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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 Research Analyst Sharyn Adams. It is a summary of a program evaluation of the specialized sex offender probation programs implemented in Coles, Madison, and Vermilion counties. The evaluation was conducted by Barbara Hayler, Ph.D., and Richard Schmitz of the University of Illinois at Springfield. Copies of the evaluation are available from the Authority's Research and Analysis Unit.

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Supervising sex offenders in Coles, Madison, and Vermilion counties

While most convicted sex offenders are sentenced to prison, sex offenders also represent a significant portion of the non-incarcerated correctional population. A 1993 study by the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts (AOIC) found that there were at least 3,000 offenders sentenced to probation for sex offense charges, about 3 percent of the total probation caseload. Most probation departments at that time had not established specialized supervision strategies for sex offenders. Guidelines for intensive supervision of adult and juvenile sex offenders were developed by AOIC in 1996 to assist probation departments in designing specialized programs for sex offenders on probation. These guidelines were used to implement intensive supervision programs in several counties.

The Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority supported the development of specialized sex offender probation projects in Coles, Madison, and Vermilion counties with federal Anti-Drug Abuse Act funds. Evaluators with the Center for Legal Studies at the University of Illinois at Springfield conducted a yearlong implementation evaluation of the project beginning in July 1998.

Coles County

The Coles County Intensive Specialized Sex Offender Supervision (ISSOS) Program added a part-time surveillance officer to the county's sex offender probation department. The officer helps

increase supervision in the community and works solely on sex offender cases. Another specialized officer, or case manager, monitors the offender's progress in treatment and maintains daytime contact with the offender, while the part-time surveillance officer provides evening supervision of the sex offender caseload.

All juvenile and adult sex offenders sentenced to probation in Coles County—most often for criminal sexual abuse—are targeted for ISSOS (Table 1). During the evaluation period (August 1997 to March 1999), the caseload for the Coles County program increased from 29 to 40 cases. Adult offenders ranged in age from 17 to 71 years. Most were employed, and all had completed high school. Juveniles ranged in age from 11 to 15 years old. Few ISSOS probationers had been previously arrested or convicted for a serious criminal offense (Table 2).

ISSOS established a three-phase supervision regimen for offenders admitted to the program. Phase I includes, but is not limited to, a minimum of five contacts per week (two face-to-face contacts), and a progress hearing in court every month. The court progress hearing serves as an institutional check on non-compliance. Phase II reduces the minimum contacts to two per week and progress hearings continue. Phase III reduces the number of contacts to six per month with monthly progress hearings.

In addition to the supervision requirements, offenders must comply with probation conditions such as a

period of incarceration, compulsory completion of a sex offender-specific treatment program, and other conditions designed to reduce the risk of re-offending, such as:

- Not having contact with their victims.
- Abstaining from alcohol and drug use.
- Not possessing pornography.

A sex offender treatment program developed and offered by the Coles County Mental Health Center is another component of ISSOS. The treatment program requires the offenders to demonstrate accountability, accept responsibility for their behavior and the impact of the abuse on their victims and others, and prevent relapse.

General criteria for positive discharge from the program include the successful completion of all treatment tasks and the demonstration of at least nine months without known high-risk behavior.

Madison County

The Madison County Juvenile Sex Offender Program (JSOP) was designed to create a sex-offender specific caseload that allows probation officers to closely supervise each offender. The program's primary goals are to increase community safety and rehabilitative opportunities for juvenile sex offenders sentenced to probation. All juvenile sex offenders sentenced to probation are targeted by the JSOP, except those who exhibit violent behavior, psychosis, neurological impairment, or contagious diseases that pose a threat to staff or their peers.

The JSOP officer is responsible for day-to-day contacts with the probationer, the probationer's family, school, and treatment provider, and other entities associated with the probationer. Contact standards varied according to the probationer's classification in one of three supervision categories, each requiring attendance at weekly sex offender treatment programs. The three supervision levels are based on an assessment of their risk to re-offend or their risk to fail at probation by not meeting program requirements and are carried out by the probation officer at

Table 1
Probationer offenses

Offense	Coles County	Vermilion County	Madison County
Aggravated criminal sexual assault	2	0	24
Criminal sexual assault	4	4	5
Criminal sexual assault and aggravated criminal sexual assault	2	0	0
Aggravated criminal sexual abuse	17	7	5
Criminal sexual abuse	5	0	7
Attempted criminal sexual abuse	1	0	0
Failure to register as a sex offender	2	0	0

intake. Maximum risk cases required three face-to-face contacts per month, medium risk cases required one face-to-face contact per month, and minimum risk cases required at least one face-to-face contact every two months. In new cases, juveniles were initially placed on maximum supervision for six months. The JSOP officer reviews each offender's probation status every six months for possible re-classification.

The majority of JSOP probationers were male, and more than half of the offenders were 13 or 14 years of age. In addition, more than 40 percent of their families' incomes were below poverty level.

The JSOP officer supervised more than 25 probationers in all but two of the 13 months for which data was collected. Forty-nine offenders were assigned to JSOP during the evaluation period (March 1998 to March 1999).

Group therapy sessions for adolescents last about an hour. Treatment sessions followed a fairly consistent format. Essay writing assignments focused on a standardized list of risk factors, attendance was taken, and fee

payments were logged in. Group members also were asked to complete a brief written quiz on particular risk factors or to participate in a verbal exercise to assess their ability to recall or define risk factors for sex offending. Group activities emphasized:

- Memorization of risk factor terms.
- Understanding the basic before, during, and after phases of an offense cycle.
- Linking personal behavioral examples to formal risk factor terms.

Vermilion County

The Vermilion County Sex Offender Probation (SOP) Program was developed to devote more resources to sex offender supervision and treatment. The SOP was designed so that the probation department could assign one officer to supervise all sex offenders placed on probation without the responsibility of any other caseload. Also, the SOP includes specialized conditions of probation for sex offenders that combines treatment and supervision to reduce the risk of re-offending. Only sex offenders placed on

probation after the program was created were included in the evaluation.

Adults and juveniles sentenced or placed on probation for aggravated criminal sexual abuse and child exploitative felony offenses were targeted by the Vermilion County SOP program.

The SOP population consists primarily of adult offenders with child victims, and many offenders were previously arrested and convicted of a crime. During the evaluation period (November 1997 to March 1999), one juvenile and 13 adult probationers were assigned to the program. Every adult offender had been convicted of criminal sexual assault or aggravated criminal sexual abuse. The average age of adult offenders was 33 years. About half of the adult offenders were single, had not completed high school, and had a median income below poverty level. The juvenile offender was a 12-year-old female. The juvenile was adjudicated delinquent of aggravated criminal sexual abuse.

The SOP encompasses a four-phase supervision strategy. In Phase I, offenders receive a minimum of three contacts by a probation officer each week. In addition, they are required to abide by a curfew between 7 p.m. and 7 a.m., with electronic monitoring to verify compliance. In Phase II, contacts are reduced to at least two per week and curfew begins at 9 p.m. In Phase III, contacts are decreased to one per week and curfew begins at 11 p.m. The offender is transferred to a regular probation officer's caseload in Phase IV, and contacts are reduced to a minimum of two per month and curfew is not required.

Sex offenders are tested for drugs at least once a month and are required to attend sex offender treatment throughout the four phases. Additional conditions of the program include:

- No contact with victims or children under age 17.
- Fingerprinting.
- Sex offender registration as required.

Group treatment for adult sex offenders is provided by the Center for Children's Services. Treatment includes homework assignments, such as reading and exercises related to stress manage-

Table 2

Number of offenders with prior probation/incarceration sentences

Prior probation/incarceration sentences	Coles County	Vermilion County	Madison County
No	44	17	47
Yes	11	6	9
Missing data	(11)	(3)	(42)*

*Prior incarceration data collected from criminal history information. In addition, criminal behavior by juveniles is often handled informally and may not become part of the official criminal history record.

ment, and therapist confrontation of the offender to shape immediate behavior and promote long-term attitudinal change. Confrontation typically is used when offenders demonstrate defensiveness or resistance to meaningful participation in treatment.

Weekly group sessions are 90 minutes long and include the following treatment components:

- Acknowledgment of offense.
- Arousal or deviant fantasy control.
- Empathy for victims.
- Relationship skill development.
- Stress and anger management.

Short-term outcomes

Coles County

The ISSOS program was unable to make 20 contacts per probationer per month in Phase I except during two months. Also, the surveillance officer position was vacant for two months of the study period. After an officer was hired, the case manager provided training for two and one-half months, which resulted in a reduced number of contacts with ISSOS probationers. Offender contacts, however, steadily increased during the evaluation period. Contacts with Phase I offenders rose and were approaching program standards while contacts with Phase II and III offenders were beginning to exceed program standards.

Despite an increased number of monthly contacts, during a five-month period in 1998, seven probationers with the program committed a combined total of 11 violations. There were two new criminal offense charges among probationers, including one sex offense by a juvenile. Seven probation violations involved non-compliance with sex offender conditions such as prohibited contact with specific individuals. The other two violations involved ordinary probation requirements such as lack of steady employment.

Coles County appears to have the most closely integrated team approach of the three programs, resulting in effective use of judicial progress hearings in the supervision of offenders. The following recommendations were offered for the program:

- Standardized personality tests and screening measures of intellectual functioning and psychiatric symptoms should be conducted on sex offenders to assist clinicians in treatment planning.
- Work to institutionalize regular communication among participants in the supervision process to avoid program disruptions due to changes in personnel.

Madison County

In Madison County, supervision was carried out primarily through home visits and through the JSOP officer's participa-

tion in on-site sex offender treatment sessions. Home visits accounted for 54 percent of the contacts. The JSOP officer also was able to observe and interact on a weekly basis with each youth that participated in the on-site sex offender treatment program. Counting both home visits and contacts made in connection with treatment sessions, the probation officer usually had seven face-to-face contacts per month with each juvenile offender in the program.

Four JSOP juvenile offenders committed a combined total of five violations during a five-month period in 1998. Each infraction was a technical violation of the probation conditions, including not complying with treatment obligations, being truant, and failing to keep an appointment with the probation officer. None of the probationers received new criminal offense charges during the study period.

Recommendations for the Madison County program included:

- Treatment staff should assess the comprehension levels of formal risk factor terms and adolescent program materials to make sure they are within the reading limits of group members.
- Program staff should facilitate deeper parental involvement in the treatment process.

Vermilion County

Vermilion County exceeded 12 monthly contacts for each probationer almost every month. They also met the eight-contact requirement during Phase II and the four-contact requirement during Phase III almost every month. They accomplished this primarily because of a low caseload of 14 probationers. During the observation period, one treatment group member was positively discharged, two treatment members were suspended for non-payment of fees, and one treatment member was suspended for unexcused absence.

Recommendations for the Vermilion County program included:

- Treatment providers should consider integrating a developmental sequence of sex offender-specific homework assignments to promote offender involvement and more productive participation in treatment.
- Program staff should consider increasing the attention given to offenders' current living situations in relation to risk for relapse.

Conclusion

The sex offender programs have made substantial progress toward achieving program goals and objectives outlined in their proposals. However, due to the small number of probationers, and because the programs have only been in progress for about a year, there was not enough data to make an assessment of each program's impact on sex offenders under supervision. ♦

