
**Research and program evaluation in Illinois:
Studies on drug abuse and violent crime**

**A Comparison of Evaluation Findings on Sex
Offender Probation Projects in Six Illinois Counties**

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This summary is a comparison of six Illinois Specialized Sex Offender Probation Projects that were the subject of separate implementation and process evaluations. The full evaluation reports and *On Good Authority* briefs are available through the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority.

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Introduction

In recognition that regular probation was insufficiently rigorous to supervise sex offenders, the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority in July, 1997 funded six sex offender probation programs in DuPage, Lake, Winnebago, Coles, Vermilion and Madison counties with federal Anti-Drug Abuse Act funds. The programs began operation in the fall of 1997, except for the Madison program, which began operation in March 1998. In July, 1998, the Authority contracted with Loyola University Chicago and the University of Illinois Springfield to conduct a process and short term impact evaluation of each of these programs. Using a similar design and method, Loyola University conducted the evaluation of the DuPage, Lake and Winnebago programs referred to as the Northern programs, and the University of Illinois conducted the evaluation of the Coles, Vermilion and Madison programs, referred to as the Downstate programs. It was originally planned to present a single document reporting on the evaluation of all six programs and containing a final chapter comparing all six programs. However, because the volume of data simply made the presentation of one document too cumbersome, we elected to prepare and submit two separate evaluation reports, and a third report that compared all six programs. The findings from the evaluation of the Northern programs, entitled *A Process and Short Term Impact Evaluation of Sex Offender Probation Programs in DuPage, Lake and Winnebago Counties*, and the findings from the evaluation of the Downstate programs, entitled *An Implementation Evaluation of Specialized Sex Offender Probation Programs in Coles, Vermilion and Madison Counties*, were submitted to the Authority in June, 1999.

As the title indicates, the findings reported here constitute the third report, which presents a comparison across all six programs. A comparison of all program elements was not attempted primarily because there were differences between the reports in the quality and completeness of some data. We

selected those program elements that both captured the essence of sex offender probation programs and for which comparable data were available. These include the following elements: program setting, development and design; program implementation focusing on target population and caseloads; offender, victim and offense characteristics, supervision and surveillance, and implementation of sex offender treatment.

Program Setting, Development and Design

The Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority classifies counties by location and population into four groups as follows. Cook County, Collar Counties that surround Cook County, Urban Counties that are characterized by a central city as part of a Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area (SMSA) and rural Counties. Two of the six sex offender programs (DuPage and Lake) were in collar counties, two (Winnebago and Madison) were in urban counties and two (Coles and Vermilion) were in rural counties. All six programs were integrated into an established part of the county probation department. In addition, all six programs had had some form of sex offender probation program prior to applying for grant funds. DuPage and Lake Counties had sex offender units staffed with four to six officers who carried a mixed caseload of sex offender and regular probation cases. Winnebago County had a four-officer unit that also carried a mixed caseload but two of the officers in this unit carried the majority of sex offender cases. Coles and Vermilion Counties had a single probation officer who carried a mixed caseload. Madison County had an adult sex offender program but none for juveniles. To this extent, all six programs had some prior experience with sex offender supervision. Also, all of the programs except Madison saw the availability of grant funds as a way to improve the department's ability to supervise sex offenders. Madison County felt a need to develop a program for its growing

caseload of juvenile sex offenders.

Each program approached the task of improving supervision in different ways. The Lake and Coles programs were the two programs that utilized a surveillance officer approach. In Lake County, a six-officer unit supervised a mixed caseload of approximately 50% sex offenders and 50% regular probationers. Two surveillance officers were assigned to the unit to provide surveillance to the sex offender cases carried by the other probation officers primarily during evenings and weekends. In Coles County the sex offender specialist, designated the Case Manager, was to supervise a caseload of sex offender cases only and a surveillance officer (half-time) was assigned to provide surveillance for the Case Manager's caseload primarily during evening hours. In DuPage County, two sex offender grant officers were added to the preexisting sex offender team but were to supervise sex offenders only. In Vermilion County, the sex offender specialists who previously had a mixed caseload, was to handle only sex offender cases. In Winnebago County, two senior probation officers who previously served a mixed caseload, were to handle sex offender cases only. In Madison County, a single sex offender specialist was to supervise only sex offenders. The common feature in all six programs is that each used grant funds to enable the department to designate probation officers who would supervise only sex offenders. A common goal of all six programs was to improve the supervision of sex offenders. The Madison program's primary goal was rehabilitation but improved supervision was also part of their goal structure.

Program Implementation

Target Population

There were major differences in the target populations identified by each program. Some programs targeted felonies only, others programs targeted both felonies and misdemeanors, some

programs targeted adults only, some adults and juveniles and one program targeted juveniles only. The DuPage program targeted adult felony and misdemeanor offenders convicted of statutorily defined sex offenses and sentenced to probation or in some instances non-sex offenders that the Court ordered into the program. Lake County's target population was broadly defined as any adult felony or misdemeanor offender convicted of any sex offense and sentenced to probation or an offender convicted of a non-sex offense that had a sexual component who was sentenced to probation. Winnebago County restricted its target population to adult felony offenders convicted of any sex offense that required the offender to register as a sex offender and who was sentenced to probation. Coles County's target population included any adult or juvenile sex offender convicted of a felony or misdemeanor sex offense who was placed on probation. Vermilion County's target population included adults and juveniles sentenced for felony sex offenses and those sentenced for a misdemeanor if their original charge was a felony reduced to a misdemeanor. The Madison program targeted all juvenile sex offenders sentenced to probation except those who were deemed inappropriate due to participation in violent behavior, psychosis, neurological impairment, or contagious diseases that posed a threat to peers. Most programs remained faithful to their target populations in that the offenders actually served by their program matched the described target population. Differences in population served are further illustrated by a comparison of the convicting offense for each program as presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Convicting Offense
Six Program Comparison

	DuPage	Lake	Winnebago	Coles	Vermilion	Madison
Sample Size	49	84	50	26	11	42
Aggravated criminal sexual assault						57.1%
Criminal sexual assault	8.2%	4.8%	24.0%	23.1	36.4%	14.3%
Aggravated criminal sexual abuse	24.5%	19.0%	54.0%	42.3%	63.6%	11.9%
Criminal sexual abuse				23.1%		16.7%
Attempted criminal sexual abuse				3.8%		
Other misdemeanor sex crimes	34.7%	46.4%	12%			
Public indecency	30.6%	22.6%				
Out of state charges	2.0%	7.1%	10%			
Failure to register				7.7%		

Note: Cases in Coles and Vermilion Counties are adult cases only since Coles County had only eight Juvenile offenders and Vermilion County only one.
Cases in DuPage, Lake and Winnebago are based on a sample. Others on total caseload.

Review of Table 1 indicates considerable diversity among the programs in the type of offenders in the program. The Winnebago, Coles, Vermilion and Madison programs primarily serve felony offenders. In Winnebago County, 78% of the cases examined are felony offenses, in Coles County, 65.4%, in Vermilion County, 100%, and in Madison County, which serves only juveniles, 83.3% are

felony offenders. It should also be noted that all eight of the juvenile offenders in Coles County were also convicted of felony offenses. By contrast, only about a third (32.7%) of the DuPage County offenders and about a quarter (23.8%) of the Lake County offenders are felony offenders. While felonies are, by definition, more serious offenses, misdemeanor sex offenses can and often do include some potential for serious sexual offending.

Caseloads

There was also considerable difference among the programs in total sex offender caseload but less difference in number of cases per officer. Because precise caseload data for the Downstate programs were not presented, the average monthly caseloads stated for these programs were estimated from bar graph material contained in each report. Average monthly caseloads ranged from a high of 214 cases in Lake County to only 12 sex offender program cases in Vermilion County. As will be discussed later, there was considerable difficulty in convincing the court to sentences sex offender cases to the sex offender program in Vermilion County, hence only 12 program cases. However, many sex offender cases were nevertheless sentenced to probation and supervised by the program officer. Sex offender program cases in Vermilion County were subject to a special set of conditions not applicable to other sex offender cases. Estimates of the total caseload (sex offender program cases plus sex offender on probation cases) suggest an average monthly caseload of approximately 36 cases in the Vermilion program. Data on average monthly caseloads and average caseload per officer are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Average Monthly Caseload and Average Number of Cases Per Officer
Six Program Comparison

Program	DuPage	Lake	Winnebago	Coles	Vermilion	Madison
Average monthly caseload	54	214	47	37	11(36)	27
Average monthly caseload per officer	27	37	24	37	11(36)	27

Data for Coles, Vermilion and Madison are estimates .

Lake County had a staff of 6 sex offender specialists and 2 surveillance officers and a very broadly defined target population leading, no doubt, to its high caseload. DuPage County had a staff of two program officers but a more restrictive target population. Winnebago County was restricted to felonies only with a staff of two. The other three programs were limited to one sex offender specialist probation officer. Despite these differences, average monthly caseloads per officer are quite similar.

Offender, Victim and Offense Characteristics

The evaluation reports on each program contained a wealth of information on offender and victim characteristics. A full comparison across all variables, in our view, would be unproductive. Instead, we have selected some key variables to illustrate the offender, victim, and offense characteristics most pertinent to sexual offending. These included median age of offenders, offender employment status while in the program, and percent of victims under age 12 in the DuPage, Lake and Winnebago County programs and 12 or younger in the Coles, Vermilion and Madison County

programs. The difference is due to a slight difference in data presentation among the reports. Percent of cases with more than one victim, gender of victims as either female or male, percent of cases in which penetration occurred, percent of cases in which abuse lasted more than a year, percent of cases in which force was used, percent of cases in which victim/offender were related, percent of cases in which the offender admitted to all aspects or most relevant aspects of the offense, and percent of cases in which the offender indicated that he was a victim of sexual abuse. Data on these variables are presented in Table 3.

Review of Table 3 reveals some similarities as well as some interesting differences. There is little difference among adult offenders in median age. However, higher percentages of offenders are unemployed in the Winnebago, Cole and Vermilion programs than in either DuPage or Lake, reflecting the strong economic base in these two counties. The DuPage and Lake programs also differ from the rest of the programs in the percentage of victims under 12 or 12 or younger. We suspect that this results from the fact that both the DuPage and Lake programs had high percentages of misdemeanor offenders. The percentage of cases with more than one victim is fairly similar among the programs except for DuPage County that has a higher percentage and Madison County that has a lower percentage. Most victims in all six programs are female. Also reflecting the difference between misdemeanor and felony offenders, both DuPage and Lake program probationers have lower rates of penetration than is the case in other programs. The three Northern programs differed from the Downstate programs in that the abuse tends to last longer in the Northern programs. It is also noted that the sharpest difference between adult and juvenile cases is in the percentage of cases in which the abuse lasted more than a year with only 2.9% of the juvenile cases fitting this variable. Force is not a part of the offense in most programs. The DuPage and Lake programs also differ from the other programs in that a much

Table 3
Selected Offender and Victim Characteristics
Six Program Comparison

	DuPage	Lake	Winnebago	Coles	Vermilion	Madison
Offender's median age	35	29	35	33	34	14
% unemployed	12.2	16.9	40.8	30.3	50.0	n/a
% of victims under 12	25	8.4	51.0	42.9 12 or under	83.4 12 or under	73.6 12 or under
% of cases with more than one victim	40	25.3	22.4	23.3	25.0	16.3
% female and % male	f=78.3 m=19.6	f=80.8 m=14.4	f=91.8 m=4.1	f=76.9 m=23.3	f=91.7 m=8.3	f=58.1 m=27.9
% in which penetration occurred	36.7	49.3	65.3	56.7	83.3	82.9
% in which abuse lasted more than a year	37.7	27.3	33.3	11.5	18.2	2.9
% in which force was used	22.2	24.7	24.5	12.5	22.2	37.5
% of cases in which offender/victim were related	23.3	21.9	73.5	48.4	50.0	31.6
% of cases in which offender admits to key elements of offense	63.6	39.4	22.0	44.4	9.1	33.3
% of offenders stating they were sexually abused as a child	9.8	14.8	19.5	20.8	Not stated	38.5

smaller percentage of their cases are cases in which the offender and victim are related. There was considerable variation in the percentage of cases in which the offender admitted to key elements of the

offense. DuPage County had the highest percentage of offenders admitting to key elements of the offense which, we believe, is related to this programs extensive use of the polygraph. Finally, most offenders did not state that they were sexually abused as a child. The highest percentage is among juvenile offenders. An additional observation is that there are few startling differences between adult and juvenile offenders on these variables.

Supervision and Surveillance

All of the programs, with the possible exception of Madison, had improved supervision and surveillance as a primary program goal. Five of the six programs developed monthly contact standards in excess of the minimum requirements for maximum supervision cases established by the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts (AOIC). Madison County adopted the AOIC standards. Contact standards were phase-based in the DuPage, Winnebago, Coles, and Vermilion programs with the highest number of contacts expected in phase I, then reducing in later phases. The Lake program did not adopt a phase-based approach believing that a high level of contact should be maintained throughout the probation period. Comparisons among programs on the extent to which each program met its supervision and surveillance standards was difficult because of sharp differences in the quality and completeness of data on this variable between the Northern and Downstate reports. A key distinction was that the Northern program report provided data on home visits and on total fact-to-face visits while the Downstate report did not often make this distinction. Thus rates of compliance with home visit standards and total face-to-face standards were not available for all six programs. A few general observations emerge from a review of both documents. Most programs experienced difficulty in meeting their supervision/surveillance standards usually because of some very practical reasons. The

Vermilion program had the "best" record of meeting its standards but this program only had 12 cases subject to increased levels of supervision. Sex offender probation cases not part of the Sex Offender Program, were supervised under regular probation standards. The Madison program had a high number of home visits. However, it was difficult to compare these numbers to program expectations, since the grant proposal stated an intent to supervise all JSOP offenders at the intensive level initially but did not specify the anticipated number of home visits. It should be noted that home visits are much more a part of juvenile case supervision than is the case for most adult caseloads. While all programs fell short of their individual expectations, the two programs with surveillance officers, Lake and Coles, when fully staffed met or approached the phase I standard of at least four fact-to-face contacts a month. Both the Lake and Coles programs experienced major staff turnover problems with the surveillance officer portion of their program. An interesting approach adopted by the Coles program was first, the use of a part-time surveillance officer and, when that person left the program, the department approved a higher-back procedure whereby a staff probation officer was allowed to work overtime to fill the surveillance officer position. A creative approach to staffing problems that could fruitfully be emulated by other programs.

Implementation of Sex Offender Treatment

While there were also differences between the reports on elements of the treatment process, it is clear from both reports that for the most part, sex offender treatment was well implemented in these programs. While no attendance rates are presented per se, the majority of offenders ordered to attend treatment did so in all six programs. The downstate report on treatment was based on actual observation of group treatment sessions and provided a rich insight into the treatment process. The

treatment process in the Coles and Madison programs was seen as excellent and appropriate, that in Vermilion was seen as less so. Treatment sessions were not observed in the Northern programs but survey results from providers and probation staff suggested that treatment in these programs was also of high quality. All programs relied most heavily on group therapy based on a cognitive-behavioral approach, except Madison, which adopted a psycho-educational approach. The treatment providers in all six programs appeared well qualified by education and experience.

One element of the treatment process that appeared to be deficient in many programs was the quality and completeness of offender assessments in that actual assessment reports and/or case files did not often contain a full range of offender assessment instruments that current practice suggest are important. The Coles County program appeared to have the most complete set of assessment measures. The treatment provider used by the Madison program did not conduct such assessments unless ordered by the court.

Another key element of sex offender treatment in the containment model is the team approach, which embodies a close working relationship between treatment providers and system personnel especially probation officers. The Northern program report documented the quality of the relationship between treatment providers and probation officers and found a high degree of mutual trust and respect between both groups. While the quality of such relationships was not documented in the Downstate report, there was no indication that the relationship between providers and probation officers were any less positive. One element of the team approach discussed in both reports (but in different places) was the relationship between the program and other parts of the system in particular the State's Attorney's office and the Judiciary. While such relationships were cordial in all six programs, there were less than ideal working relationships in which sex offender cases would be jointly identified by the state's

attorney's office and the sex offender program staff with concurrence of the Judiciary. In numerous instances, sex offenders were sentenced to probation without prior consultation with the program personnel. This was not a major problem with most programs since sex offenders were usually assigned to the sex offender program from cases sentenced to probation. It was a major problem for the Vermilion program because sex offenders selected prior to sentencing for inclusion in the sex offender program were subject to special conditions and increased supervision. However, a large number of sex offenders were sentenced to probation without the pre-sentence review. An additional problem experienced by some programs was turnover in the state' attorney's office and the judiciary requiring "reeducation" of system personnel in order to have the program operate as planned. Many of the programs had intended to use presentence investigation reports as a key part of the case selection process. However, in practice many cases were granted probation based on plea bargaining without consultation with the probation department which, again, reflects the absence of a close working relationship between the program and other parts of the system.

Despite various program glitches, the overall finding from this six program comparison is that each of these programs successfully implemented a sex offender probation program in their county.



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