

Research Brief

Exploring perceptions of correctional climate among people on community supervision in New South Wales

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AIMS To examine perceptions of correctional climates among people on community supervision and explore the relationship between those perceptions and experiences of wellbeing.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS A self-report online survey was administered to people under community supervision in NSW, with a total of 1,102 responses received. The survey asked people about their perceptions of relational elements of correctional climate – procedural fairness and staff relationships – as well as their subjective experiences of wellbeing.

In general, people reported above average scores on both procedural fairness and staff relationships that were representative of positive perceptions of the correctional climate in a Community Corrections context. While people on suspended supervision tended to report more favourable perceptions of the correctional climate compared to those on active supervision, it was identified this may have also been reflective of people on suspended supervision being classified as lower risk.

Among those on suspended supervision, older individuals and those assessed as lower risk were more likely to report more favourable perceptions of procedural fairness and staff relationships, while Aboriginal people were more likely to report less favourable perceptions. There were no significant differences in scores on procedural fairness or staff relationships as a function of individual factors or supervision intensity for those on active supervision. Additional analyses revealed a significant association between people's perceptions of both procedural fairness and staff relationships and their subjective experiences of wellbeing, after controlling for individual factors and supervision intensity.

We concluded that while people on active supervision reported lower perceptions of procedural fairness and staff relationships than those on suspended orders, they still reported above average scores that were representative of generally positive perceptions of the correctional climate in a Community Corrections context. We note that it may be particularly important to develop respectful, supportive and collaborative relationships in situations where staff often have dual roles of care and control. Such relationships play an important role in fostering positive outcomes for people under community supervision. Overall, the paper contributes to evidence for understanding people's perceptions of correctional climates in a Community Corrections context and may help inform evidence-based best practices for establishing fair and respectful environments that support rehabilitation and prosocial change.

INTRODUCTION

Correctional climates are recognised as playing an important role in shaping people's experiences and outcomes while serving orders. Positive correctional climates promote the social, psychological, and instrumental conditions that enable positive change, and can encompass the physical environment, objective and subjective measures of safety and security, interpersonal relationships, and fairness of institutional policies and practices (Bieijersbergen et al., 2014; Burek & Liederbach, 2021; Goomany & Dickinson, 2015; Lambert et al., 2010; Ross et al., 2008; Taxman & Gordon, 2009; Van der Helm et al., 2014). Much of the correctional climate literature has focused on custodial environments, which has linked positive correctional climates with a range of outcomes including improved mental health, better readiness for change, greater success in rehabilitation and reintegration, and reduced incidences of violence (Beijersbergen et al., 2014; Goomany & Dickinson, 2015; Tonkin et al., 2016).

Research on correctional climates in the Community Corrections context has received less attention. While climates across both custodial and Community Corrections contexts are necessarily diverse, a common element is the centrality of staff in shaping people's experiences of corrections and promoting conditions that enable change. As such, in considering perceptions of correctional climate for those under community supervision, attention is given to interpersonal relationships with staff and the perceived fairness of the policies, practices and orders that supervisees are required to comply with, rather than on elements related to the physical environment and experiences of safety. One concept that has been subject to a growing body of literature in understanding correctional climates is procedural fairness.

Procedural fairness is based on the premise that people pay attention to both the perceived fairness of decision-making processes and the perceived fairness of how they have been treated during those processes (Jackson et al., 2010; Tyler, 2008). It encapsulates four key elements: treating people with dignity and respect, demonstrating trustworthiness through showing concern and understanding, ensuring a fair and consistent approach is taken when making decisions, and providing people an opportunity to voice their concerns or tell their side of the story before decisions are made (Tyler, 2008). When people perceive they are treated with procedural fairness, they feel valued and involved in the justice system, which in turn promotes positive interpersonal relationships; reduces conflict, misconduct, and psychological distress; and supports rehabilitative efforts (Abderhalden & Alward, 2024; Barkworth & Murphy, 2021; Beijersbergen et al., 2014; Liebling et al., 2005; Reisig & Mesko, 2009; Slotboom et al., 2011). Within Community Corrections contexts, procedural fairness has been linked with greater satisfaction with probation officers, greater compliance with directives and obligation to obey the law, as well as fewer formal violations and reduced recidivism (Baker et al., 2024; Buckner et al., 2023; van Hall, 2025; van Hall, Baker, Dirkzwager et al., 2024). People under community supervision have also reported that the degree of procedural fairness they experienced influenced their attitudes and behaviours, which in turn influenced how they engaged with the supervision process (Williams & Schaefer, 2024).

Relational elements of procedural fairness in these contexts focus on the perceived fairness of decision-making processes based on people's interactions with representatives of the authority involved in those processes. A broader body of research also highlights that quality relationships with staff, characterised by empathy, open communication, mutual respect, and support are important for people serving correctional orders, and are linked to perceptions of positive and supportive correctional climates that are seen as fair, safe and conducive to rehabilitation (Bosma et al., 2020; Liebling et al., 2011; Van Ginneken & Nieuwbeerta, 2020). Such relationships have been linked with greater compliance and order, reduced misconduct and violence, and more positive psychological outcomes among people in prison (Beijersbergen et al., 2015; Crewe et al., 2011; Liebling & Kant, 2018; Peterman et al., 2021; Reisig & Mesko, 2009).

In Community Corrections, a healthy working relationship between people serving orders and supervising officers, often referred to as the working alliance, is characterised by mutual respect, collaboration and agreement about the goals and tasks to work on, and the bond that facilitates that collaboration (Kennealy et al., 2012; Polaschek & Ross, 2010). Staff, however, are often faced with interacting, dual roles around care

and control that include supporting people towards prosocial behaviour change while also monitoring compliance with the conditions of their order (Skeem et al., 2007; Trotter, 2015). These dual-role relationships therefore include elements of both procedural fairness and a good working alliance to develop firm but fair quality relationships with people on supervision orders. Such relationships help improve receptivity to treatment and have been associated with greater engagement in supervision practices, reduced program participant attrition, improved problem-solving, and reductions in reoffending and parole violations (Kennealy et al., 2012; Kozar & Day, 2012; Skeem et al., 2007; Tatman & Love, 2010; Walters, 2015).

AIMS

A key strategic objective of Corrective Services NSW (CSNSW) is to improve peoples' perceptions of correctional climates in both custodial and community settings. To support this, CSNSW has adopted a biannual measurement regime that includes measures of procedural fairness and staff relationships, the latter of which was developed specifically for the CSNSW context. The measures each provide a unique contribution to understanding people's perceptions of correctional climates where procedural fairness represents perceptions of fair treatment and processes, while the CSNSW staff relationships measure captures supportive and collaborative relationships.

The current study is situated within a broader agenda of research being conducted by Corrections Research Evaluation and Statistics (CRES) in line with CSNSW's strategic objective. Following an initial exploration of how people in custody perceive correctional climate (see Islam et al., 2024), this study aims to further examine people's perceptions of correctional climate in a Community Corrections context. In doing so, we contribute to the evidence for valid and reliable measures of procedural fairness and quality of staff relationships adopted by CSNSW and explore how perceptions of correctional climate may differ as a function of various individual and contextual factors for people on community supervision. We also examine whether people's perceptions of correctional climate are associated with their subjective experiences of wellbeing in this context.

The current study aims to address three research questions:

1. Are the procedural fairness and staff relationships measures valid among a Community Corrections sample?
2. How do perceptions of procedural fairness and staff relationships vary as a function of individual and contextual factors for people under community supervision?
3. Are there associations between perceptions of correctional climates and experiences of wellbeing for people under community supervision?

METHODS

The current study draws on data from a sample of people on community supervision who completed an online self-report survey in February-March 2024. A link to the survey was sent via SMS to individuals with registered mobile numbers and both posters and flyers were made available to people when attending Community Corrections offices. Survey participation was voluntary, and respondents were asked to enter their Master Index Number (MIN) to allow their responses to be linked with individual and contextual data from the CSNSW Offender Integrated Management System (OIMS).¹ OIMS serves as a central CSNSW database that collects and manages information about individuals in custody and under community supervision.

¹ Participants also had an option to enter their full name rather than their MIN given the limited use of MINs by people under community supervision and the possibility they may not remember it.

At the time of the survey, a total of 36,141 people were on a Community Corrections order, with the final sample (N = 1,102) representing a response rate of 3.1%.² Almost half of all individuals serving a Community Corrections order in NSW had their supervision suspended.³ More than a third of those on suspended supervision were assessed as low or low-medium risk. In the current sample, there is an overrepresentation of those on suspended supervision (58.1%) who were also assessed as low or low-medium risk (92.3%). As these individuals have both a different risk profile and no ongoing supervision relationship with a Community Corrections Officer (CCO), we were interested in how perceptions of correctional climate may vary for those on suspended and active supervision. Table 1 provides an overview of participant demographics obtained from OIMS for the total sample and for those on suspended and active supervision.

Table 1. Selected characteristics for all survey respondents

	Total sample (N = 1,102)		Suspended (N = 640)		Active (N = 414)	
	M (SD)	%	M (SD)	%	M (SD)	%
Age	42.7 (12.65)	-	42.2 (12.71)	-	43.5 (12.42)	-
≤ 25 years		10.7		12.0		8.7
26 – 35 years		17.0		17.8		15.9
36 – 49 years		42.6		41.7		44.2
50 – 64 years		24.8		24.1		25.6
65+ years		4.9		4.4		5.6
Gender						
Male	-	76.3	-	74.0	-	80.2
Female		23.7		26.0		19.8
Aboriginal status						
Aboriginal	-	14.5	-	12.0	-	17.9
Non-Aboriginal		82.3		83.4		80.9
Unknown		3.2		4.5		1.2
Relationship status						
Partnered (Married/De Facto)		33.6		34.3		33.0
Non-Partnered (Single/Divorced/Separated)	-	64.8	-	64.0	-	65.7
Unknown		1.6		1.8		1.4
Dependent children						
Yes	-	24.0	-	17.2	-	34.8
No		27.4		18.9		40.8
Unknown		48.5		63.9		24.4
LSI-R risk profile						
Low / Low-Med		67.3		92.3		35.7
Med		18.4		5.3		40.8
High / High-Med		8.5		0.6		21.7
Unknown		5.7		1.7		1.7

² We acknowledge there is a low response rate, which could be attributed to a range of factors, including people under community supervision having limited contact with CSNSW staff and therefore feeling they could not provide a meaningful response to the survey questions; the possibility that people may not have access to a smartphone or available data to complete an online survey or did not attend a Community Corrections office during the survey period; the potential that people might have a general mistrust of an SMS from CSNSW or are cautious about whether the text originated from CSNSW.

³ CSNSW Community Corrections Policies and Procedures stipulates supervision can be suspended for: administrative reasons (when an offender cannot be supervised – e.g., is in custody, immigration detention, hospital); case management reasons (when evidence indicates an offender does not require supervision – e.g., assessed as low risk); or for resource management reasons (when workload reduction strategies are required). Individuals are assessed for suspension on commencement of supervision following at least two interviews.

The self-report measures administered via the survey included:

Procedural fairness	A 10-item measure covering four key elements of procedural justice: respect (3 items; e.g., “Staff address and talk to me in a respectful manner”), neutrality (3 items; e.g., “Staff try to be fair when making decisions”), voice (2 items; e.g., “Staff listen to me before making decisions”), and trustworthiness (2 items; e.g., “Staff show concern and understanding towards me”) (Barkworth & Murphy, 2021). A 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree) was used to rate each item; higher scores indicate stronger perceptions of procedural fairness. The measure was previously validated with a CSNSW custodial sample and had strong internal consistency (Cronbach’s alpha = .97; Islam et al., under review).
Staff relationships	A bespoke 12-item measure that covers four key elements of staff relationships with a rehabilitative lens: motivate change (3 items; e.g., “Staff support people in their care to make positive change”), inspire hope (3 items; e.g., “Staff support me to achieve my goals”), staff collaboration (3 items; e.g., “Staff work with me towards mutually agreed upon goals”), and rehabilitative orientation (3 items; e.g., “Staff seem motivated to help me become more ready for change”). Items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree); higher scores indicate stronger perceptions of positive staff relationships. The measure was previously validated with a CSNSW custodial sample and had strong internal consistency (Cronbach’s alpha = .98; Islam et al., under review).
Wellbeing	The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) is a 14-item instrument designed to assess the mental wellbeing of a population (Taggart et al., 2015). The scale captures a comprehensive spectrum of attributes associated with mental health and wellbeing (e.g., “I’ve been feeling optimistic about the future”). A 5-point Likert scale is used to ask how often the respondent experiences each state (1 = None of the time to 5 = All the time); higher scores represent better mental wellbeing. The measure had strong internal consistency (Cronbach’s alpha = .96).

To address the research questions, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was used to confirm the unidimensional factor structure of the procedural fairness and staff relationships measures in a sample of people under community supervision. CFA is used to confirm the factor structure of a latent construct when there is a pre-existing theoretical measurement model that statistical fit criteria can be assessed against (Knoke, 2005).

Average scores for procedural fairness and staff relationships across individual factors (age, gender, Aboriginal status, relationship status, dependent children) were examined using independent samples t-tests and one-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs).

A factorial ANOVA also examined whether perceptions of procedural fairness and staff relationships varied as a function of individuals’ supervision intensity based on CSNSW’s Service Delivery Standards (SDS). The SDS comprises nine levels of supervision based on a combined assessment of risk of reoffending and potential consequences of reoffending and provides for a balance of intervention and monitoring. Intervention includes any activity where an individual is addressing criminogenic needs, while monitoring refers to any activity which verifies an individual is complying with the conditions of their order or that provides an opportunity to determine how an individual has been engaging with interventions, programs or other services. An individual’s risk of reoffending and criminogenic needs are identified through the Level of Service Inventory-Revised (LSI-R; Andrews & Bonta, 1995). Higher risk individuals are provided more intensive intervention, with priority given to one-on-one supervision work, and referrals to CSNSW or external programs and services. Monitoring is based on the potential consequences of reoffending captured

by a CSNSW-developed Community Impact Assessment (CIA) that assesses the potential category, severity, and public impact of reoffending for people with comparable risks and needs as determined by the LSI-R. Higher consequence individuals require increased levels of monitoring or engagement, which are related to risk and responsivity factors, and can include contact with third parties, drug and alcohol testing, and electronic monitoring, in addition to relevant behaviour change interventions based on an individual's risks and needs. Some activities (such as interviews with supervisees) can serve to fulfill both intervention and monitoring roles, through ongoing engagement that focuses on providing individuals with support and ensuring theirs and the community's safety. The factorial ANOVA allowed us to examine main effects of LSI-R and CIA independently, as well as the interaction between LSI-R and CIA to capture the nine supervision levels identified in the SDS.

Finally, bi-variate correlation and hierarchical regression analyses were performed to examine the association between measures of correctional climate and experiences of wellbeing for people under community supervision. Two hierarchical regression models for people on suspended supervision and for people on active supervision were conducted following identification of high correlations and multicollinearity issues with measures of procedural fairness and staff relationships. In the first Block, individual factors and indicators of supervision intensity (CIA and LSI-R risk profile) were entered as covariates, followed by the inclusion of procedural fairness and staff relationships in the second Block of their respective models. Statistical significance was set at $p < .05$ (two-tailed) for all analyses.

FINDINGS

Confirming the factor structures of relational measures of correctional climate

The two measures of correctional climate previously underwent validation processes through Exploratory Factor Analyses (EFA) utilising a CSNSW custodial sample and were identified as having a unidimensional factor structure (see Islam et al., 2024). The current study employs CFA, with the Maximum Likelihood method of estimation, to assess whether this factor structure remains constant when applied to a sample of people under community supervision.

Procedural fairness

Figure 1 presents the unidimensional factor structure for the procedural fairness measure. The model identified strong factor loadings for all 10 items (≥ 0.83). The Chi-square goodness of fit was statistically significant ($\chi^2(30, 1075) = 185.15, p < .001$), indicating a possible misfit. However, large samples (> 200 -400) often result in significant p-values and therefore alternative measures of fit should be examined (Byrne, 2016; Kenny, 2024). Other model fit indices indicate an acceptable to excellent model fit (CFI = .99; RMSEA = .07).⁴ The measure also showed strong internal consistency for the Community Corrections sample (Cronbach's alpha = .97).

⁴ The Comparative Fit Index (CFI) is an acceptable fit when $\geq .90$ (West et al., 2012) and the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) is considered acceptable when $\leq .08$ (Awang, 2012).

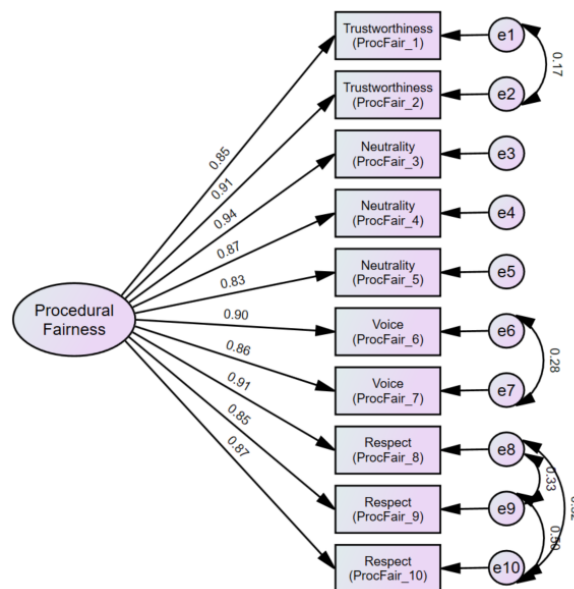


Figure 1. One-factor structure for procedural fairness with maximum likelihood estimation

Staff relationships

Figure 2 presents the unidimensional factor structure for the staff relationships measure. The model identified strong factor loadings for all 12 items (≥ 0.83). The Chi-square goodness of fit was statistically significant ($\chi^2(49, 1029) = 423.11, p < .001$), which could again be attributed to the large sample. Further examination of other model fit indices, however, indicate an acceptable to excellent model fit (CFI = .98; RMSEA = .08). The measure also showed strong internal consistency for the Community Corrections sample (Cronbach's alpha = .98).



Figure 2. One-factor structure for staff relationships with maximum likelihood estimation

Perceptions of correctional climate for people under community supervision

Figure 3 shows the distribution of procedural fairness scores for the total sample of people under community supervision, and for people on suspended and active supervision. The distribution of scores suggests people tended to report positive perceptions of procedural fairness, with an overall mean score of 4.09 (SD = 0.99) for the total sample.

People on suspended supervision orders reported a significantly higher mean score of 4.18 (SD = 0.94) compared to those on active supervision (M = 3.94, SD = 1.07), $t = 3.73$, $p < .001$. The finding suggests people on suspended supervision orders report more favourable perceptions of procedural fairness than those on active supervision.

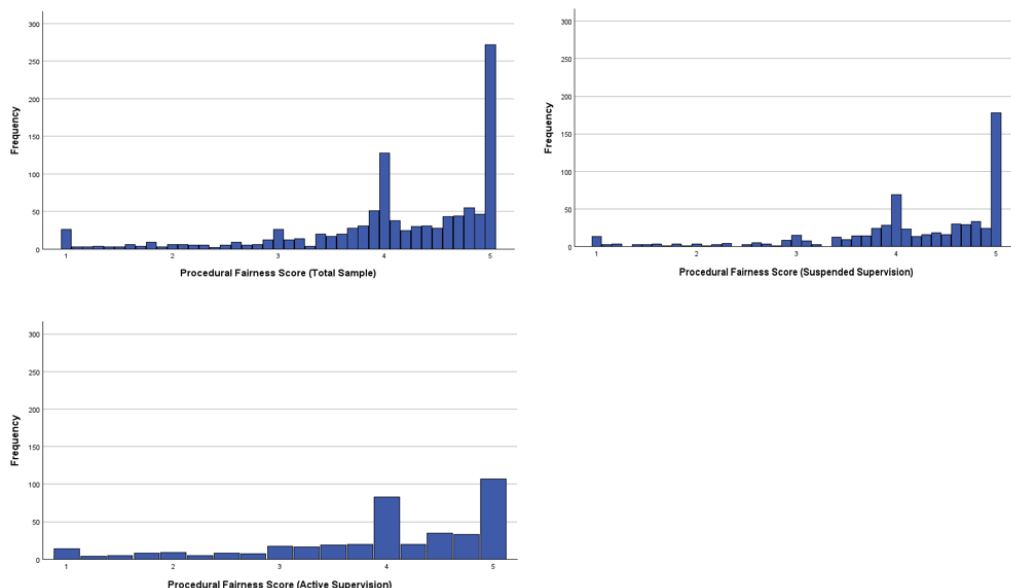


Figure 3. Distribution of scores on the procedural fairness measures for the total sample, people on suspended supervision, and people on active supervision

Figure 4 shows the distribution of staff relationships scores for the total sample of people under community supervision, and for people on suspended and active supervision. The distribution of scores suggests people also tend to report positive views of staff relationships, with an overall mean score of 4.09 (SD = 0.95) for the total sample.

People on suspended supervision orders reported a significantly higher mean score on the staff relationships measure (M = 4.14, SD = 0.94) compared to those on active supervision (M = 3.99, SD = 1.02), $t = 2.37$, $p < .001$. Again, people on suspended supervision orders report more positive views of quality staff relationships than those on active supervision.

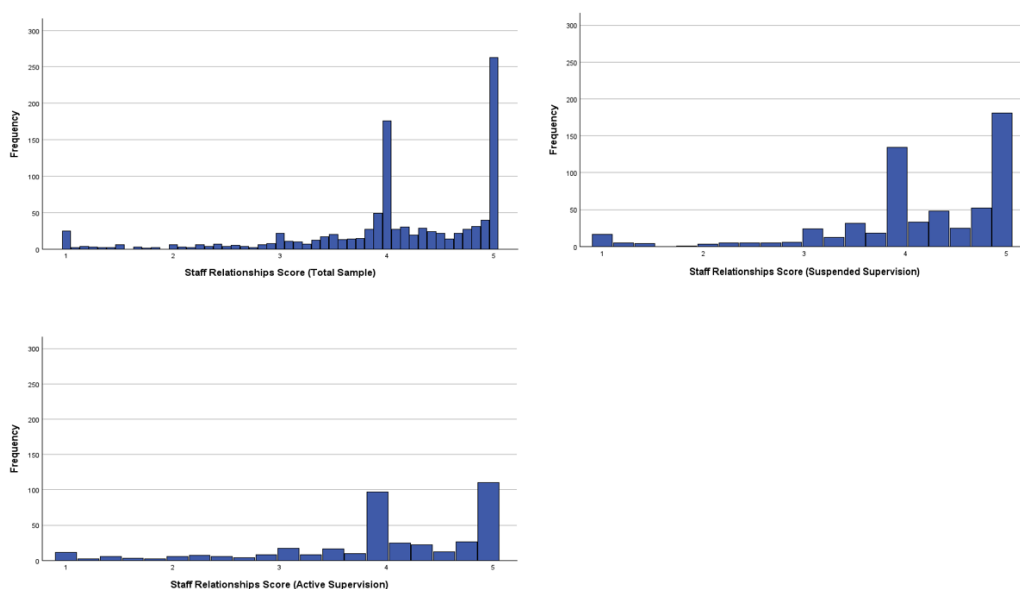


Figure 4. Distribution of scores on the staff relationships measure for the total sample, people on suspended supervision, and people on active supervision

To examine whether people's perceptions of procedural fairness and staff relationships varied across a range of individual factors, a series of independent samples t-tests and one-way ANOVAs were conducted for people on suspended and active supervision (see Table 2). No significant differences were identified across any of the individual factors for people on active supervision.

For those on suspended supervision, there was a significant difference in scores on both procedural fairness and staff relationships as a function of age and Aboriginal status. People in the youngest age group (< 25 years) reported significantly lower perceptions of procedural fairness and staff relationships compared to all other age groups (p 's < .001); those in the 36-49 year age group also reported significantly lower scores on the staff relationships measure compared to those in the 65+ year age group (p = .032). Aboriginal people also tended to report lower perceptions compared to non-Aboriginal people. Effect sizes for all significant findings were considered small (Cohen's d = .28 to .38).⁵ There were no significant differences for either measure as a function of gender, relationship status or having dependent children.

Table 2. Perceptions of correctional climate across individual factors

	Suspended supervision		Active supervision	
	Procedural fairness	Staff relationships	Procedural fairness	Staff relationships
Age				
≤ 25 years	3.77 (1.03)	3.68 (1.15)	3.53 (1.04)	3.71 (0.98)
26 – 35 years	4.26 (0.94)	4.27 (0.88)	4.03 (1.07)	4.07 (1.09)
36 – 49 years	4.16 (0.98)	4.11 (0.98)	3.89 (1.12)	3.96 (1.08)
50 – 64 years	4.29 (0.80)	4.22 (0.74)	4.06 (1.02)	4.05 (0.90)
65+ years	4.51 (0.47)	4.51 (0.41)	4.25 (0.75)	4.25 (0.78)
<i>F</i> , <i>p</i> -value	5.55, p < .001	6.03, p < .001	2.32, p = .056	1.23, p = .299
Gender				
Male	4.20 (0.95)	4.16 (0.95)	3.97 (1.04)	4.02 (0.97)
Female	4.13 (0.89)	4.10 (0.85)	3.85 (1.17)	3.89 (1.21)
<i>t</i> , <i>p</i> -value	0.79, p = .430	0.72, p = .474	0.85, p = .395	0.86, p = .392
Aboriginal Status				
Aboriginal	3.87 (1.03)	3.90 (1.03)	3.88 (1.11)	3.99 (0.97)
Non-Aboriginal	4.21 (0.93)	4.16 (0.92)	3.96 (1.07)	4.00 (1.03)
<i>t</i> , <i>p</i> -value	2.94, p = .002	2.19, p = .029	0.53, p = .596	0.03, p = .973
Relationship status				
Partnered	4.26 (0.97)	4.25 (0.88)	3.92 (1.08)	3.98 (1.05)
Non-Partnered	4.06 (1.02)	4.06 (1.01)	3.94 (1.08)	4.00 (1.03)
<i>t</i> , <i>p</i> -value	-1.84, p = 0.67	-1.76, p = .079	0.19, p = .850	0.17, p = .869
Dependent children				
Yes	3.99 (1.02)	4.05 (1.01)	3.89 (1.12)	3.98 (1.03)
No	4.09 (0.97)	4.09 (0.97)	3.93 (1.07)	3.95 (1.06)
<i>t</i> , <i>p</i> -value	0.70, p = .483	0.32, p = .752	0.36, p = .823	-0.22, p = .823

Note: Bold = significant results

We were also interested in whether differences in perceptions of procedural fairness and staff relationships varied based on supervision intensity, including the frequency of supervision (CIA) and the level of intervention based on risk (LSI-R). A factorial ANOVA was conducted to examine both main effects and interaction effects for supervision intensity on procedural fairness and staff relationships for those on suspended and active supervision (see Table 3). There was a significant main effect for LSI-R on procedural fairness ($F(2, 614) = 3.94, p = .020$) and staff relationships ($F(2, 588) = 4.14, p = .016$) for people on suspended supervision, but not for those on active supervision. There was no significant main effect for CIA and no significant interaction effect between LSI-R and CIA for either group on the measures.

⁵ Cohen's d effect size is used to report the magnitude of the average difference in scores on each measure. Interpretations of effect sizes were guided by Cohen (1988), where effect sizes of .2 are considered small, .5 are considered moderate, and .8 are considered large.

Table 3. Factorial ANOVA for supervision intensity

	Suspended supervision		Active supervision	
	Procedural fairness	Staff relationships	Procedural fairness	Staff relationships
CIA (F, p-value)	0.541, p = .582	1.463, p = .232	1.920, p = .148	1.321, p = .268
LSI-R (F, p-value)	3.938, p = .020	4.142, p = .016	1.685, p = .187	0.424, p = .654
CIA*LSI-R (F, p-value)	1.771, p = .133	1.974, p = .097	0.539, p = .708	0.362, p = .836

Note: Bold = significant results

Post-hoc analyses for those on suspended supervision revealed that people assessed as low or low-medium risk reported significantly higher scores on procedural fairness and staff relationships compared to those assessed as medium risk and medium-high or high risk (see Table 4). There was no significant difference between those assessed as medium and medium-high or high risk.

Table 4. Perceptions of correctional climate across LSI-R risk levels

	Suspended supervision		Active supervision	
	Procedural fairness	Staff relationships	Procedural fairness	Staff relationships
LSI-R				
Low / Low-Med	4.21 (0.91)	4.17 (0.90)	4.07 (1.02)	4.04 (0.98)
Medium	3.74 (1.19)	3.75 (1.23)	3.90 (1.07)	3.99 (1.03)
Med-High / High	4.05 (0.39)	3.90 (0.43)	3.82 (1.16)	3.93 (1.06)

Note: Bold = significant results

Associations between perceptions of correctional climate and wellbeing

Turning to how people's perceptions of correctional climate are associated with experiences of wellbeing, scores on the wellbeing measure varied from 14 to 70, with the mean score for the total sample reflecting relatively positive experiences of wellbeing ($M = 50.96$, $SD = 12.52$). People on suspended supervision orders reported a statistically significant higher mean wellbeing score ($M = 52.51$, $SD = 11.95$), compared to those on active supervision orders ($M = 48.34$, $SD = 12.86$), $t = 5.12$, $p < .001$.

Table 5 presents correlations between the measures of correctional climate and wellbeing. Procedural fairness and staff relationships were both significantly, positively, and moderately correlated with wellbeing among both those on suspended and active supervision (see Table 6).⁶

Table 5. Correlations between perceptions of correctional climate and wellbeing

	Suspended supervision			Active supervision		
	1	2	3	1	2	3
1. Procedural fairness	-			-		
2. Staff relationships	.92***	-		.92***	-	
3. Wellbeing	.38***	.42***	-	.46***	.49***	-

*** $p < .001$

To examine whether people's perceptions of procedural fairness and staff relationships were related to wellbeing, a series of hierarchical regression analyses were conducted, controlling for individual characteristics and supervision intensity (see Table 6). Age, gender, Aboriginal status, relationship status, having dependent children, CIA level and LSI-R risk profile were entered in Block 1. A strong correlation between procedural fairness and staff relationships ($r = .92$) suggests significant overlap across these

⁶ Guidelines for interpreting Pearson correlation coefficients indicate values ranging from 0 to .29 suggest a weak or small association, between .30 and .49 indicate a moderate association, and values of .50 or higher indicate a strong or large association (Cohen, 1988).

measures, and examination of Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values indicated multicollinearity, which can lead to issues with interpretability and misleading results (Daoud, 2017).⁷ Separate regression analyses were therefore conducted for the inclusion of procedural fairness and staff relationships in Block 2 to aid in interpreting associations between these measures and people's experiences of wellbeing.

In Block 1, there was a significant relationship between gender and wellbeing for people on suspended supervision, where females were more likely to experience better wellbeing. For those on active supervision, LSI-R was significantly related to wellbeing, with people assessed as higher risk reportedly experiencing lower wellbeing.

After accounting for individual factors, both procedural fairness and staff relationships showed significant positive associations with wellbeing among people on suspended supervision and among those under active supervision in their respective models. Procedural fairness accounted for 13% of the variance in wellbeing among the sample of people on suspended supervision, and 20% among people under active supervision. Staff relationships was also found to account for 16% of the variance in wellbeing among those on suspended supervision and 23% for those on active supervision. The findings suggest that these relational elements of correctional climate explain a significant proportion of the variance in people's experience of wellbeing above and beyond individual factors.

Table 6. Hierarchical regression analyses examining associations between perceptions of correctional climate and wellbeing

	Suspended supervision			Active supervision		
	Block 1	Model 1 Block 2	Model 2 Block 2	Block 1	Model 1 Block 2	Model 2 Block 2
Age (years)	.09	.04	.04	.00	-.04	-.02
Gender (0 = Male; 1 = Female)	-.14**	-.12*	-.12**	-.07	-.07	-.05
Aboriginal status (0 = No; 1 = Yes)	-.01	-.03	-.02	.00	.01	.01
Relationship status (0 = Unpartnered; 1 = Partnered)	.00	-.03	-.02	-.02	-.03	-.03
Dependent children (0 = No; 1 = Yes)	-.02	-.06	-.04	-.05	-.08	-.08
LSI-R	-.10	-.08	-.07	-.17**	-.14**	-.16***
CIA	.03	.02	.04	.07	.05	.06
Procedural fairness	-	.37***	-	-	.45***	-
Staff relationships	-	-	.41***	-	-	.49***
R ²	.04	.17	.21	.05	.25	.28
ΔR ²	.04	.13	.16	.05	.20	.23
F	2.29*	57.38***	74.68***	2.37*	89.24***	107.39***

*p <.05; **p <.01; ***p <.001

CONCLUSIONS

The current study contributes to a broader agenda of research being undertaken by CRES to examine CSNSW's strategic objective to improve people's perceptions and experiences of correctional climates. It is the first study seeking to understand such perceptions among people serving orders in the community, drawing on self-report survey data from a sample of people on both suspended and active supervision.

Following initial validation of two relational measures of correctional climate—procedural fairness and staff relationships—in a NSW custodial sample (Islam et al., 2024), the current study provides further evidence of the validity of these measures in a Community Corrections sample. Confirmatory Factor Analyses

⁷ Variance Inflation Factors (VIFs) are used to determine the presence of multicollinearity. A VIF > 5 suggests variables are highly correlated, while VIFs between 1 and 5 suggest moderate correlation and should still be investigated further (Daoud, 2017). VIFs for procedural fairness and staff relationships were > 6, suggesting the presence of multicollinearity.

supported the unidimensional factor structure of both measures in the Community Corrections context, with reliability analyses confirming strong internal consistency for both measures.

Across the total sample, and for both the suspended and active supervision cohorts, people tended to report above average scores on procedural fairness and staff relationships, representing generally positive perceptions of correctional climate in a Community Corrections context. Such positive perceptions are consistent with previous research examining the quality of the dual role relationship between CCOs and supervisees in NSW (Chong et al., 2024; Howard et al., 2019) and are particularly evident when compared to previously reported below average scores for people in custody (see Islam et al., 2024). People on suspended supervision consistently reported higher perceptions of both procedural fairness and staff relationships compared to people on active supervision. Among those on suspended supervision, half had their supervision suspended within 3 months prior to completing the survey, and the average period of active supervision prior to suspension was 5.3 months, suggesting many had still experienced a meaningful degree of depth and recency in their interactions with a CCO.⁸

Perceptions of correctional climate were also found to vary as a function of age, Aboriginal status and LSI-R risk profile among people on suspended supervision. Older individuals tended to report higher scores on procedural fairness and staff relationships, while Aboriginal people tended to report lower scores on both procedural fairness and staff relationships. People classified as low risk also reported significantly higher scores on both procedural fairness and staff relationships compared to those classified as medium or high risk. There were no significant differences as a function of individual characteristics or risk profile among those on active supervision. Taking the pattern of findings together, variance in perceptions across supervision cohorts (suspended vs active) and individual characteristics may likely be confounded to some extent by respondents' risk of recidivism. That is, significant results identified among the suspended supervision cohort may be driven by the higher proportion of people assessed as low risk. This may be distinguished from the nature and intensity of their supervision, given that CIA scores were not related to perceptions, either as main effects or in interactions with LSI-R score.

People assessed as higher risk tend to have more severe criminogenic needs and responsivity factors that may affect their engagement with supervision and criminal justice agents (Bonta & Andrews, 2007). For example, higher-risk individuals may hold more antisocial or procriminal attitudes, including a propensity for legal cynicism that can lead to greater distrust of CCOs, making it more difficult to build rapport with individuals who hold those attitudes (Wright & Gifford, 2017). It is these very individuals, who are assessed as having the highest risk of reoffending, who need targeted strategies for encouraging engagement in behaviour change processes. The responsivity principle of the RNR model includes establishing warm, respectful and collaborative relationships (Bonta & Andrews, 2007), which speaks to the importance of the relational elements of correctional climate examined in the current study. Williams and Schaefer (2024) suggest that community corrections agencies should establish best-practice procedures aligned with procedural justice principles to prioritise long-lasting behaviour change and improve satisfaction and cooperation and compliance behaviours of people under community supervision. Research has also shown that perceptions of procedural justice can change over time, for example from ongoing, regular contact with officers (van Hall, Baker, Nieuwbeerta, et al., 2024) and that more positive perceptions of procedural justice are linked with less legal cynicism (van Hall et al., 2025).

Additional analyses examined the association between people's perceptions of correctional climate and their subjective experiences of wellbeing. Across both suspended and active supervision respondents, scores on both procedural fairness and staff relationships were positively related to subjective experiences of wellbeing, and this association persisted after controlling for individual factors and supervision intensity. These findings are consistent with previous research that shows both respectful and supportive staff relationships and the perceived fairness and transparency of decision making processes play important

⁸ Among those on suspended supervision in the current sample, just over 10% had their supervision suspended within 2 weeks of being placed on a community supervision order, and over 50% had their supervision suspended within 3 months. While people on suspended supervision may have had recent contact with a CCO (within 3 months of completing the survey), that contact may have also been limited for those who had their supervision suspended soon after being placed on community supervision.

roles in fostering positive outcomes for people serving correctional orders (Crewe et al., 2011; Islam et al., 2024; Liebling et al., 2011; Liu et al., 2020; Williams & Schaefer, 2024).

When considering supervision status, people on suspended supervision reported more positive experiences of wellbeing compared to those on active supervision. Among those on active supervision, higher risk was also associated with lower wellbeing. Higher risk classifications are again indicative of having more criminogenic needs that are often associated with poorer experiences of wellbeing (Bonta & Andrews, 2007). Having access to quality (prosocial / positive) social support has been identified as a protective factor in reducing negative emotions, stress, and substance use and improving people's overall mental health and wellbeing (see Wang et al., 2024 for a review). While social support from family and positive peer networks was identified as important, the type of support received was also important (Wang et al., 2024). For example, informational and practical support were just as important as emotional support, and CCOs may be one group that can help provide and facilitate that support.

The current study, however, is unable to establish a causal mechanism of change due to the cross-sectional nature of the data; the results may therefore reflect an interrelated association where wellbeing may be both an outcome of experiencing positive staff relationships or a potential driver of increased or active engagement in behaviour change processes that improves perceptions of relationships with staff. Engagement in processes of behaviour change may also have cyclical effects on wellbeing, whereby better wellbeing can lead to more positive interactions with CCOs, which in turn further improves wellbeing. Following that a similar pattern of results emerged for both people on suspended supervision and those on active supervision, it may also be the case that supervision has a relatively modest effect on wellbeing and the associations between perceptions of climate and wellbeing could to a large extent reflect unmeasured individual or contextual factors that influence both perceptions and wellbeing.

Limitations of the current study should be noted. Self-report data is acknowledged as being subject to social desirability bias where the complexities of correctional climates may not be fully captured. The reliance on recruiting people under community supervision by way of text messages and posters made available in Community Corrections offices may have also limited the scope of the sample to those who had available access to smartphones or who were attending supervision appointments during the survey period. The results should also be interpreted with respect to sampling bias; people assessed as low risk are overrepresented in the current sample and paired with the low response rate this may suggest the findings are not generalisable to the broader population of people serving community corrections orders. High scores on each of the climate measures for both groups indicate the presence of a ceiling effect where reduced variance within the climate measures can affect the quality of analyses. High multicollinearity values identified between the two climate measures also indicate the underlying latent constructs are very closely related, necessitating that use of separate regression models for each measure and limiting our ability to isolate how each factor contributes to variance in wellbeing.

Overall, the current study contributes to an understanding of people's perceptions of correctional climates and how relational elements of climate may help foster positive outcomes for people under community supervision. The use of procedurally fair practices and development of respectful, supportive and collaborative relationships may be particularly important in situations where staff often have dual roles of providing care and control. For example, Skeem et al. (2007) identified that relationship quality and working alliance was best established when officers used a combination of fairness, care, trust, and authoritativeness. Procedural fairness may speak more to developing firm but fair relationships with people under supervision, while staff relationships represent the more therapeutic aspect of working alliance. In the context of the current study, both relational elements of correctional climates were identified as being closely related but play an important role for improving a range of outcomes for people on supervision orders. The paper provides a first look at people's perceptions of community-based correctional climates and extends and supports the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of NSW correctional climates to help inform evidence-based practices and policies for developing fair and respectful environments that support positive outcomes for people completing orders.

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