Does Reducing Supervision for Low-risk Probationers Jeopardize Community Safety?

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THE NUMBER OF individuals on community supervision in the U.S. far surpasses those incarcerated. Of the 6.6 million adults in 2016 under correctional control, more than 4.5 million (68 percent) were serving a term of community supervision (Kaebel & Cowhig, 2018). Eighty-one percent of the individuals placed on community supervision were probationers (Kaebel, 2018). With large numbers of individuals supervised on probation, agencies must explore how to allocate resources more wisely, all while meeting the mandate for enhanced public safety.

One model used to guide effective decision-making in corrections is the risk-need-responsivity (RNR) model (Bonta & Andrews, 2017). Within the RNR model, the risk principle states that supervision and treatment intensity should match the level of offender risk (Andrews & Dowden, 2006; Andrews, Zinger, Hoge, Bonta, Gendreau, & Cullen, 1990; Lowenkamp, Latessa, & Holsinger, 2006). Intensive supervision and treatment services should be reserved for high-risk offenders, as low-risk individuals undergoing these same interventions tend to recidivate at higher rates (Lowenkamp & Latessa, 2004; Brusman-Lovins, Lowenkamp, Latessa, & Smith, 2007). Because of this, some argue that low-risk individuals should receive minimal community supervision or no supervision at all (Cullen & Jonson, 2014).

Although empirical studies have shown support for the risk principle, these studies tend to focus on either high-intensity supervision programs (e.g., Petersilia & Turner, 1993) or high-risk offenders (e.g., Paparrozi

& Gendreau, 2005). Research on low-intensity supervision and low-risk offenders is sparse (e.g., Barnes, Ahlman, Gill, Sherman, Kurtz, & Malvestuto, 2010; Cohen, Cook, & Lowenkamp, 2016; Viglione & Taxman, 2018). Since all individuals sentenced to probation or released on parole have been convicted of a criminal offense, this leaves supervision agencies questioning what to do with low-risk individuals.

The need for devising specific strategies for low-risk supervisees is not conjectural. Texas, for example, has the second-largest probation population in the country (Kaebel, 2018). A validation study of the Texas Risk Assessment System (TRAS) found that the majority of Texas probationers sampled scored in the low to low-moderate range (Lovins, Latessa, May, & Lux, 2017). Nationally, a validation study of the risk instrument used by federal probation found that 37 percent of offenders fell into the low-risk category, and almost half the study sample fell into the low-moderate risk category (Johnson, Lowenkamp, VanBenschoten, & Robinson, 2011). Despite lower risk individuals representing a sizable portion of those on probation, differentiation in supervision typically focuses on what to do for higher risk probationers. Intermediate sanctions, such as Intensive Supervision Probation (ISP), specialty courts, and electronic monitoring, are designed to provide an additional layer of surveillance, particularly for those at higher risk for recidivism (Latessa & Lovins, 2019). On the contrary, little attention is given to alternative supervision strategies for low-risk offenders (Viglione & Taxman, 2018).

Two important policy implications related to the supervision of low-risk offenders are community safety and the efficient use of criminal justice resources. Legislators, and even officers (Viglione & Taxman, 2018), fear that decreasing supervision of probationers may result in increased crime, despite being a more efficient use of agency resources. If true, less supervision poses a great burden on society by increasing the risk of victimization. However, if not true, then sparse taxpayer resources could either be saved or reallocated where they are needed—treatment and supervision for higher risk individuals. More research is needed on low-intensity supervision of low-risk offenders to answer this question.

The following study examines the relationship between supervision intensity and supervision outcomes (i.e., revocations for technical violations, rearrest, and new charges) among low-risk offenders. The goal of this article is to contribute to the limited literature on the impact of low-intensity supervision on low-risk offenders. Data from a large probation department in the United States are used to examine the effectiveness of a low-risk caseload program on recidivism. Supervision outcomes are compared between offenders placed on low-intensity caseloads and low-risk probationers maintained on regular supervision caseloads.

Literature review

By definition, low-risk offenders possess few criminogenic needs to target via community supervision (Cullen, Jonson, & Mears, 2017).

Yet these offenders have been convicted of a crime; hence, probation officers and agencies are reticent to pull back on the level of supervision they receive. Using qualitative data, Viglione and Taxman (2018) examined probation officer perception of a telephone monitoring system developed for low-risk probationers. They examined officer use of the telephone monitoring protocol and found that officer perception of risk and concern about liability led to the over-supervision of low-risk individuals.

Research in support of the risk principle finds that low-risk individuals subject to intensive treatment and supervision tend to fare worse than low-risk individuals that are given minimal supervision (Lipsey, 2009; Lowenkamp & Latessa, 2004). For low-risk offenders, intensive supervision strategies tend to either have no effect or have criminogenic effects, especially if the intervention is punitive (Cullen & Johnson, 2014). Cullen, Jonson, and Mears (2017) propose a plan for reinventing community corrections. Among their recommendations are to "do less harm" (p. 71) by "leaving low risk offenders alone whenever possible" (p. 72). They argue that probation has been the default response of courts towards lower risk individuals, believing some punitive response to a law violation is necessary. These authors favor the use of fines and restitution for low-risk individuals to avoid failed terms of supervision that often result in jail or prison confinement. They also argue that conditions of supervision should be "criminologically defensible" (p. 74); that is, a condition imposed by the court must be linked to recidivism reduction. This departs from the common practice of courts issuing standardized conditions that all probationers must follow.

Lowenkamp and Latessa (2004) argue that intensive correctional interventions are iatrogenic for low-risk offenders for two primary reasons. First, placing low-risk offenders in intensive programs (e.g., residential programs) can disrupt their prosocial networks (e.g., ties to family and friends) as well as opportunities necessary for a law-abiding lifestyle (e.g., employment, education). These networks and opportunities are the very factors that make low-risk offenders low risk. Second, intensive supervision may expose low-risk offenders to higher risk individuals from whom they learn antisocial beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors (Lowenkamp & Latessa, 2004; Lovins, Lowenkamp, & Latessa, 2009; Barnes et al., 2010).

In addition to their criminogenic effects, intensive supervision of low-risk offenders also imposes an unnecessary burden on the criminal justice system. If supervised intensively, low-risk offenders may fail to comply with their supervision conditions and get revoked (Cullen et al., 2017). Revoking offenders for technical violations is not only costly to taxpayers, but it contributes to elevating rather than mitigating the risk factors of justice-involved individuals. The limited relationship between technical violations and new law violations (Petersilia & Turner, 1993) indicates that locking individuals up for supervision noncompliance is doing little to increase community safety.

Many empirical studies, including meta-analyses, lend support to the risk principle (Sperber, Latessa, & Makarios, 2013; Lowenkamp et al., 2006; Lovins et al., 2009; Brusman-Lovins, Lowenkamp, Latessa, & Smith, 2007; Dowden & Andrews, 2003; Hanson, Bourgon, Helmus, & Hodgson, 2009; Lipsey, Landenberger, & Wilson, 2007). However, outcome studies that specifically examine the impact of *less* intensive supervision for low-risk offenders are limited. Does the recidivism rate of low-risk offenders increase, decrease, or stay the same when minimal intervention is applied?

To address this question, Wilson, Naro, and Austin (2007) evaluated an automated reporting system used by the New York City (NYC) probation department. Since the 1990s, the NYC probation department has used kiosks to supervise probationers, expanding the system to include all low-risk offenders in 2003. Wilson et al. (2007) found that after the expansion, caseload sizes changed substantially for both officers who supervised low-risk offenders and officers who supervised high-risk offenders, with caseload sizes increasing for low risk, and decreasing for those supervising high-risk probationers. Wilson et al. (2007) found that rearrest rates declined for the low-risk offenders as well as the high-risk offenders after the expansion of the automated reporting system.

Barnes et al. (2010) also examined the relationship between supervision intensity and recidivism among low-risk offenders, this time using a randomized controlled trial. Data from the Adult Probation and Parole Department of the First Judicial District of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia were used. They randomly assigned a nearly equal number of low-risk offenders into low-intensity versus regular supervision conditions. Barnes and

colleagues found that, although supervision intensity was substantively lower in the low-intensity condition, recidivism rates were almost the same in both conditions.

A more recent study by Cohen et al. (2016) evaluated a low-risk policy by federal probation and pretrial services. The low-risk policy recommended the application of minimal levels of supervision intensity for low-risk offenders. Cohen et al. (2016) found that recidivism rates among low-risk offenders were similar pre- and post-implementation of this policy. Like Barnes et al. (2010), Cohen et al. (2016) found that pulling supervision back for low-risk offenders had no negative impact on recidivism.

Wilson et al. (2007), Barnes et al. (2010), and Cohen et al. (2016) found improved or similar rates of recidivism when community supervision was limited for low-risk offenders, indicating that the goals of both efficient use of resources and community safety could be met. However, two of these studies used data from two large metropolitan areas in northeastern states, limiting the generalizability of the findings to other jurisdictions; the low-risk study with federal probationers may also be difficult to generalize due to differences in federal offender populations. Our goal is to contribute to the literature on effective supervision practices for low-risk offenders using data from another large metropolitan area.

Methods

Low-risk Caseloads

In an effort to improve evidence-based practices and to decrease the size of high-risk and special needs caseloads, this agency adopted a two-tier process. First, they created compliance caseloads for existing individuals performing well on community supervision. Compliance caseloads were designed to manage large volumes of individuals on supervision who had demonstrated a pattern of compliance and did not pose a risk to the community. The second tier was to create low-risk caseloads for individuals identified as low risk on the agency's validated risk assessment.

Eleven probation officers (POs) were assigned to supervise these caseloads as an initial pilot. Given the number of low-risk individuals placed on supervision, not all low-risk probationers could be assigned to a low-risk caseload. Many remained on regular caseloads. While the assignment process of the probationers into the low-risk versus the regular caseloads was not random, there was not a systematic selection process either.

Once the initial caseloads were established, through the process of attrition, the next low-risk probationer was placed onto a low-risk caseload if there was an open slot. If no space was available, the individual was placed onto a regular caseload.

Initially, POs assigned to low-risk caseloads supervised as many probationers as the POs assigned to regular caseloads. Upon program inception, POs in both the low-risk and the regular caseloads supervised an average of 120 individuals. Gradually the number of people supervised by POs assigned to low-risk caseloads increased, while the number of probationers supervised by POs in the regular caseloads continued to average roughly 120 clients. By July 2015, POs of low-risk caseloads supervised approximately 220 individuals. Figure 1 below shows the median number of clients supervised by CSOs in the low-risk versus the regular caseloads from September 2013 to July 2016.

Research Design

The research design for this project is a quasi-experimental cross-sectional study. The study is cross-sectional because we observe the predictor (i.e., supervision intensity) and the outcome variables (recidivism) simultaneously. The unit of analysis is the individual probationer. The units are not assigned into conditions randomly; rather, low-risk probationers (according to the risk assessment) assigned to low-risk caseloads are compared to low-risk individuals assigned to regular caseloads during the same period. Although such a design is weaker than one that uses

random assignment, there was no known selection process during the assignment of the cases (i.e., probationers) into conditions (i.e., regular vs. low-risk caseload), which would have led to selection bias. Nevertheless, we still control for known factors that may influence the results by using multivariate statistical techniques. Specifically, multiple logistic regression is to determine the impact of low-risk caseload assignment on recidivism.

Data and Variables

Data on background characteristics, measures of supervision intensity and revocation come from the probation department with recidivism data provided through a statewide database. While low-risk caseloads were initiated by the department in September of 2013, it is apparent from Figure 1 that this project was not fully implemented until July 2015, with clear discrepancies in caseload size between low-risk and regular caseloads. Therefore, the study sample consists of low-risk probationers who were placed on community supervision from July 2015 to June 2016 (inclusive), comparing those who were placed onto regular versus low-risk caseloads during this same period.

Several groups of probationers were excluded from the sample, including individuals who were placed on bond supervision (n=183) or on the Interstate Compact Unit (n=24), as conditions for these specialized caseloads are different from that of traditional community supervision caseloads. Also excluded were low-risk individuals whose assessment results required referral to

a treatment program (n=60); those in need of treatment were automatically placed on a regular caseload so that treatment progress could be more closely monitored. Since those who fail treatment are more likely to face technical violations, outcomes would be skewed in favor of the low-risk caseload. Finally, seven cases were excluded due to missing data. For the low-risk caseload sample, the individual had to be placed on a low-risk caseload within the first 12 months of supervision. This resulted in a final sample of 2,999 low-risk probationers, 665 who were placed on a low-risk caseload, and 2,334 who were supervised on a regular caseload. The following variables were used in the analyses:

Independent Variables

Caseload placement (0=regular, 1=low risk)

Measures designed to ascertain the level of supervision intensity within the first 12 months of placement: (1) number of case notes PO recorded for the probationer, (2) number of face-to-face office visits with PO, (3) number of face-to-face group visits with PO, (4) number of urinalysis tests.

Control Variables

Gender (0=female, 1=male); race (0=White, 1=all other races)*; age (in years) or as a binary (0=below median age; 1=above median age); criminal history: total number of prior arrests; number of prior felony arrests (using statewide data)

Dependent Variables

Increase in supervision level: date (or month) that the supervision level increased for the client and binary variable where 0=no increase in supervision level; 1=increased supervision level. For those on regular supervision, an increase in level was signified by (1) new referral to a treatment program or (2) placement into a program other than a regular caseload (e.g., residential facility, specialized caseload). For those on the low-risk caseload, a supervision level increase is signified by (1) referral to a treatment program or (2) placement on any caseload/program other than the low-risk program.

Rearrest within 18 months of probation/caseload start date based on statewide data: (1)

Figure 1. Median number of offenders supervised on regular vs. low-risk caseloads

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* More than 69 percent of the offenders were White, and 24 percent were African American. Therefore, we recoded race as a dummy variable. Ethnicity was missing for nearly 67 percent of the cases. Therefore, we excluded ethnicity from the study.
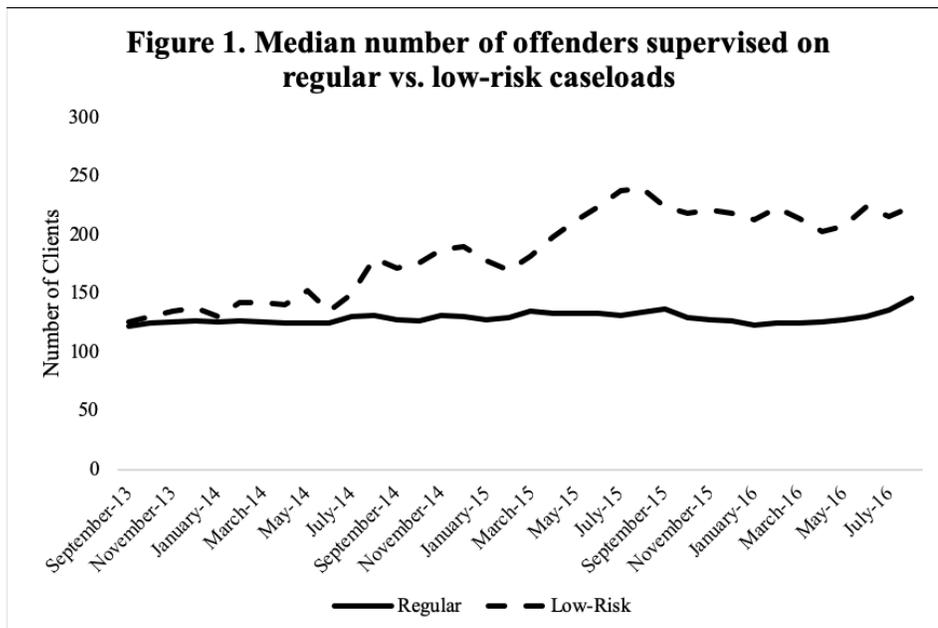
rearrest for any level of offense (1=yes; 0=no), and (2) rearrest for a felony-level offense (1=yes, 0=no).

Revocation within 18 months of probation/caseload start date: (0=not revoked, 1=revoked for a technical violation, and 2=revoked for a new law violation).

Analytical strategy

The first research question examined was whether supervision intensity was, in fact, lower on the low-risk caseloads versus the regular caseloads. Bivariate t-test statistics were used to answer this question. The second research question was the impact low-risk caseloads had on supervision outcomes, specifically increased level of supervision intensity, as well as recidivism, as measured by rearrest and revocation. To answer these questions, multiple logistic regression statistics were used, controlling for gender, age, race, and number of prior arrests. All outcome variables are binary, except for revocation, which is ordinal; the ordinal logistic regression technique was used for that model. We also use chi-square and t-test statistics to assess differences in background characteristics between the two samples.

Results

The descriptive statistics for probationers assigned to the regular and the low-risk caseloads are in Table 1. The last column of the table shows statistically significant differences between the two groups. Table 1 indicates that 33 percent of the individuals on regular caseloads and 44 percent of those on low-risk caseloads were females, a statistically significant difference (p<.001). Twenty-seven percent of the probationers on regular caseloads and 32 percent of those on low-risk caseloads were White; this difference is statistically significant (p<.05). The samples are similar in terms of age, with the mean age 34 for probationers assigned to both a regular caseload and low-risk caseload. Individuals assigned to a regular caseload were significantly more likely to have two or more prior arrests (49 percent versus 42 percent; p<.01), but significantly less likely to have one or more past felony arrests (26 percent versus 50 percent; p<.001).

The first research question examines implementation of the low-risk caseload, specifically whether the intensity of supervision varies by caseload type. The expectation is that supervision intensity will be lower for the low-risk versus regular caseloads.

Findings from Table 1 show that the level of supervision intensity was quite different by group. The mean number of case notes was 33.4 for individuals on regular caseloads and 19.9 for those on low-risk caseloads, a significant difference (p<.001). The mean number of face-to-face contacts was 12.1 for probationers on regular caseloads and significantly lower (6.3) for probationers assigned to low-risk caseloads (p<.001). Finally, the mean number of UAs was 3.2 for individuals on regular caseloads, which was significantly higher than the mean number of UAs for individuals on low-risk caseloads ($\bar{x}$=1.1; p<.001). Thus, the bivariate statistics demonstrate that probationers assigned to low-risk caseloads were supervised less intensively than those on regular caseloads.

Our second research question was what effect the caseload assignment had on the supervision outcomes. The last three rows of Table 1 offer some insight into this question. The first question centers on whether the individual's supervision level was increased during the course of community supervision. Those on regular supervision were significantly more likely to experience movement to a more intensive intervention compared to the low-risk caseload (22 percent versus 10 percent respectively; p<.001). Next, the impact of caseload on recidivism was examined. Those on a regular caseload were significantly more likely to be rearrested within 18 months of placement (10 percent versus 7 percent; p<.05). Three percent of those on a regular caseload had supervision revoked for a technical violation versus just one percent of those on a low-risk caseload; similarly, those on a regular caseload were also more likely to be revoked for new law violation (3 percent versus 1 percent; p<.01).

Since individuals were not randomly assigned to regular versus low-risk caseloads, differences in the supervision outcomes between the two groups may be due to the differences identified in their background characteristics (i.e., gender, race, and criminal history). To control for the influences of these factors, we conducted multiple logistic regression analyses. The results of these analyses are found in Table 2.

Table 2 offers multivariate analyses using three outcome variables: increase in supervision level, revocation, and rearrest. Our primary research question is the impact of supervision intensity on supervision outcomes for low-risk individuals. Hence, the primary independent variable of interest is

low-risk (versus regular) caseload. The control variables are male (versus female), Non-White (versus White), age, and the number of prior criminal charges. Both age and the number of prior arrests variables had skewed distributions. These were therefore recoded as ordinal level variables (age: 0=below median; 1=above median; prior arrests: 0=1 prior arrest, 1=2 or more prior arrests). There are three logistic regression models in Table 2 (see page 26).

Concerning the control variables, Table 2 shows that males were more likely to have their probation revoked for technical and law violations, but gender had no significant impact on supervision level increase or rearrest. Younger probationers had a significantly higher likelihood of revocation and rearrest (p<.001), but not of an increase in supervision level. Race does not have a significant effect on revocation or rearrest, but non-White individuals are significantly more likely to experience an increase in supervision level (p<.01). Number of prior criminal charges significantly increases the likelihood of increased supervision, revocation, and rearrest (p<.001). Findings related to gender, age, and prior criminal history are consistent with the literature on common predictors of recidivism (Bonta & Andrews, 2017).

The primary independent variable of interest is low-risk caseload. Table 2 shows that the likelihood of movement to a more intensive supervision caseload is significantly lower for individuals assigned to low-risk caseloads (p<.001). The likelihood of experiencing an increase in supervision level is nearly 60 percent lower for those placed on low-risk versus regular caseloads. Similarly, those placed on a low-risk caseload are significantly less likely to be revoked from supervision (p<.001). The likelihood of revocation is again close to 60 percent lower for probationers on low-risk caseloads versus regular caseloads. Finally, the rate of rearrest is lower for those placed on a low-risk caseload, but the difference in rates of rearrest is not statistically significant after controlling for sample differences in demographics and criminal history (p=.09).

Discussion and Conclusion

This study explored the impact of decreasing the intensity of community supervision for low-risk probationers. Data came from one of the largest probation departments in the United States. The first research question explores whether creating low-risk caseloads leads to a decrease in supervision intensity. Viglione & Taxman (2018) found that officers

Table 1.
Descriptive and Bivariate Statistics

	Regular		Low-risk		Total		
	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Gender							
Male	1,569	67	375	56	1,944	65	***
Female	765	33	290	44	1,055	35	
Race							
Non-White	1,695	73	449	68	2,144	71	*
White	639	27	216	32	855	29	
Age							
Below median	1,164	50	344	52	1,508	50	
Above median	1,170	50	321	48	1,491	50	
# of prior arrests							
One	1,202	51	384	58	1,586	53	**
Two or more	1,132	49	281	42	1,413	47	
# of prior felony arrests							
None	1,725	74	335	50	2,060	69	***
One or more	609	26	330	50	939	31	
	mean	SD	mean	SD	mean	SD	
# of case notes	33.4	12.0	19.9	10.2	30.5	12.9	***
# of face-to-face contacts	12.1	4.2	6.3	4.3	10.9	4.8	***
# of urine-analysis tests	3.2	2.3	1.1	1.5	2.8	2.3	***
	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Increase in supervision level†							
No	1,813	78	601	90	2,414	80	***
Yes	521	22	64	10	585	20	
Rearrested†							
No	2,107	90	618	93	2,725	91	*
Yes	227	10	47	7	274	9	
Revocation†							
No	2,191	94	649	98	2,840	95	**
Yes, technical violation	81	3	7	1	88	3	
Yes, law violation	62	3	9	1	71	2	

Age-Regular: mean=34, SD=11, median=32. Low-risk: mean=34, SD=12, median=31

* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001, † within the first 18 months after placement.

given new, low-intensity standards for low-risk probationers had concerns about the reduced monitoring, despite the probationers' low-risk status. They found that officers would deviate from the protocol that limited their supervision practices. To test the impact of creating low-risk caseloads on levels of monitoring, we examined variation in supervision intensity between low-risk caseloads and low-risk probationers supervised on regular caseloads. Study findings supported that individuals placed on low-risk caseloads were supervised less intensively than low-risk probationers placed on regular caseloads. Indicators of less intensive monitoring included significantly fewer face-to-face contacts, case notes, and urinalysis tests.

Why did the caseload placement make a difference? Variation in supervision practices may be attributable to clear differences in agency standards for low-risk versus regular caseloads. It may also be attributable to the higher caseload size of low-risk caseloads (220 versus 120 cases); high caseload numbers may

have left officers with no choice but to limit supervision intensity so that even the low-risk contact standards could be met. Finally, officers assigned to low-risk caseloads were informed about why this initiative was taking place, and how it aligned with evidence-based practices. This may have motivated officers to follow the new practice standards. Regardless of the reason, homogenous, low-risk caseloads with low-intensity standards appeared successful in creating variation in supervision practices for low-risk probationers.

The second research question examined the impact of low-risk caseload assignment on supervision outcomes. This study found that individuals placed on a low-risk caseload were significantly less likely to have their supervision level increased. Increased supervision might include movement to a regular or specialized caseload, or referral to a treatment or residential program. Low-risk individuals placed on regular caseloads were significantly more likely to be referred to a more intensive caseload or treatment program. It may be that the level of monitoring on regular caseload resulted in detection of more problem behaviors, initiating an officer response to increase the supervision intensity. It may also be the risk principle at work—that low-risk individuals can self-correct, and can do so as long as we stay out of their way.

Previous studies on the impact of decreased supervision intensity for low-risk individuals on recidivism are limited. Those that have been conducted found that decreasing monitoring for low-risk probationers resulted in either similar rates of reoffending as individuals monitored more intensively (Barnes et al., 2010; Cohen et al., 2016), or it resulted in reductions in recidivism (Wilson et al., 2007). This study found that rates of rearrest were similar among low risk individuals placed on low risk or regular caseloads. Rates of revocation, however, were significantly lower for those placed on a low-risk caseload. Even the finding from this study that there was not a significant reduction in the rate of rearrest demonstrates that criminal behavior did not increase as a result of less intensive supervision. Hence, community safety is at worst preserved and at best improved when probation agencies employ strategies to reduce surveillance and supervision requirements for low-risk individuals.

One explanation for why low-intensity supervision might decrease the likelihood of revocations for technical violations is that individuals who are supervised less intensively

TABLE 2.
Multiple logistic regression results

	Increase in supervision level				Revocation†				Re-arrest			
	Odds ratio	Std. Err.	p-value		Odds ratio	Std. Err.	p-value		Odds ratio	Std. Err.	p-value	
Constant	0.23	0.03	0.00	***					0.07	0.01	0.00	***
Gender (ref=female)	1.15	0.12	0.18		1.64	0.32	0.01	**	1.27	0.18	0.09	
Age (ref=below median)	1.01	0.09	0.90		0.49	0.08	0.00	***	0.39	0.05	0.00	***
Race (ref=White)	0.73	0.08	0.01	**	1.11	0.20	0.58		1.15	0.16	0.32	
# of prior arrests (ordinal§)	1.46	0.14	0.00	***	2.64	0.47	0.00	***	2.62	0.36	0.00	***
Low-risk program (ref=regular caseload)	0.39	0.05	0.00	***	0.41	0.11	0.00	***	0.75	0.13	0.09	
Pseudo R squared	0.03				0.05				0.06			

*$p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$ † Ordinal logistic regression, 0 = not revoked, 1 = revoked, technical violation, 2 = revoked, law violation § 0 = one, 1 = two or more

are less likely to be caught violating their conditions of supervision. Every time a PO arranges a meeting with a probationer, there is a risk that he or she does not come to the meeting. Every time a PO inquires about the behavior of a probationer since the last meeting, there is a risk that he or she reveals a violation in the conditions of supervision. When a probationer submits a UA, there is a risk that the UA is positive for drugs. That is, every supervision activity increases the risk of a probationer being caught violating some condition of supervision, resulting in a possible revocation for technical violations.

Another explanation is that low-risk individuals, by definition, have many attributes that serve as protective factors against future criminal behavior. They tend to be educated and employed, have family support, have limited problems with drugs or alcohol, have prosocial peer networks and healthy leisure activities. Imposing strict conditions related to community supervision can disrupt these protective factors, resulting in violations of community supervision. For example, mandated weekly treatment or surveillance programs may disrupt their job schedule, resulting in loss of employment. Engagement in supervision meetings or groups also exposes probationers to other probationers (i.e., criminal peers). Hence, not only could probationers be caught more often violating the conditions of supervision, but supervision requirements might also create risk factors for low-risk individuals that otherwise did not exist.

Policy Implications
The provision of low-intensity supervision for

low-risk probationers has important policy implications. First, decreased supervision of low-risk probationers saves taxpayer dollars. The higher the intensity of supervision (e.g., intensive treatment probation, electronic monitoring, specialty caseloads), the higher the cost. Likewise, every person revoked for a technical violation or a new crime is an additional burden for the criminal justice system. Individuals revoked of community supervision occupy beds in jails and prisons, and incarceration is much more expensive than community supervision (Petersilia, 2011). Second, every incarceration represents another dent on the person's identity. Incarceration impairs the ties that the individual has to society and often to his or her family or other community supports. Low-intensity supervision of low-risk individuals reduces the harmful effects of incarceration and probation. Third, low-intensity supervision of the low risk does not pose a threat to community safety. Findings from this study show no significant difference in rearrest rates for those placed on low-intensity versus regular caseloads. This suggests that fewer resources can be spent supervising low-risk probationers without jeopardizing the community.

The department found that 11 POs assigned to low-risk caseloads were able to supervise as many probationers as 16 POs supervising regular caseloads. The low-risk caseload program enabled the department to reallocate 5 POs to other caseload types. Note that the low-risk caseload program was partially implemented; at the conclusion of the study, most low-risk probationers were still supervised on regular caseloads. If

fully implemented, more POs could be used to decrease caseload size on higher need caseloads or to expand programming for specialized caseloads targeting high risk/need individuals (e.g., those with chronic mental health or significant substance abuse issues). Such a policy aligns with the RNR principles and serves to allocate resources more wisely.

Finally, now that the United States is seeing a reduction in the rate of incarceration, increased attention is being paid to the impact of mass probation (Phelps, 2017). Ideas for changing the face of probation and parole have started to circulate (see Lovins, Cullen, Latessa, & Jonson, 2018). While the current study does not address the role of the probation officer, findings from this study do assert that probation agencies must explore new mechanisms for reducing the harm of community supervision. Adjusting how low-risk probationers are supervised is one step in this direction.

Study Limitations and Conclusions
There are limitations to this study that should be noted. First, the boundary between the low-risk versus regular caseloads was very porous. In this study, many individuals on the low-risk caseloads spent some time previously on a regular caseload. This may have diluted the results or caused differences between the caseload groups to be less pronounced. Therefore, although this is a study limitation, it has a limited impact on the significant findings on recidivism. Second, the probationer population of our study is in a southern state and from only one county, impacting generalizability. The findings may be different for different jurisdictions.

Despite these limitations, this study contributes to the growing literature on effective supervision practices. This study should help support the efforts of probation agencies with evidence-based decision making on caseload organization. Findings from this study that agencies can allocate fewer resources toward low-risk probationers with either similar or an improved impact on community safety appear to offer a win-win. Agencies with the resources to do so should consider creating specific low-risk caseloads (or for smaller jurisdictions, assigning all low-risk probationers to a single officer, with specific standards for those individuals). This takes a step beyond simply having different standards of supervision by risk. Specialized low-risk caseloads may help combat the natural tendency for officers to over-supervise low-risk individuals, rather than allowing these individuals to self-correct, getting their lives back on track.

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