



Program Evaluation Summary

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Lake County probation program addresses women-specific needs

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The Lake County Women's Specialized Services Program combines social services and supervision to address the needs of an increasing number of women probationers dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

The specialized probation program offers counseling and education to help participants understand the nature and symptoms of trauma. Following pre-sentence investigations and intake assessments, probationers are referred to services specializing in PTSD and coping strategies, understanding relationships, and parenting. Program participants also are referred to services that address employment, education, finances, child care, housing, physical health, and mental health needs.

This *Program Evaluation Summary* details the implementation and impact evaluation of the Lake County Women's Specialized Services Program.

Program overview

The program is designed to help women probationers deal with the past traumas and victimizations that they have experienced, including domestic violence and sexual abuse. Through counseling, the women are taught to understand how these past experiences may contribute to the criminal activity that they are involved in and how it may affect the decisions they make in their daily lives.

The Lake County Women's Specialized Services Program focuses on the participant's behavior, feelings, and interpersonal skills, and provides problem-solving social skills and interventions aimed at restructuring decision-making processes. The program was evaluated from June 2004 to July 2006.

Program participants received psycho-educational trauma counseling over an eight-week period, including information on the cause and effect of trauma in their lives, PTSD, and services available to them in the community. Group counseling included presentations, discussions, exercises, and handouts on how to differentiate stress from trauma, symptoms of trauma and depression, and the process of trauma, including the physiological responses of fight, flight, and freeze. Also discussed were coping skills and the distinction between healthy and unhealthy relationships and coping mechanisms.

Speakers from an employment service agency and a domestic violence agency made presentations to participants of the program. Program participants also were introduced to a mental health therapist who could



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Table 1
Comparison of control and participant groups on substance use and abuse

Probationer characteristic	Participant groups combined (n=80)	Control group (n=125)	Participants under first service provider (n=48)	Participants under second service provider (n=32)
Using alcohol	54.5%	25.8%	60%	46.9%
Substance abuse problem	80.8%	80%	79.2%	81.3%
Prior substance abuse treatment	60.3%	60.7%	66%	51.6%
Past use of marijuana	80%	77.4%	81.3%	78.1%
Past use of cocaine, heroin, or other stimulants	61.3%	57.3%	64.6%	56.3%
Currently taking illicit drugs	40%	28.8%	45.8%	31.1%
Currently using cocaine, heroin, or other stimulants	75%	55.6%	72.7%	80%
Using marijuana*	50%	63.9%	40.9%	70%
Using tranquilizers or pain killers*	3.1%	2.8%	0%	10%
Using other drugs*	3.9%	3.2%	4.4%	3.1%
Under influence of drugs/alcohol at time of offense	52.6%	63.1%	58.7%	43.3%
Avoiding substance abuse as condition of probation	75%	82.3%	75%	75%

* Of all clients who reported current use of illicit drugs.

provide free counseling. In addition, participants shared their own experiences.

Another focus of the program was to provide referrals to services that the women needed, including mental health counseling, treatment, employment, and housing.

The program retained a new service provider at the end of the first year of implementation in an effort to provide more comprehensive services to participants. The new provider offered psycho-educational trauma counseling and specialized in the treatment of clients who have both substance abuse and mental health problems.

The new provider also offered supportive psycho-educational trauma counseling to smaller groups for shorter periods. The number of allowable missed sessions was lowered, and participants were required to participate in counseling with a victim advocate. Program developers were also responsive to suggestions that could improve the program structure.

Data collection and methods

A control group of 125 non-participating women probationers in Lake County were used to measure the probationer participation in community-based services and

the program’s success at increasing service referrals. The control group included individuals that had participated in the educational programs, but had not participated in group sessions.

In addition, data from probationer files, including demographics, mental abuse history, substance abuse history, social support characteristics, and criminal history was collected and analyzed. Data collected on the control group were compared to those of the program participants in both the first provider’s group (n=48) and the second provider’s group (n=32).

To generally assess probationers’ needs and views about the helpfulness of probation services, a short survey was offered to measure, among other things, probationer needs and referral to community-based services. The respondents (n=56) were a mix of those women involved in the program and those not in contact with the program.

Probationer characteristics

The data revealed similarities between control and participant groups in demographics, social backgrounds, and substance abuse and criminal histories. Also across both participant and control groups, 66 percent had received a high school degree, 73 percent had children, 61

Table 2
Referred probationers by type

Referral type	Participant groups combined (n=80)	Control group (n=125)	Participants under first service provider (n=48)	Participants under second service provider (n=32)
Mental health	71.4%	58%	55.6%	93.8%
Domestic violence	12.5%	18.5%	8.3%	18.8%
Sexual assault	5.3%	0.8%	6.8%	3.1%
Welfare/public aid	17.5%	14.5%	22.9%	9.4%
Child care	5.6%	2.7%	4.7%	7.1%
Employment training	20.3%	4%	23.4%	15.6%
Job/education training	19%	6.4%	14.9%	25%
At least one other referral type	35%	40%	27.1%	46.9%

percent had intimate partners who abused alcohol and drugs, and 66 percent said their intimate partners were involved in criminal activity. Seventy-nine percent of the women were required by the court to abstain from drugs or alcohol during their probation.

The groups were compared on the amount of mental health treatment received, how many tested positive for illicit drugs, administrative sanctions received for non-compliance, and the number of violation of probation petitions filed against them.

The evaluation found that substance abuse was a major factor and area of need for all probationers, including the program participants.

More than 80 percent of all probationers studied reported having a substance abuse problem. Nearly 60 percent said they were under the influence at the time of their crime, and 60 percent reported receiving prior substance abuse treatment. Half of the participants reported marijuana use and 61 percent reported past use of stimulants.

Seventy-five percent of the women were required by the court to abstain from drugs or alcohol during their probation. However, based on data from probation case files of the program participant and control groups, 40 percent were using illicit drugs while on probation, during the study period. Of them, nearly 75 percent used stimulants, 80 percent used marijuana, 3 percent used tranquilizers, and 4 percent used other drugs (*Table 1*).

Program implementation

Program implementation included probationer needs assessment and referrals to appropriate services.

Probationer needs assessments

The most frequent needs cited in the survey sample were for mental health counseling and affordable housing. About one third of the sample also wanted to learn about job interviews and how to complete job applications, obtain a social support network, learn how to handle finances, and obtain a means of transportation to meet probation requirements.

Among those who were unemployed, nearly 45 percent needed token or transportation resources and 52 percent wanted to learn how to interview for a job and complete an application for employment. Affordable housing was a need for half of all clients, both employed and unemployed.

Referrals

Providing referrals to services was an important part of the program. A significantly higher percentage of participants received referrals for mental health and sexual assault counseling and employment services than probationers in the control group (*Table 2*). The second provider of trauma counseling significantly increased the number of referrals clients received, offering referrals for mental health counseling to nearly 94 percent of participants in their group. These referrals were received by 58 percent of the control group and 56 percent of the group led by the first provider. The increase was possibly

due to efforts by the second provider to emphasize that counseling was free of charge.

Program impact

The need for specialized services for women is recognized in the Lake County social services community. Of community-based agencies in Lake County, 65 percent provide services that are specifically designed to meet the unique needs of women.

The majority of referred clients from both participant and control groups ultimately received mental health care, child care, employment services, and substance abuse treatment. About half of the referred clients obtained domestic violence services.

Clients of the second treatment provider were more likely to obtain welfare services than probationers in the control group. Program participants said trauma counseling and education they received, including information on how to communicate with and discipline their children, had helped them to improve their children's lives.

At the end of the evaluation period, 82 percent of all program participants were still on probation, and many clients of the second provider had just been referred for mental health treatment. Therefore, evaluators could not determine whether the program increased successful client completion rates of substance abuse treatment or mental health treatment. Evaluators also could not determine whether participants missed fewer treatment sessions and probation officer appointments than women in the control group. A follow-up impact study to measure the success rates in these areas will be completed in 2009.

Conclusion

The program achieved intermediate goals of increasing referrals to mental health agencies, employment services, domestic violence programs, welfare agencies, and parenting classes during the second year of implementation. Once referred, most clients went to the referral agency and participated in mental health treatment and employment services.

Evaluator recommendations to improve the program included:

- A clear rules enforcement policy on tardiness.
- Collaboration between the program development team and the therapists.
- An increase in the number of trauma counseling sessions.
- Educational materials on healthy and unhealthy relationships and self-destructive behaviors.
- Domestic violence and childhood sexual and physical violence assessments.
- A resource book for the treatment agency and probation office.

Identifying specific needs of female probationers plays a key role in developing programs for this population. Helping female offenders understand, manage, and overcome personal issues with group counseling, individual therapy, and services to address housing and employment needs continue to be the primary goals of the program.



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This *Program Evaluation Summary* was based on the full report, “*The Implementation and Short-term Impact Evaluation of Lake County Adult Probation Department’s Women’s Specialized Services Program*,” conducted by Loretta J. Stalans, Ph.D., Magnus Seng, Ph.D., and Arthur Lurigio, Ph.D. The full report is available on the Authority website at www.icjia.state.il.us.

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