

Probation officers and corre

They help people convicted of crimes in the transition to freedom.



Correctional treatment specialists



by Andrew D. Alpert

When you think of law enforcement occupations, what are the first that come to mind? Your answer might include police officers and investigators, whose jobs are to track down criminals and solve crimes. But fighting crime also involves encouraging offenders to put their criminal pasts behind them and move forward with their lives. Probation officers and correctional treatment specialists supervise and help offenders in these efforts.

The work of many probation officers and correctional treatment specialists has changed in recent years, reflecting shifting attitudes about probation and parole in the criminal justice system. Today's probation officers and correctional treatment specialists may rely on community involvement and technological advances, for example, to aid them in their work. Regardless of their specific duties, however, these officers' and specialists' core job remains the same: working with offenders to keep them out of trouble.

These occupations are expected to have a favorable job outlook through 2008. The following pages include more details about employment prospects, along with other information—such as job duties, earnings, and training requirements—describing probation officers and correctional treatment specialists. If you're interested in a career related to law enforcement, read on to learn whether these occupations might suit you.

Nature of the work

Probation officers and correctional treatment specialists work in similar ways with people convicted of crimes. Probation officers supervise those who have been placed on probation, the period during which offenders may avoid prison by staying out of trouble and meeting other requirements. Correctional treatment specialists evaluate the progress of inmates in jails and prisons.

Probation officers—who, in some States, may be referred to as community supervision officers—monitor offenders' behavior through personal contact with the offenders and their families. Officers also may arrange for offenders to get substance

abuse rehabilitation or job training. Parole officers, who perform many of the same duties as probation officers, supervise offenders paroled from prison to ensure their compliance with the conditions of their parole. In some States, the jobs of parole officer and probation officer are combined. Probation officers usually work with either adults or juveniles exclusively. Only in small, usually rural, jurisdictions do probation officers counsel both adults and juveniles.

Another part of the probation officer's job involves working in the courts. Officers investigate the background of offenders brought before the court, write presentence reports, and make sentencing recommendations for each offender; review sentencing recommendations with offenders and their families before submitting the recommendations to the court; and testify in court regarding their findings and recommendations. Probation officers also attend hearings to update the court on an offender's probation compliance status and on the offender's efforts at rehabilitation. Occasionally, probation officers in the Federal courts system work as pretrial services officers, conducting pretrial investigations and making bond recommendations for defendants.

Correctional treatment specialists, also known as case managers or drug treatment specialists, assess inmates' rehabilitative development. They work with inmates, probation officers, and agencies to develop plans for parole and release, providing case reports to the parole board when their clients are eligible for release. In addition, they arrange for offenders' attendance at education and job training programs and counsel offenders, either individually or in groups, regarding issues such as coping skills, anger management skills, and drug and sexual abuse. They usually write treatment plans and summaries for each client.

The number of cases a probation officer or correctional treatment specialist has depends on both the counseling needs of offenders and the risks they pose to society. Higher risk offenders and those who need more counseling usually command more of an officer's or specialist's time and resources. Those who work with these offenders handle fewer cases. Caseloads also vary by agency jurisdiction. Consequently, officers or specialists may handle 20 to more than 300 active cases at a time.

Public debate on the roles of prisons, probation, and parole has resulted in more community involvement by probation officers in many jurisdictions. In such locales, officers go into the community to meet offenders in their homes and at their places

Andrew D. Alpert is an economist in the Office of Occupational Statistics and Employment Projections, BLS, (202) 691-5754.



of employment or therapy, rather than have offenders meet them at probation offices. Officers also involve community organizations, such as religious institutions and neighborhood groups, and local residents to monitor offenders' behavior.

Working conditions

Probation officers and correctional treatment specialists usually work a standard 40-hour week, but they may be required to

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work longer or to be on call 24 hours a day to supervise and assist offenders at any time. In addition, meeting with offenders who are on probation or parole may require extensive travel or fieldwork. However, this burden may be eased somewhat for workers whose agencies allow them to telecommute from home via computers and other equipment and to make use of other technology, such as electronic monitoring devices worn by offenders that allow probation officers to monitor their activities.

Probation officers and correctional treatment specialists may find their jobs stressful for a variety of reasons. They work with convicted criminals, some of whom may be dangerous. In the course of supervising offenders, officers and specialists usually interact with many other individuals, including family members and friends of their clients, who may be angry, upset, or uncooperative. Officers and specialists also may be required to collect and transport urine samples of offenders for drug testing.

Fieldwork assignments in high crime areas may require that probation officers carry a firearm or other weapon for protection. Correctional treatment specialists who do not work in parole and probation agencies may have to work in institutions where there is a risk of violence or communicable diseases. Officers and specialists must meet deadlines, most of which are imposed by courts, which contributes to the stress of their heavy workloads.

Although stress makes these jobs difficult at times, the work also can be rewarding. Many probation officers and correc-

tional treatment specialists gain personal satisfaction from counseling members of their community and helping them become productive citizens.

Employment and earnings

About 78,930 people were employed as probation officers and correctional treatment specialists in 1999. Nationwide, all but a small number worked for State or local governments.

The employers of these workers vary by State. In some, the State government employs all probation officers and correctional treatment specialists; in other States, local governments are the only employers. In still other States, both levels of government employ them. Other employers include the Federal Government and private firms.

Jobs for probation officers and correctional treatment specialists are more plentiful in urban areas. There are also more jobs in States that have numerous men and women on probation and parole—such as California and Texas, which currently have the largest such populations. Together, these two States account for about one-fourth of the country's correctional supervision total of almost 4.5 million offenders on either probation or parole in 1999, according to the U.S. Department of Justice.

Median annual earnings of probation officers and correctional treatment specialists in 1999 were \$36,130. The middle 50 percent earned between \$29,260 and \$44,890. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$24,310, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$54,810. Officers and specialists who worked in urban areas usually had higher earnings than those working in rural areas.

Job outlook

Employment of probation officers and correctional treatment specialists is projected to grow through 2008. Vigorous law enforcement is expected to result in a continuing increase in the prison population. Overcrowding in prisons also has swelled the probation population as judges and prosecutors search for alternative forms of punishment, such as electronic monitoring and day reporting centers. In addition, the number of offenders released on parole is expected to increase to create room for other offenders in prison. The growing prison, parole, and probation populations should spur more demand for probation and parole officers and correctional treatment specialists.

In addition to openings due to growth, many other openings will result from the need to replace workers who leave the occu-



pation permanently—including the large number expected to retire over the next several years.

Some States, including Georgia and Tennessee, have privatized some of their probation agencies; others are considering doing so. Additionally, some States have placed increased restrictions on parole while other States have abolished it altogether. These changes to probation and parole are not expected to greatly affect employment, however. Even in States where parole has been abolished, for example, another form of supervised release has been established.

The job outlook for these occupations depends on the amount of government funding that is allocated to corrections, especially to probation systems. A change in political trends toward more imprisonment and away from community supervision could result in reduced employment opportunities.

Qualifications, training, and advancement

Prospective probation officers and correctional treatment specialists must be in good physical condition and be emotionally stable. Most agencies require applicants to be at least 21 years

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old and, for Federal employment, not older than 37. Those convicted of felonies may not be eligible for employment in these occupations.

Probation officers and correctional treatment specialists need strong writing skills because of the large number of reports they must prepare. Familiarity with computers often is required. Job candidates also should be knowledgeable about laws and regulations pertaining to corrections.

Educational requirements for probation officers and correctional treatment specialists vary by State, but a bachelor's degree in social work or criminal justice usually is required. In addition, some States require probation officers to have 1 year of work experience in a related field or 1 year of graduate study in criminal justice, social work, or psychology. Employers of correctional treatment specialists may require applicants to

have previous experience or a master's degree in criminal justice, social work, or psychology.

Most probation officers and some correctional treatment specialists must complete a training program sponsored by their State government or the Federal Government. Most work as trainees for about 6 months. Candidates who successfully complete the training period obtain a permanent position. Some States require applicants to take a certification test during or after training. Applicants usually must also pass written, oral, psychological, and physical examinations.

Agencies that employ probation officers and correctional treatment specialists have several levels of officers and specialists, as well as supervisors. A graduate degree—such as a master's degree in criminal justice, social work, or psychology—may be helpful for advancement.

Sources of additional information

To learn more about these occupations, visit your local library or your school's career guidance center for periodicals, books, and other resources. The counseling and public safety aspects of the work are found in related occupations—including social worker, counselor, and correctional officer—that are described in the 2000-01 *Occupational Outlook Handbook*. The online version of the *Handbook* is also available at <http://www.bls.gov/ocohome.htm>.

More information about probation officers and correctional treatment specialists is available from the following organizations:

American Probation and Parole Association
PO Box 11910
Lexington, KY 40578-1910
(859) 244-8203
<http://www.appa-net.org>

American Correctional Association
4380 Forbes Blvd.
Lanham, MD 20706-4322
1 (800) 222-5646
<http://www.corrections.com/aca>

For information about criminal justice internship and job opportunities in your area, contact your State's Department of Corrections, Criminal Justice, or Probation. You also might ask to meet directly with probation officers and correctional treatment specialists to talk with them about their work. 