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On Good Authority is a periodic briefing on trends and issues in criminal justice. This report was written by David E. Olson, Ph.D., assistant professor of criminal justice at Loyola University Chicago and senior scientist at the Authority. It is based on a study of Illinois probationers completed by Dr. Olson and Rich Adkins of the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts' Probation Services Division. Copies of the study are available from the Authority's Research and Analysis Unit.

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Probation in Illinois: A study of outcomes

In 1997, the 81,996 adults on probation in Illinois accounted for 59 percent of all adults under correctional supervision in the state, including those in prisons and jails. Despite the fact that most convicted offenders are placed on probation, little detailed information regarding probationer characteristics and case outcomes has been available in Illinois. To fill this void, the Probation Services Division of the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts (AOIC) and the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority collaborated with local probation departments to conduct the 1997 Illinois Probation Outcome Study—the first of its kind in the state.

The data collection effort involved probation officers throughout Illinois reporting detailed information for every adult discharged from probation in Illinois during a four-week period in November and December 1997. As a result of these efforts, detailed information on more than 2,400 probationers was obtained, representing every judicial circuit in Illinois. Probationer characteristics, the current offense, court-ordered sanctions, case outcomes, and quantitative and qualitative data regarding performance while on probation were recorded.

Analyses of these data revealed that the majority of offenders discharged from probation in Illinois successfully completed the terms of their sentence. This included the payment of fees, fines, restitution, and court costs; compliance with orders to engage in various treatment programs; and remaining free of arrest for new crimes during the supervision period.

Despite these positive findings, however, there were a number of specific probationer characteristics found to be associated with higher rates of probation violations, arrest, and a negative discharge from probation. These included a history of drug abuse, prior involvement in the justice system, the nature of the current offense, and probationer's age.

Background on probation outcome study subjects

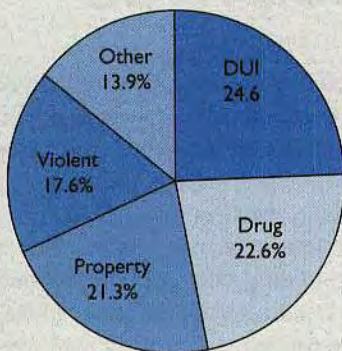
In general, adults discharged from probation in Illinois during the study period tended to be white males under the age of 31 with annual incomes below \$15,001. However, there were some substantial differences in the demographic characteristics of probationers in Cook County compared to the rest of Illinois. Almost two-thirds of discharged probationers in Cook County were nonwhite, compared to 41 percent of probationers in the rest of Illinois. Statewide, 58 percent of probationers were white.

The average age of probationers in Cook County was 33, compared to 31.7 years in the rest of Illinois. Throughout Illinois, the majority of probationers were male (80 percent) and almost two-thirds (64 percent) had annual incomes of less than \$15,001.

With respect to prior involvement in the justice system, the majority (61.2 percent) of probationers did not have a prior adult conviction before their current sentence to probation, and very few (less than 9 percent) had ever been in prison before. Across all probationers, the number of prior adult convictions averaged 1.11 per probationer,

indicating that while most had none, a small proportion had numerous prior convictions. In addition, one-fifth of all probationers had at least one prior adult conviction or juvenile adjudication within the past five years for a violent crime.

Figure 1
Probation population
by type of offense



Driving under the influence (DUI) was the most common offense for probationers statewide (Figure 1). Approximately one-half of all probationers were convicted of felonies, while the other half were convicted of misdemeanors.

In addition to their sentences to probation or supervision, about one-half of all probationers in Illinois were also ordered to pay court costs, supervision fees, and fines, and participate in some form of treatment. A smaller proportion of probationers were ordered to urinalysis as a condition of probation (25.9 percent), to perform community service (23 percent), or to pay restitution to victims (13.4 percent). There were, however, substantial differences across offense categories in the inclusion of these sanctions in sentences. For example, probationers convicted of drug offenses were much more likely to be ordered to drug treatment and urinalysis, while restitution was more likely to be ordered against those convicted of property or violent offenses.

Case outcomes

A variety of measures were collected and examined to describe the outcomes of

those discharged from probation during the study period, including both objective and subjective measures. Included among the objective criteria were the case discharge status, arrests while on probation, technical violations of the probation sentence, and compliance with court orders included as part of the probation sentence. However, because it is extremely difficult to objectively measure changes in some dimensions of probationer behaviors and situations, information based on the subjective impressions of probation officers was also collected and considered, including the perceptions of the probation officers with respect to the probationer's employment stability, drug or alcohol use, attitude and family/marital stability.

One measure of probation outcome that was considered was the status of the case at the time of discharge, which was categorized as either positive, neutral or negative. Probationers discharged due to scheduled or early termination were categorized as positive discharges. Those whose probation was revoked due to either a technical violation or new arrest, or who were committed to the Illinois Department of Corrections, were considered negative discharges (Figure 2).

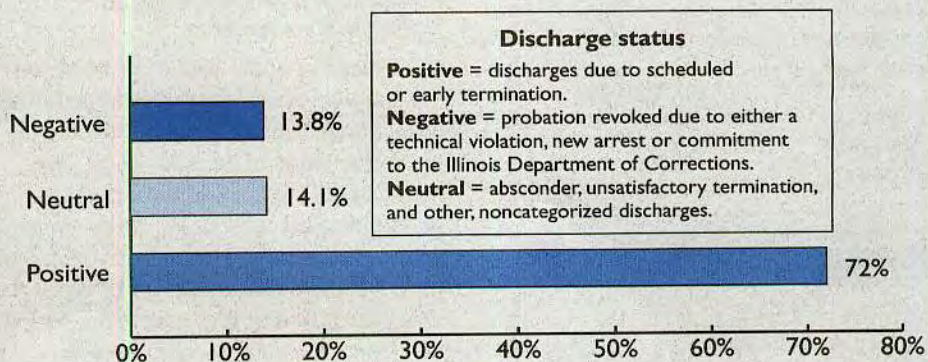
Because not all technical violations or arrests result in a revocation of probation or a negative discharge from probation, the prevalence of technical violations or arrests during the period of supervision, regardless of whether or not these violations resulted in a revocation, was also examined.

Across all probationers, 37 percent had one or more technical violations of their probation during the supervision period, 32 percent were arrested at least once while on probation, and 21 percent had both a technical violation and arrest while on probation. Thus, the majority of adult probationers were positively discharged from probation and had no technical violations or arrests during their period of supervision.

Across each of the outcome measures considered (discharge status, technical violations, and arrest while on probation) consistent patterns emerged. In general, offenders placed on probation for DUI, older probationers, those without a prior conviction, those not using drugs while on probation and those without a history of drug abuse had lower rates of negative discharge, technical violations and arrests than their counterparts on probation. For example, probationers serving a sentence for a DUI conviction had the lowest rate of negative discharges (8 percent), technical violations (33.2 percent) and arrests (18.4 percent). On the other hand, those placed on probation for property and drug offenses had the highest rate of negative discharges (19 percent and 18 percent, respectively), technical violations (41 and 40.4 percent, respectively) and arrests (40.8 and 36.1 percent, respectively).

Similarly, almost 25 percent of probationers with a history of drug abuse were negatively discharged from probation, compared to 8 percent of those with no history of drug abuse.

Figure 2
Probation outcome: Status at discharge



Among those probationers tested for illegal drugs during the course of their supervision, those testing positive were three times as likely to be negatively discharged than those whose urinalysis indicated no drug use, (37.5 percent compared to 12.6 percent).

Probationer age also appeared to be associated with differences in case outcomes. In general, the younger the probationer, the more likely they were to be negatively discharged from probation, have technical violations and be arrested while supervised. For example, more than 20 percent of those under 21 years of age were negatively discharged, compared to less than 9 percent of those over the age of 40. Those with a prior adult conviction also had a higher rate of negative discharge, technical violations, and arrests, than those without a prior conviction.

When the extent to which probation officers were able to meet supervision contact standards was examined, differences in case outcomes also were noted. Among those cases where supervision contact standards were not met, higher rates of negative discharge, technical violations, and arrests were evident. Part of this may be due to the fact that cases assessed as maximum risk (based on probationer characteristics) have more frequent contact requirements, and those probationers assessed as at maximum risk also had higher rates of negative case outcomes than those assessed at a lower level of risk. When interpreting these differences in case outcomes, consideration should be given to the fact that AOIC estimates that approximately 260 adult probation officers are needed statewide to meet supervision standards.

In addition to considering probation discharge status, and the extent to which probationers were arrested or had technical violations during the course of supervision, information on the degree to which probationers satisfied the other conditions of their probation also were examined. These conditions included treatment participation, payment of supervision fees, fines, court costs, and restitution, as well as the performance of community service. In general, most

	Negative discharge	Technical violation	Arrest	Percent of all probationers
Violent offense	12.5%	37.2%	33.6%	17.6%
Property offense	19.0%	41.0%	40.8%	21.3%
Drug offense	18.0%	40.4%	36.1%	22.6%
DUI offense	8.0%	33.2%	18.4%	24.6%
History of drug abuse	24.3%	52.2%	44.9%	35.2%
No history of drug abuse	8.0%	28.3%	24.1%	64.8%

probationers satisfied these additional sanctions.

Across all probationers so ordered, the average amount collected per probationer was \$215 for supervision fees, \$414 in fines, almost \$232 in court costs, \$963 in restitution, and almost 77 hours of community service. In addition, the majority (76 percent) of those ordered to treatment completed or were still enrolled in the treatment program at the time of discharge from probation.

Information also was collected to measure probation officer perceptions of changes in the probationer's family and employment stability, as well as changes in probationer attitude and drug and/or alcohol use. Officers were asked to determine if they perceived improvement, no change, or deterioration across these dimensions for each probationer discharged during the study period.

According to the probation officers, during the period of supervision a relatively large proportion of probationers who were positively discharged improved their attitude, employment stability, and family/marital stability. A very small proportion of those probationers negatively discharged were perceived as having experienced improvement in these areas.

The largest area where improvement was seen was with respect to attitude change. Almost 60 percent of the

probationers positively discharged during the study period were seen as having improved their attitude, compared to about 10 percent of those with a negative discharge. More than 30 percent of the positive probation discharges were perceived as having improved their family and employment stability during the period of supervision, compared to 10 percent or less of those with a negative discharge.

The probation officers also seemed to confirm the benefits of participation in, and completion of, drug treatment. They reported that the majority of probationers who completed drug treatment during the course of their probation sentence appeared to have reduced their drug use. Among those completing drug treatment, almost 90 percent were perceived by probation officers as reducing their drug use. These probationers accounted for 60 percent of all probationers ordered to drug treatment. By comparison, less than 20 percent of those probationers who did not complete their court-ordered drug treatment were perceived as having reduced their drug use. Approximately 30 percent of probationers ordered to drug treatment did not complete treatment.

Conclusions

For the first time in Illinois, there are a number of conclusions that can be made about the outcomes of adults sentenced

to probation—the most frequent sanction imposed on convicted offenders in the state. Many of these conclusions point to the effectiveness of probation as a viable, and cost effective, sanction for many convicted offenders. A number of the conclusions also illustrate the need to continue to increase the capacity of probation in Illinois, and ensure an adequate supply of treatment and rehabilitative programs for these offenders.

The following general conclusions can be made from the study:

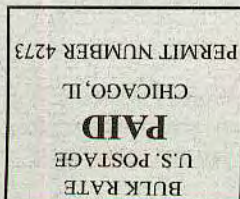
- The majority of adults on probation in Illinois complete their sentence satisfactorily, with no technical violations or arrests during their period of supervision;
- Certain types of offenders, particularly those convicted of property and drug offenses, those with histories of drug abuse, those with prior involvement in the justice system, those in their late teens and early 20s, and those who continue to

use drugs while on probation, are most likely to be negatively discharged from probation, have technical violations of their probation sentence or be arrested for a new offense while on probation. Although these offenders account for a relatively small proportion of all probationers in Illinois, there needs to be a continued and expanded focus on these higher-risk probationers and the establishment/expansion of programs to address their criminal tendencies;

- A substantial portion of probationers have conditions attached to their sentence of probation, including payments of supervision fees, fines, court costs, and restitution, and the performance of community service. The fulfillment of these conditions by the majority of probationers not only provides the justice system with substantial revenues to supplement taxpayer funding, but also results in the recovery of losses experienced by victims through restitution, and the community through court-ordered community service;

- Although, due to limited availability and program crowding, not all probationers who are in need of treatment have access to treatment, most of those ordered to treatment as a condition of their probation complete that treatment before the end of their sentence. For many, this was their first opportunity to get treatment, which may have a substantial impact on future criminality. Among those probationers who completed their drug treatment, almost 90 percent were perceived by their probation officer as reducing their drug use; and

- In addition to the positive findings regarding the low levels of probationer arrest and negative discharge from probation, these data have also provided some indication that during supervision a substantial portion of probationers experienced improvement in various aspects of their personal lives, such as their attitude, employment stability, and family relationships. ■



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