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On Good Authority is a periodic briefing on trends and issues in criminal justice program evaluation. This report was written by staff Research Analyst Sharyn Adams. It is a summary of a program evaluation of the Cook County Adult Sex Offender Probation Project. The evaluation was conducted by Magnus Seng, Ph.D., and Loretta Stalans, Ph.D., of Loyola University Chicago. Copies of the evaluation are available from the Authority's Research and Analysis Unit.

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Specialized sex offender probation in Cook County links supervision, treatment

Across the nation, jurisdictions have begun to address the limitations of standard probation in supervising sex offenders. Intensive supervision programs that combine treatment and home visits are considered a viable alternative to standard sex offender probation.

The Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, using Federal Anti-Drug Abuse Act funds, awarded a grant to the Cook County Adult Probation Department to develop a specialized intensive supervision sex offender unit. Implemented in 1996, the Adult Sex Offender Probation (ASOP) Project is an intensive supervision probation project for offenders convicted of felony sex offenses against minors. The project is based on the containment approach, a nationally recognized, intensive supervision and community-based probation model with three major components, including:

- Intensive supervision of offenders, which includes frequent searches of the offender's home and verification of information verbally obtained from offenders.
- Group therapy treatment supplemented with individual counseling.
- A partnership between probation officers and treatment providers that includes frequent communication and information sharing on specific offenders.

Background

The Cook County ASOP began screening cases in March 1997 and received its first sentenced offender in April 1997. The main distinction between sex offenders on regular probation and ASOP is that ASOP project participants are selected using specifically identified criteria, are subject to increased levels of supervision and surveillance, and must participate in a sex offender treatment program.

Four specially trained ASOP officers supervise offenders selected for the project. A sex offender caseload of between 25 to 35 cases per officer, which would allow sufficient time for increased supervision and surveillance of offenders, was the capacity goal for the ASOP Project.

The ASOP unit was designed to include eligibility screening before an offender was sentenced and accepted into the unit. Only 25 percent of 81 cases reviewed followed the formal screening process, while the remaining cases were directly sentenced by judges into the project without pre-screening. Despite the deviation from the original design, no substantively significant differences existed between offenders who were screened and those who were directly sentenced. In April 2000, the project caseload was 108, or 27 cases per officer.

The ASOP probation officers met the standard of four monthly face-to-face office contacts, averaging more than six per offender per month. From May 1999 to December 1999 the probation officers,

on average, made more than the required number of office contacts. The findings for field visits remained consistent throughout the two and one-half year evaluation period. Although ASOP probation officers had not conducted, on average, one field visit per offender in any month during the evaluation period, ASOP administrators did establish a home check procedure with the probation department's Home Confinement Unit. The Home Confinement Unit, in the course of curfew checks, would enter the offender's home to check for evidence of minors or the victims of their offense, as well as other indications of high-risk behavior. About 175 home confinement checks were made of Phase I offenders and 50 checks were made of Phase II offenders each month.

Treatment

The Cook County ASOP project worked well in various areas. The unit provided a written list of the requirements for treatment evaluations to all treatment providers. The requirements state that the evaluations must be written, integrate all information, and include a polygraph examination, an objective personality test, and an objective sexual preference test. The ASOP unit also created a committee of therapists to create uniform criteria to judge progress in and successful completion of treatment. Additionally, the unit and therapists created standard policies on how to respond to noncompliance demonstrated in treatment, such as tardiness, unexcused absences, and failing to complete treatment. The unit also requires that providers hold group therapy sessions that last a minimum of 90 minutes per week, and conduct one group therapy session a week and one individual counseling session twice a month. Finally, the ASOP unit contracted with treatment providers throughout Cook County to ensure that services are geographically accessible to offenders.

According to monthly reports submitted by therapists, the average number of sex offender group therapy sessions scheduled per month was 3.71, slightly below the expected average of four. Of the 45 sex offenders studied who were treated by the two major treatment

Table 1
Therapist ratings on six dimensions related to sex offender treatment*

Offender treatment dimensions	Mean rating on first monthly report across sex offenders	Mean rating on last monthly report across sex offenders	Mean rating across all monthly reports and all sex offenders
Participation	5.57	6.31	6.12
Commitment	5.38	6.22	5.87
Acknowledges personal responsibility for the offense	5.46	6.52	6.14
Understands consequences of reoffending	5.93	6.71	6.53
Willing to disclose inappropriate sexual behavior	5.02	6.22	5.66
Accepts responsibility for harm caused to victims	4.98	5.86	5.52

*Scale ranges from 1 to 10 and was developed by the project evaluators and treatment providers. Higher numbers indicate more of the characteristic.

Offenders demonstrated positive lifestyle changes by seeking or obtaining employment. They also learned to manage their anger, were more emotionally open in group therapy, and took more responsibility for their crimes.

agencies, 12 attended every group therapy session, while one-third missed three or more. The average number of individual sessions attended by offenders was 1.25, slightly below the expected average of two, but more than one-half of the offenders did not miss any individual sessions.

The monthly treatment reports therapists submitted also indicated the occurrence of positive lifestyle changes, such as strengthening social relationships, maintaining sobriety, and improving employment status. Offenders

demonstrated positive lifestyle changes by seeking or obtaining employment and by receiving a promotion. Offenders who made positive lifestyle changes also learned to manage their anger, were more emotionally open in group therapy, and took more responsibility for their crimes. In addition, offenders tended to improve over time on the six critical dimensions of treatment, measuring an offender's potential for recidivism and how well offenders are responding to treatment (Table 1). Nineteen of the 45 offenders did not show any positive lifestyle changes.

Group comparisons

The research design for the evaluation included a control sample of sex offenders who were convicted of the same crimes as the ASOP sample and were sentenced to standard probation. Data was collected from 208 sex offenders on standard probation in Cook County and was compared to data collected on the ASOP offenders to determine the impact

of the project. Offenders in the control sample were convicted of aggravated criminal sexual assault, criminal sexual assault, or aggravated criminal sexual abuse, had committed an offense against a minor, and were sentenced to probation between January 1993 and January 1997. Control sample data were obtained from probation department case files, however, the files generally did not include treatment information or detailed information about the offense.

According to comparisons on variables that may affect recidivism, the ASOP sample and the control sample were similar on 20 characteristics, and differed on five characteristics. In terms of similarities, close to one-half of both the ASOP and control samples were never-married single men and 28 percent of the ASOP sample and 36 percent of the control sample were married. Both groups were in their 30s, with a mean age of 32 in the ASOP sample and about 35 in the control sample. About one-half of both samples were regularly employed in the past (53 percent of the ASOP sample and 50 percent of the control sample) and were employed during the evaluation (51 percent of the ASOP sample and 67 percent of the control sample). Also, more than 70 percent of the sex offenders in both samples lived in poverty at the time of the intake interview, and roughly one-half of both samples failed to complete high school.

The ASOP and control sample differed on these five characteristics:

- Whether the offender was a family member of the victim.
- The age of the youngest victim.
- The number of prior arrests for misdemeanor crimes.
- The number of prior arrests for any offense.
- Whether an offender previously had been arrested for at least one offense but never had been convicted.

ASOP offenders were more likely to have victimized a family member, and were more likely to have victimized a child between the ages of 2 and 8. Also, ASOP offenders were less likely to have been arrested previously for a misde-

Table 2
Characteristic differences between ASOP and control samples

Characteristic with statistically significant difference	ASOP sample (78 offenders)	Control sample (208 offenders)
Victim was not a family member	33%	55%
Age of youngest victim		
2 - 8	42%	11%
9 - 12	26%	45%
12 - 17	29%	44%
18 or older	3%	0
Previously arrested for a misdemeanor		
Previously arrested for a misdemeanor	25%	44%
Previously arrested for any crime		
Previously arrested for any crime	36%	59%
Arrests and convictions		
Prior arrests, no convictions		
Prior arrests, no convictions	22%	41%
No prior arrests or convictions		
No prior arrests or convictions	78%	59%

*Valid percentages represented. Denominator of 28 or 208 was adjusted to take into account missing data.

meanor, or for any offense, and less likely to have been arrested but not convicted of any offense (Table 2).

Probation outcomes

About 23 percent of ASOP participants and 18 percent of control sample offenders were arrested during their probation period. Just more than 5 percent of ASOP offenders were arrested for and/or convicted of a sex-related offense, compared with just more than 3 percent of control sample offenders. Eighteen ASOP offenders were arrested at least once while on probation – four of these offenders were charged with a new sex offense. Of 38 control offenders arrested at least once while on probation, seven were charged with a new sex offense. Both ASOP and control sample offenders were arrested for battery, domestic

battery, drug possession, and burglary, among other charges. ASOP participants were arrested much earlier during their probation – two times faster than offenders on standard probation. On the average, ASOP offenders were first arrested after seven months of probation whereas control offenders were arrested after one year and four months of probation. About the same percentage of ASOP offenders and control offenders absconded for a period of time. As a result, arrest warrants were issued against them (21 percent and 18 percent, respectively).

ASOP offenders and control offenders differed the most in three outcome variables:

- The number of probation revocations (26 percent of ASOP sample and 11 percent of control sample).

- The number of unsatisfactory probation terminations (26 percent of ASOP sample and 17 percent of control sample). While probation was revoked from ASOP offenders who were terminated unsatisfactorily, 14 control sample cases (almost 7 percent of the sample) were terminated unsatisfactorily without repercussion.

- The number of probation violation petitions filed (59 percent of the ASOP sample received violation petitions, as did 42 percent of the control sample).

These differences may have been the result of the number of probation conditions on ASOP offenders and the strictness of ASOP probation officers. ASOP offenders are faced with a larger number of more restrictive probation conditions that are readily enforced by their probation officers. ASOP officers also were three times more likely to file a violation of probation petition than were standard probation officers. Control sample probationers often committed two

or three non-sex-related offenses before a violation of probation petition was filed.

Conclusion and recommendations

Evaluators found that Adult Sex Offender Probation Project was well implemented. The project was under effective management and was improving its partnerships with therapists and its surveillance efforts.

ASOP probation officers met face-to-face office contact standards, required offenders to keep logs of their time, developed graduated sanction guidelines, and established strict and appropriate responses to offender noncompliance. The Cook County ASOP project also showed superior performance in obtaining quality treatment evaluations, meeting treatment frequency standards, seeking treatment agencies in all geographical areas of the county, and attempting to obtain uniform quality treatment from several agencies. Despite successful implementation and quality

treatment, the project was still unable to meet field visit requirements. Evaluators offered the following recommendations:

- Home Confinement Unit visits should remain part of the field visit structure, but should not substitute for the ASOP officer-conducted field visits.
- Officers conducting searches should have detailed knowledge of high-risk behaviors in each case.
- Some consideration should be given to assigning all sex offenders to an expanded ASOP unit or increasing supervision practices of sex offenders in the standard probation unit.
- The project should establish uniform criteria for determining treatment progress across agencies, and communicate the conditions of treatment and probation to each offender in a meeting with the therapist, probation officer, and offender. ♦

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