

Understanding Caseload and Workload: Research Perspectives

Christian Ghanem

“Of course, I try to keep up to date with research. I use my offdays on weekends to read selected journal articles. That's not possible during working hours because there are too many cases.”

Caseload

How many is too many?



20

the same old song and dance about caseload



40

the same old song and dance about caseload



60

the same old song and dance about caseload



80

or more

the same old song and dance about caseload



**Who feels their
workload is too high?**

the same old song and dance about caseload



The Central Distinction: Caseload vs. Workload

WORKLOAD

All tasks, time & effort required to effectively handle those cases

≠

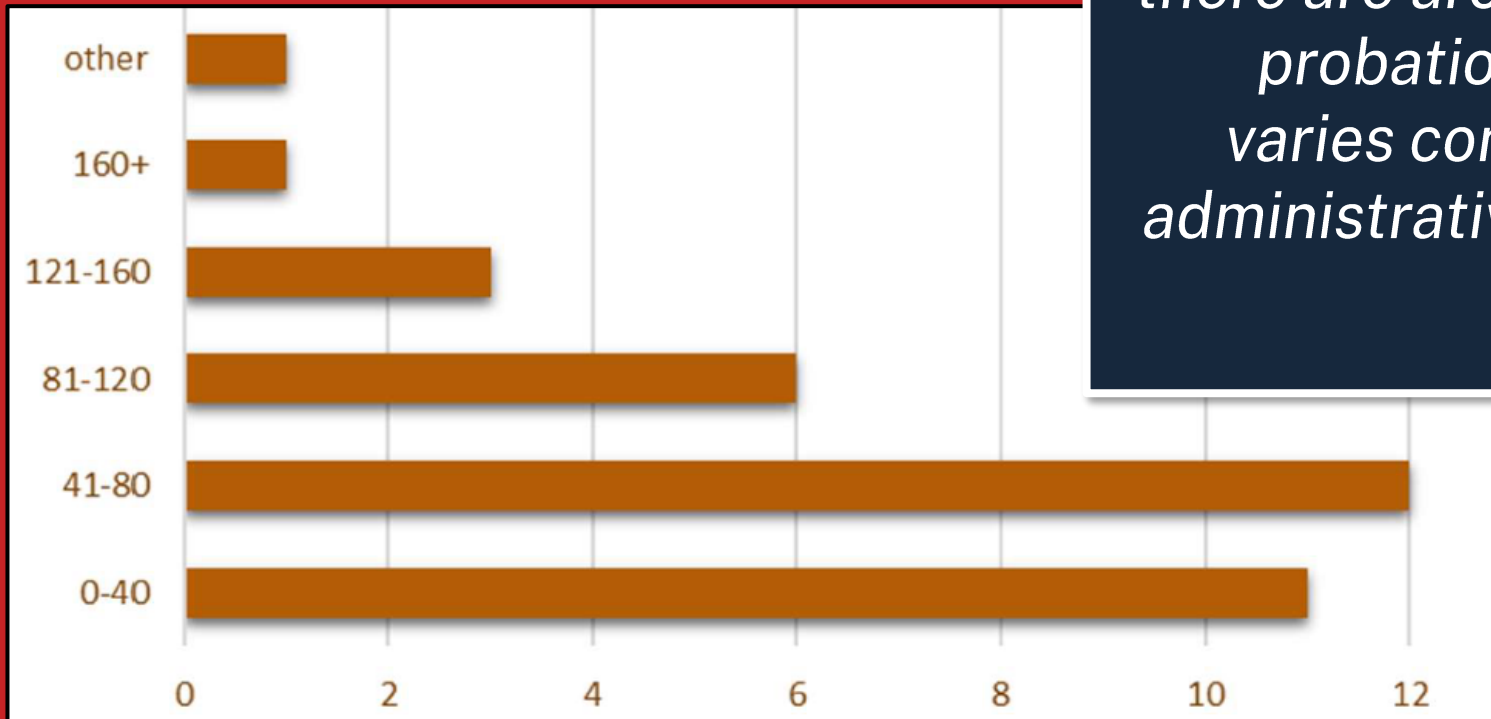
CASELOAD

The number of cases assigned to one officer

"It's not about numbers. It's about what officers do." DeMichele & Payne, 2018, p. 41



Ratio of probationers per one staff member



“there are around 30 probationers for each probation staff member, but that ratio varies considerably across countries or administrative entities ranging from to 7.5 (Bulgaria) to 220 (Monaco)”
Aebi et al., 2025, p. 2

How many is too many?

...can't be answered without context

Case- and workload in Germany – Survey*

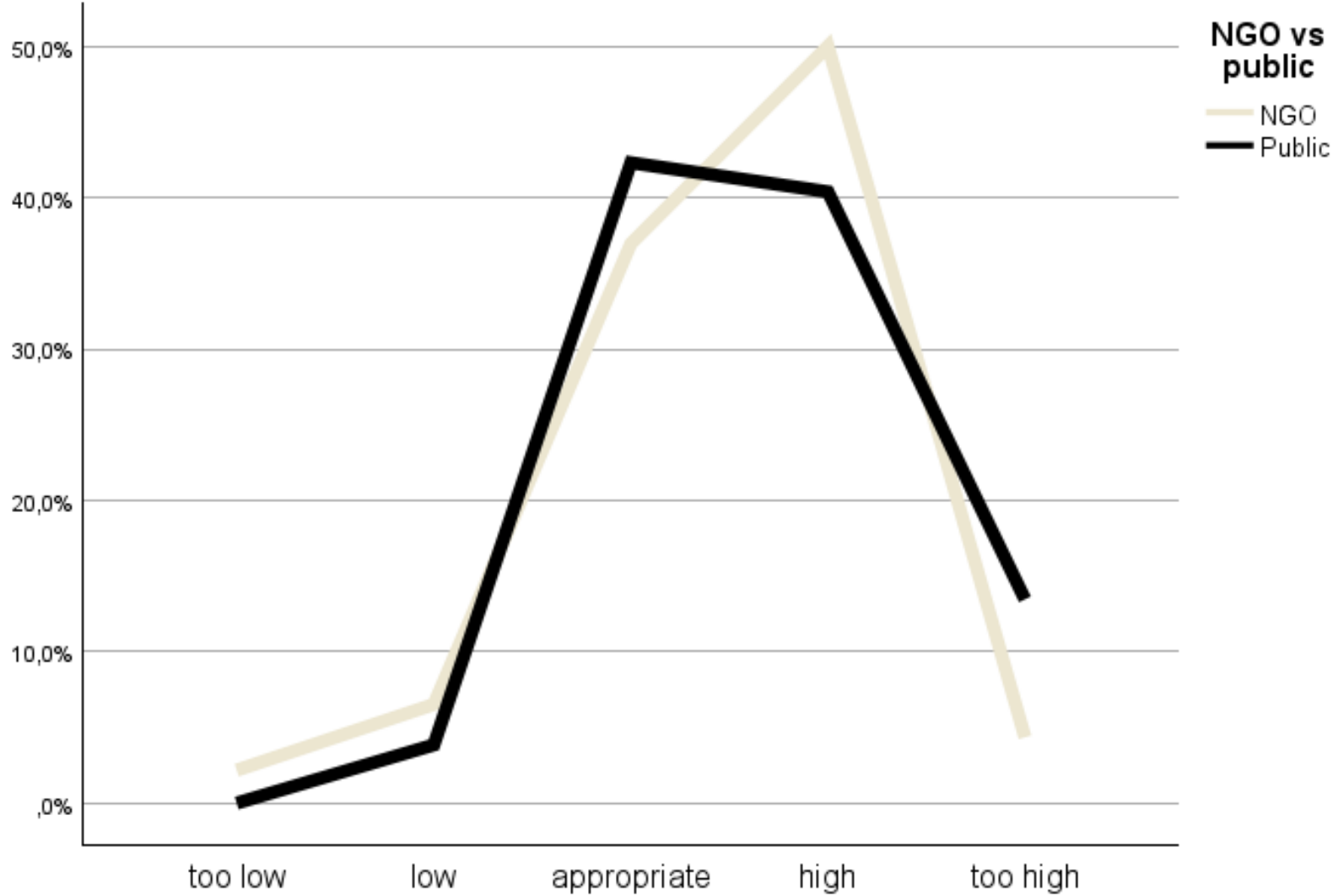
Governmental services (2024/25)

- Service users (N = 103) and professionals of probation/supervision & court social service (N = 53)

Non-governmental probation services (2026/27)

- Service users (N = ?) and professionals of eight services (N = 55): forensic treatment, restorative justice, children affected by parental imprisonment and domestic violence, reentry service, domestic violence training, court-ordered community service

* The studies are conducted together with Michael Hanslmaier, Anna Isenhardt, Sarah Petersen and Hannes Stadler in cooperation with the ministry of justice Schleswig-Holstein and Schleswig-Holsteinischen Verband für soziale Strafrechtspflege- Straffälligenhilfe und Opferhilfe e.V.



NGO vs public
— NGO
— Public

NGO

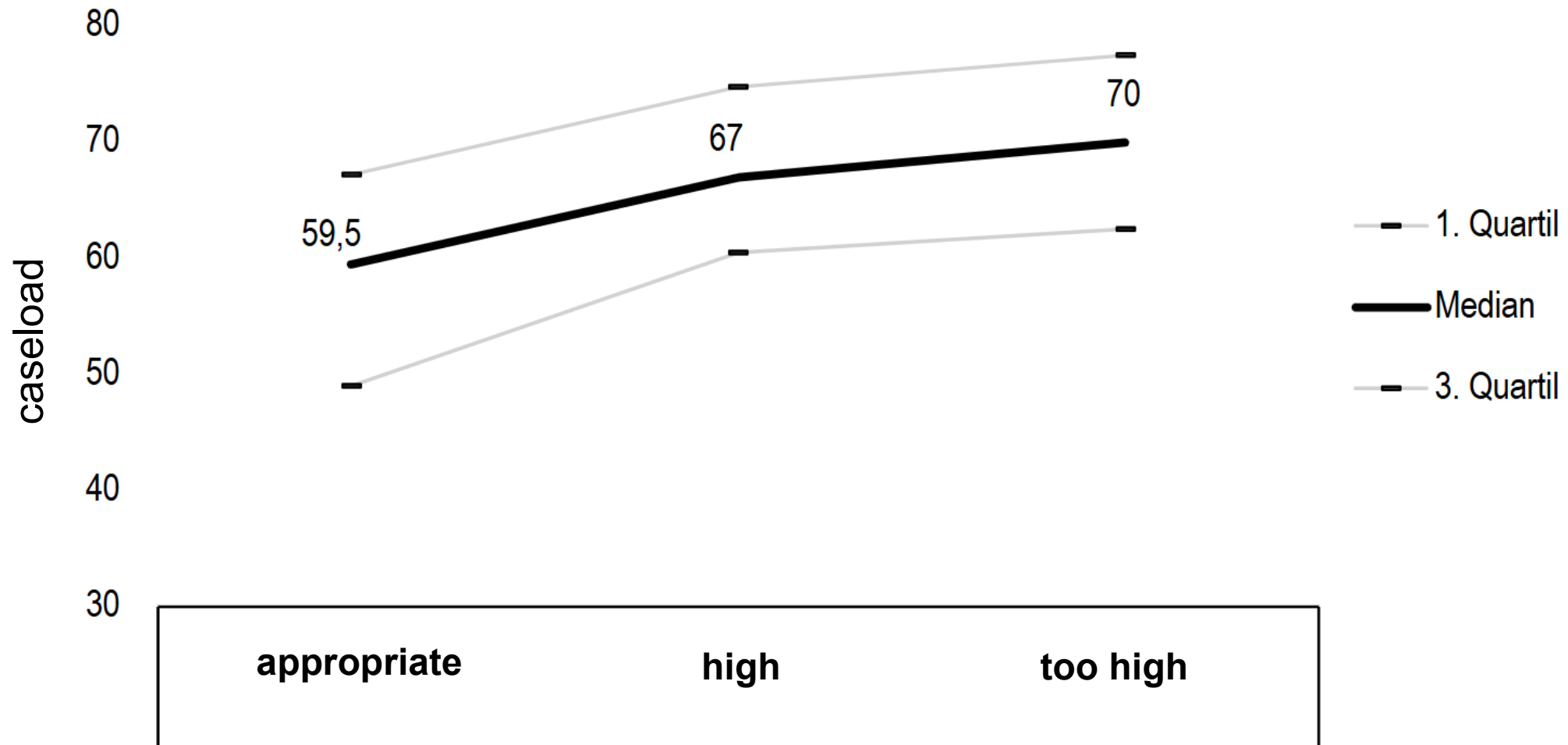
- Caseload: Ø 15 - 200

Public Probation

- Caseload: Ø 64

the higher the caseload, the higher the perceived workload

(Pearson $r = 0,456$, $p = 0,002$)



*„caseloads of 50+ impair the overall
quality of probation work“*

Ball et al., 2021, p. 4

*“Review staffing levels, particularly in jurisdictions
with high probationer-to-staff ratios exceeding 30:1”*

Aebi et al., 2025, p. 2

How many is too many?

*“Current probation practice in many European countries seems to suggest that limiting
individual caseloads to between 40 to 60 clients per (fulltime) probation
officer/supervisor at any time can ensure quality in probation services”*

Geiran & Durnescu, 2019, p. 14

Caseload & probation outcome

- Growing evidence for **preventative effects** of lower caseloads e.g. Ball et al., 2021; Fox et al., 2022
- Austrian experiment showed positive effects on employment services (e.g. faster job entry and cost-effectiveness) Böheim et al., 2023
- Positive **effects on other probation outcomes** (e.g. needs identification, task prioritization) Groome et al., 2024; Jalbert & Rhodes, 2012; Norman & Ricciardelli, 2022

Böheim, R., Eppel, R., & Mahringer, H. (2023). The impact of lower caseloads in public employment services on the unemployed. *Journal for Labour Market Research*, 57(1), 31.
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s12651-023-00357-4>

Fox, C., Harrison, J., Hothersall, G., Smith, A., & Webster, R. (2022). A Rapid Evidence Assessment of the impact of probation caseloads on reducing recidivism and other probation outcomes. *Probation Journal*, 69(2), 138–158.

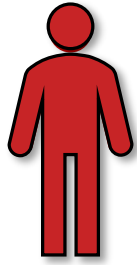
Groome, E., Blinkhorn, V., Kewley, S., Forshaw, M., Petalas, M., & McGuirk, L.-J. (2024). 'The most stressful thing...was never the content, really': The emotional impact PICS practitioners experience during consultation and formulation. *European Journal of Probation*, 16(3), 203–225.

Jalbert, S. K., & Rhodes, W. (2012). Reduced caseloads improve probation outcomes. *Journal of Crime and Justice*, 35(2), 221-238.

Norman, M., & Ricciardelli, R. (2022). Operational and organisational stressors in community correctional work: Insights from probation and parole officers in Ontario, Canada. *Probation Journal*, 69(1), 86–106.

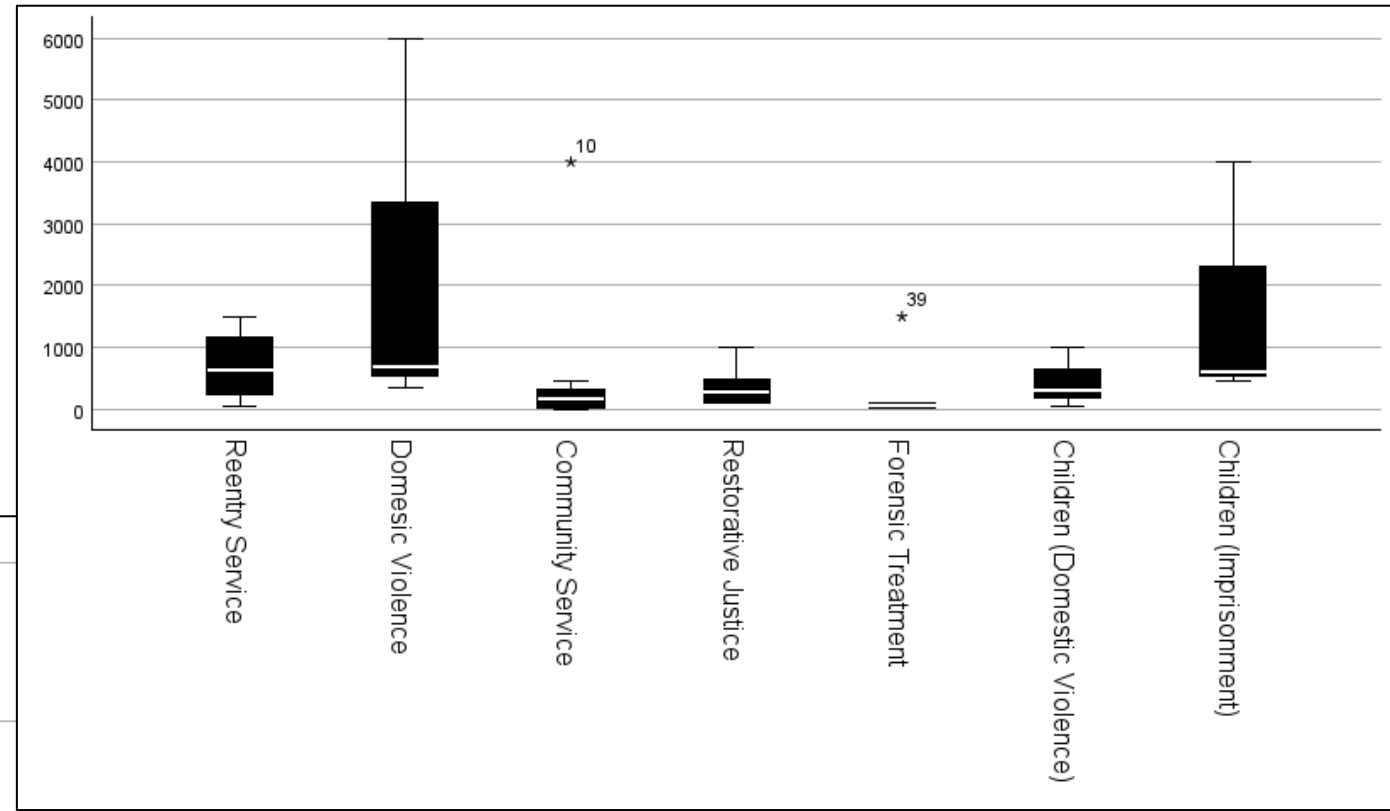
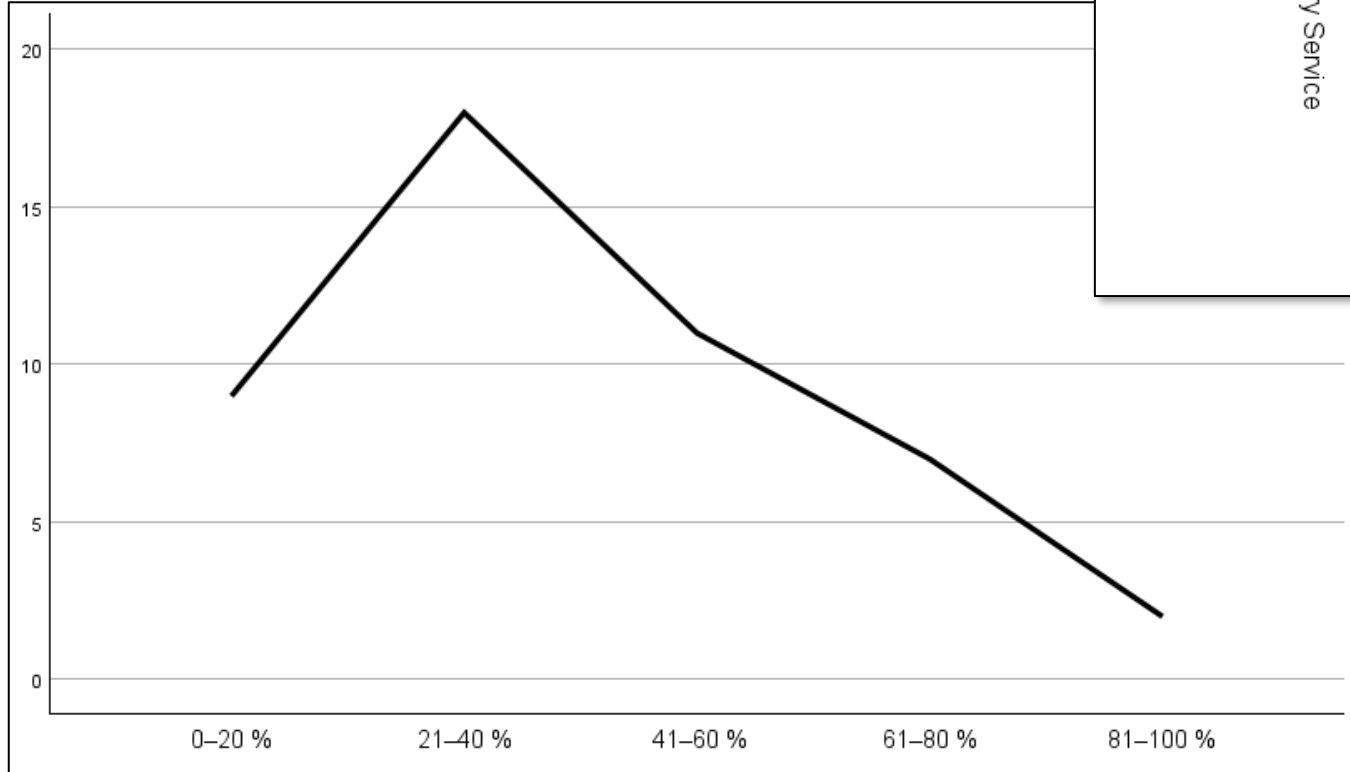
Caseload & probation outcome

- Broad consensus that caseload alone is **insufficient for probation management**
- Lower caseloads does not ,automatically‘ lead to lower recidivism – some studies even show **negative effects on recidivism and technical violations** e.g. Bouchard & Wong, 2017; Jalbert & Rhodes, 2012
- Caseload interacts with **organizational and individual factors**

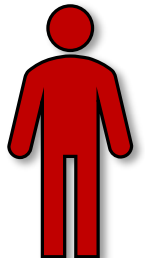


service user

% of „particular challenging and labour-intensive cases“



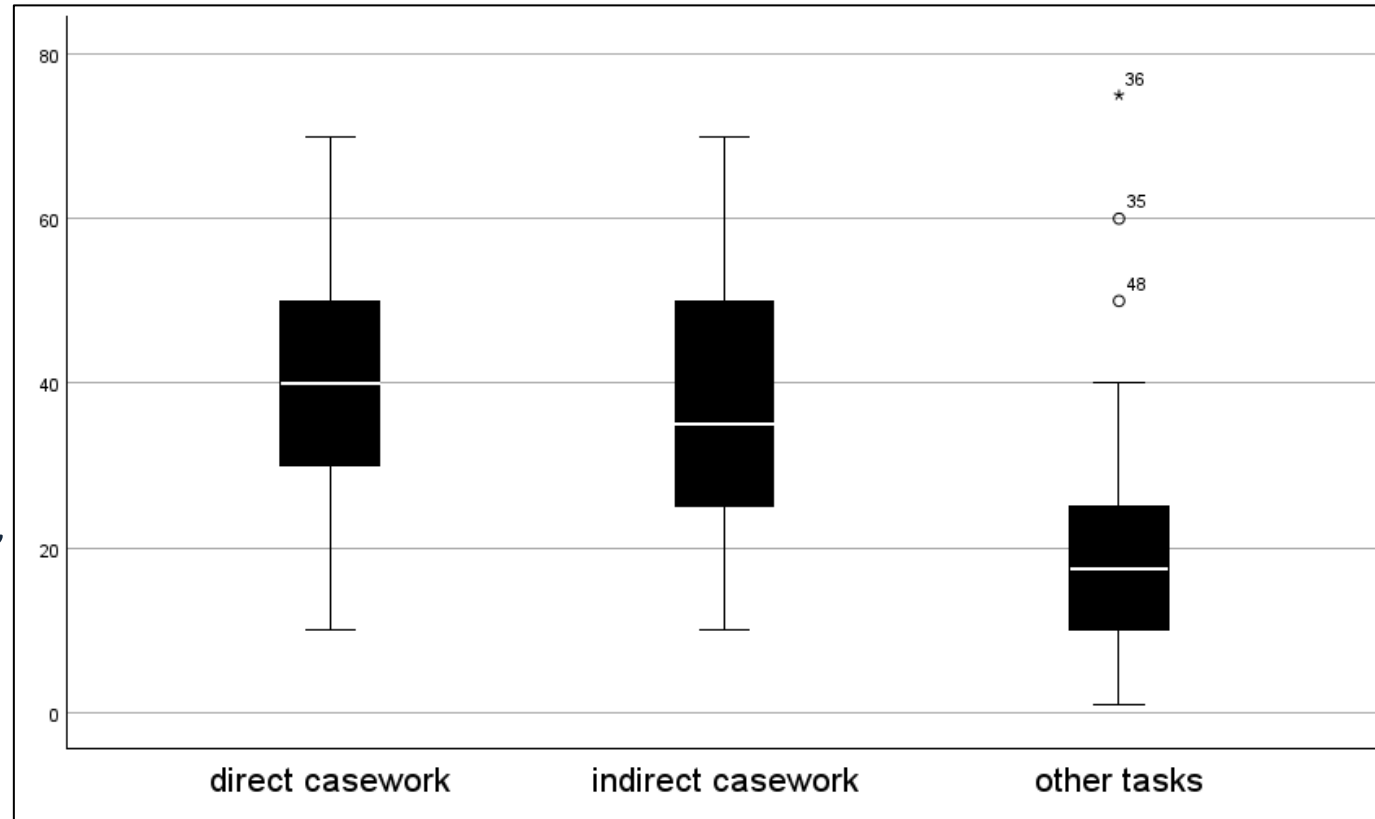
work-related kilometers per month



professional

“There is an emerging theme across sectors that increased administrative burdens on workers mean that even less demanding cases generate considerable workload [...]”

Fox et al., 2021, S. 156



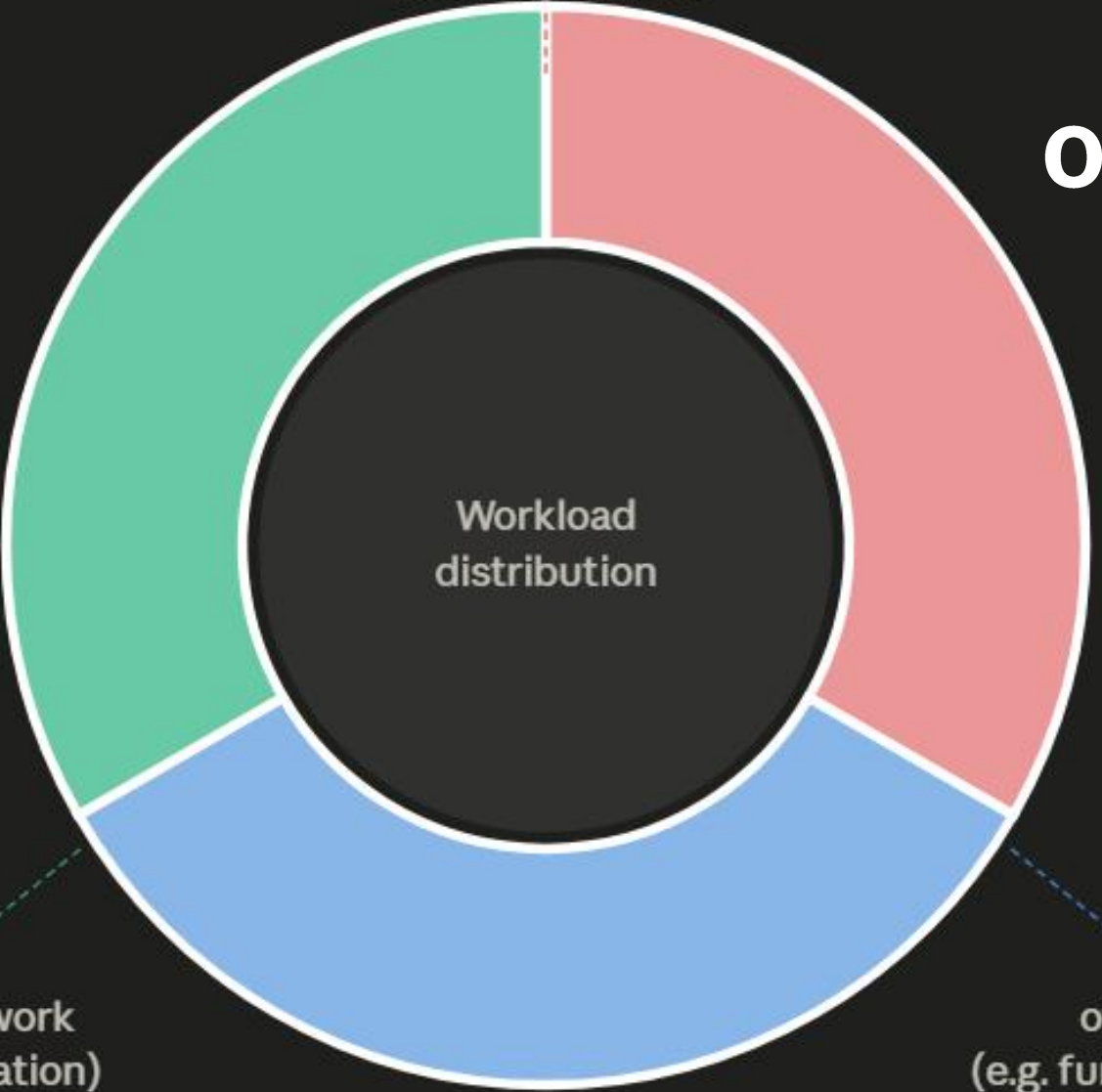
1. Complete assessment
2. Face-to-face
3. Face-to-face other party
4. Prepare case/transition
5. Complete referral
6. Address violations/compliance
7. Inter/intra-state paper
8. Child protective service
9. Collect payments
10. Urine drug screen
11. Breath test
12. Court duty
13. Search home/car
14. Field visit
15. Progress report
16. Research/verify info.
17. Complete non-court doc.
18. Data entry
19. Generate/respond comm.
20. Transfer case
21. Office arrest
22. Serve warrant field
23. Permanency table
24. Prepare violation/petition Modify
25. Prep. discharge report
26. Prep. civil judgment
27. Prep. court memo
28. Prep. other court doc.
29. Other supervision

DeMichele, M., & Payne, B. (2018). Taking officer time seriously: A study of the daily activities of probation officers. *Probation Journal*, 65(1), 39–60.

Fox, C., Harrison, J., Hothersall, G., Smith, A., & Webster, R. (2022). A Rapid Evidence Assessment of the impact of probation caseloads on reducing recidivism and other probation outcomes. *Probation Journal*, 69(2), 138–158.

Optimal Task Distribution (?)

Schwarze et al., 2018



one third for direct casework is also found in observational studies

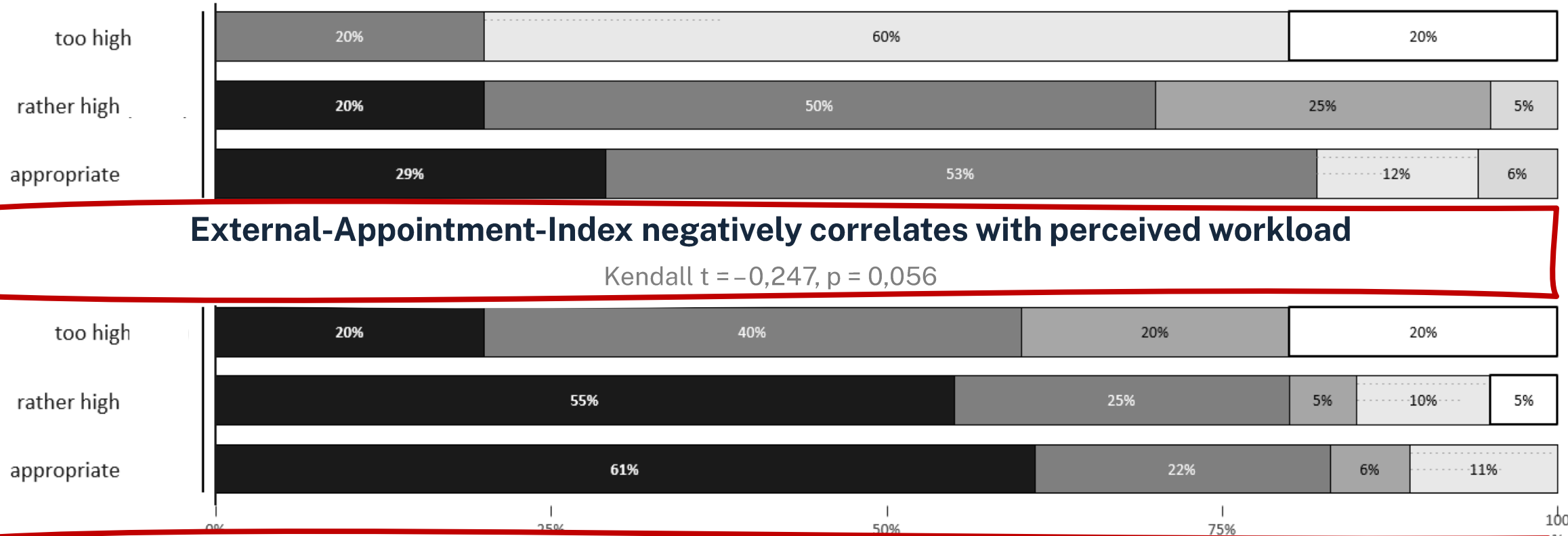
Martin & Zeitler, 2021

Martin, K. D., & Zettler, H. R. (2021). An Examination of Probation Officer Tasks by Officer-Caseload Type. *Criminal Justice Policy Review*, 32(7), 693–717.

Schwarze, C., et al. (2018). Qualitätskriterien forensischer Ambulanzen des Strafvollzugs. *Forensische Psychiatrie, Psychologie, Kriminologie*, 12(4), 369–379.

Workload and external appointments

Prison visit /
forensic psychiatry
Home visit / outdoor
appointments / café setting



Workload is associated with limited engagement with clients, and a shift toward reactive or administrative practices

Ball et al., 2021; Groome et al., 2024; Norman & Ricardell, 2021

“I think desistance is a bit like raising a child. You need a village. Desistance is a community thing. You need the community, work, family, relationships. So people who stay very office based are not using the community, then we’re not actually doing desistance.”

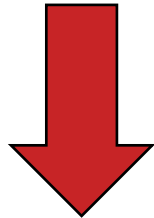
[The road from crime -Iriss](#)

Maintaining probation outcomes and a fair distribution of the ‘burden’ requires an understanding of workload as a multifaced concept which is closely linked with staff well-being, stress, burnout and anxiety

Ball, 2021; Carr et al., 2025; Chon, 2024; DeMichele & Payne, 2018; Gladfelter & Haggis, 2024; Haggis & McDermott, 2025; Kenton & Moore, 2020; Leone et al., 2025

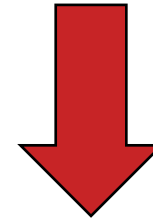
- Ball, K., Buckley, L., & Moore, R. (2021). Caseloads, workloads and staffing levels in probation services. In: Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Probation (ed.), *Research & Analysis Bulletin 2021/02*.
- Carr, N., Annison, H., Burke, L., Millings, M., & Robinson, G. (2025). Constrained voice and complicated loyalty: Understanding reasons to leave or stay working in the probation service. *Criminology & Criminal Justice*. Advance online publication <https://doi.org/10.1177/17488958251397117>
- Chon, D. S. (2024). Korean Probation Officers’ Perception of Positive Impact on Probationers’ Lives, Job Accomplishment, and Their Relationship with Job Satisfaction. *International Criminology*, 4(3), 293–305.
- DeMichele, M., & Payne, B. (2018). Exploring probation officer styles and goals with individual, organizational, and social characteristics. *European Journal of Probation*, 10(3), 232–248.
- Gladfelter, A. S., & Haggis, W. A. (2024). Burnout Among Probation Officers: The Importance of Resilience. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 68(4), 336–352.
- Haggis, L., & McDermott, M. (2025). No Choice But to Leave’: Understanding Voluntary Resignations Amongst Probation Staff in England and Wales. *The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice*, 64(4), 421–434.
- Kenton, O. & Moore, R. (2020). Impact of organizational inputs upon the quality of delivery (probation services). In: *Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Probation* (ed.), *Research & Analysis Bulletin 2020/1*.
- Leone, M. C., Lambert, E. G., Solinas-Saunders, M., Hines, C., Haynes, S. H., May, D. C., & Keena, L. D. (2025). A Preliminary Study of Different Types of Organizational Support Associated With Community Corrections Staff Job Satisfaction. *Criminal Justice Policy Review*, 36(6), 305–327.

- Increasing evidence that **organisational circumstances** (e.g. recognition, autonomy, values) are key drivers for workload capacity
- **Resources and job demands** predict health issues and attrition Gladfelter et al. 2022
- Restructuring probation *“from an ethos of social work to a rhetoric of public protection”* Haggar & McDermott, 2023, p. 422 contributes to workload capacity



“workplace harm”

Walker et al., 2019



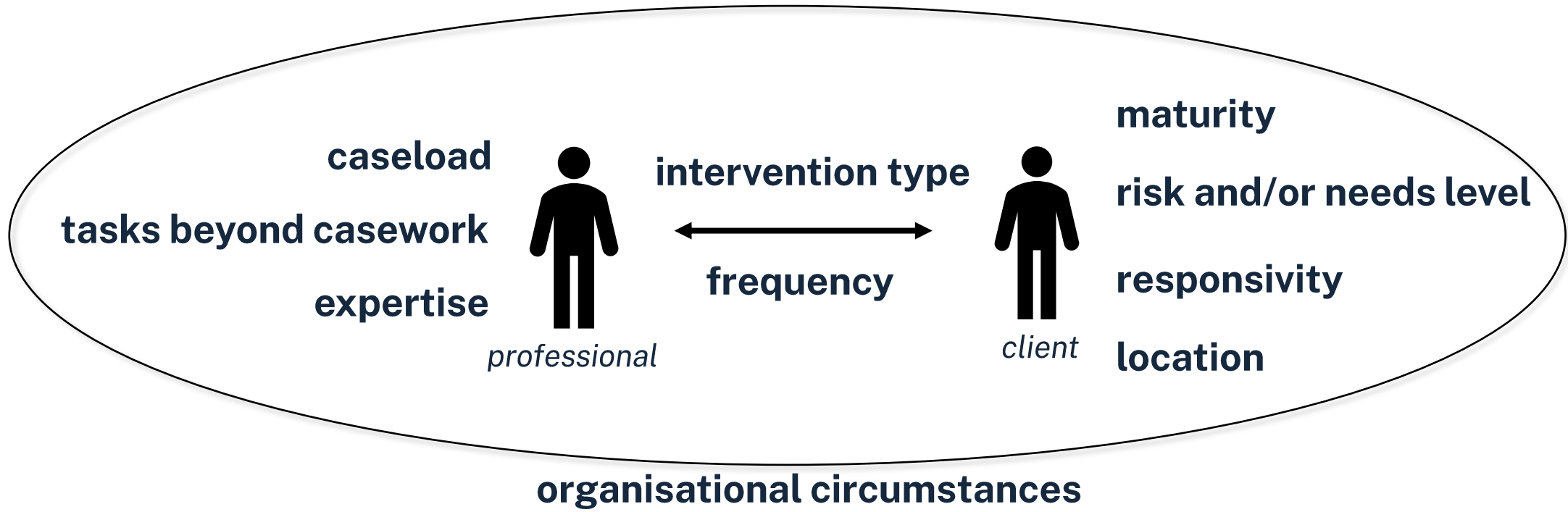
“moral distress”

Palma Contreras & Pardo Adriasola, 2024

Haggar, L., & McDermott, M. (2025). No Choice But to Leave’: Understanding Voluntary Resignations Amongst Probation Staff in England and Wales. *The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice*, 64(4), 421–434.

Palma Contreras, A. M., & Pardo Adriasola, M. A. (2024). Moral Distress in Social Work: A Systematic Literature Review. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 54(7), 3053–3072.

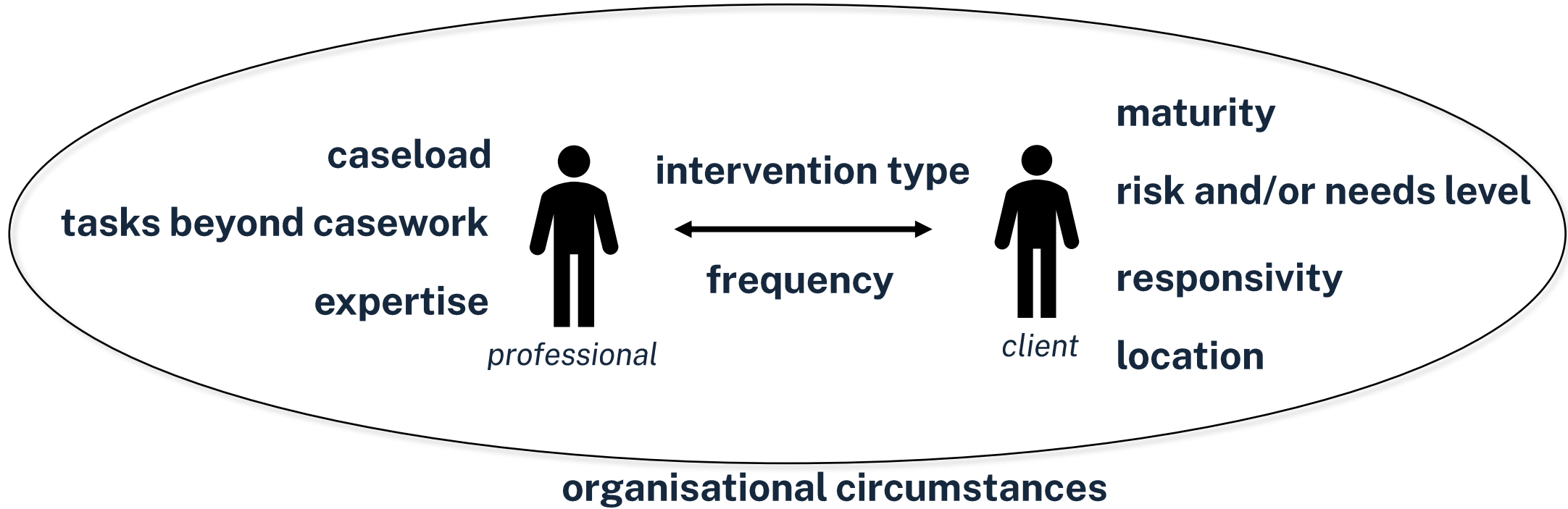
Walker, S., Annison, J., & Beckett, S. (2019). Transforming Rehabilitation: The impact of austerity and privatisation on day-to-day cultures and working practices in ‘probation’. *Probation Journal*, 66(1), 113–130.



factors are not only additive
→ fit between subjective and structural factors determine workload

- Evaluation of the **implementation of Good Lives Model (GLM)** in probation (ethnography & interviews) Anke, 2026; Fackler, 2026
- GLM as a “*psychological self-care*” within a risk-oriented structure which doesn’t fit to own identity and values (“moral distress”)
- The **care-control tension becomes subjectively more manageable**; however, the structural conditions themselves are not changed → e.g. “*double bookkeeping*”

level of digitalisation



Digitalisation – a Janus-faced phenomenon

Negative effects on workload

e.g. Phillips et al., 2021

„you had your caseload, you could focus on that. Now, there’s Teams channels firing off information. You’re getting emails about this and that”

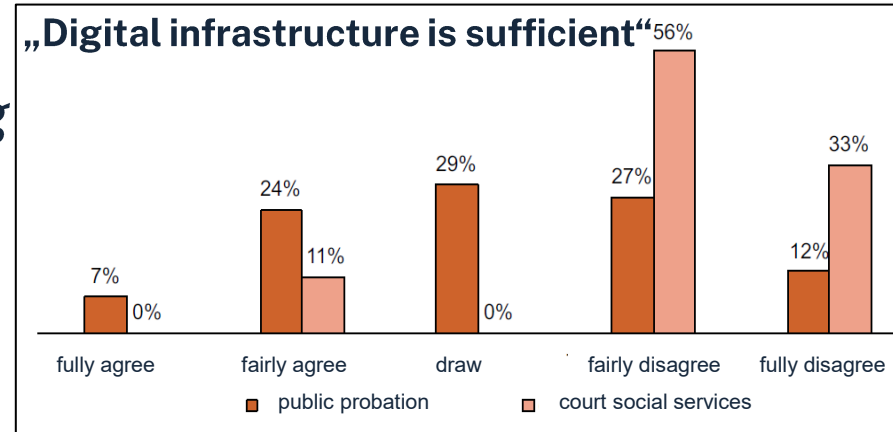
Carr et al., 2025, p. 12

Positive effects on workload

e.g. Sturm et al., 2021

2024: 21 % of UK social workers had used unauthorised AI tools

Garrett 2026, S. 378f., 386f.



Garrett, P. M. (2026). Social work’s ‘electronic turn’: Notes on the deployment of information and communication technologies in social work with children and families. *Critical Social Policy*, 25(4), S. 529-553

Phillips, J., Westaby, C., Ainslie, S., & Fowler, A. (2021). ‘I don’t like this job in my front room’: Practising probation in the COVID-19 pandemic. *Probation Journal*, 68(4), 426-443.

Sturm, A., Robbers, S., Henskens, R., & De Vogel, V. (2021). ‘Yes, I can hear you now ...’ Online working with probationers in the Netherlands: New opportunities for the working alliance. *Probation Journal*, 68(4), 411-425.

„[...] the justice system has been described as „**an innovation free zone**“ (Shelupanov, 2017), resistant to social innovations like collaborative partnership models and user-informed service design, and to technological innovations.“ Ross, 2018, S. 53

COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS
COMITÉ DES MINISTRES
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

75
1949 - 2024

MINISTERS' DEPUTIES Recommendations CM/Rec(2024)5 9 October 2024

Recommendation CM/Rec(2024)5 of the Committee of Ministers to member States regarding the ethical and organisational aspects of the use of artificial intelligence related digital technologies by prison and probation services

(Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 9 October 2024 at the 1509th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)

The Committee of Ministers, under the terms of Article 15. b of the Statute of the Council of Europe (ETS No. 1),

Having regard to the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5) and the case law of the Court of Human Rights;

Having regard to the Convention for the Protection of individuals with regard to Automatic Processing of Personal Data (ETS No. 108), as amended by its Protocol (CETS No. 223, "Convention108+");, in particular: the Guidelines on artificial intelligence and data protection; the Guidelines on the protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data in a world of Big Data, the Guidelines on recognition and the Guidelines on national digital identity;

Having regard also to the European Convention for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (ETS No. 126) and to the work carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and in particular the it has developed in its general reports;

Having further regard to the Council of Europe Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence and Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law (CETS No. 225);

Endorsing the standards contained in the relevant recommendations of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to member States and in particular in recommendations: Rec(2006)2-rev (revised) amended by the Committee of Ministers on 1 July 2020) on the European Prison Rules; CM/Rec(2010)1 on the European Rules for juvenile offenders subject to sanctions or measures; CM/Rec(2010)1 on the Council of Europe Probation Rules; CM/Rec(2012)5 on the European Code of Ethics for Prison Staff; CM/Rec(2014)3 concerning dangerous offenders; CM/Rec(2014)4 on electronic monitoring; CM/Rec(2017)3 on the European Rules on community sanctions and measures; CM/Rec(2020)1 on human rights impacts of algorithmic systems and CM/Rec(2023)2 on rights, services and support of crime;

Taking also into consideration Recommendation CM/Rec(2021)8 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the protection of individuals with regard to automatic processing of personal data in the profiling;



Practice recommendations regarding technologies in probation



EUROPRIS

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION IN PRISONS: CONSIDERATIONS FOR INTEGRATING ICT AS THE BACKBONE OF ALL ASPECTS OF PRISON OPERATIONS

PRODUCED BY:
THE EUROPRIS ICT EXPERT GROUP
OCTOBER 2025

- A checklist for probation organisations when using digitalisation in probation:**
- To raise awareness of the benefits of new technologies;
 - Holistic approach - the use of technologies should be coordinated with other processes and activities of probation organisations;
 - To be informed and critically evaluate and choose technology fit for purpose;
 - Prior to application, an assessment of the benefits and risks for each technology is necessary;
 - Functional and responsible use of technology as a prerequisite;
 - Necessity of continuous evaluation of effectiveness in relation to probation goals;
 - Specific training of staff for the application of certain technologies is necessary (competences for the application of digital technology in probation, digital management competencies and so on);
 - For the use of each technology there have to be internal guidelines aligned with European guidelines and approved by senior management;
 - The use of technologies should be appropriate to the IT skills and capabilities of the client.

DIGITAL REHABILITATION IN PRISONS

March 2024

unieri
United Nations
Interregional Crime and Justice
Research Institute

CHECKLIST FOR MOVING TO DIGITAL REHABILITATION

This report has organized rehabilitative digital pathways according to their complexity and reach, and the degree to which they involve fundamental versus incremental reform. The three pathways set out in this report (*Transformational, Enhanced and Adaptive*) represent general types and the actual pathway for any individual agency will necessarily be shaped by its rehabilitative priorities and technological capacities.

A key consideration in choosing a pathway is the level of digital maturity within a prison service. In this context, activities such as using digital tools for administration, providing educational and therapeutic interventions through digital platforms, and assessing the impact of technology on rehabilitation all contribute to the digital maturity. The intensity and breadth of activities is key here, although even adaptive and enhanced pathways meet important needs and support people in their rehabilitative journeys.

TYPE OF DIGITAL PATHWAY	MOVING TO DIGITAL REHABILITATION
TRANSFORMATIONAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Create a service-wide shared vision of rehabilitation; ✓ Align to e-government activities and agendas; ✓ Identify sources of state investment (education, employment, health etc); ✓ Establish partnerships with services, suppliers and developers; ✓ Use data to drive decision-making; ✓ Establish comprehensive quality assessment and feedback processes; ✓ Cover all dimensions of rehabilitation; economic, social, personal, cultural, and health; ✓ Actively manage change and establish dedicated teams with digital skills; ✓ Ensure that rehabilitation, custody management and security teams are represented in decision making;
See: Case Example 1 Case Example 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Be culturally and gender responsive; and ✓ Undertake screening for safety of use.
Typical Digital Maturity level: Leaders in readiness	

Thanks for your attention!

christian.ghanem@th-nuernberg.de