

# High Risk Clients' Perception of Their Relationship with Their Probation Officer

November, 2018

## Key Findings

- 94% of clients stated they and their PO respect each other
- 90% of clients said their PO listens to them
- Roughly 90% of clients are taking the steps necessary to make the changes they want in their lives and are working on the correct issues.
- Clients who have received a referral to a community program are significantly more likely to have a positive perspective on the working relationship
- Clients of color were more likely to answer *always* to statements related to the tasks of supervision, goals and their relationship with their probation officer than white clients who were more likely to answer *very often/often*.
- The age, gender and length of supervision with their current probation officer does not impact the strength of the working relationship.

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## Introduction

Hennepin County DOCCR strives to be an Evidence Based Practice (EBP) agency. This includes adhering to Core Correctional Practices (CCP) like the principles of risk, need and responsivity (RNR) and affirming probation officers as agents of behavioral change. The relationship between the probation officer and the client is important in this process. Some research indicates the relationship between the probation officer and the client may be a core condition for changing the behavior and social circumstances associated with recidivism (Burnett & McNeil, 2005; Spiegler & Guevremont, 2003; Trotter, 1996, 2006) Skeem et al. (2007,



2009) concluded the quality of the client-probation officer relationship was a significant predictor of future violations, new arrests and revocations. Raynor (2004, 2008) contends it is essential to have the right staff skills and the right qualities in the relationship between offenders and probation staff to have effective intervention programming.

The Minnesota Association Community Corrections Act Counties (MACCAC) EBP Quality Work Group, of which Hennepin County is a member, has developed a plan to ensure fidelity to EBP which includes the implementation of an offender survey of high risk clients. This report provides the results of a survey conducted by Policy, Planning and Evaluation between 2/26/18 and 7/11/18. A total of 474 surveys with clients 40:1 caseloads were completed using the Working Alliance Inventory-Short Revised survey tool (WAI-SR). This report examines the responses of clients overall and some select demographics.

## Survey Results

### Demographics

On average, there are approximately 8,000 clients on a 40:1 caseload each day. In order to determine how closely the survey respondents matched the overall population, clients on a 40:1 caseload on 9/26/2018 were analyzed. The results show that the clients surveyed are very similar to the overall population of clients on September 26th.

Figure 1 shows that slightly more than 8 in 10 clients surveyed were male (85%), which is representative of the 40:1 population (85%). Currently, clients identifying as transgender are not tracked in adult case management, but transgender was a response option on the survey.

Figure 1

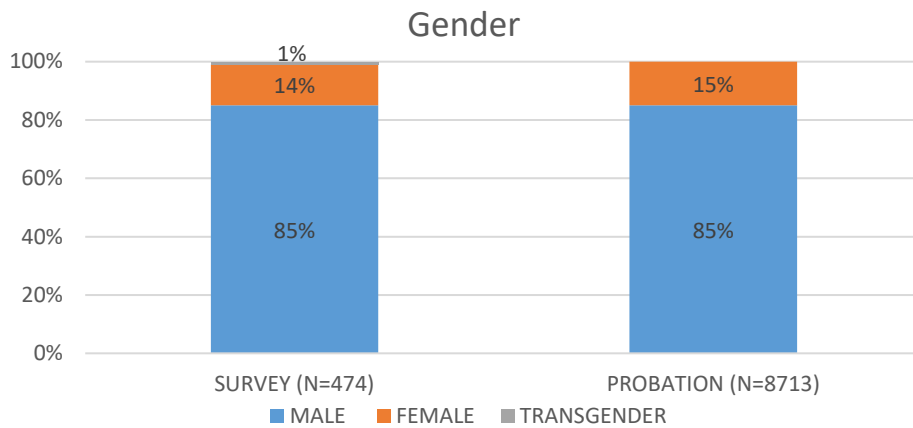
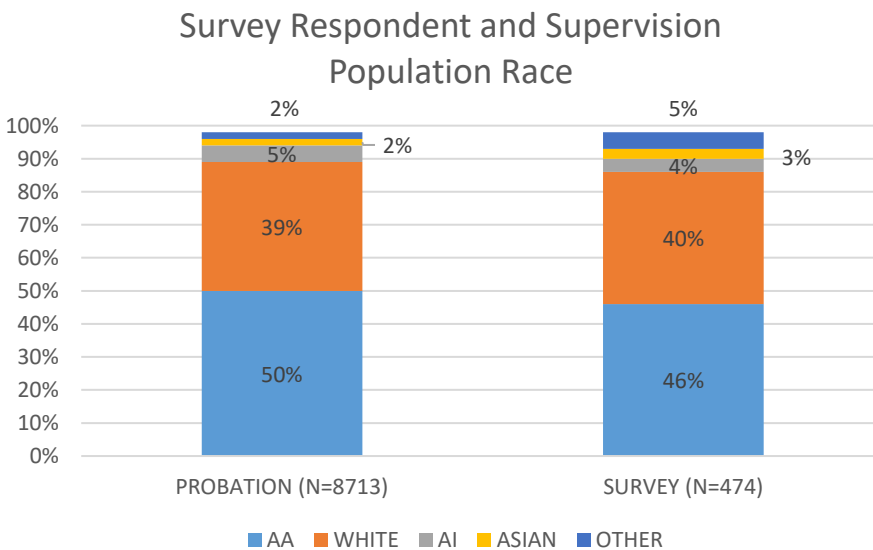


Figure 2 shows survey respondents and overall population were very similar with regard to race. About half of the clients in both groups identified as black (survey = 46% vs. population = 50%) and roughly four in ten clients in both groups identified as white.

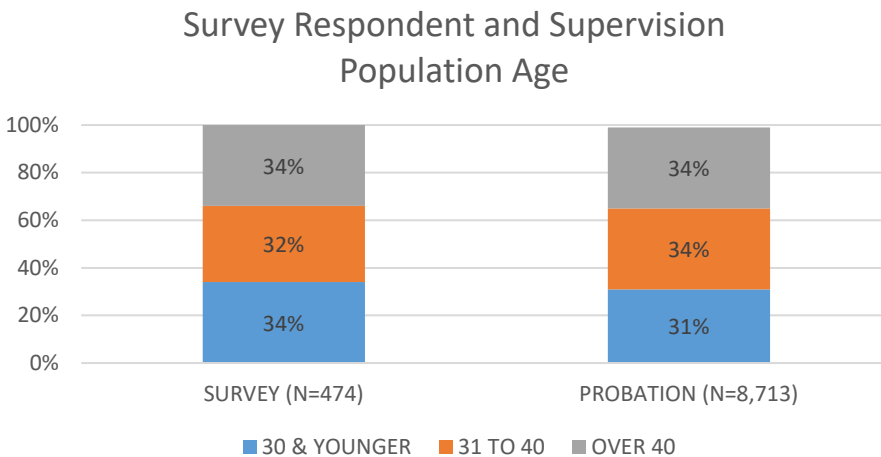
Figure 2



Seven percent of survey respondents reported their ethnicity as Hispanic/Latino/Latina.

About a third of the respondents and the overall population fall into each age category. (Figure 3)

Figure 3



In addition to the standard age, race and gender variables, two additional questions were asked which could potentially impact a working relationship: primary language spoken and length of time a client has been working with their current probation officer.

It was surmised that clients who primarily speak a language other than English may have a more challenging time building a working relationship with their probation officer. Almost all respondents (93%) reported that English was the predominate language spoken in the home.<sup>1</sup> Because so few clients speak languages other than English, additional analysis to see the impact of language on the working relationship was not possible.

It was also important to consider the length of time a client has been working with their current probation officer. Almost two-thirds (64%) of the clients surveyed reported that they have been working with their current probation officer for less than a year. About 3 in 10 (29%) clients reported working with their current probation officer for 1 to 2 years.

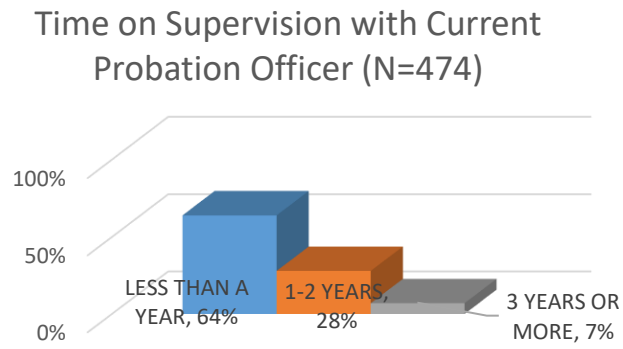
Analysis was completed to see if clients' who had been working with their probation officer longer had a different relationship than those clients who were just beginning supervision with their current officer. There was no difference in client responses based on length of time with their current probation officer. This reaffirms the findings of Tatman and Love

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<sup>1</sup> The primary other languages spoken in the homes were Spanish, Hmong, Somali and Ukrainian.

(2010) when they concluded “the length of time a PO has supervised a client, does not appear to influence the WAI-SR total scores.”

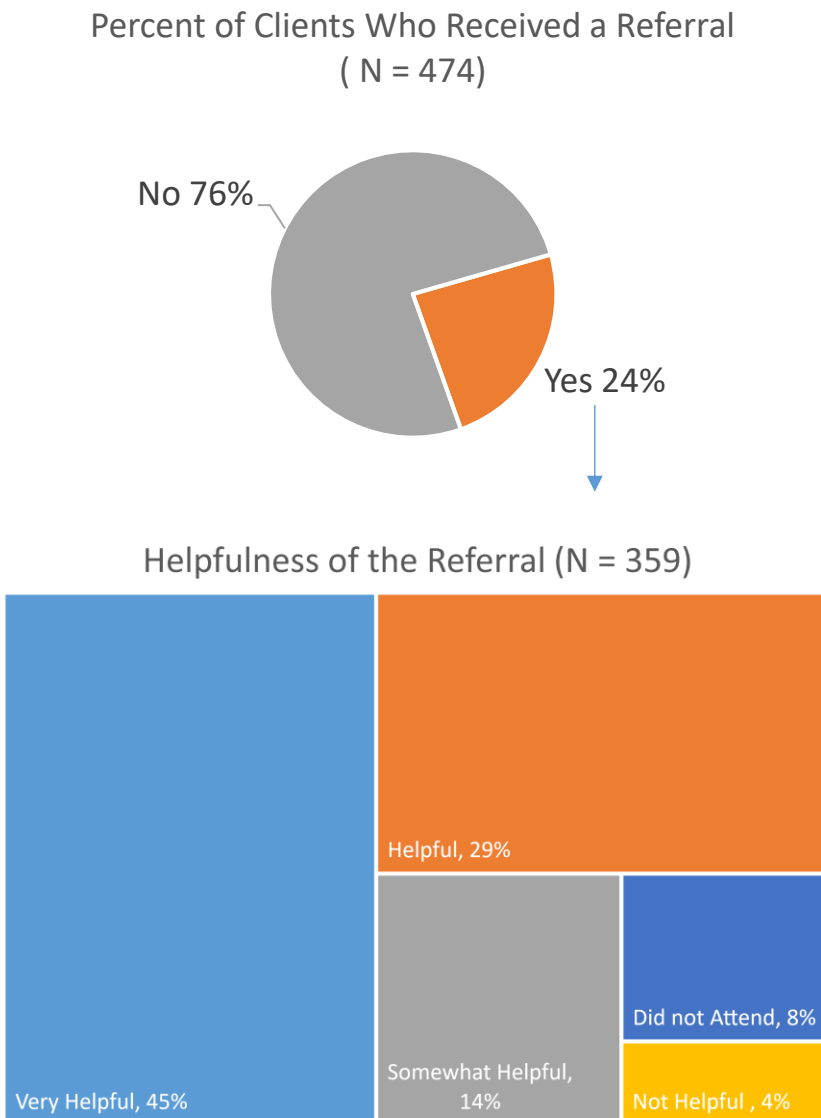
Figure 4



## Referral to a community agency

Seventy-six percent of clients were referred by their probation officer to a community agency or program. Of those who received a referral, almost three-quarters (74%) found the referral to be very helpful or helpful. Slightly less than one in ten clients who received a referral (8%) did not attend. (Figure 5)

Figure 5



## Survey Findings

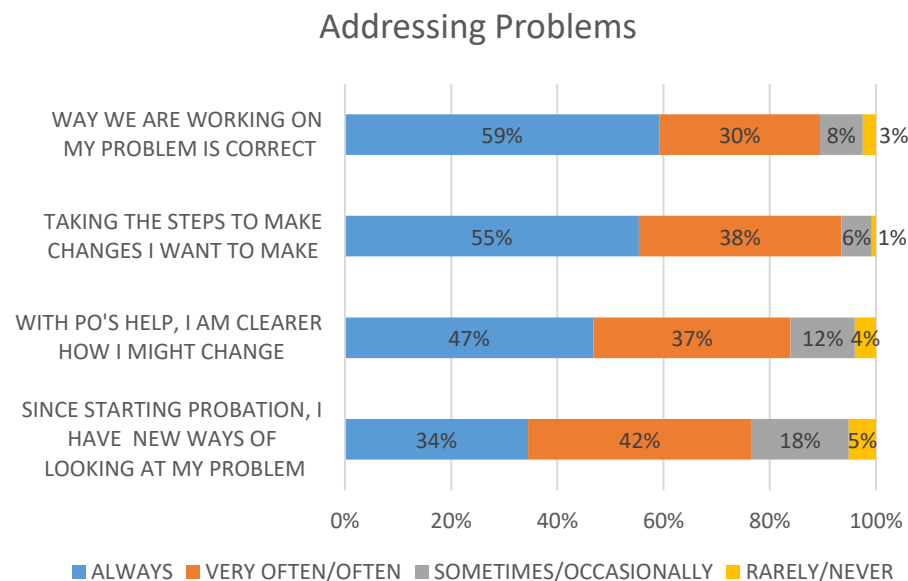
Overall, clients expressed a strong working alliance with their probation officers. Between 76% and 94% of clients said that they and their PO always, very often/often engage in activities that are related to a positive relationship.

The report is organized into three sections; how well the client and probation officer are working on the clients' problems; how well they are working on their goals; and their ability to build a positive working relationship. When applicable, significant differences based on client demographics are indicated.<sup>2</sup>

### Addressing Problems

The following four statements focus on the client's perception and understanding of their problem and their progress on making positive changes in their lives.

Figure 6



<sup>2</sup> There were no significant differences in the strength of the relationship based on client gender, age, or length of supervision with the current probation officer. Differences based on race and whether the client received a referral are discussed in the appropriate sections of the report.

Figure 6 shows that approximately 9 out of 10 respondents reported they are always or very often/often taking the steps necessary to make the changes they want in their lives (93%) and are correctly working on their issue (89%).

Eighty-four percent of respondents feel they always, very often/often are clear on how they might change, while slightly more than three-quarters (76%) of respondents always, very often/often state that with their probation officer’s help, they have new ways of looking at their problem.

Overall, clients who have received a referral to a community program from their probation officer (N = 359) were significantly more likely than clients who did not receive a referral (N = 115) to answer always to the following statements related to the tasks of supervision:

- Since starting probation, I have new ways of looking at my problems (referral - 40% always vs. no referral - 18% always)
- With my PO’s help, I am clearer now as to how I might be able to change (referral – 52% always vs. no referral – 31%)
- I believe the way we are working with my problems is correct (referral – 64% always vs. no referral – 44% always)
- I feel I am taking the steps to help me to accomplish the changes that I want to make (referral – 59% always vs. no referral – 45% always)

Clients of color were more likely to answer always regarding the following statements related to the tasks of supervision, while white clients were more likely to answer very often or often:

	Always		Very Often or Often	
	Clients of Color (N = 284)	White Clients (N = 190)	Clients of Color (N=284)	White Clients (N=190)
<b>Since starting probation, I have new ways of looking at my problems</b>	42%	24%	36%	52%
<b>With my PO's help, I am clearer now as to how I might be able to change</b>	55%	34%	32%	45%

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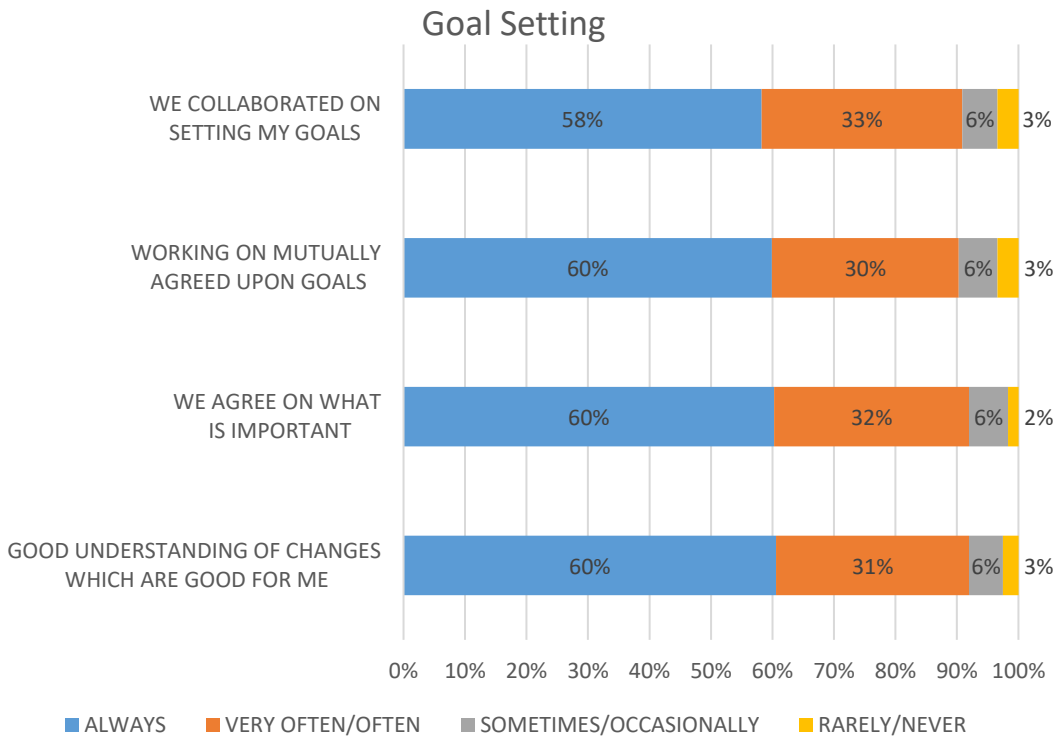


	Always		Very Often or Often	
	Clients of Color (N = 284)	White Clients (N = 190)	Clients of Color (N=284)	White Clients (N=190)
<b>I believe the way we are working with my problem is correct</b>	68%	46%	23%	41%
<b>I feel I am taking the steps to help me to accomplish the changes that I want to make</b>	61%	47%	33%	45%

## Goal Setting

The following four statements of the WAI-SR focus on client agreement with their probation officer about their goals.

Figure 7



Approximately six out of 10 clients surveyed stated they always collaborate on goals, work on mutually agreed upon goals, agree on what is important, and understand which changes are good for them. More than nine out of 10 surveyed clients responded always, very often/often to these statements.

Clients who received a community referral (N = 359) were significantly more likely than those who did not receive a referral to state always when asked the following statement about goal setting:

- My PO and I are working towards mutually agreed upon goals (referral - 66% always vs. no referral - 41% always)
- We agree on what is important for me to work on (referral - 65% always vs. no referral - 47% always)
- My PO and I collaborate on setting goals for my probation (referral - 65% always vs. no referral - 38% always)
- We have a good understand of the kind of changes that would be good for me (referral - 65% always vs. no referral - 46% always)

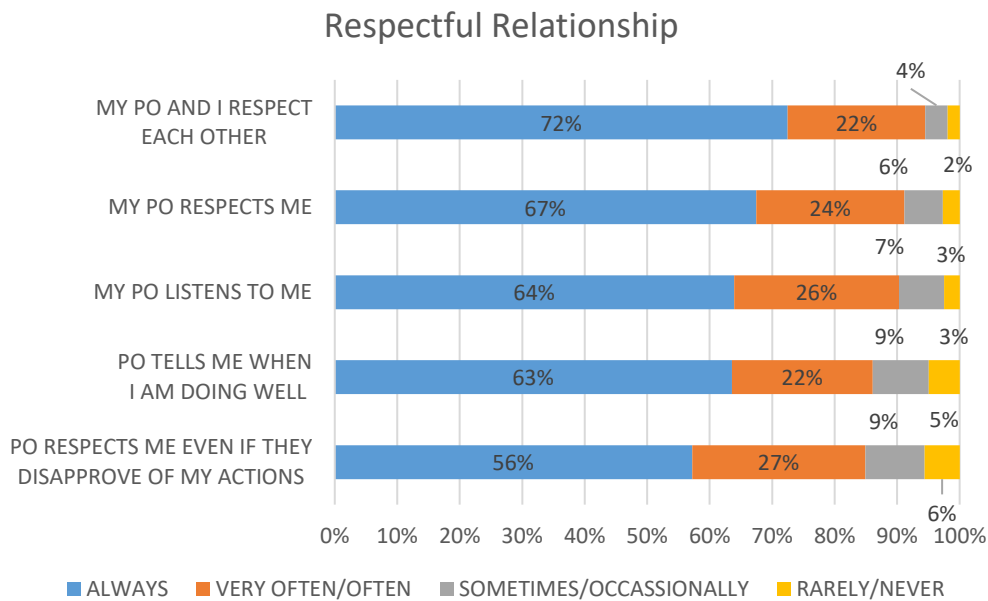
Clients of color were more likely to answer always regarding the following statements related to goals, while white clients were more likely to answer very often or often:

	Always		Very Often or Often	
	Clients of Color (N=284)	White Clients (N=190)	Clients of Color (N=284)	White Clients (N=190)
<b>We agree on what is important for me to work on</b>	66%	51%	26%	40%
<b>My PO and I collaborate on setting goals for my probation</b>	66%	47%	26%	43%
<b>We have a good understanding of the kind of changes that would be good for me</b>	70%	47%	23%	44%

## Respectful Relationship

The statements below focus on how clients perceive the respectfulness of the relationship between themselves and their probation officer. Four of the questions in this section had the highest always responses in the entire survey.

Figure 8



Ninety percent or more of respondents responded always or very often/often to the following statements:

- My PO and I respect each other (94%)
- My PO respects me (91%)
- My PO listens to me (90%)

Eighty-five percent of clients reported that their probation officer always or very often/often tells them when they are doing well. A similar percentage (83%) of clients reported that their probation officers always or very often/often respects them even when they disapprove of their actions.

Clients who received a referral for a community program were more likely to respond always to the questions directly related to their relationship respect:

- I believe my PO respects me (referral - 73% always vs. no referral - 50% always)
- I feel that my PO really listens to me (referral – 70% vs. no referral – 46% always)
- My PO shows me respect even when I do things he/she does not approve of (referral – 62% vs. no referral – 41% always)
- My PO and I respect each other (referral – 79% vs. no referral – 53% always)
- My PO tells me when I am doing well (referral – 70% vs. no referral – 44% always)

Clients of color were more likely to respond always to the following statements related to the relationship with their probation officer, while white clients were more likely to respond very often or often:

	Always		Very Often or Often	
	Clients of Color (N=284)	White Clients (N=190)	Clients of Color (N=284)	White Clients (N=190)
<b>I believe my PO respects me</b>	74%	57%	18%	33%
<b>I feel that my PO really listens to me</b>	69%	56%	21%	34%
<b>My PO and I respect each other</b>	78%	65%	17%	29%
<b>My PO tells me when I am doing well</b>	70%	54%	17%	31%

## Conclusion

Overall, the results of the survey indicate clients have a very positive working relationship with their probation officers. For 8 of the 13 statements on the WAIS-SR, 90% or more of clients responded always or very often/often. The most positive responses were surrounding the relationship between the probation officer and the client with the clients feeling respected and listened to by their probation officer.

Clients feel like they and their probation officer agree upon what the main issues are and how to address them. The clients believe they are working on the appropriate changes and these are collaborative decisions made with their probation officer.

There was not a significant difference in responses by gender, age or length of time working with a probation officer. However, clients who are referred to a community agency are significantly more positive in their attitude towards their probation officer.

People of color who took the survey were more likely to respond always to the various aspects of their relationship, while white clients were more likely to respond very often/often.

While still overwhelmingly positive, the responses related to helping clients be clear on how they might change and providing new ways to see problems suggest that this could be an area of improvement.

## Recommendation

Client surveys offer a unique opportunity to provide insight into the working relationship between client and probation officer. Knowing how well client and probation officers are working together is foundational in achieving positive client outcomes. This report represents DOCCR's first attempt at gathering this information and provides a strong baseline for future measurement. Because of this, it is recommended that the survey be completed again to measure the strength of relationship over time and engage clients about other issues related to their experiences with DOCCR.

## Method

The Working Alliance Inventory-Short Revised (WAI-SR) was selected as the assessment tool because it has been validated for a probation population (Tatman and Love, 2010).

For this study, PPE staff approached clients on high risk caseloads at various probation locations and in specialty courts to ask for participation in the survey. It was important that clients understood that their probation officer would never see their individual answers, so no identifying client information was gathered. Clients provided their probation officer's name,

answered the 13 survey questions on an iPad and provided some additional demographic information.

To ensure a variety of clients were offered the opportunity to participate, surveys were conducted on varying days and times to maximize client availability.

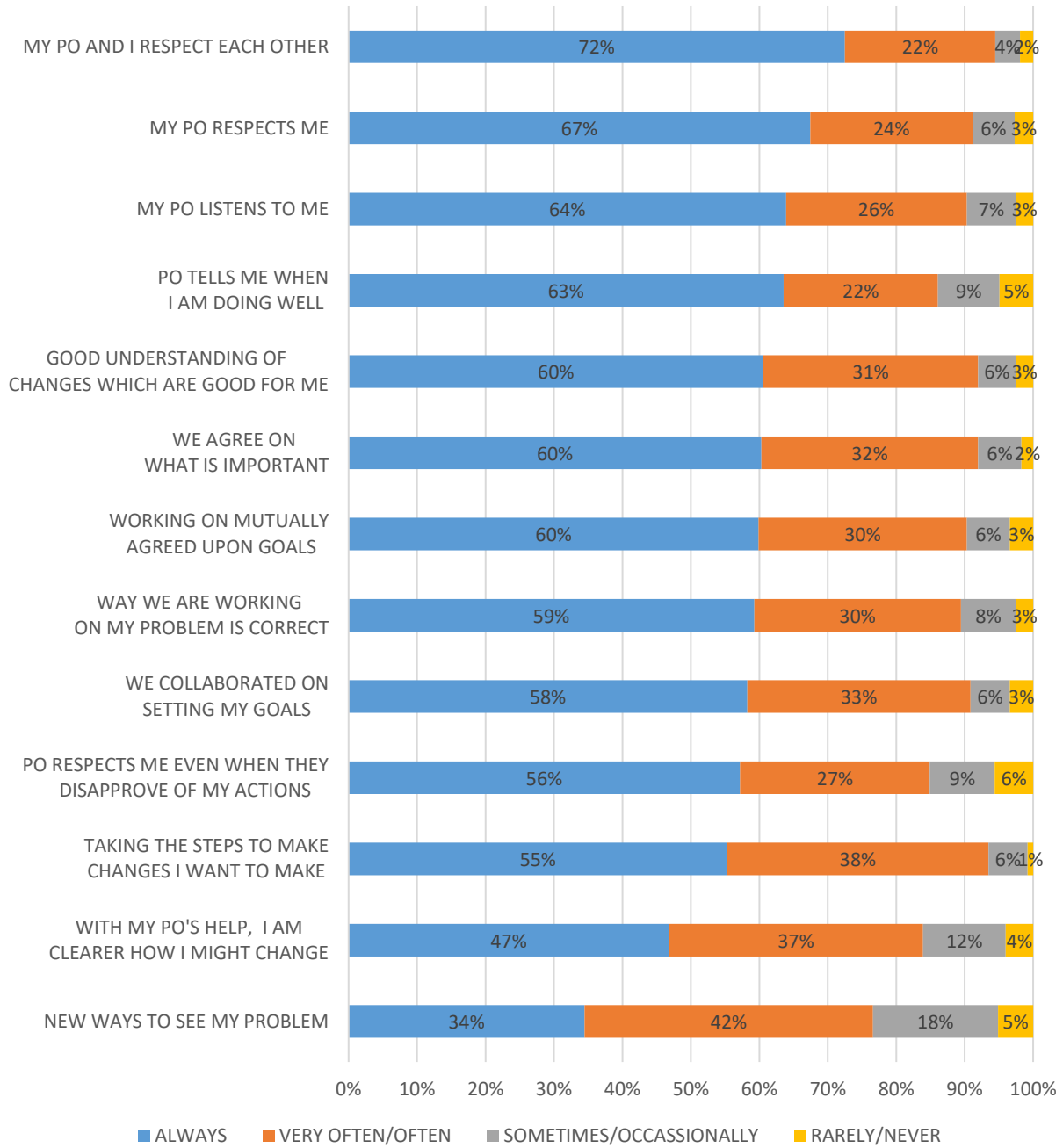
The WAI-SR has 12 questions designed to measure client perception of their working relationship with their probation officer. In addition to these standard questions, a question from the Maricopa County (Arizona) Corrections survey was added to assess whether clients receiving and utilizing community agencies differed from clients who were not referred to a community agency. PPE also added a section on demographics to the survey to analyze responses by client groups.

Of the 610 clients approached to complete the survey, 474 (78%) clients agreed to participate. Many clients who declined did so because they had not met with their probation officer enough times to formulate an informed opinion.

Of the 474 respondents, 311 (66%) were on traditional probation, 154 (32%) were on supervised release and nine (2%) were on intensive supervised release.

# APPENDIX: Overall Statement Responses

## Responses to all WAI-SR Statement



## References

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