



Vol. 6, No. 3
October 2002

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 an evaluation of the domestic violence probation programs in Sangamon, Peoria, and Tazewell counties. The evaluation was conducted by the Center for Legal Studies at the University of Illinois at Springfield. Copies of the evaluation are available from the Authority's Research and Analysis Unit.

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The evaluation was supported by grant #00-DB-MU-0017 awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. Points of view in this document do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

Printed by authority of the State of Illinois, October 2002. Printing order #03-076.

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The impact of domestic violence probation programs

Domestic violence incidents account for a large proportion of service calls received by local police departments. In recent years, the calls have resulted in more arrests and more referrals for prosecution. Efforts by prosecutors, judges, domestic violence shelters, and women's advocacy organizations have increased the proportion of charges that go to trial or result in a defendant pleading guilty. As a result, probation departments are dealing with growing numbers of domestic violence offenders.

Evaluators with the Center for Legal Studies at the University of Illinois at Springfield conducted a process and impact evaluation of the domestic violence probation projects in Sangamon, Peoria, and Tazewell counties. The probation departments of these counties implemented the projects to improve their ability to supervise domestic violence probationers and hold the offenders accountable for their behavior. The Authority supported development of these programs with federal Anti-Drug Abuse Act funds.

Sangamon County

The Sangamon County Domestic Violence Probation Program (DVPP) began in January 1999. The program was designed to prevent and reduce future battering and victimization. The goals included:

- Expanding the surveillance of domestic violence offenders placed on probation.

- More effective integration of batterer intervention programs by making completion of a program a condition of all orders of probation for domestic violence offenses.
- More immediate and effective intervention by probation officers in response to non-compliance with probation conditions.
- More effective victim services from the probation officer.

The DVPP utilized two strategies. One mandated participation in a batterer intervention program as a condition of probation in every domestic violence case. The other set up a fast-track system within a court that heard only domestic violence cases, which includes regularly scheduled hearings to review the status of DVPP probationers and consider changes in their probation conditions to allow quick responses to non-compliant behavior.

Beginning in 1999 all new domestic violence and violation of order of protection cases were assigned to the DVPP with two exceptions. Offenders who were already on probation for a non-domestic violence conviction that was rendered more serious by the state's attorney's office remained on the caseload of their original probation officer and conditional discharge cases were assigned outside the DVPP, even when completion of a batterer intervention program was required. Two full-time domestic violence probation officers were on staff.

During the evaluation period, 135 of the 136 DVPP probationers were male with almost 60 percent of the caseload being African-American and almost 40 percent white. Forty-four percent of probationers had completed some high school, 44 percent had completed high school or obtained a general equivalency degree, and 12 percent had taken college courses. About one-half were single, about 24 percent were married and the remainder were either divorced, separated, or widowed. More than 95 percent of probationers had at least one prior conviction, with 50 percent having a prior conviction for domestic violence. About one-third were on probation for domestic violence at the time of their last offense.

Peoria County

The Peoria County Probation and Court Services Department began a specialized Domestic Violence Unit (DVU) in January 1999. The DVU provided specialized domestic violence probation in coordination with other agencies. The program aimed to:

- Provide pretrial supervision in high-risk domestic violence cases.
- Provide ongoing victim advocacy from the earliest possible point in the prosecution and sentencing process.
- Develop and implement special supervision strategies for use with domestic violence cases posing the highest levels of risk.
- Develop and implement specialized probation strategies for domestic violence cases assigned to the DVU.

Existing domestic violence cases and other cases involving intimate partner or family violence were screened to identify cases appropriate for transfer to the DVU. New domestic violence cases in which completion of the Center for Prevention of Abuse batterers intervention program was mandated, and probationers who had a history of domestic violence or who otherwise appeared to pose a high risk for additional abuse and violence, were assigned to one of the two DVU officers. The DVU caseload consisted of 206 probationers sentenced primarily for domestic battery or order of protection violations.

Table 1
Offender demographics

	Sangamon County	Peoria County	Tazewell County
Gender			
Male	99%	92%	96%
Female	1%	8%	4%
Race			
African-American	59%	52%	None
White	39%	44%	98%
Other	2%	4%	2%
Average age			
	31	32	32
Education			
Less than high school	44%	43%	47%
Completed high school/G.E.D.	44%	41%	42%
Some college	12%	16%	11%
Marital status			
Single	54%	49%	Unknown
Married	24%	20%	Unknown
Divorced, widowed, or separated	22%	31%	Unknown
Percent with prior convictions			
	96%	79%	69%
Percent on probation at time of offense			
	32%	19%	15%

During the period of evaluation, males accounted for 92 percent of DVU probationers, with slightly more than one-half being African-American and 44 percent being white. Forty-three percent of the DVU probationers had less than 12 years of education, with almost 10 percent of this group not having attended high school. Forty-one percent had finished high school and 16 percent had attended college. Almost 50 percent of probationers were single, 20 percent were married, and about 30 percent were divorced, separated, or widowed at the time of sentencing. Almost 80 percent of

offenders had at least one prior conviction, with more than 40 percent of those having a conviction for domestic violence. Almost 20 percent were on probation at the time of their last offense.

Tazewell County

The Tazewell County Court Services Office developed the specialized Domestic Violence Probation Unit (DVPU) in 1999. The specialized domestic violence probation program was created to improve supervision of probationers, and ultimately decrease domestic violence recidivism. The DVPU worked toward:

- Reducing domestic violence recidivism through increased referral to batterer intervention programs, and closer monitoring of program participation and completion.
- Increasing contact with offenders and offender family members or significant others, and establishing probation's role in unified Family Court.
- Addressing life skills needs of probationers.

DVPU also emphasized referral to, participation in, and completion of a batterer intervention program.

Beginning in 1999 all new domestic violence and violation of an order of protection cases were assigned to DVPU. Two full-time officers were on staff in the unit. Exceptions to being placed in the program included probationers who were assessed as minimum risk cases, domestic violence cases that did not involve intimate partners, and cases that did not require the Center for Prevention of Abuse batterer intervention program as a condition of probation.

During the evaluation period, males made up 96 percent of the 132 DVPU probationers, with 98 percent of the participants being white, and 2 percent being Hispanic. More than 45 percent of the probationers had not completed high school, 42 percent had completed high school, and 11 percent had attended some college. More than two-thirds of the probationers had at least one prior conviction. Almost one-half had previously been arrested on domestic violence charges and one-third had been convicted of domestic violence. About 15 percent of the DVPU probationers were on probation when they committed their last offense.

Short-term outcomes

Sangamon County DVPP

Ninety percent of the 136 probationers sampled in DVPP were required to complete a batterer intervention program as a condition of probation. Probationers are required to contact the batterer intervention group within a week of being referred and must begin the program within 30 days. Forty-seven percent of probationers started the

Table 2
Probation outcomes

	Sangamon County	Peoria County	Tazewell County
Percent required to complete batterer intervention program			
	90%	99%	90%
Number of probationers with violation/revocation petitions filed			
	52	40	47
Type of violation			
Technical	62%	93%	62%
Criminal	10%	7%	15%
Combination	28%	None	23%
Number of sentences revoked			
	22 (42%)	25 (63%)	12 (27%)

batterer intervention program within the required 30-day period, with 24 percent starting during their second month on probation, 9 percent during the third month, 5 percent during the fourth month, and almost 15 percent taking longer than four months to enter.

DVPP officers filed violations on 52 probationers, with eight receiving two violations each for a total of 60. Sixty-two percent of these violations were technical violations alone, while 28 percent received a combination of technical and criminal violations, and 10 percent received only criminal violations. The criminal violations were evenly distributed between those that were domestic violence-related and those that were not. Almost all of the technical violations were the result of a probationer not enrolling in or attending the batterer intervention program. Of the 60 violation petitions filed, 23 were granted by the court, six were denied, and the rest were pending a court decision. Probation was revoked from 22 offenders. These offenders were then re-sentenced to probation.

Of the DVPP probationers whose files were reviewed, 102 were still serving their original probation sentence, and 22 had their original sentence revoked. Those offenders were re-sentenced to the DVPP. With regard to

DVPP completion, 11 probationers were classified as unsuccessful, with nine absconding and two receiving revocation of probation and sentenced to a term of imprisonment.

Peoria County DVU

The central requirement for DVU probationers was to complete a batterer intervention program; all but two of the 206 probationers sampled were ordered to attend. Although 99 percent of probationers were ordered to the program, 33 percent had made no contact with the program at the time of data collection, 7 percent had successfully completed the program, and 12 percent had been terminated unsuccessfully. Twelve percent of the Peoria County DVU probationers sampled were ordered to submit to a substance abuse evaluation or to participate in a substance abuse treatment program. Only about 42 percent of these probationers successfully completed the mandated treatment. Almost 20 percent were terminated unsuccessfully from treatment and about 40 percent were still in treatment at the time of data collection.

Notice of probation violations and requests to revoke probation were submitted by the DVU to the state's attorney's office for 40 probationers, with two of these probationers being reported

for more than one violation. Technical violations accounted for 93 percent of the total. Two criminal violations were reported with one being domestic violence related. The most frequent technical violations were for non-compliance in completing the batterer intervention program and a failure to report to probation. Of 40 probation revocation requests, 33 petitions were filed, and the court granted 25. In most cases the offender's probation sentence was modified or terminated unsuccessfully, but in some cases the probationer was resentenced to probation without any significant change in the conditions of probation.

Tazewell County DVPU

A review of 132 case files revealed that 90 percent of the Tazewell County DVPU probationers were required to complete a batterer intervention program. The batterer intervention program was completed by almost 40 percent of the probationers. Thirty percent of the probationers were still enrolled in the

intervention program, 13 percent had made no contact with the program, and 12 percent had been terminated unsuccessfully. Five percent were classified as "Other."

The DVPU officers filed probation violations with the state's attorney's office for 47 probationers. Thirty probationers had one violation filed, while 17 probationers committed two or more violations. Technical violations accounted for 62 percent of those filed, while criminal violations made up 15 percent, with four criminal cases involving domestic violence. More than 20 percent of the violations involved a combination of technical and criminal violations, with seven cases being domestic violence related. The state's attorney's office filed 31 petitions to revoke probation. The petitions were granted in 12 cases, denied in nine cases, and still pending in nine cases. The majority of participants whose probation was revoked received another longer probation sentence. One probationer had successfully completed the probation sentence at the time of data collection. Two percent of probationers were unsuccessful in completing their probation sentence at the time of data collection, 5

percent had absconded, and 93 percent were still on probation.

Conclusion

Evaluators concluded that the three probation departments recognized the need to draw on community resources in supervising this probation population. Most prominent among these resources are organizations that provide batterer intervention programs. Evaluators also determined the programs were appropriately addressing alcohol and substance abuse problems.

Evaluators noted that because of these specialized domestic violence probation units, the three counties are gaining a better understanding of their domestic violence offender populations and are identifying patterns that are relevant to the supervision of these offenders. They also understand that enforcing the conditions of probation that have been imposed is an important intervention tool that is key to successful probation and the prevention of future offenses.

