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On Good Authority is a periodic briefing on trends and issues in criminal justice. This report was written by staff Research Supervisor Tracy Hahn. It is based on a program evaluation of the Adult Sex Offender Probation Program in Cook County. 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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Cook County sex offender probation program provides supervision and treatment

Criminal justice professionals have recognized the need for specialized, intensive probation supervision for sex offenders. A 1993 study by the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts probation division documented that while more than 2,500 adult sex offenders were on probation in Illinois, few departments had the necessary resources to monitor them.

The Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, through federal Anti-Drug Abuse Act funds, awarded a grant to the Cook County Adult Probation Department for the development of a sex offender program. Implemented in 1996, the Cook County Adult Sex Offender Probation (ASOP) program was the first specialized program of its kind in Illinois and incorporated three major components:

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

In 1997, an additional grant was awarded to Loyola University Chicago to

conduct a process and impact evaluation on the program. The study is scheduled for completion in 2000. This *On Good Authority* is a summary of interim findings from the first year of the evaluation and focuses primarily on the implementation of the program. The study describes how the program was developed, the timeliness and successfulness in implementing the program components, and the operation of the program to date.

Program background

The targeted offender group for ASOP includes offenders convicted of aggravated criminal sexual abuse or criminal sexual assault against a family member. The offender must reside in Cook County, and away from children, child-care facilities, or schools. The program design calls for potential participants to complete a rigorous eligibility screening developed to control the nature and size of the caseload.

The process begins in the state's attorney's office, where all cases that have at least one charge fitting the target group criteria are flagged as potentially eligible for placement. There are a variety of reasons why a target case may not be selected, including the presence of prior felony convictions. Defendants who agree to consider placement in the program then confer with the judge, defense attorney, and assistant state's attorney.

If all parties agree on an ASOP sentence, the program supervisor is contacted to initiate an eligibility screening. The ASOP supervisor briefly meets

Because the ASOP program was designed to include more intense surveillance of sex offenders than in regular probation, field searches play an integral role in the program.

with the victim and the victim's family to explain the program, then meets with the defendant to review the stages and requirements of the program. Next, the case is assigned to an ASOP officer that meets with the defendant to complete an intake form and review information relating to the case. A home visit to the defendant's residence is conducted to confirm that the defendant is not living in the household of the victim or in close proximity to children. The residence is also inspected for inappropriate or sexually explicit material. The defendant's relatives are informed of the program's conditions and procedures so they also will know what to expect, and to enlist their cooperation.

If the defendant is selected by staff for the program, an eligibility letter is signed and the offender is sentenced to a specific term of probation under the program. The defendant meets immediately with the probation officer to establish a schedule of face-to-face visits and begin treatment.

The program also includes an advisory committee to aid in program development. This committee includes representatives from criminal justice agencies and treatment providers.

The ASOP caseload reached 58 offenders in May 1998. Between February 1997 and May 1998, the ASOP program filed a total of 19 violation of probation petitions against 15 of its participants. Of those petitions, 12 were granted, four were dismissed, two were withdrawn, and one was pending at the time of the interim report. Of the 58 offenders, seven were taken into custody for probation violations and their probation was revoked. For the entire population of ASOP program participants, there have been a total of 10 arrests, including one for aggravated

criminal sexual abuse, another for failing to register as a sex offender, four domestic batteries, two traffic violations, and two batteries.

Based on the first 42 cases reviewed at the time of the interim report, ASOP participants are males ranging in age between 16 and 64 years, with most between 27 and 43 years. The program includes three juvenile offenders who were tried as adults. Over 37 percent of ASOP participants have some college or trade school experience and 60 percent completed high school. About 60 percent of the offenders are employed, with most holding a full-time job. Despite the employment rate, nearly 65 percent make less than \$13,500 per year. Forty-three percent are single, 36 percent are married, and the remaining 21 percent are separated or divorced. Slightly more than half (53.8 percent) noted they were in a sexually active relationship with a consenting adult.

Fourteen percent said they had been sexually abused during childhood. More than 90 percent of ASOP participants do not have prior arrests recorded for sex offenses, but about a quarter of them were arrested for other offenses at least once.

Information was incomplete in some cases regarding alcohol and drug use. Over 25 percent of 37 offenders indicated they may have an alcohol addiction and 40 percent of 40 offenders admitted to taking illegal drugs.

Interim evaluation findings

The program initially had a slow start. The caseload size was short of the original goal of 75 participants by March 1998, as stated in the program's proposal. The delay in securing treatment providers, which was due in part to delays in obtaining final approval for the ASOP program from the Cook County Board,

significantly contributed to a lower than expected caseload size.

The ASOP program was designed to screen potentially eligible defendants before they were sentenced to the program. However, based on the 42 ASOP cases reviewed, only about 36 percent of ASOP clients received eligibility screening. About 64 percent were sentenced directly to the program (see table). While judges have been made aware of the program and seem eager to utilize it, they have directly sentenced offenders who do not meet the program's initial eligibility criteria.

The table also shows that 42 percent of ASOP clients have a family-related sexual offense charge, which indicates that these participants are legally family members (limited to parents, grandparents, stepparents, stepgrandparents, and other household members who have lived with the victim for at least one year).

When this definition is expanded to include uncles, 52 percent of the defendants are related to their victims. Thus, nearly 48 percent are acquaintances of the victim, a distant relative, or in a position of trust, such as a teacher or neighbor.

While evaluators expected that defendants who were sentenced directly to the program would be significantly less likely to meet the eligibility criteria, this was not the case. About 60 percent of both screened and directly sentenced offenders were not legally family members.

Another important criterion of the program is that the defendant be sentenced to 48 months of probation, which is the maximum probation sentence for a Class 1 or 2 felony. Only 40 percent of the defendants were sentenced to 48 months of probation, and defendants sentenced directly to the program were

Eligibility Criteria on Defendants in the
Cook County Adult Sex Offender Program

Characteristics	Total Program Population	Screened for Eligibility	Sentenced Directly
Was an eligibility screening conducted?			
No	27 (64.3%)		
Yes	15 (35.7%)		
Length of probation			
12 to 18 months	3 (7.1%)	1 (6.7%)	2 (7.4%)
24 to 30 months	11 (26.2%)	8 (53.3%)	3 (11%)
36 months	11 (26.2%)	3 (20%)	8 (29.6%)
48 months	17 (40.4%)	3 (20%)	14 (51.9%)
Number of family-related charges			
None	24 (58.5%)	9 (60%)	15 (57.7%)
1 to 2	9 (22%)	2 (13.3%)	7 (26.9%)
3 to 18	8 (19.5%)	4 (26.7%)	4 (15.4%)
Missing	1		1
Offender relationship to victim			
Father	7 (16.7%)	2 (13.3%)	5 (18.5%)
Stepfather	6 (14.3%)	3 (20%)	3 (11.1%)
Other live-in member	3 (7.1%)	1 (6.7%)	2 (7.4%)
Uncle	6 (14.3%)	3 (20%)	3 (11.1%)
Other distant relative	6 (14.3%)	2 (13.3%)	4 (14.8%)
Unrelated	14 (33.3%)	4 (26.7%)	10 (37%)
Convicted charge			
Criminal sexual assault	12 (28.6%)	4 (26.7%)	8 (30.8%)
Aggravated criminal sexual assault	22 (52.4%)	9 (60%)	13 (50%)
Other	7 (16.7%)	2 (13.3%)	5 (19.2%)
Missing	1		1
Number of aggravated criminal sexual assault counts			
None	26 (61.9%)	10 (66.7%)	16 (61.5%)
1 to 3	9 (21.4%)	2 (13.3%)	7 (26.9%)
4 or more	6 (14.3%)	3 (20%)	3 (11.5%)
Missing	1		1

more likely to receive 48-month sentences than those screened for eligibility.

Because the ASOP program was designed to include more intense surveillance of sex offenders than in regular probation, conducting field searches is an integral part of the program. About six office visits were performed each month for each offender, in accordance with the original program design. Due to a number of factors, however, field visits were substantially lower than the goal of five or six each month, averaging less than one monthly visit per offender. Most offenders also have submitted to at least one drug test and are subject to regular curfew checks.

Treatment is a cornerstone component of the program. Treatment providers and probation officers coordinate their efforts to contain the offender in the community and prevent relapses that lead to reoffending. Program staff and treatment providers maintain frequent communication and probation officers may sit in on treatment sessions. Three

treatment centers have been providing services to ASOP clients. Offenders are assigned to centers based on location, treatment needs, and language requirements. While the treatment centers are still struggling with their “newness” to some extent, there seems to be a lack of clear and consistent rules and sanctions regarding absences, lateness, or noncompliance in therapy. It is expected that therapy will continue to improve as consistent treatment standards are established and as provider/client relationships develop.

Conclusion

After a slow start, the ASOP program is fully operating and beginning to accept cases at a more accelerated rate. Many of the program’s policies have been fully implemented. The evaluators noted that the ASOP program must improve its compliance regarding the submission of data reports and other materials necessary for grant funding. Program staff have received excellent training and appear

dedicated to learning more about the supervision of sex offenders. The evaluators also recommended that ASOP officials initiate the following:

- Re-examining the criteria for the program’s target population when impact data becomes available;
- Making judges aware of the criteria and necessity of a 48-month probation sentence for the offenders sentenced to the program;
- Discussion by the ASOP unit, advisory committee, and evaluation team on scheduled field searches to be conducted by ASOP officers each month, as well as the standards and possible schedule modifications needed to accommodate such searches; and
- Establishing uniform written guidelines addressing graduated sanctions for noncompliance with treatment. ■



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