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### *Accountability Under a Contracting Regime*

April Walters

University of Utah

Winner of the Pi Alpha Alpha Student Manuscript (Masters Level)

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### *Adding Guns to the Workplace Equation: A Description of Texas Department of Criminal Justice— Parole Division Staff Perceptions Regarding Officers Carrying Firearms in the State of Texas*

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*Adding Guns to the Workplace Equation:  
A Description of Texas Department of Criminal Justice—  
Parole Division Staff Perceptions Regarding Officers  
Carrying Firearms in the State of Texas*  
**Carey A. Welebob**

*"I've been in this field for over 10 years and I've never needed a gun. What would make me think I need one now? We're supposed to be helping these people." (Texas Department of Criminal Justice-Parole Division unit supervisor)*

*"I've been in law enforcement for 15 years and I would never go into some areas of town where you people do home visits without a weapon." (Austin Police Department Lieutenant)*

*"You mean to tell me that parole officers in Texas don't carry guns? I thought that everyone there rode a horse and had a gun strapped to his side--especially the people who have to deal with criminals on a daily basis." (US Coast Guard Captain)<sup>1</sup>*

When people are unfamiliar with the fields of community supervision,<sup>2</sup> they tend to assume that parole officers are similar to law enforcement personnel and that they carry guns for protection. Perhaps this assumption is made because parole officers are in daily contact with violent, convicted felons—even supervising offenders<sup>3</sup> on their turf, including subsidized projects, ghettos and rural homes miles from a nearby city or town. There is an inherent safety risk for these officers simply because of the clientele and the nature of the job. Some would then ask why the standard paradigm of the parole field does not include firearms.

Traditionally, across states, agency philosophy and supervision techniques have opposed the use of guns by community supervision field staff. Since philosophies and techniques are changing, guns are being introduced into the workplace (Brown, 1996:27) and provoking conflict between staff. Overall, the topic of officers<sup>4</sup> carrying firearms is one filled with opposing opinions and emotional overtones. Opponents and proponents of carrying firearms have convincing reasons for supporting their position; however, at organizational and managerial levels the introduction of guns in a non-carrying field has the potential for strong consequences. Introducing guns may

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<sup>1</sup> Each of the statements listed was stated to the author within a month period (April, 1998) before implementation of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice-Parole Division's firearm policy.

<sup>2</sup> The term "community supervision" includes the probation and parole supervision fields; for this paper's purposes, the parole field is specifically addressed.

<sup>3</sup> For clarity, the individuals on either probation or parole will be referred to as "offenders" unless a reference or quote from the literature specifically states otherwise. Numerous names are given to the individuals who are supervised by officers; to name a few: "clients," "probationers," "releasees," and "parolees."

accelerate conflict within staff roles and even affect the culture in which officers have traditionally supervised offenders. More than any other tool, guns have the potential for changing the overall workplace environment. Within the national field of community supervision, it is still too early to evaluate the long range implications of officers carrying firearms (Champion, 1996:428). Unfortunately there is little empirical data examining the perceptions of staff about whether officers should carry or not carry firearms on duty.

Texas recently adopted a new firearm carry policy for parole officers. This applied research project attempts to capture and address some of the issues that have surfaced within the Texas Department of Criminal Justice—Parole Division since implementation of the policy. The purpose of this research is two-fold. The first is to describe the safety perceptions of Parole Division staff since implementation of the firearms policy within the Division and the second is to explore possible officer supervisory style changes since implementation of the firearms policy within the Division.

## **THE PAROLE SYSTEM AND ITS AUTHORITY**

As a community supervision method, parole deals with offenders on the back-end of the system. This imprisonment is usually a reflection of offense severity or criminal history of the offender (Abadinsky, 1991:295). Parole agencies are responsible for compiling information about incarcerated offenders and giving it to a decision-making authority, such as a parole board (Allen, Eskridge, Latessa, and Vito, 1985:120). The parole board then has the authority to either suspend or to release (parole) the sentence of the offender (Allen, et al, 1985:120). Once administratively released, parole officers then enforce the rules and conditions of the offender's supervision as set by the decision-making authority. They are responsible for conducting office, home and field visits and submitting reports and recommendations regarding the offender's adjustment in the community while he is serving his sentence.

### **Legislative and Judicial Authority**

Agencies charged with supervising convicted felons and misdemeanants receive their authority and direction from legislative mandates and internal agency policies and procedures. POs employed by these agencies, whether they are federal, state or local, then follow rules and regulations as allowed by law. Few public employees are exposed to an inherent danger risk simply because of the nature of the job. Because the perception of risk to officers is increasing, demands for safety have not only taken an informal tone but have also taken a more formal

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<sup>4</sup> The terms "PO" or "officer" are used referring to either parole or probation officers. Specific terms (e.g.: "parole officer" or "probation

approach involving legislative changes, collective bargaining agreements and court cases (Smith, 1991:38). One way officers are given the authority to carry firearms comes from the legislative branch. When agencies are making the decision to arm, they must look at legislative intent, how the statutes are defined and the agency's purpose. Administrators must also examine statutory authority to determine if the agency's scope is limited or general in nature (Stiles, 1996:27). Agencies cannot exercise authority unrecognized by law and administration needs to be careful in this respect (Stiles, 1996:28). There is little need to debate the firearms issue if the legislature has authorized officers to carry firearms.

Officers are also be given the authority to carry firearms through the judicial branch of government. Officers in California were not allowed to carry firearms on duty so the state parole agents association sued the agency for the right to carry<sup>5</sup> (Brown, 1990:22). Conflict and safety concerns were the basis for the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) 1978 class action lawsuit (DelGrosso, 1997:46; Smith, 1991:38). The department maintained that the work was not dangerous, as demonstrated by a good safety record to date (Smith, 1991:39). "The court rejected out of hand the department's safety record, labeling it as merely good fortune and pointed out in its decision that it is not necessary to wait until someone is seriously injured or killed before steps must be taken to provide a safe workplace" (Smith, 1991:39). The court found the parole officer's job to be inherently hazardous and ordered the department to take steps to increase officer safety, including the option to arm with firearms (Smith, 1991:39). It should also be noted that even prior to the court ruling, many California agents either refused to carry out mandated enforcement policies or unlawfully carried firearms while on duty<sup>6</sup> (DelGrosso, 1997:46).

### **Administrative Authority**

Once authority to carry firearms is given by either the legislative or the judicial branches of government, parole and probation agencies must take steps to further clarify officers' authority to carry through policy implementation. The mission statement should reflect the agency's authority as the legislature or the courts have given it. Once the mission statement has been identified, consideration of the firearms issue must be made with respect to this overall agency mission. The scope of authority to carry a firearm needs to be in alignment with the

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officer") are used when the literature indicates such or if the concepts/issues apply only to one group.

<sup>5</sup> California State Employee's Association and Charles Swim v. J.J. Enemoto et al., 53863 Superior Court, Shasta County, August 17, 1978 (Brown, 1990:22)

<sup>6</sup> This is actually a common practice among officers who are not authorized to carry firearms (Brown, 1990:22; Champion, 1996:429). There were several officers who covertly carried firearms when the author was a parole officer between 1989 and 1993; during this time Texas officers were prohibited from carrying firearms on duty.

agency's mission. Agencies can either mandate weapons or give officers the option to carry. Some agencies may also only allow weapons in certain situations, e.g., fieldwork, making arrests or transporting offenders (DeGrosso, 1997:45).

According to Howard Abadinsky (1991:314), agency policy regarding firearms falls in to one of three categories:

1. Officers are not permitted to carry firearms at any time based either on state law or agency policy.
2. Officers are by statute peace/law enforcement officers, but the agency either restricts or discourages the carrying of weapons.
3. Officers are by statute peace/law enforcement officers and the agency permits or requires all qualified personnel to carry firearms.

By reviewing other agencies' policies, administrators can get a sense of direction, however, they also need to develop a final policy that specifically reflects the philosophy and intent of the department (Veit and Smith, 1993:17). Failure to do this has allowed firearms to unnecessarily impact the mission of the department. The firearm has the potential (more than any other 'tool') to disproportionately impact the role/function of the agency (Veit and Smith, 1993:17). If addressed by policy and reinforced by other aspects of the program, the firearm should not control an agency's philosophy or mission (Veit and Smith, 1993:17). Policy issues about how to handle the position of firearms depends on factors such as officer expectations, desired agency outcomes and the most effective and efficient ways to achieve these goals and outcomes (Paparozzi and Martin, 1996:38).

### **SAFETY FOR OFFICERS ON THE STREET**

This section provides some of the fundamental reasons people argue for the arming of POs. It also provides the background and framework for the first research question. Do officer safety perceptions increase when firearms are introduced into the work role? Whether an agency is public or private, worker safety is considered an important right which is expected by all employees. Since officers deal directly with convicted offenders, there is little disagreement that the job contains unique risks. The question is *how* to address officer safety and *why* changes are needed if firearms have traditionally not been used by Texas community corrections.

#### **Risks to Officer Safety**

The personal safety of POs is a growing concern in community corrections (Smith, 1991:38; APPA, 1994:35). Literature reveals that not only is crime and societal violence on the increase, but violence against symbols of authority is increasing as well.<sup>7</sup> POs are at a higher risk and are exposed to greater risks than in the past

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example: Abadinsky, 1991:313; APPA, 1994:35; Paparozzi and Martin, 1996:39; Champion 1996:428.

(DelGrosso, 1997:45). If parole is considered to be a law enforcement role in the community, then the officers may be at an increased risk for violent acts (Paparozzi and Martin, 1996:39).

Historical data about violence against parole and probation officers is limited. Reports and surveys examining PO victimization are recent (Welch, 1989:4). In a 1988 Pennsylvania survey, William Parsonage found 24% of the active officers who responded had been threatened, assaulted or subjected to intimidation within the preceding 12 months<sup>8</sup> (Welch, 1989:4). In 1989, Welch (p. 4) stated that violence against officers was higher than previously thought. Violence against officers took the form of anonymous calls, verbal harassment and physical assaults. In 1993, the Federal Probation and Pretrial Officers Association conducted a nationwide survey to determine the victimization of officers since 1980 (Champion, 1996:429). The goal of the research was to identify the types and number of serious assaults or attempted serious assaults that occurred while the officer was on duty or when the offender knew that the person was an officer (DelGrosso, 1997:46). The research showed 1818 serious physical assaults and 792 attempted assaults over the 13 year time span (Champion, 1996:429; DelGrosso, 1997:46).<sup>9</sup> In addition to victimization, POs are concerned about the offender population for which they are accountable.

Parole officers of the 1990s are subject to a newer population of more violent offenders (Smith, 1991:114; Champion 1996:428). Welch (1989:4) states that there are more violent offenders released due to prison overcrowding; or, because of overcrowding, violent offenders stay on probation longer. Gang violence has also escalated which influences the offender population (Welch, 1989:4). Other problems with the offender population include drug and alcohol use, which leads to more frequent testing (Champion, 1996:429; APPA, 1994:35; DelGrosso 1997:45), more serious instant offenses<sup>10</sup> and prior convictions (DelGrosso, 1997:45). In addition, numerous offenders are also armed themselves (DelGrosso, 1997:45).

The diversification of the offender population has always been an obstacle for community corrections, but now that violent juvenile offenders are classified as adults, POs will have to use even more of their skills to ensure appropriate supervision as well as safety. This skill use will be of the utmost importance since officers are also finding themselves out in the community more.

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<sup>8</sup> DelGrosso (1997:45) stated that the 1988 survey by Parsonage and Bushey indicated that more than half of all officers will be the victim of assault or other hazardous incident while they are employed by the probation agency.

<sup>9</sup> Even though the survey was national in scope, there were several major metropolitan areas that did not respond, leading the researchers to conclude that the results may under-represent the actual number of assaults occurring within the field (Champion, 1996: 429; DelGrosso, 1997:46).

<sup>10</sup> An "instant offense" refers to the specific crime which placed the offender on community supervision.

## **Involvement in the Community**

As previously noted, POs are often referred to as “community supervision officers.” As the name implies, these officers are expected to supervise offenders within the community—on the offender’s turf. There is a high demand *by the public* to hold officers accountable for enhancing the level and effectiveness of supervision provided to the offenders in the community (APPA, 1994:35).

Specific legislation and agency policies often require officers to execute contacts at the offender's residence which requires the contacts to be unscheduled or even at odd hours<sup>11</sup> (DelGrosso, 1997:45). POs feel more endangered in high crime areas, especially during the evening hours (Abadinsky, 1991:313). In addition, offenders often live in communities which do not support officer authority (Smith, 1991:38; APPA, 1994:35). Even though officers have to conduct face-to-face interviews with offenders in high crime areas, their fears are generally not from the offender or the offender's family (this is usually a good relationship and may even be a safety net for the officer) (Welch, 1989:9). Their fears stem from the community itself including the offender's friends or neighbors (Welch, 1989:9; Champion 1996:428). Further, rural officers are generally hours away from back-up or law enforcement help (DelGrosso, 1997:45).

PO risk is also influenced by local law enforcement agencies’ willingness and legal authority to accept responsibility<sup>12</sup> for community supervision violations (Paparozzi and Martin, 1996:38). Abadinsky (1991:313) states that if law enforcement agencies are unwilling or unable to provide warrant services and officers cannot make their own arrests, then offenders will not be arrested on a violation warrant.<sup>13</sup> Safety concerns are higher when parole agencies are expected to “take care of their own” which means using agency staff to do risk management and law enforcement duties (Paparozzi and Martin, 1996:38).

## **Officer Perceptions**

Aside from on the job risks, officers’ perception of safety influences their confidence and effectiveness in the field. Firearms may enhance safety perceptions. There is undoubtedly a need for increased safety perception.

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<sup>11</sup> Texas Parole Division policy requires that officers utilize a "flex schedule" and schedule all offender visits around the offender's work hours; officers may not ask offenders to miss work in order to make an appointment with the parole officer. During the summer, officers may have to work very odd hours in order to complete the required contacts on each case. As a parole officer, the author often conducted visits at 6:00 am or even at 8:00 pm in order to meet the offender at his residence.

<sup>12</sup> Warrant and enforcement services.

<sup>13</sup> Violation warrants may be issued for criminal or technical rules of release. In some jurisdictions, law enforcement officers will generally arrest an offender if he has a criminal court warrant but not if the warrant is solely for technical allegations (e.g., failure to report or contact with the victim). One of the problems with not being able to execute these warrants is that the offender stays on the streets. Protection of the public cannot occur when an offender is violating his release, is deemed a threat to the community and cannot be arrested on a violation warrant. Unfortunately, Texas has also struggled with this problem in the past and has not been able to have parole violators arrested by local law enforcement agencies; sometimes the decision of whether or not to arrest offenders is based on funding for the arresting agency itself.

In Texas, a survey regarding officers' experiences with intimidation, threats and assaults indicated that 38% reported being intimidated by offenders in the office (Thornton and Shireman, 1993:35). Similarly, a New York State study surveyed all probation staff and found 51% were fearful in the office (Thornton and Shireman, 1993:35).

Arming POs may be one solution to the perception of safety risk in the field and office. Welch (1989:9) reported that in California, officers found guns enhance feelings of psychological safety. As one officer said, "It is a psychological relief to know I have something here that I can protect myself with" (Welch, 1989:9). The Texas Department of Criminal Justice-Parole Division (TDCJ-PD) Safety Committee linked enhanced safety perceptions to increased confidence (Ballard, 1996:53). Brown (1996:74) cautions that officers may experience an overdependence on the firearm itself. Over-reliance on equipment may be hazardous if the firearm is not available to the officer or if the firearm malfunctions. Increased safety perceptions are important, however, even if given authority to carry, not all POs will carry because they may fear that the personal liability of carrying a firearm outweighs the guarantee of a safe workplace.<sup>14</sup>

### **Liability**

Regardless of whether officers carry firearms, there is always the possibility of liability. Liability may occur if an officer discharges his weapon in violation of the law or agency policy, whether the incident is intentional or accidental (DelGrosso, 1997:45, 47). Liability may also occur if the agency restricts firearm carrying privileges to chosen officers. If an officer is denied access to a firearm and the end result is his death, then the agency is exposed to potential lawsuits. If POs are armed, some administration and officers fear problems such as careless discharge, personal weapons turned on them, or inappropriate use of deadly force (Stiles, 1996:27). Although officers are only justified in using enough force to prevent injury or death to self or others (Brown, 1996:77), there still exists the possibility that in a high stress situation that an officer will escalate beyond when is reasonably necessary. Herein is where potential liability lies for officers who are authorized to carry. If agencies do not arm their officers, then other liability issues surface (Abadinsky, 1991:313). For example, if POs are not allowed to carry and are injured on duty, then they could sue their department for not protecting them from risk. But if officers are allowed to carry, but misuse their weapons or hurt other people, the officers and their supervisors could be sued for negligence (Welch, 1989:8). The liability issue is problematic because lawsuit risks are high regardless of firearm carry policy.

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<sup>14</sup> Even if officers do carry a firearm on duty, there is never a "guarantee" of a safe workplace. No defensive weapon can promise safety.



## **OFFICER SUPERVISORY STYLES**

Aside from safety perceptions firearms in the workplace may alter officer supervisory styles. The responsibilities of POs require officers to assume many roles<sup>15</sup> (Abadinsky 1991:304) toward offenders because of the diverse needs of the population and the nature of the job. Within community supervision, there are two primary roles that influence PO supervisory styles. The two roles are social work and law enforcement.

### **Officers as Social Workers<sup>16</sup>--Reintegrating the Offender**

Traditionally, POs have adopted the social work role. When POs act as social workers, they are operating under the therapeutic or “medical/treatment” model. Under this model, offenders are viewed as socially “ill” and are “treated by caseworkers with a combination of therapy, social engineering or manipulation, personality restructuring and other 'habilitative' processes” (Smith, 1991:38). POs are viewed as advocates of the offender and the offender does not view the officer as a threat to his freedom (Smith, 1991:38; Thornton and Shireman, 1993:8). In this traditional approach, the officer acts as the offender’s helper by providing community resources, guidance, and by reducing the barriers to reintegrate the offender into the community (Brown, 1989:194). The helping role was also presented and emphasized in the 1973 Supreme Court case *Gagnon v. Scarpelli* (Brown, 1989:194; Brown, 1990:21). In commenting on the case, Brown (1989:194) notes that “revoking probation was seen as 'a failure of supervision,' as the purpose of supervision was to successfully work with offenders in the community.” The “social work” treatment model dominated and, hence, the issue of safety was virtually ignored by the larger profession of community corrections. Also, the social work model was “office administered” therefore POs were seldom exposed to the more dangerous community interaction (Smith, 1991:38).

During the late 1980s and 1990s, the public has typically demanded more punishment and incarceration of offenders rather than “rehabilitative” models and approaches (Smith, 1991:38). This attitude has extended to probation and parole, which are viewed as an extension or an expansion of the criminal justice prison system (Smith, 1991:38). Thornton and Shireman (1993:16) assert that the role of the officer is changing and there is no longer the same kind of emphasis on treatment. The public is demanding protection first and then rehabilitation.

### **Officers as Law Enforcement—Protecting the Community**

The law enforcement role of community supervision is also referred to by several names: “surveillance,” “control,” “accountability,” and “authoritarian.” The National Conference on Parole gave a classic surveillance

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<sup>15</sup> For an in-depth review of the eleven identified work roles of POs, refer to Abadinsky (1991:304, 305).

definition: “Surveillance is that activity of the parole officer which utilizes watchfulness, checking, and verification of certain behavior of a parolee without contributing to a helping relationship with him” (Allen, Eskridge, Latessa, and Vito, 1985:128). Increased surveillance activities by POs changes their role from rehabilitative to that of a “proactive enforcer.” Parole work is more adversarial (Papy, 1996:23; Thornton and Shireman, 1993:8). Additional adversarial tasks include “on-site home and work visits, searches, drug testing, installing electronic surveillance equipment, crisis intervention and making arrests” (Smith, 1991:38). Depending upon the agency’s mission and policy requirements, officers are expected to conduct these adversarial tasks regardless of administrative steps taken to ensure officer safety, e.g., issuance of firearms while on duty. Greater emphasis on adversarial enforcement techniques generates more concern for an officer’s safety (Thornton and Shireman, 1993:8). If offenders view their PO as an adversary, they are more likely to be aggressive thereby increasing the potential for officer victimization (Thornton and Shireman, 1993:8).

The appropriate role of firearms among POs has sparked debate since most law enforcement duties involve guns (Paparozzi and Martin, 1996:38). If an officer cannot immediately arrest an offender who is involved in criminal behavior then the community supervision agency is not providing an adequate level of service or community protection (Abadinsky, 1991:315).<sup>17</sup> Abadinsky (1991:316) also maintains that arrest abilities do not interfere with the PO’s capacity to do a thorough job. Usually because of the relationship with the offender, officers make arrests or perform searches without hostility or tension that often accompanies the arrests made by other law enforcement authorities (Abadinsky, 1991:316).

### **Role Conflict**

Obviously the roles of social work and law enforcement have the potential to be polar opposites. The introduction of firearms into the workplace has the potential to crystallize this role conflict (Sigler and McGraw, 1985:28; Sigler, 1988:123). Role conflict occurs when someone “is subjected to two or more contradictory expectations whose stipulations the individual cannot simultaneously meet” (Brown, 1990:22). Officers may not feel they can meet the expectations of judges, supervisors, parole boards, colleges, the public, or law enforcement<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> For more literature on the social worker role, see Sluder, Shearer and Potts, 1991:3-11; Brown, 1989:196; Champion, 1996:428.

<sup>17</sup> Abadinsky (1991:316) states that POs should be able to immediately arrest an offender who violates special conditions such as frequenting play areas or drinking and driving. Law enforcement officers may not be able to arrest individuals for special conditions because the offender may not be breaking the law; but POs with arrest authority can take the offender into custody because he serving an administrative release and has violated set conditions of this release (parole).

<sup>18</sup> This list could actually go on and on, to include any person who has a stake in or is a customer of the community supervision system, even including the expectations of the offender or of the officer himself.

all at the same time.<sup>19</sup> Paparozzi and Martin (1996:38) ascertain that when the officer fills the role of surveillance, the perception of the public may be one of the enforcer of the law. Once established, this role is difficult to change. This is the case whether officers act as enforcers themselves or broker with other agencies (Paparozzi and Martin, 1996:38). Although still preliminary, empirical evidence suggests officers are able to cope with role conflict when firearms are introduced (Sigler, 1988:121-128).

Abadinsky (1991:315) notes that if there is a role conflict, then it is probably there in many professions--the true professional finds a way to integrate various role expectations (Abadinsky, 1991:315). Regardless, the debate over an officer's role still exists and it will continue to focus on the agency's emphasis toward rehabilitation or on law enforcement functions (APPA, 1994:35). Even with limited empirical evidence, the assumption of role conflict is prevalent in the field of community supervision and in the literature (Sigler and McGraw, 1985:28; Sigler, 1988:123).

### **Role Compatibility and Agency Philosophy**

Another recurring theme in the literature is that there needs to be precise role identification for officers to follow (Sigler and McGraw, 1985:30). This can be done through an agency's mission, policies, procedures and philosophical approach. Sigler (1988:123) suggests that clarification of policies and philosophy within the agency may alleviate some of the perceived conflict among staff. Abadinsky (1991:306) outlines three models that provide the framework for an agency's contextual orientation:

- **Control:** emphasizes unannounced home visits, employment visits, drug tests and close working relationships with law enforcement agencies.
- **Combined:** provides social services along with control functions.
- **Social Service:** focuses on client's needs, such as employment, housing, or counseling which gives social and psychological support.

Abadinsky (1991:312) suggests that if the agency model is one of social service, then officers should not carry firearms and should not have arresting authority. Problems often occur when the agency model is predominantly a control/combined model (officers have authority to arrest and search offenders) but officers are not permitted to carry firearms for protection or enforcements. The mixed messages associated with this framework causes problems, because it is difficult for officers to perform law enforcement functions (arrests, searches) without carrying firearms (Brown, 1990:21).

Keve (1979:427-434) surveyed administrators regarding their policies and concluded that the best needs of

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<sup>19</sup> For a more thorough discussion regarding role conflict and the differences between inter-role and intra-role conflict, see Sigler, 1988:121 - 129,

the agency and the officers are served if there is clear policy definition. He also suggests that carrying firearms and beliefs of staff about firearms are more influenced by the agency's philosophy than by legislative definition of parole officers or whether agents work in rural or urban areas (Keve, 1979:434). Existing policy should dictate “how the mission is accomplished and determine to what degree safety equipment and training are needed” (Stiles, 1996:26), instead of the other way around.

### **Finding a Balance**

Depending on the expectations that agencies have of their officers, POs may become used to performing only law enforcement or social work functions. Sigler and McGraw (1985:30) state that if local law enforcement is especially active then officers may adjust their role to an unarmed approach. If the law enforcement agencies are resistant or understaffed, POs may adjust their philosophy and take on the enforcement role. The change in supervision may not be immediately apparent. For example, an agency may start to arm officers who in turn experience a gradual change in supervisory practices. Also, the agency itself may change employment practices and start hiring people with firearms experience instead of social service experience (Welch, 1989:5).

Often the debate over officer orientation and safety equipment is discussed in a polarized fashion, such as treatment v. surveillance or social work v. law enforcement. Paparazzi and Martin (1996:39) note that this kind of thinking limits the full potential of probation and parole services. Polarized perspectives also enhance the likelihood of each group viewing the roles as mutually exclusive. Literature emphasizes that officers should individualize their response to each case, emphasizing either the law enforcement role or the therapeutic role, as needed; officers should also have the flexibility to adapt methods that are useful in their field (Abadinsky, 1991:306, 315; APPA, 1994:35). POs should keep a balanced approach to work and not change their supervision techniques simply because they are armed (Smith, 1991:116). Although it appears that surveillance and casework are diametrically opposed, within the context of community corrections, they must co-exist. Agencies usually have two distinct parts to their mission: rehabilitate/reintegrate offenders into society while simultaneously protecting society from the very people who have been proven to be dangerous (Allen, Eskridge, Latessa, and Vito, 1985:129). Studies have supported the idea that officers are aware of the social work/law enforcement dichotomy that exists within the field of corrections (Allen, Eskridge, Latessa, and Vito, 1985:137). The dichotomy is simply a part of the job and helps to make community supervision positions unique in their field.

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and Sigler and McGraw, 1985:28-32.

## **Supervisory Style Changes**

Most of the literature states that officers do not change their supervisory styles once they have been given the authority to carry firearms. In California, for example, after the implementation of the firearms policy, types and frequency of service referrals remained similar (Smith, 1991:124). There was no polarization of parole officers' attitudes and perceptions (social work role vs. law enforcement role) after officers were given the authority to carry while on duty. "Put succinctly, the firearm did not turn a caring, humanistic work force into clack-jawed, drooling fascists" (*Op. cit.*). Officers in California were specifically instructed to perform their duties as they have done before and handling any situation should be the same regardless of whether they carry or not (Smith, 1991:115, 116). When the policy changed in California from non-carrying to carrying, the agency made clear that availability of firearms was not indicative that there was a change from the traditional treatment functions to a law enforcement role (Smith, 1991:124). The officers were told not to become more like police officers, but to continue "to use the skills, training, techniques, and other tools they had acquired during their careers" (DelGrosso, 1997:48).

## **THE TEXAS SETTING**

Although it may be surprising to others in the community supervision field, Texas parole has always followed the treatment and combined models for supervision enforcement. Parole Officers employed by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice-Parole Division (TDCJ-PD) were only recently authorized to carry a firearm on duty (1998). There is a group of people who have been proponents of arming parole officers in Texas, but several events moved this controversial topic of carrying to the policy agenda and led to the passage of a law authorizing officers to carry firearms on duty. This section explores not only the reasons officers were armed in Texas, but it also provides the framework for the empirical portion of this research project.

### **Reasons to Arm**

Prior to 1998, officers did not have the authority to carry firearms on duty, even if they were a licensed peace officer or a reserved deputy. Then, in 1995, the Texas legislature passed a concealed handgun bill that allowed citizens to apply for a concealed handgun license (CHL) (Ballard, 1996: Appendix C). In response to the CHL, TDCJ issued an agency-wide memorandum that specifically prohibited officers from carrying guns on duty or on TDCJ property (Reynolds, 1996:1).<sup>20</sup> Ironically, many POs qualified for a CHL to carry a gun during personal hours but were unable to carry while conducting home and field visits on convicted felons.

The issue of firearms for safety also reached prominence in early 1995. On March 14, 1995, a shooting incident occurred at the Houston II District Parole Office (Ballard, 1996:2). An offender and his girlfriend came into the district office to report to his parole officer. Shortly thereafter an altercation occurred outside of the office; the girl was shot and killed and the offender was apprehended by a security guard (Ballard, 1996:2). After this incident, officers' concern for their safety increased.

Then, in September of 1995 several policy changes made officers even more wary of their safety. The contact standards for supervising offenders were revised so that officers were mandated to spend more of their time in the field making work and home contacts instead of in the offices (Ballard, 1996:2). Additionally, the parole offices began staying open later in the evening to accommodate working offenders. Both officers and clerical staff were apprehensive for their safety since they had to leave for home late in the evening (Ballard, 1996:2).

Soon afterward, in October of 1995, the Parole Division's Safety Committee was tasked with the assignment of assessing officer attitudes about carrying a concealed handgun while on duty (Ballard, 1996:2). The resulting safety survey revealed 80.3% of officers (N=863) supported a policy allowing officers to carry firearms while on duty (Ballard, 1996:5). These findings support an earlier (1988) study. Almost 72% of officers attending a statewide meeting supported the option to carry firearms on duty (Tenner, 1998:1). Officers in Texas were speaking out and requesting the authority to optionally arm themselves on duty.

### **Legislative and Policy Changes**

The Texas legislature granted officer authority to carry firearms in 1997. The Texas Penal Code (1998, 120) allows parole officers to be armed while on duty as long as the officer is in compliance with the policies and procedures of the TDCJ. According to the Government Code (Texas, 1998:170; Texas, 1998:202) officers are only able to carry a weapon if they possess a firearms proficiency certificate from the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement Officer Standards and Education (TCLEOSE). Officers are not, by statute, certified peace or law enforcement officers. Policy was also developed to reflect the change in the Texas statutes. Authorization to carry firearms is optional under current policy and it clearly does not allow officers to execute any law enforcement activities such as searches or arrests. It also states that the firearm is to be carried in a concealed manner and only displayed with the intention of use (Parole Division Administrative Directive, 1998:5).

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<sup>20</sup> The only way Parole Division staff could receive an exception to the policy was with written consent from the Executive Director (Reynolds, 1996:2)

## Safety Perceptions

The Texas safety committee stated that one of the advantages of implementing a firearms policy within the Parole Division was that officers would have increased security. The committee also stated that officers would experience “added morale from knowing that their desires are not being ignored and that they are entrusted with the responsibility of carrying a weapon” (Ballard, 1996:53). Do officers experience added morale from carrying firearms? Do they actually feel safer because they are carrying firearms while executing home and field visits? The meaning of safety is almost equivalent to officer safety *perceptions*. If an officer *perceives* he is safe, the officer will act and conduct himself as if he *is* safe, thereby increasing his safety and confidence level.

## Supervisory Styles

As stated, parole officers take on different roles while executing the duties of their job. In Texas, a primarily social work model is combined with portions of law enforcement techniques. Veronica Ballard, Parole Division Director (Ballard, 1998),<sup>21</sup> began her community corrections career in Louisiana. In Louisiana, she was certified to carry a firearm on duty while supervising convicted felons on community supervision. In an interview, Ms. Ballard stated that she is concerned about supervisory style changes in Texas once officers begin carrying firearms on duty. While in Louisiana, she routinely conducted more unscheduled and late visits for offenders than she did as an officer unarmed in Texas. Since these types of visits are primarily viewed as surveillance techniques, Ms. Ballard wondered if Texas officers would start this same pattern once they were armed.

As stated earlier, arrests, urinalysis testing, unscheduled home visits and electronic monitoring are considered law enforcement or surveillance methods. Parole Division policies govern the minimum number of office, home and field visits conducted. There are also policies regulating which offenders may be referred to Electronic Monitoring, the Super Intensive Supervision Program and other specialized caseloads. Some region and district policies have quotas for the number of urinalyses conducted on offenders; but, officers can also conduct urinalyses as often as they deem appropriate for the offenders under their direct supervision. Another category in which officers may increase surveillance techniques is technical reports of violation. Violation reports may be

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<sup>21</sup> As the author compiled information for the literature review portion of this applied research project, she contacted Veronica Ballard, Director of the Parole Division to obtain her input about the firearms topic. The author wanted to obtain not only the Director’s support for the project but also feedback concerning research questions and project applicability for the Parole Division. Since Ms. Ballard has field experience in another state that allows community corrections officers to carry firearms on duty, her contribution to this project provided another aspect with which the author was unfamiliar.

written for technical or non-technical violations.<sup>22</sup> Depending upon the officer's supervision style, his ideologies and strategies may reflect in the number of visits conducted, reports written, urinalysis taken or referrals made.

Another concern within the field of community corrections is the change that the addition of firearms may make in the relationship between officer and offender. This thread of reasoning has been pervasive during discussions at recent Parole Division firearms trainings. Typically firearms are viewed as enforcement and they are accepted as deadly weapons. Bringing firearms into the workplace raises the fear that the tension between an officer and an offender may escalate simply because the officer carries the firearm. This type of situation would result in the possibility of more attacks on officers or more resistance from offenders to follow an officer's direction (DelGrosso, 1997:45, 48).<sup>23</sup>

Firearms may not impact an officer's supervisory style, but the addition of firearms could have another type of unintended effect. For example, Smith (1991:124) notes that the California firearm carrying policy may fail to attract potential employees who would normally apply because of the casework component of community supervision. People opposed to firearms may not enter the field. As a result, the policy may "eliminate some of the people who have historically kept probation and parole balanced between control and treatment" (Smith, 1991:124). Overall, the vast majority of POs have remained more positive than negative about accepting firearms (Smith, 1991:124).

## **METHODOLOGY**

Parole officers throughout the state of Texas were surveyed about issues concerning Texas new firearm carry policy. Questionnaire construction was guided by the literature and a series of statewide focus groups. Although still in its early stages, several policy and management related questions have emerged concerning Texas' new firearm policy. The remainder of the paper addresses questions such as: What happens to staff safety perceptions once firearms are introduced into the workplace? Once officers carry guns on duty, do they take on a more active surveillance role? Even though some officers choose to carry firearms, unarmed officers<sup>24</sup> must still work in offices where no one has previously carried a firearm on duty.

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<sup>22</sup> These reports are submitted with the intention of obtaining a warrant for the offender's arrest. Non-technical violations are law violations, such as arrests; these violation reports must be written in a timely manner according to Parole Division policy. Technical violations are violations of parole rules, such as missing a home visit or not attending a treatment group; there are policies that give some direction regarding when to write a technical report, however an officer may also submit a written report even after the first violation.

<sup>23</sup> DelGrosso (1997:48) notes that there is little empirical evidence to support this position. Discussions in Texas are mixed regarding how firearms influence a PO's relationships with offenders. Some people believe that the offenders will be more resistant toward supervision since parole officers may be viewed as law enforcement officers. Others state that the change in relationships between officers and offenders will be good in that the offenders will be more respectful and will view the officer as a professional authority figure. Any change in relationships will have to be determined once the firearms policy has matured past its infancy stage.



## Focus Groups

Focus groups contributed a great deal of information to this project. Morgan (1997:17) suggests that focus groups be conducted on topics that allow participants the opportunity to actively and easily participate in the conversation. The issue of parole officers carrying firearms on duty readily meets this criterion. One strength of focus groups is that they have the ability to generate concentrated information on the exact topic of interest (Morgan, 1997:13). Group interaction can also provide insights into participants' opinions and experiences (*Op. cit.*). According to Morgan (1997:16), focus groups are essentially a compromise between the strengths and weaknesses of participant observation and individual interviewing. Even though the interaction between participants is valuable in a focus group setting, it is also a corresponding weakness since the researcher is reliant upon this interaction (Morgan, 1997:15). Another weakness of focus groups is the fact that the facilitator creates and directs the groups therefore making them less naturalistic than, say, participant observation; there is also less certainty about participants' convictions because they could be influenced by other views within the group (Morgan, 1997:14).

Focus groups may be structured using a pre-existing agenda or less structured and more exploratory (Morgan, 1997:39,40). Due to the nature of this research, a combination of the two approaches was used. Morgan (*Op. cit.*) refers to this technique as a "funnel" approach. The "funnel" approach begins with less structured open discussion among participants in order to give them the opportunity to pursue areas within the topic which interests them. The group then concludes with more specific questions targeted to the researcher's specific interests. Using the "funnel" approach, seven focus groups<sup>25</sup> were conducted in July, 1998 throughout the state of Texas in order to supplement the literature dealing with the issue of parole officers carrying firearms on duty. In order to capture a wide range of perspectives on this topic, group participants included Parole Division support staff, parole officers, parole supervisors and substance abuse casemanagers.

Morgan (1997:35) recommends segmentation of some groups, in order to control group composition and match chosen categories of participants. Since Morgan (*Op. cit.*) goes on to state that homogeneity in the focus groups allows for more free-flowing conversation, two of the seven focus groups were comprised of either pro-gun staff or anti-gun staff. These groups were conducted second and third, respectively; once information was compared between these groups with information from the first and fourth groups (mixed opinions), the researcher decided to

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<sup>24</sup> This is also the case for support staff who were hired in a "no-carry" workplace.

<sup>25</sup> Since the author is employed by TDCJ-PD as a curriculum developer, she is responsible for Staff Development's annual training needs assessment. When compiling information for needs assessments in the past, the author has conducted various division focus groups in order to gain insight and feedback from district office staff.

mix the remaining groups. Homogeneity did allow for some additional discussion regarding an extreme view, however, the participants tended to rapidly agree on an issue and then conclude the discussion. In the mixed opinion groups, the conversation remained lively while extreme views still surfaced. For a brief summary of the seven focus groups, refer to **Appendix A: Table A-1**. The literature review on community supervision and firearms use guided the development of the focus group questions. For a synopsis of focus group questions and response comparisons obtained during the focus group discussion, refer to **Appendix A: Focus Group Responses**.

Information from the focus groups was reviewed and studied to determine ways to use the data for survey construction. This information was used to construct a survey for distribution to Parole Division staff throughout the state. Information obtained during the focus groups then also guided the refinement of the conceptual framework for this project.

### **Development of the Conceptual Framework**

The literature review and focus groups contributed to the conceptual framework for this applied research project. The conceptual framework acts as an organizing device for data collection. Research results are also structured according to this framework. This section contains the conceptual frameworks for Parole Division staff safety perceptions and officer supervisory styles.

*Safety Perceptions.* Three categories and sets of working hypotheses are used to describe the safety perceptions of Parole Division staff since implementation of the Parole Division's firearm policy. The descriptive categories include:

**Carriers**--officers who are authorized to carry firearms while on duty;

**Non-carriers**--officers who do not carry firearms while on duty, and;

**Support Staff**--staff members who work with parole officers in the office but are not given the option to carry firearms.

Using these three descriptive categories, multiple sub-hypotheses are proposed:

#### **Working Hypothesis 1: Carriers' safety perceptions will INCREASE while:**

WH#1a: in the **office**.

WH#1b: conducting **home visits**.

WH#1c: conducting **field visits**.

#### **Working Hypothesis 2: Non-carriers' safety perceptions will:**

WH#2a: DECREASE while in the **office**.

WH#2b: NOT CHANGE while conducting **home visits**.

WH#2c: NOT CHANGE while conducting **field visits**.

**Working Hypothesis 3: Support Staff safety perceptions will DECREASE while in the office.**

**Working Hypothesis 4: There will be a DIFFERENCE IN SAFETY PERCEPTIONS ACROSS GROUPS, including carriers, non-carriers and support staff.**

The working hypotheses for the carriers group were based on the literature review and input from participants in the focus groups. The first working hypothesis for non-carriers was developed after meeting with the focus groups. Several people in different groups stated that, initially, when officers were given the authority to carry firearms, officers who did not wish to carry would not feel as safe in the office. This fear branched in two directions: a fear of the officers themselves and a fear of differences with offenders. A couple of focus group participants continued to state that after a while, when carrying-officers had had an opportunity to “prove themselves,” their safety level would probably level off and return to normal. For WH#2b and WH#2c, participants stated that they would not feel a difference in their safety while conducting field or home visits; this belief is derived from the premise that non-carrying officers would continue to supervise offenders as they had in the past. The third working hypothesis in the safety perception category relates to support staff members. Given input from the focus groups, it was hypothesized that support staff would experience a decrease in safety perceptions in the office.<sup>26</sup> The final working hypothesis was developed to examine the differences between the three groups. After examining the data from the focus groups, it seemed that there should be a difference in safety perceptions between carriers, non-carriers and support staff.

*Supervisory Styles.* In order to address the second purpose of this research and examine possible officer supervisory style changes since implementation of the Division’s firearms policy, the conceptual framework is comprised of loosely defined descriptive categories. The categories and descriptors are as follows:

- **Home Visits**--# of scheduled/unscheduled home visits; time home visits are conducted;
- **Field Visits**--# of scheduled/unscheduled field visits; time field visits are conducted;
- **Referrals**--# of referrals to EM/SISP (Electronic Monitoring/Super-Intensive Supervision Program) caseloads; # of referrals to DRC (Day Resource Center);
- **Urinalysis**--# of offender UAs (urinalysis);
- **Reports of Violation**--# of reports written for technical violations; and
- **Relationships**--interaction with offenders; interaction with co-workers.

Generally the focus group participants stated that they were not sure about any changes in officers’ supervisory styles. A few participants were concerned that officers who carried firearms would act more controlling

and demanding of their offenders. Some even stated that the officers who want to carry guns are just “wanna-be cops” and guns will make them act more like law enforcement. One other continuing concern within the field of community supervision, also voiced in the focus groups, was the potential change of firearms on the relationship between officer and offender. Several focus group participants stated that they thought some relationships would change (between officers and offenders, as well as between officers and officers), but the direction of change would depend solely on the officer and how he conducted himself.

### **Survey Research and Development**

Both the literature and focus groups supported the design of the survey questions. Surveys are generally used for descriptive, explanatory and exploratory purposes (Babbie, 1995:257) and are an excellent way to obtain people’s attitudes and beliefs (Alreck & Settle, 1995:11). Since the first research purpose in this project is describing perceptions, focus groups and surveys are appropriate research methodologies.<sup>27</sup>

The framework used to develop the questionnaire was derived from the literature and the focus groups. Focus groups were used to construct key issues and verbage in the survey. For one example, focus group participants stated repeatedly that they were more concerned about their level of safety when in contact with the offender’s neighbors or family and friends than when in contact with the offender himself. Hence, separate categories of “neighbors,” “family/friends,” and “offender” were used to question concerns about perception of safety.

Another example of how survey development was influenced by the focus groups is found in the second research purpose. The focus groups discussed aspects of supervision and differences in supervisory styles between people who wanted to carry guns and those who did not. Although some participants stated that there would be no changes in officers’ supervisory styles, others stated that they thought changes would occur. They continued to state that the carriers would probably not acknowledge any change in their own supervisory style or techniques. Due to the perception that carriers may be unaware of supervisory technique changes, two reporting methods were linked in the survey. The first set of items (#12-21) asks the respondents about increases or decreases in supervisory styles they have noticed on the job (self-report). The second set of items (#23-32) uses the identical questions as the first set of items, but asks about the observation of other officers’ supervisory styles and techniques since carrying

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<sup>26</sup> Several clerical staff participants even approached the facilitator after the groups and stated that they would be concerned about their safety level after officers were able to carry firearms in the district offices.

<sup>27</sup> Note that this study does not examine *actual* changes in supervisory style, but examines district office staff’s *perceptions* of change in supervisory style.

firearms on the job (observed-report). Then a comparison can be made between the perceptions of carriers and others working with her in the office.

Questionnaire design also followed the logic of the conceptual framework, which was informed by the literature review and focus groups. A copy of the survey and cover letter is presented in **Appendix B: Firearms Survey**.<sup>28</sup> The link between the survey and the conceptual framework is outlined in **Appendix C:**

#### **Operationalizing the Conceptual Frameworks, Tables C-1 and C-2.**

#### **Sampling Issues**

Since implementation of the Parole Division firearms policy is relatively new, not all officers who want to carry firearms on the job have been authorized to do so. Therefore, it had to be determined which district offices and staff members were directly affected by policy implementation. It was important to know which district offices had officers authorized to carry firearms because the survey was designed to gather information regarding safety and supervisory style perceptions after implementation of the policy. The law authorizing officers to carry was passed in 1997; however, the first parole officers were not armed until the last week of July, 1998.<sup>29</sup> Officers must follow Division policy that requires several steps before final authorization to carry a firearm on duty is granted. Due to these procedures, few officers are currently carrying<sup>30</sup> and many are still working on the final requirements to obtain authorization to carry. Since the policy requires the officers themselves to financially support this endeavor,<sup>31</sup> quite a bit of time may pass before all officers who want to carry firearms are able to complete the entire process for certification. Within the district parole offices where officers are currently carrying firearms, there are support staff, parole officers, supervisors and casemanagers who are exposed to firearms within the workplace; it is a stratified sample of these people who received the surveys in this project.

According to Alreck and Settle (1995:59), sample size depends on the budget and degree of confidence required from the survey. Alreck and Settle (1995:62) also state that it is seldom necessary to sample more than 10% of the total population to obtain adequate confidence. If the sample is divided into small sub-samples (as was done with the carriers, non-carriers and support staff categories) and if there is a possibility of high variance among

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<sup>28</sup> The survey was pre-tested by the TDCJ-PD Staff Development training employees and by various parole officers and supervisors known by the researcher. Once the survey was pre-tested, it was also given to the Parole Division Director Veronica Ballard for further input.

<sup>29</sup> It was estimated that the first officers would be carrying no later than the first part of June, 1998. Due to problems with the mandated TCLEOSE curriculum, authorized TCLEOSE academies were not able to start training officers until the first part of July, 1998. After this training, officers must still submit paperwork and wait for a final decision from their Regional Directors; this can take anywhere from two weeks to a month.

<sup>30</sup> As of October 1, 1998 there were approximately 60 parole officers carrying firearms across the state of Texas. (In June, 1999, the number has risen to about 300.)

units, a higher number than 10% may be required to obtain adequate confidence (Alreck & Settle, 1995:68).

Currently there are approximately 1350 Parole Division field staff in the state of Texas. On October 9, 1998, surveys were distributed by inter-agency mail to two of the three TDCJ-PD regions.<sup>32</sup> Four hundred and fifty surveys were mailed to 12 offices in Region I and six offices in Region III.

Surveys were returned by pre-stamped, addressed envelopes. Since the topic of firearms in the workplace is laden with emotional overtones, the anonymity of responses was secured with the return delivery of questionnaires by the US Postal Service. The survey response rate was 57%<sup>33</sup> (258 surveys were returned by November 20, 1998). Babbie (1995:267) states that a response rate of 50% is considered good. The deadline for returning the surveys was October 21, 1998; however, the date was extended to allow for late responses. Refer to

**Table 1: Survey Respondents**, for a distribution of Parole Division staff responding to the survey.

<b>Table 1: Survey Respondents</b>		
<i>Category</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Carriers	43	17.7
Non-carrying but getting authorization to do so	110	45.3
Non-carrying by choice	61	25.1
Support Staff	29	12.9
Total	243*	100.0

\*Total respondents equaled 258; however, 15 (5.8%) failed to respond to this critical demographic item.

## Statistics

<sup>31</sup> Training expenses in some areas are free while in other areas of the state the TCLEOSE course alone is over \$200. Officers must also pay for their own psychological exams and all weapons-related expenses.

<sup>32</sup> At the time of survey distribution, Region II (Houston and surrounding areas) had not authorized any officers to carry firearms on duty.

<sup>33</sup> Several incidents occurred after distribution of the survey which may have lowered the response rate somewhat. First, PD-Staff Development (researcher's employment) clerical staff received a call on October 12, 1998 about the survey from a caller who refused to identify himself but was obviously upset about distribution of the survey. The caller eventually hung up on the support staff member stating that the researcher was one of the biggest opponents to the firearm policy.

Second, the firearms committee met on October 14, 1998, and this researcher was in attendance (as part of employment responsibilities supervising the Staff Development safety training program). The researcher approached one of the members after the meeting to ask if he had received the survey. He asked if he could be frank and proceeded to ask the researcher about her motives for distributing the survey and what her opinion was about the firearms policy. He continued to state that "several" officers believe the researcher is anti-gun and that she was going to purposely skew the results in order to take their guns away. The researcher assured the officer and stated that regardless of her firearm preference the results would be reported as received. Also, if the carriers did not respond to the survey, then they would be under-represented in the results and would not have the opportunity to state any perceptions of safety in the field. The conversation continued for approximately 20 minutes, and-at the conclusion-the officer stated that he would do what he could to help dispel the rumors.

Third, the researcher was contacted by an Assistant Regional Director (ARD) who stated that "people are wiggling-out over your survey." He too, had received calls about the survey from carriers who were afraid that their firearms would be taken away. The ARD stated that there is a small faction of staff in West Texas who are so pro-gun that they believe there is an agency conspiracy to destroy the firearms policy. Again, the researcher's intentions (completion of the applied research project) were discussed at length with the ARD.

Several Staff Development trainers have also received similar phone calls and have reported to the researcher their responses. Mistrust within the Division may contribute to a lack of survey responses from parole field staff. As a final note, the firearms committee member e-mailed this researcher on October 23, 1998 to state that he had talked to several officers about the survey. In light of the researcher's statements regarding her motives and the analysis of the results, there would probably be several late survey responses from carriers in the field.

Once the surveys were returned, a coding sheet was used to categorize the data. Likert scales were used in the survey, and codes from 2 (Significantly Increased; Always; and Strongly Agree) to -2 (Significantly Decreased; Never; and Strongly Disagree) were used for the coding sheet. Also refer to **Appendix B: Firearms Survey** for item specific codes used for statistical means. Since the research questions are descriptive and exploratory by nature, the results are inherently qualitative and only lend themselves to simple statistical descriptors. As applicable, measures of central tendency such as percent and frequency distributions are given along with some statistical means. SPSS software was used to tabulate the results; this software is an invaluable tool to help with comparisons and present the data in percentage distributions. For comparison across groups, t-tests and one way analysis of variance (ANOVA) are used. Post hoc tests using the Scheffé test are used to compare the differences between groups. The Scheffé test is very conservative and not subject to incorrect interpretation (Tajalli, 1998).

## **FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS**

The final section summarizes the information and findings obtained from the research. This project had dual research purposes. First it describes safety perceptions of TDCJ-PD staff members since implementation of the firearms policy. Second, changes in officers' supervisory styles since implementation of the firearms policy are examined. It should be emphasized at the outset that changes in supervisory styles noted by the respondents are perceptual. Neither focus groups nor survey research are methodologies which document actual changes in supervisory styles. This section is not exhaustive in its content, rather it provides a big picture perspective for each of the research questions.

### **Safety Perceptions**

It has been said that your perception is your reality. If you see the glass as half-full, then you will be thankful for the remaining beverage; however, if you see the glass as half-empty you may be disappointed that what you want is gone. Do officers feel safer while at work since implementation of the firearms policy? For those that carry firearms, 86% stated that their safety had increased while in the office and another 98% and 95% stated that their safety had increased while conducting home and field visits, respectively (see **Table 2**). Each of the proposed working hypotheses for officers carrying firearms was strongly supported by the research data (supplemental data may be found in **Tables D-1 to D-6** in **Appendix D**).

**Table 2** also illustrates the division that was made within the non-carrying category. "Non-carriers" is the largest category of officers who responded to the survey (N=171; 70.4%); however, it does not mean that this is the

number of officers who do not *want* to carry a firearm on duty. Of the 171 respondents in this category, 64.7% are actually in the process of receiving training and requesting authorization to carry a firearm on duty. Since this number is high and it is assumed that officers who *want* to carry a weapon will have similar ideologies as those officers who currently carry, the category of non-carriers has been divided into two sub-categories as appropriate. The sub-categories include: non-carrying by choice and non-carrying but in the process of obtaining authorization to carry. As demonstrated by **Table 2**, the non-carrying but planning to do so showed a higher increase in safety perceptions than the officers who do not plan to carry firearms on duty (smallest percent difference=28). Even though non-carriers and support staff reported modal responses of “no change” in safety perceptions, ANOVA and t-tests revealed significant differences between groups at the .0001 level (see **Tables D-15 to D-17** in **Appendix D**). After implementation of the firearms policy, no group reported a decrease in safety perceptions as was hypothesized for the non-carriers and support staff groups; for additional non-carrier and support staff responses, refer to **Appendix D, Tables D-7 to D-14**. For a summary of the safety perception hypotheses and the research methods used to compile information, refer to **Table 3: Summary of Research Evidence in Support of Working Hypotheses**.

<b>Table 2: Safety Perceptions</b> (Percent Increased* and Modal Responses)									
	Office			Home Visits			Field Visits		
	% *	Mode Response	N	% *	Mode Response	N	% *	Mode Response	N
H #1: Carriers	86%	Sig. Increased	43	98%	Sig. Increased	41	95%	Sig. Increased	41
H #2: Non-carrying but in the process of obtaining authorization to carry	42%	No Change	110	54%	No Change	97	51%	No Change	102
H #2: Non-carrying by choice	14%	No Change	59	8%	No Change	48	8%	No Change	47
H #3: Support Staff	25%	No Change	24	N/A			N/A		

\* Sum of responses: Significantly Increased and Increased.

<b>Table 3: Summary of Research Evidence in Support of Working Hypotheses</b>		
<b>Working Hypothesis 1: Carriers’ safety perceptions will increase while:</b>	<b>Survey</b>	<b>Focus Group</b>
<b>#1a: in the office.</b>	<i>Strong Support</i>	<i>Strong Support</i>



#1b: conducting <b>home visits</b> .	<i>Strong Support</i>	<i>Strong Support</i>
#1c: conducting <b>field visits</b> .	<i>Strong Support</i>	<i>Strong Support</i>
<b>Working Hypothesis 2: Non-carriers' safety perceptions will:</b>		
#2a: decrease while in the <b>office</b> .	<i>No Support</i>	<i>Supports</i>
#2b: not change while conducting <b>home visits</b> .	<i>Partial Support</i>	<i>Strong Support</i>
#2c: not change while conducting <b>field visits</b> .	<i>Partial Support</i>	<i>Strong Support</i>
<b>Working Hypothesis 3: Support staff safety perceptions will decrease while in the office.</b>	<i>No Support</i>	<i>Partial Support</i>
<b>Working Hypothesis 4: There will be a difference in safety perceptions across groups, including carriers, non-carriers and support staff.</b>	<i>Strong Support</i>	<i>Strong Support</i>

### Supervisory Styles

At this time, the concerns of Veronica Ballard, Parole Division Director, that officer supervisory styles may change are overall unfounded. **Table 4** provides the overall modal responses indicating that “no change” occurred in all categories. A few pockets of individuals reported a change in some supervisory techniques, but the numbers were not significant; refer to **Appendix D, Tables D-18 to D-27** for specific percent distributions and mean responses. To check the self-report rate by officers who carry firearms, additional survey items for other staff member observations were included. Other staff members’ responses supported the assertions by carriers that the supervisory techniques have not changed. **Table D-28** (see **Appendix D**) does, however, show the potential for conflict between non-carriers by choice and their co-workers. A minority (27%) of officers who do not want to carry firearms stated that the policy had changed their relationships with co-workers; the other responding groups reported less than 8% agreement in this same area. Even though 27% does not represent the majority, this population should be monitored for any increases.

<b>Table 4: Supervisory Styles*</b> (Modal Responses)		
<b>Descriptive Categories</b>	<b>Reported</b>	<b>Observed</b>
Home Visits	No Change	No Change
Field Visits	No Change	No Change
Referrals	No Change	No Change
Urinalysis	No Change	No Change

Reports of Violation	No Change	No Change
Relationships	No Change	No Change

\*This table represents a composite of 22 survey questions, with differing Ns.

## SUMMARY

The addition of firearms within the community corrections' field has many intentional and unintentional results. The instrument created by this applied research project helped measure the effects of adding guns to the Texas parole workplace. For Texas parole officers, the introduction of firearms has had a surprisingly positive influence. As one advantage, officers who carry firearms report an overall increase in safety perceptions while in the office or conducting home and field visits. Since the instrument itself became a tool for monitoring the policy within the agency, the firearms committee expressed concerns about such high increases in carrying officers' safety perceptions. Members stated that extreme safety increases (in the home and field visit categories) might indicate possible overconfidence by the officers due to firearm access. These concerns led to additional training on lower levels of force to reduce the possibility of immediate firearm use in a high stress situation.<sup>34</sup>

Guns in the workplace also have the potential for shifting the traditional "helping role" paradigm to one of surveillance; however, preliminary research indicates that has not happened within Texas parole. Undoubtedly officer roles are so ingrained that guns have not changed the manner by which offenders are supervised. Since there are positive baseline effects of the firearms policy (e.g.: increases in safety perceptions and no changes in supervisory styles) the Parole Division is planning to implement the mandated firearms training<sup>35</sup> which would decrease costs to parole officers while giving more officers the opportunity to carry firearms on duty.

Regardless of the positive impact of the firearms policy, the topic remains with its opponents. Discussion of arming officers at the July 1996 American Probation and Parole Association conference led to disagreement and shouting between intelligent, educated, professional people because the decision allowing officers to carry firearms on duty is difficult and controversial (DelGrosso, 1997:48). The results from the focus groups and survey indicate potential conflict between a minority of officers who choose not to carry firearms and their co-workers. Since the possibility of friction exists between groups, the firearms committee mandated an internal firearms preparedness

<sup>34</sup> During high stress situations, officers may prematurely escalate to higher levels of force, e.g.: firearms use, if they are uncomfortable or unfamiliar with lower levels, e.g.: defensive tactics or intermediate weapons (Oleoresin Capsicum or pepper spray).

<sup>35</sup> Currently offered by another state agency (TCLEOSE) at personal officer expense.

training to educate all POs, supervisors and support staff; the curriculum is designed to increase the knowledge and skill level of staff while minimizing the impact of adding firearms to the workplace.

The framework adopted by this project has helped to continually evaluate the firearms policy and staff training. However, this research represents only a baseline and will be repeated once more officers are carrying guns on duty. Then, perhaps, management will obtain additional information about the total effect and consequence firearms have on employees' work environment. If the work environment or officers' supervisory styles are affected by the addition of firearms, then steps must be taken to ensure that these changes will be positive and will benefit the public who the agency is mandated to serve.

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