assumption that I’m a “walking coronavirus” and have it everywhere in my bag, on my phone, in the car, I don’t touch my eyes, my mouth; lack of fear of contagion, as currently, when I’m visiting several families during one day, even though I verify beforehand if no one in the family is sick with COVID-19 and ask about it on the spot, it is known that this is an apparent precaution and the infection may be latent. I go from one family to another hoping that I will not get infected and will not further infect people.”

Probation officers visit several families during one day. Despite verifying that there is no person in the family infected with the virus, they were aware that the infection might be latent. This caused probation officers to miss longer direct conversations with clients since, for safety reasons, their time was shorter than usual. The probation officers were conducting several visits during one day, going from one family to the next hoping that they would not get infected with the coronavirus and they would not infect others. While in the field, some individuals tried not to touch anything, causing technical problems with note-taking. Additionally, conducting long conversations in masks in hot rooms was exceptionally inconvenient.

The entire context left them mentally and physically exhausted, and they longed for normalcy and freedom in organizing their work. The first six months of the pandemic proved particularly challenging, with insufficient provision of personal protective equipment, according to the survey participants. In the initial period of the pandemic, participating probation officers lacked clear, written guidelines or unequivocal statements on how to perform assigned tasks while ensuring safety, for example, when a family is on quarantine, and a deadline for a task is set.

Lack of the ability to freely summon parties to the probation office

Probation officers hold office hours in courts. During the pandemic, access for clients from outside was often organized to minimize contact with a large number of people. To meet this need, probation officers were assigned a place, such as a room, for client meetings. Consequently, probation officers missed the ability to freely invite parties into their own offices. Walking long corridors to the meeting room and logging into the computer there were considered inefficient and uncomfortable for both probation officers and clients.

In the statements of surveyed probation officers, information emerges that the designated probation office rooms did not meet the requirements for working with clients. One of the respondents points out: “limitations in receiving clients at the Probation Service Team office, as for a 10-person team, we have only one room designated for meetings.” Such an organization of the workplace makes it challenging to establish proper contact with the client and diminishes the sense of freedom and trust.

Feelings of loneliness at work and organizational difficulties

Probation officers longed to work more often in the field and collaborate freely with representatives of other institutions, services, and specialists. Above all, they lacked direct contact with district officers, social workers and close cooperation with schools. They experienced a sense of helplessness when they could not directly visit the relevant institutions. They also observed that before the pandemic, aid institutions placed more emphasis on working with the client, and courts were more likely to impose sentences with a period of probation. Among the statements of probation officers, there were reflections in the form of expectations that everyone should work the same way, without making excuses for the pandemic to avoid fulfilling their duties.

The work of probation officers largely involves individual case management. In this regard, it is the responsibility of probation officers to skillfully motivate and refer their clients to appropriate support institutions. According to the surveyed probation officers, during the pandemic period, the possibility of influencing and referring clients to supportive and therapeutic institutions and workplaces was reduced. One of the survey participants pointed out that during the pandemic, “there was a reduction in contact with the clients, an inability to refer clients to certain institutions. Lack of psychiatric care, therapy for the wards, and, therefore, a lack of tools for the work of the probation officer!!!!” Probation officers perceived higher levels of anxiety in their clients due to circumstances arising from the pandemic. Consequently, they recognized the need to increase accessibility for clients to support services and psychologists.

It should be noted that probation officers play an essential role in interdisciplinary teams for preventing local social problems (Kieszkowska, 2012),

where the direct and informal flow of information is particularly crucial (Chojecka and Muskała, 2021). Therefore, during the pandemic, they lacked personal contact with representatives of other aid institutions, which was evident in their statements indicating increased loneliness at work due to limited and more formal contact with other social institutions. In their limited interactions with other aid institutions, they perceived that personal contact with representatives of other institutions strengthens their commitment to the activities they undertake, providing some respondents with a greater sense of agency, as mentioned in their statements.

The pandemic resulted in probation officers missing their previous contact with colleagues in the workplace, including superiors and judges. They longed for conversations with other probation officers on challenging professional topics and the support and hints of solutions they used to receive. Some of them, if given the opportunity to make a difference during the pandemic period, pointed to the need to expedite court decision-making and to have more flexibility in the number of inquiries ordered, especially in cases where examination during the court proceedings seems quite sufficient.

Professional probation officers are tasked with managing community probation officers. During the pandemic period, they felt the difficulty of direct contact with them. On the other hand, the number of electronic contacts, through which documents were sent, increased. According to survey participants, the pandemic caused difficulties in distributing tasks among probation officers, especially those primarily working in the community, due to the intense anxiety they feel.

What changes would probation officers like to make in their supervision during the pandemic period?

Systematicity and frequency of direct contacts

Another goal of the survey was to determine the desired changes in the provision of supervision by probation officers during the pandemic period. In the statements they provided, the most common request was to enhance the regularity and frequency of direct contact with clients and their milieu. One of the respondents emphasizes that “...in some cases, the absence of personal contacts between the probation officer and the participants in the proceedings at their place of residence leads to a clear reduction in the amount and type of information that the probation officer possesses about the clients, a significant weakening of the possibility of real influence on the attitudes and behavior of the clients, and a deterioration of the established principles of cooperation with other institutions in the local environment.”

For some clients, the pandemic served as a convenient excuse for irregular contact with the probation officer. Therefore, respondents expressed a belief that,

given the opportunity to make a difference during the pandemic period, they would increase the frequency of contact with clients, especially at their place of residence, and also the frequency of office work. According to some probation officers, the lack of regular contact with their clients has contributed to a weakening of the relationship.

Improving remote working

Another issue that probation officers would like to change during pandemic supervision is to improve remote working. This would involve increasing access to departmental programs and other institutions, enhancing the capability to perform tasks electronically, and maintaining communication with clients through remote technology. As expressed in the respondents' statements, there was a need for probation officers to be equipped with service phones featuring communicators for video calls with their clients. This concern was more prominent during the initial period of the pandemic, and as the pandemic progressed, various measures were implemented to support remote work.

Some of the office work was shifted to home environments, emphasizing the importance for probation officers to adapt and supplement their service equipment to facilitate working from home. Effective utilization of remote technology necessitates reliable network access and adequate coverage for both probation officers and their clients, aspects that were found to be insufficient during the pandemic. The frequent changes of contact numbers by clients disrupted work and hindered communication. Therefore, the statements of probation officers included a suggestion to mandate a permanent telephone number for the entire probation period.

Given that some probation officers have transitioned to working from home, it has posed an organizational challenge for those without a dedicated room, especially considering the sensitive data they handle that requires protection.

Limiting direct contact

During the pandemic, probation officers carried out the environmental inquiries they were assigned to conduct. Consequently, the ability to contact neighbors via remote technology became crucial for them. Some suggested that, during the pandemic period, fieldwork and environmental inquiries should be restricted to urgent cases or left to the discretion of the probation officer. Respondents' statements advocate for the "subjectivity of the field activities undertaken, rather than performing them in a templated fashion, according to the recommendations and orders of the court." They also call for "differentiating supervision according to the risks arising in the family, reducing the frequency of visits to supervisions where the parties remain obligated to behave in a certain way, and focusing on frequent personal contact with the clients in cases where there is a real risk to the welfare and safety of minor children."

Doubts have arisen about the legitimacy of conducting an urgent inquiry ordered in July due to a minor's failure to fulfill compulsory education or ordering an urgent inquiry in May based on damage to a bench the previous November.

What changes have occurred in the exercise of supervision during the pandemic period?

Changing attitudes of clients and anxiety over uncertainty about actual supervision

According to the respondents, the pandemic has led to changes in the implementation of supervision, affecting the form of contact with the clients and their milieu, the use of service equipment, ICT systems, communicators, work organization, as well as the verification and control of information pertaining to the clients' duties. Arguably, all these changes have influenced the behavior of the clients and their relationship with the probation officer. Due to prescribed social distance and information obtained mainly through telephone contacts, the control function carried out by probation officers was disrupted. They expressed that they were unsure of the actual course of supervision, because of difficulties in obtaining objective information about the client, as illustrated by the following statement: "telephone contact does not reflect the actual situation in the family," "during the pandemic, the clients became more defiant and less disciplined, using quarantine or illness as excuses to avoid contact." According to the respondents: "The pandemic has become an excuse for evading duties and supervision imposed."

Respondents observed that clients exhibited a greater sense of lack of control, increased entitlement, disrespect for the justice system, and perceived probation officers as "spreading the plague." This contributed to a growing reluctance on the part of families to allow probation officers into their homes, accompanied by an increase in "people's distrust of contact with those potentially carrying the disease."

Respondents also noted a demoralizing reduction in demands placed on juvenile clients by aid institutions, creating a sense of "supposed improvement." Moreover, probation officers observed an increase in alcohol consumption, violence, neglect, school absenteeism, greater inactivity, aggression, mental problems, and a tendency towards pessimism and depression among clients.

This led probation officers to undertake more assistance interventions and measures to verify the obligations imposed on the clients. Probation officers found it more difficult to confront clients with their words and behavior, prompting them to seek alternative channels and sources of information about the clients, especially where children were in their care, because in their view, "where children are involved, you can't rely on telephone statements." The anxiety experienced by probation officers is vividly depicted in the following statement: "Fear of

infection and, at the same time, a sense of duty to do things as well as possible. Awareness that working remotely or relying on remote communication – email, phone, Messenger – always gave a sense of fear that something might be going wrong in the family after all.

After the relaxation of sanitation regimes, according to probation officers, some of the clients became accustomed to telephone calls. They often emphasize that they do not have time and ask to be contacted by phone. Some of the clients have distanced themselves from the issue of the supervision provided to them and believe that they do not need it, as they were able to cope for several months without direct contact with the probation officer.

What did probation officers enjoy most while conducting supervision during the pandemic period?

Remote communication

Probation officers, despite recognizing a number of limitations of mediated communication, at the same time realize the many benefits of using new technology. They appreciated the fact that the workplace provided them with electronic equipment for mobile work with Internet access. One person surveyed stated: “I like the quick installation and enabling probation officers to work on currenda, noe-sad, and departmental systems remotely from home on a company laptop, something that had not been possible before for many years.”

They perceived that greater use of remote communication means enabled them to conduct environmental inquiries more frequently, or to make contact with their clients without going into the field. They appreciate the ability to use remote technologies, as they have noticed that they speed up the process of doing things at the same time as saving time and costs associated with traveling to their clients. They believe that many activities could be carried out only via remote communication, such as in cases where there is no suspicion of danger to the life or health of the person involved or where direct contact is not possible, or in so-called “easy supervision.”

In some cases, remote communication could be implemented after prior personal examination of the place of residence and living conditions. An example of this is the statement of the survey participant: “...the possibility of conducting an inquiry by means of a telephone call. Especially in situations such as case for an application for contact, in which I conducted an inquiry several times before, and the case goes on for another year, more volumes are put on.” It is obvious then that in some situations the same activities can be performed using means of remote contact. For this reason, probation officers liked the possibility of online meetings in working groups or interdisciplinary teams. During the pandemic period, probation officers observed greater flexibility in using telephones and other media for official activities.

The imposed limitations on personal contact during the pandemic were deemed beneficial in certain cases, according to probation officers. They argue that there are situations where maintaining frequent personal contact is unnecessary, contrary to regulatory assumptions. This sentiment is well expressed in the following respondent's statement: "I would like to see the post-pandemic continuation of the option for remote supervision equivalent to field visits. My point is that sometimes phone contact is sufficient, and there's no need to visit the supervised individual just because you 'should.'" The end of the pandemic brought increased autonomy for probation officers in deciding the form of measures to be implemented

Additionally, the use of technology-mediated communication has created a sense of distance from the clients, reducing irritation caused by their attitudes. Probation officers also appreciate the continued trust they receive from their clients despite communication obstacles. Survey responses also revealed satisfaction stemming from the slowed pace of daily life, increased friendliness, and a willingness to assist one another without unnecessary paperwork during the pandemic.

Tasking and working time flexibility

Among the statements about what probation officers liked about supervision during the pandemic, there were also issues related to tasking and flexible working hours, the possibility of on-site office work, and the use of remote access to court systems. According to some of those surveyed, this allowed them to regulate working hours and better organize daily duties. Some respondents suggested that the pandemic prompted positive changes toward good practices in work organization. Addressing problems in this area is crucial for preventing professional burnout in this highly stressed professional group (Piotrowski and Wirkus, 2022).

Working from home also led to an increase in electronic workflows, reducing reliance on paper documentation. Probation officers expressed satisfaction with the practice of making client appointments, suggesting its continuation after the pandemic for streamlining clerical work in court. The less frequent visits of probation officers to the court provided a quieter environment, enhancing efficiency and allowing for catch-up on typical office tasks.

Professional development

The pandemic period provided probation officers with opportunities for professional development and online training. During this time, they acquired knowledge on using various programs and applications for long-distance communication. Participation in numerous online courses not only saved them time and money but also offered new ideas for working with clients during the pandemic, allowing for creative solutions to emerging challenges.

Probation officers expressed the expectation that some changes adopted during the pandemic would persist

Remote access to court information systems and electronic flow of information

Statements from participating probation officers revealed that the pandemic, despite its constraints, introduced new and useful opportunities that they hope will continue. The ability to access court information systems from home or receive company equipment for remote work significantly improved their efficiency. They no longer need to physically come to the office to check for new execution inquiries; they can simply review the system and proceed with their tasks. This shift has resulted in reduced congestion in probation officers' workspaces, enabling them to work quietly and enhance comfort during interactions with clients.

Additionally, the electronic transfer of some documentation proved effective during the pandemic.

Hybrid form of communication

Not only the clients of probation officers, but also probation officers themselves have grown accustomed to more frequent remote interactions with their clients and obtaining contact phone numbers through submitted applications. Survey respondents suggest that the hybrid contact model is proven and feasible under normal conditions, emphasizing that the discretion to determine the implementation of each contact should be left to the probation officers.

Summary

The pandemic has altered the professional and social functioning of probation officers, compelling them to limit face-to-face interactions, adopt remote work or study practices, and curtail specific activities. The impact of this challenging experience extends beyond physical health, influencing relationships, work organization, security perceptions, and future considerations, as revealed in the statements of probation officers. This makes it worthwhile to subject the circumstances during the pandemic period to analysis.

Interpersonal relationships play pivotal role in both personal and professional aspects of people's lives. The functioning of institutions is inherently tied to interpersonal relations within and collaboration with external entities. During the pandemic, interpersonal relationships changed. Good relations largely depend on communication. Throughout the pandemic, face-to-face communication shifted to technology-mediated communication, contributing to the deterioration of relationships with clients, colleagues, and other aid agencies, as reported by many respondents. Supervisions revealed a surge in issues such as unemployment,

school absenteeism, mental disorders, substance abuse risks, and domestic violence, coupled with increased difficulties in accessing specialists. The absence of personal contact between clients and probation officers, coupled with disrupted communication among aid institutions, led to weakened social control, evident in a demoralizing reduction in demands placed on wards and avoidance of contact with probation officers under the pretext of the pandemic.

While some individuals, including probation officers and their clients, experienced benefits during the pandemic, there is a risk that returning to the pre-pandemic status quo may deprive them of these advantages. Addressing the needs of both individuals who encountered hardship and those facing a sense of loss in reverting to pre-pandemic functioning is crucial. Activities fostering relationship-building, bonding, communication, and togetherness will be instrumental.

Remote technology, swiftly integrated into the justice system during the pandemic, demonstrated significant potential in certain circumstances, according to statements. Learning the IT systems and devices for remote work posed a learning challenge for court employees. In their statements, some probation officers view post-pandemic technology as a crisis measure, while others see its potential under specific conditions.

Skillfully leveraging technology for remote communication among probation officers, clients, and other professionals is deemed important in light of the survey results. The survey mainly included people with relatively short seniority which is a certain limitation of the research undertaken, as it can be assumed that they are more familiar with new technologies. According to the statements of survey participants, a form of remote communication can be useful in certain circumstances, therefore it is worthwhile to know the opinion of those with longer experience in the probation officer profession and consider how to spread the useful practices implemented during the pandemic.

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