

## **Differing Conceptions of Risk and Need in Irish Probation Officers**

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**Summary:** Developments in work with offenders have been guided over the past two decades by an approach that relies on assessment of risk as a primary guide to allocation of resources and development of case management strategies to reduce reoffending. Risk-based case management is perceived to be both more effective in preventing reoffending and better able than previous methods to enhance community safety. This paper explores these issues using data from focus group discussions held with Irish Probation Officers in the spring of 2007. The discussions were part of a larger project examining education and training for probation practice. Views were expressed in the focus groups concerning the need to balance probation practice between community safety and addressing offender needs (criminogenic and/or more traditional welfare needs), and an understanding of risk assessment and its relationship to case management within a context perceived by some as emphasising community safety over rehabilitative considerations.

**Keywords:** Risk, need, risk assessment, Probation, Probation Officers, supervision, offender management, rehabilitation, welfare, attitudes, roles.