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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 Senior Research Scientist David Olson, Ph.D., and Research Analyst Sharyn Adams. It is a summary of the 2000 Illinois Probation Outcome Study, conducted by local probation departments in Illinois, the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts' Probation Services Division, and the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority. Copies of the full reports used in this summary 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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Probation Research

Results of the 2000 Illinois Probation Outcome Study

By David Olson, Ph.D.,
and Sharyn Adams

While probation is the most frequently imposed sentence in Illinois, statewide data on the characteristics and outcomes of probation sentences are limited. To fill this void, the Probation Services Division of the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts (AOIC), with the support of the Authority, conducts periodic statewide data collection to support probation program development and research in Illinois.

The 2000 Illinois Probation Outcome Study, conducted by AOIC, the Authority, and local probation departments, resulted in the collection of detailed data for 3,364 adult and 821 juvenile probationers discharged in November 2000. This *On Good Authority* summarizes the demographic, socio-economic, and criminal and substance abuse histories of those discharged from probation in Illinois, as well as the conditions of their sentences, the extent to which probationers complied with these conditions, and the outcomes of these sentences.

Probationer characteristics

A number of demographic, socio-economic, and criminal and substance abuse history characteristics were collected in the study, including many found in criminological research to increase the likelihood of recidivism and rearrest. Statewide characteristics of Illinois probationers were examined, and regional variations in these characteristics

were noted across counties and between adult and juvenile probationers. In general, about 50 percent of both adult and juvenile probationers in Illinois were white and almost 80 percent were male (Figure 1). Racial distribution of probationers varied considerably across Illinois. For example, in Cook County most adult and juvenile probationers were non-white (70 and 80 percent, respectively). By comparison, only about 10 percent of adult and juvenile probationers in rural counties were non-white.

Substantial proportions of both adult and juvenile probationers enter probation with limited school achievement, or experiencing educational problems. About 30 percent of adult probationers had not completed high school or received a general equivalency degree at the point of probation sentencing, and 39 percent of juvenile probationers were identified as either enrolled in non-traditional educational programs, such as an alternative school or special education program, or as dropouts or truants at sentencing.

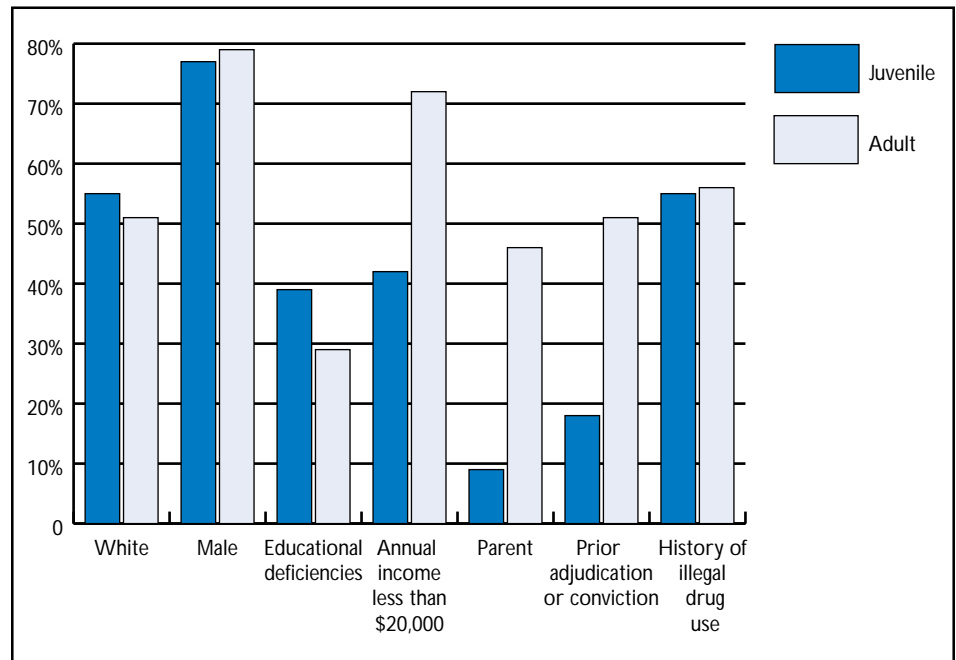
Another risk factor that was fairly consistent across the state and between adult and juvenile probationers was the relatively low economic status of the probationers or their families. Most adult probationers and juvenile probationers' families had low incomes. Statewide 72 percent of adults had annual incomes below \$20,000, as did 42 percent of the juvenile probationers' families. Among

adult probationers, gender differences were noted in employment status. While unemployment rates averaged 30 percent across all adult probationers, almost 40 percent of female adult probationers were unemployed when sentenced to probation. Most adult probationers lived with family members (69 percent) and had never been married (59 percent). Almost one-half of all female adult probationers were living with children, compared to less than one-third of male probationers. Slightly more than 20 percent of juvenile probationers were living with both biological parents and 73 percent had siblings. About 10 percent of all juvenile probationers were parents themselves. In addition, roughly 15 percent of all female adult and juvenile probationers were pregnant at some point during their probation supervision period.

Prior involvement in the justice system and the extent and nature of substance abuse problems were two of the most consistent predictors of recidivism among offender populations. Adult probationers were much more likely than juveniles to have been convicted of a crime prior to their current sentences. About 50 percent of adult probationers had one or more prior convictions, compared to less than 20 percent of juveniles having a prior adjudication. Little difference was found when adult and juvenile probationers were compared in terms of the prevalence of current and prior illegal drug use. Roughly 55 percent of both adult and juvenile probationers were identified as illegal drug users at, or prior to, sentencing.

Thus, a large proportion of Illinois probationers bring with them a variety of interrelated needs. Almost one-third of adult probationers lacked a high school diploma or general equivalency degree, and more than one-third of juvenile probationers were in a tenuous educational status or had dropped out of school. Also, significant numbers of probationers face child care responsibilities. For female probationers, these responsibilities are compounded by low incomes, high rates of unemployment, and limited child support. A substantial proportion of probationers also are drug abusers, which increases the

Figure 1
Probationer characteristics



When the nature of the offenses was examined, it was revealed that almost 40 percent of adult probation cases were for drug crimes and driving under the influence. Property-related offenses were most frequent among younger probationers, accounting for 34 percent of all juvenile cases.

likelihood of continued involvement in the justice system.

Probation sentence characteristics

Information also was collected regarding the nature of the conviction offense and the conditions of the probation sentence on all probationers discharged during the study period. These data revealed a number of regional differences, as well as differences between adult and juvenile probationers. When the offense class was examined, an even statewide distribution among adult probationers was seen, with roughly 50 percent of adult probationers convicted of a felony and the other half convicted of a misdemeanor. Regionally, slightly more than one-half of adult probationers from urban areas received the sentence for a felony, while nearly 70 percent of adult probationers from rural areas were convicted of misdemeanor offenses. Among juveniles, 60 percent of

offenses were classified as misdemeanors, slightly less than 40 percent were classified as felonies and less than 1 percent were classified as status offenses, including truancy and curfew violations. When the nature of the offenses were examined, it was revealed that almost 40 percent of adult probation cases were drug law violations and driving under the influence. Property-related offenses were most frequent among juvenile probationers, accounting for 34 percent of all juvenile cases.

In addition to being supervised in the community by probation officers, other sanctions may be imposed on probationers, including payment of fees, court costs, fines or restitution; performance of community service; urinalysis; and/or participation in various treatment programs. The inclusion of financial conditions as part of a sentence to probation was much more prevalent

among adult probationers than juveniles, whereas juveniles were more likely to be ordered to community service (Figure 2).

There also were some slight differences between adult and juvenile probationers in terms of treatment being ordered as part of the probation sentence, with almost 60 percent of adult probationers referred to treatment, compared to 50 percent of juvenile probationers. The use of urinalysis, however, was more frequently seen in juvenile probation sentences. Forty percent of juveniles statewide were ordered to submit to urine testing, compared to less than 30 percent of adult probationers.

Probation outcomes

A number of dimensions were considered when the outcomes of adult and juvenile probation sentences were examined, including legal outcomes, new arrests, technical violations, compliance with court-ordered conditions of probation, and improvement of the probationer's life situation.

In terms of legal outcomes, information regarding arrests for new crimes while on probation was examined, along with the rates of technical violations, such as failing to report to a probation officer, missing a treatment appointment, and failing to pay fees or fines.

When legal outcomes were examined regionally and across adult and juvenile probationers, relatively few differences were noted. During their supervision periods, more than 30 percent of adult and juvenile probationers were arrested for another crime, almost 40 percent of both groups had at least one technical violation, and probation was revoked from almost 15 percent of both groups (Figure 3).

When new arrests while on probation were examined more closely, a number of important patterns emerged. First, new offenses of both adult and juvenile probationers arrested while on probation tended to be non-violent in nature. Also, several probationer characteristics increased the odds of adults and juveniles being rearrested while on probation. To determine the influence various probationer and sentence characteristics had on probationer rearrests, multivariate

Figure 2
Probationer sentence conditions and characteristics

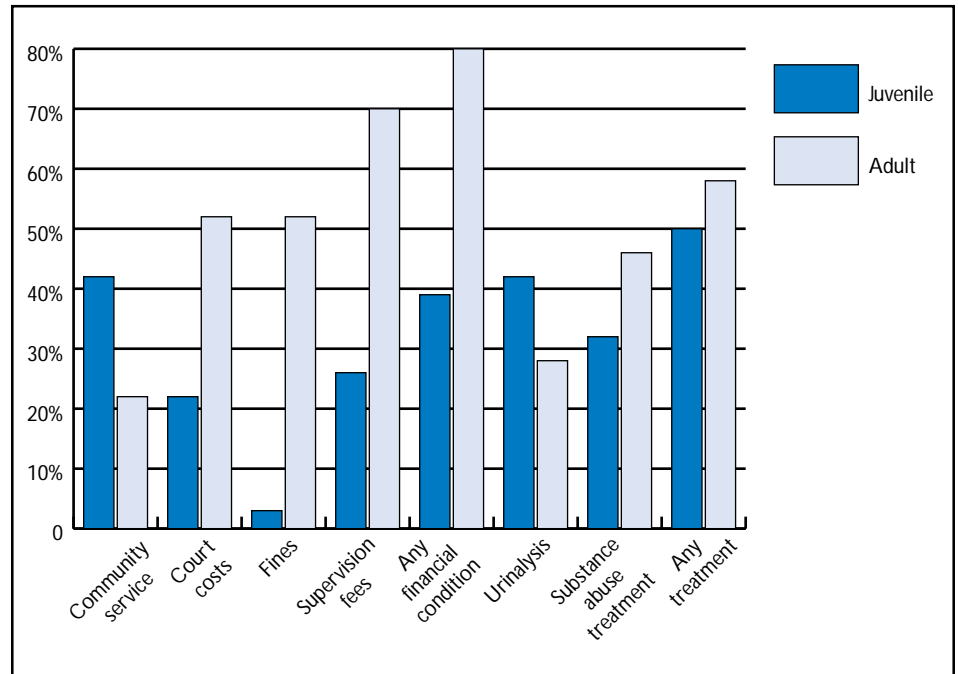
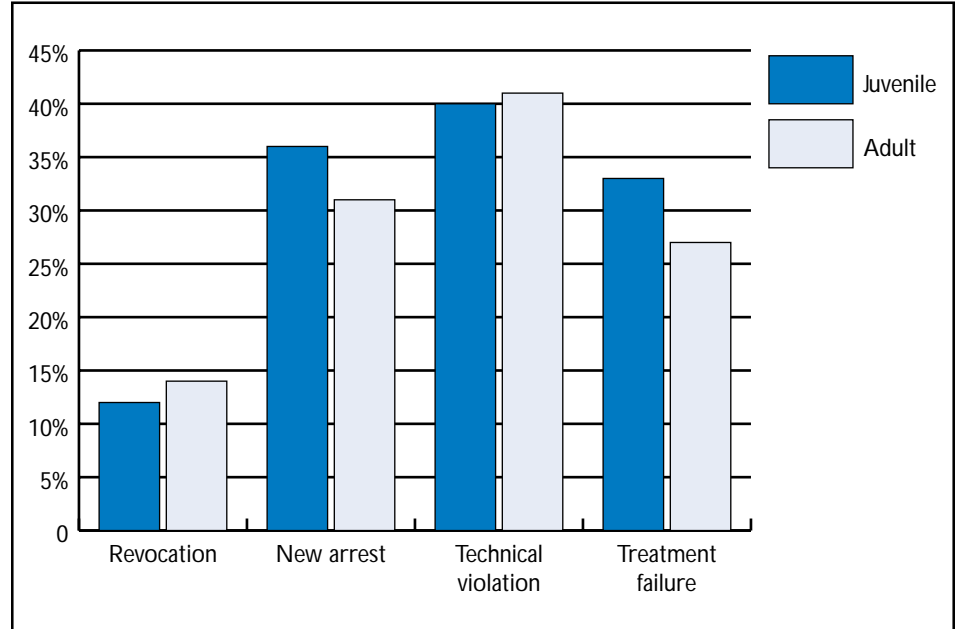


Figure 3
Probationer outcomes



analyses were performed using logistic regression. With this technique, it was possible to isolate the influence specific factors — demographic, socio-economic, substance abuse and criminal history, offense characteristics, and supervision strategies — had on the likelihood of rearrest. The results indicated that in

adults, age, gang affiliation, abuse of illegal substances, and prior convictions were the most influential factors associated with new arrests while on probation, while in juveniles, age, abuse of illegal substances, and prior adjudications were most influential. Low educational achievement also increased the odds of a

new arrest independent of the other factors in both adults and juveniles. Rearrest rates were substantially lower among probationers completing substance abuse treatment.

Other outcomes of probation sentences included compliance with conditions of the sentence, such as payment of supervision fees, fines, court costs, and restitution to the victim, completion of community service, and participation and completion of treatment programs. More than 60 percent of the adults, and more than 70 percent of juvenile probationers completed, or were still enrolled in, court-ordered treatment programs at the point of discharge from probation. In addition, the majority of probationers with financial conditions paid the fees, fines, and court costs imposed by the end of the probation sentence, averaging more than \$562 per adult and \$136 per juvenile. The majority of probationers ordered to perform community service also satisfied this condition by the time they were discharged. Finally, many adult and juvenile

probationers improved their life situations while on probation. For example, one-third of the adult probationers who were unemployed when sentenced to probation had obtained and kept a job during their period of probation supervision. Similarly, almost one-third of the juveniles identified as dropouts or truants at probation intake were enrolled in school by the time they were discharged from probation.

Conclusions

The initial analyses of these data affirmed that probation in Illinois is an effective and efficient form of supervision and rehabilitation for large numbers of adult and juvenile offenders. While about 30 percent of adult and juvenile probationers were rearrested during their probation period, the majority of these offenses were non-violent, and could stem from the considerable levels of poverty, low academic achievement, and substance abuse problems exhibited by many probationers. For those whose new arrests were serious, probation sentences

were revoked, and probationers were sentenced to prison. Still, achieving compliance with treatment orders, satisfying financial conditions of probation, performing community service, and improving employment status while on probation may produce long-term benefits for these offenders and the communities in which they reside.

Researchers are still analyzing data collected in the study to determine how probation responds to violent and substance-abusing offenders, differences in how males and females perform on probation, and the impact treatment and other conditions of probation sentences have on probation outcomes. In addition, criminal history records will be generated one year after each offender's discharge from probation to examine recidivism rates and assess the long-term outcomes of Illinois probationers. These topics will be examined in subsequent publications. ♦

