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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 Senior Research Analyst Christine Martin. It is a summary of a program evaluation of the Cook County Sheriff's Day Reporting Center program, prepared by Christine Martin, David E. Olson, Ph.D., and Arthur J. Lurigio, Ph.D. Copies of the evaluation are available from the Authority's Research and Analysis Unit.

The **Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority** is a state agency dedicated to improving the administration of criminal justice in Illinois. The basic functions of the Authority are criminal justice research, federal and state grants administration, and information systems development and support.

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Cook County Day Reporting Center serves as an alternative to incarceration

Day Reporting Centers (DRCs) as alternatives to traditional incarceration made their U.S. debut in Connecticut and Massachusetts. At the beginning of the 1990s, 13 DRCs were operational in the United States, and by mid-1994 there were 114 programs in 22 states. Correctional populations served by these centers range from pretrial detainees to probationers to released and paroled prisoners. Day reporting centers have been in operation long enough now to accommodate evaluations of program implementation and short-term effects, as well as evaluations of long-term effects after participants are discharged.

The Cook County Sheriff's Office has managed the Cook County Day Reporting Center (CCDRC) since 1993, providing an alternative to incarceration for Cook County's male pretrial defendants. Annual process and outcome evaluations of the CCDRC have been conducted since 1996 and have consistently shown that the program is highly successful in increasing participants' court appearance rates and decreasing their arrest rates while they are in the program. The Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority was asked by the Cook County Sheriff's Office to conduct an evaluation of the program's long-term effects on discharged participants.

To assess the long-term impact of the CCDRC program, the Authority examined rearrest and reincarceration rates of participants following their

discharge. Nearly 1,400 participants who entered the program during 1995 were tracked through the management information system at the Cook County Jail and the criminal history records systems of the Chicago Police Department and Illinois State Police between 1995 and 1998.

Based on the results of this evaluation, Authority staff concluded that the CCDRC has had a positive effect on reducing post-release recidivism. This *On Good Authority* summarizes the results of the evaluation.

The CCDRC program

CCDRC participants are selected from among pretrial defendants in the Electronic Monitoring program (EM), which is a community-based supervision program for nonviolent offenders run by the Cook County Sheriff's Office. CCDRC participants are selected from the EM program instead of the general jail population to ensure that only defendants who pose no threat to the community are allowed to participate. This is accomplished essentially by screening CCDRC participants twice, once for the EM program and then again more stringently for the CCDRC. This two-tiered screening is important because CCDRC participants are unsupervised during evenings and weekends, even though they are technically in the custody of the Cook County Department of Corrections.

Unless there is a previously approved absence, participants are required to report to the CCDRC Monday through Friday from 8:45 a.m. to 8 p.m. Approved absences are obtained for a variety of reasons, such as for court appearances, job interviews, or medical appointments. A day of programming consists of lectures, support groups, counseling, or time spent in the computer lab. Treatment Alternatives for Safe Communities (TASC) was the service provider for the evaluation sample. Services included drug testing, treatment and recovery, basic life skills, violence prevention, literacy, job skills training, GED preparation, and job placement.

Previous studies of the CCDRC, and most of the evaluations of day reporting centers in the United States, have examined program implementation and short-term program effects. CCDRC short-term evaluations have shown that participants do well while in the program, but they also are at high-risk to recidivate once they are released. Participants are characterized as heavy drug users with extensive criminal histories and low levels of education and employment. Participants in the evaluation sample spent an average of 49 days in the program. Sixty percent of the participants in the sample were in the program 30 days or less, and only 14 percent were in it for more than 90 days (Figure 1).

Despite the short stays and high risk of the participants to recidivate, previous evaluations have consistently shown that CCDRC participants have dramatic decreases in illegal drug use, low rearrest rates, and high court appearance rates while participating in the program. The current evaluation takes these findings a step further to assess client performance after the program.

Evaluation results

Assessing the effect of the CCDRC program on recidivism required an examination of the participants' time in the program and their rearrest and reincarceration activity after being

Figure 1
Length of time in the program

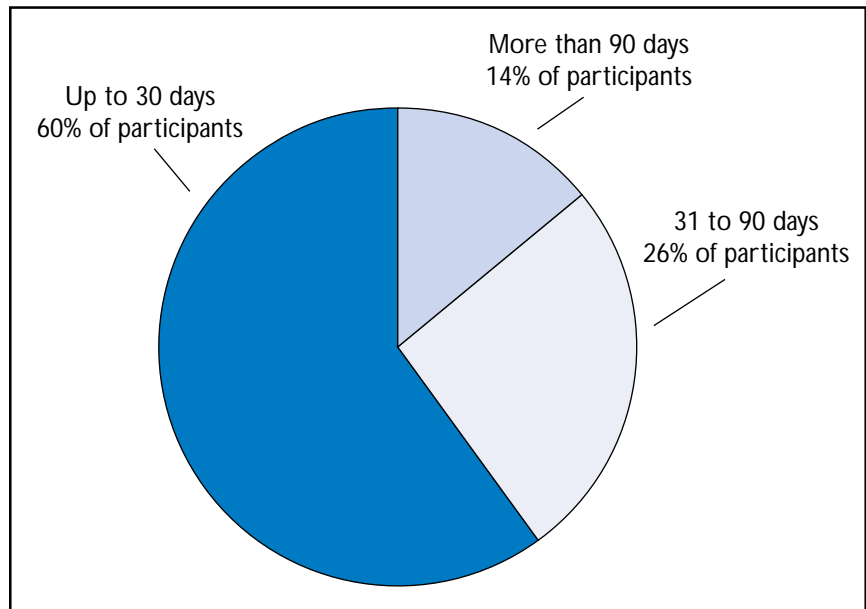
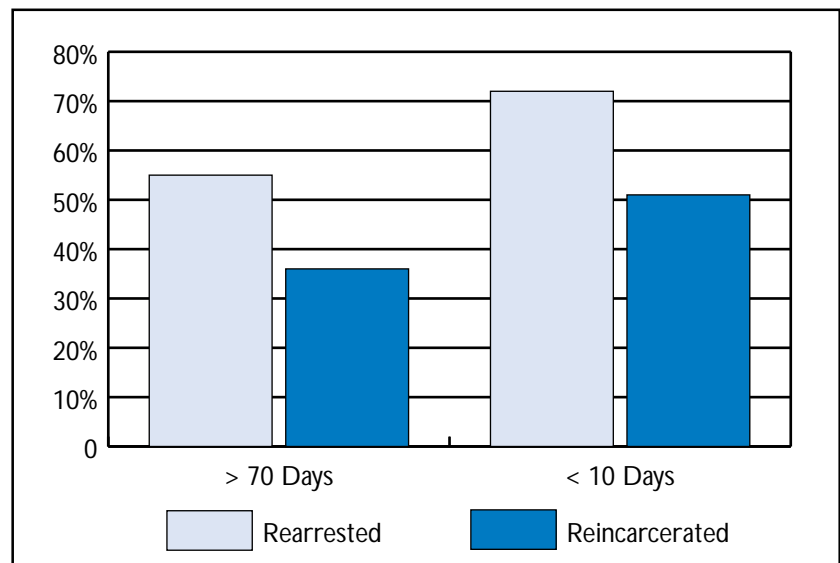


Figure 2
Percent of participants rearrested and reincarcerated within one year of discharge, by time in program



discharged from the program. Of the 1,391 participants tracked, 1,277 had both arrest and incarceration information available at the time of data collection. Since each participant was selected for the program using the same criteria, they had similar criminal justice experiences in terms of being charged with non-violent offenses and having non-violent

criminal histories. Although they were essentially alike regarding their criminal justice experience, participants had very different levels of exposure to program services. Comparing those that had virtually no service with those who had extensive exposure to services provided a preliminary measurement of the CCDRC's impact on post-discharge

recidivism. Thus, a separate analysis was performed for those in the program for fewer than 10 days and those in the program for at least 70 days. Those in the program fewer than 10 days received little or no rehabilitative services and were essentially a “control group,” while those in for at least 70 days received a substantial amount of program services and were considered the “treatment group.” These two extreme groups combined represented 591 of the 1,277 participants, or 46 percent of those whose recidivism data were collected.

Recidivism rates for participants in the treatment group were considerably lower than the rates for the control group (Figure 2). The average number of days to rearrest for the control group was 303, compared with 425 for the treatment group. Comparing time to reincarceration, the treatment group remained free, on average, 57 days longer than the control group.

In addition to differing lengths of program participation, individual characteristics of the participants also affected the recidivism of the study group. Recidivism rates varied depending on age and criminal history. Older participants were less likely than younger ones to recidivate (Figure 3). But there were also far fewer older participants in the program — only 8 percent were over the age of 39. Also, the more prior arrests a participant had, the more likely he was to recidivate (Figure 4). Sixty-two percent of the participants had more than four prior arrests. Similarly, as the number of prior incarcerations for participants increased, so did the rate of reincarceration after discharge from the program.

Although each of these factors independently influenced the likelihood of recidivism, specific combinations might have had varying effects on recidivism. Examining participant characteristics in relation to one another is important in determining if the CCDRC had an independent effect on recidivism even after considering all other factors. It also helps identify the

Figure 3
Percent of program participants rearrested within one year, by age group

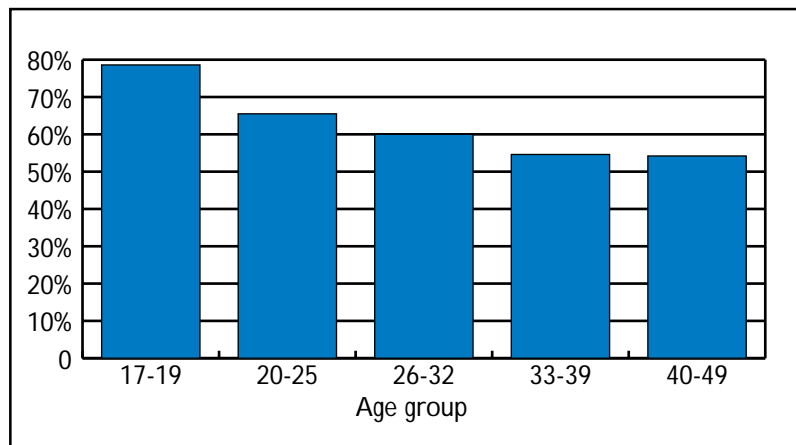
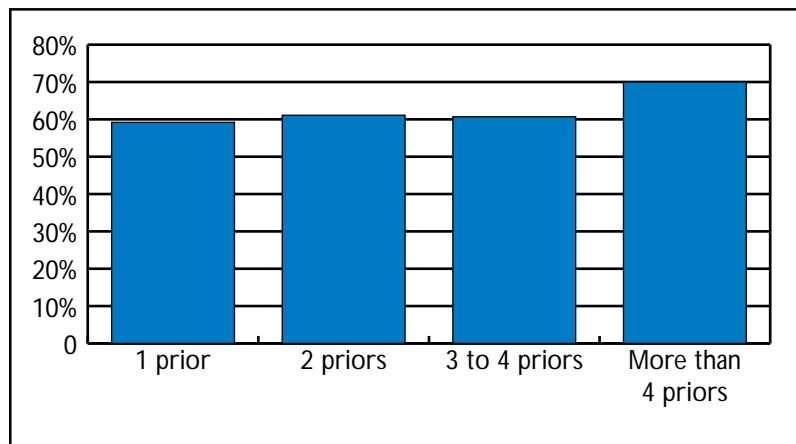


Figure 4
Percent of program participants rearrested within one year, by prior arrest



factors that exert the most influence on recidivism and identify those participants who are most or least likely to recidivate.

After simultaneously measuring the influence of all factors that impact recidivism, the evaluation found that time spent in the CCDRC decreased the likelihood of recidivism even after considering all combinations of the other factors. It was also shown that criminal history had the strongest influence of all factors on the odds of a participant being rearrested or reincarcerated for a new crime. A profile of the participants who were most likely

to recidivate was developed from this analysis with those most likely to recidivate being younger, with extensive criminal histories, and less time spent in the CCDRC.

Conclusions and recommendations

Length of time in the CCDRC affected participants’ likelihood of being rearrested and reincarcerated after being discharged from the program. Those who were in the program longer were less likely to recidivate. Unfortunately, as Table 1 shows, a majority (60 percent) of the participants spent less than one

month in the program. In addition, many participants also were at high risk to recidivate because of other characteristics, such as being younger than 30 or having had prior involvement with the criminal justice system, all of which is reflective of Cook County's pretrial population.

The Cook County Jail houses not only pretrial defendants but also those who have been convicted and sentenced to less than one year of incarceration. One suggestion offered by the evaluators to increase the benefits of the CCDRC was to establish a way to keep participants in the program longer, such as allowing some defendants who receive jail time to serve out their sentences in the DRC program. ♦

Table 1

Summary of recidivism rates based on participant characteristics

	% Rearrested	% Reincarcerated	% of Participants
Age			
30 and under	86.4 %	69.7%	66.6%
Over 40	64.3%	52.4%	6.7
Prior Arrests			
At least one	83.8%	67.1%	94.3%
None	56.2%	50.7%	5.7%
Prior Incarcerations			
At least one	87.5%	76.6%	55.1%
None	75.8%	53.3%	44.9%
Length of Stay in DRC			
Less than 1 month	86.3%	69.6%	60.0%
More than 1 month	76.3%	60.9%	40.0%

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