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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 Project implemented in DuPage, Lake, and Winnebago counties. 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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## Supervising sex offenders in DuPage, Lake, and Winnebago counties

Recent research indicates that sex offending is a lifelong problem for many sex offenders. Inadequate supervision of high-risk offenders can lead to re-offending behavior, and may contribute to high rates of recidivism among sex offenders. Specialized probation projects involving intensive supervision were developed in several counties to address the unique supervision needs of sex offenders.

In July 1997, the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, through the federal Anti-Drug Abuse Act, awarded grant funding to develop specialized sex offender probation projects in DuPage, Lake, and Winnebago counties. These probation initiatives serve adult offenders and are modeled on the *containment approach*, which incorporates:

- Intensive supervision of offenders including frequent field searches of the their residences and the verification of information verbally obtained from them.
- Group therapy, supplemented with individual counseling.
- A partnership between probation officers and treatment providers that includes frequent communication and information sharing on each offender.

### Probation standards

The three probation projects were created to provide a higher level of sex offender supervision, and provide a more comprehensive, structured, and intensive strategy to address the supervision and treatment issues of sex offenders.

The target populations for the DuPage County and Lake County projects are adult felony and misdemeanor offenders convicted of an identified sex offense, or any offense that is sexual in nature, and sentenced to probation. The Winnebago County project restricts its target population to adult felony offenders convicted of any offense that subsequently requires sex offender registration. Victims of the offenders in all three programs consisted of both adults and children.

Each DuPage County probation officer handled a monthly average of 27 cases; Lake County officers had an average monthly caseload of 37 each; and Winnebago County officers had an average monthly caseload of 24 each.

While the three projects have common goals, each one addresses the supervision component in a different manner.

The DuPage County sex offender project encompasses three levels. Level I consists of:

- Four face-to-face contacts per month.
- A written agreement by the offender within seven days of sentencing to comply with 15 special conditions of probation.
- Urinalysis and breathalyzer test taken at each probation office visit.
- A daily activity log reviewed at each office visit.
- Ongoing treatment.

Table 1  
Sex offender characteristics\*

Characteristics related to risk	Number of DuPage County participants	Number of Lake County participants	Number of Winnebago County participants
<b>Offense</b>			
Criminal sexual assault	4	4	12
Aggravated criminal sexual abuse	12	16	27
Public indecency	15	19	0
Other misdemeanor sex crime	17	39	6
Out-of-state sex offense charge	1	6	5
<b>Victim/offender relationship</b>			
Unrelated	35	61	13
Father/stepfather	10	11	13
Uncle	1	1	9
Other relative	2	6	14
State of Illinois (for failing to register)	0	3	0
Missing data	1	2	1

\*Data presented in this table is based on all cases handled through the probation projects between September 1997 and September 1998.

- Probation officer contact with the spouse or significant other of the offender for assistance in supervising the offender.

Level II consists of:

- Three face-to-face contacts per month.
- Monthly urinalysis and breathalyzer tests.
- A daily activity log maintained and reviewed at least once a month.
- A polygraph test to ensure the offender is following probation orders and is sincerely remorseful of his actions.
- Weekly contact between specialized probation officers and treatment providers.
- Attendance and identifiable progress in individual and group therapy.

Level III of the DuPage County project is achieved upon passing a polygraph test and showing progress in sex offender treatment for at least six

months. The case is then transferred to the sex offender probation team, part of the county's standard probation program. The offender is placed under maximum supervision on standard probation, including face-to-face and home visit contacts, for six months. Offenders may then be ordered to repeat their participation in the specialized project.

The Winnebago County project uses a three-level supervision plan similar to the one established in DuPage County. Level I of the Winnebago project consists of:

- Four face-to-face contacts a month.
- Random phone contacts by the probation officer to the offender.
- One weekly contact with the offender's significant other, employer, or treatment provider, or any other individual with whom the offender has frequent contact.

- Random urinalysis.
- Verification of employment and residence at each face-to-face contact.
- Daily communication with local law enforcement to ensure the offender is complying with probation requirements.
- Ongoing treatment interventions.
- Conferences with a supervisor to assess offender's readiness for Level II.

Level II contains the same specifications as Level I with the exception of two face-to-face contacts a month rather than four. Level III involves one face-to-face contact a month, with additional contacts and urinalysis as needed; monthly verification of employment and residence; and communicating with local law enforcement.

Unlike the DuPage and Winnebago county projects, Lake County does not decrease supervision as offenders progress to higher levels of the project.

Table 2

Average scores received by sex offenders in six critical dimensions of treatment\*

Offender treatment dimensions	Combined average ranking of DuPage, Lake, and Winnebago participants	Average ranking for Dupage County project participants	Average ranking for Lake County project participants	Average ranking for Winnebago County project participants
Participates in treatment	5.9	7	6.1	4.8
Committed to treatment	5.6	6.6	6.5	4.4
Acknowledges personal responsibility	6.3	7.6	6.6	5.1
Understands consequences of re-offending	7.4	8.6	7.6	6.2
Willing to disclose inappropriate sexual behavior	4.9	6	5.2	3.7
Accepts responsibility for victim's emotional/physical damage	5.7	6.9	6.2	4.4

\*Scale ranges from 1 to 10 and was developed by the program evaluators and treatment providers. Higher numbers indicate more of the characteristic.

Instead, a high level of supervision is maintained throughout each offender's term of probation. Prior to project implementation, the expectations for Lake County were that there would be an average of three home/field visits per month and two office visits per month for each offender.

There were a number of differences in offender and offense characteristics in the three county caseloads (Table 1). In Winnebago County, 71 percent of the offenders were living below poverty level, whereas 45 percent of Lake County offenders and 26 percent of DuPage County offenders lived below poverty level. Winnebago and Lake offenders were significantly more likely to have dropped out of high school (42 percent) than DuPage County offenders (15 percent). Also, a substantially higher percentage of Winnebago County offenders were divorced or separated (38 percent) than Lake (19 percent) or DuPage (16 percent) offenders.

In regard to offense characteristics, criminal sexual assault cases comprised 27 percent of the Winnebago County caseload, and only 5 percent of Lake and 8 percent of DuPage caseloads. The percentage of victims who were unrelated

or unknown to the offender also varied dramatically. In about half of Winnebago County cases, the offender knew the victim or was related to the victim as an uncle, grandfather, or other relative. These types of cases comprised less than 9 percent of the Lake and DuPage caseloads. Because Winnebago County participants generally were more serious offenders, were less educated, had lower incomes, and differed from Lake and DuPage offenders in their relationship to their victims, they tended to rank lower on the critical dimensions of treatment, which measures an offender's potential for recidivism and how well offenders are responding to treatment (Table 2).

### Short-term outcomes

While the primary goal of the three specialized projects was to increase supervision and surveillance of sex offenders, none of the projects succeeded in continually meeting the monthly contact standards for every case. Lake County met its home/field visit standard in three of the 17 months studied, Winnebago County met its standard in one of 16 months studied, and DuPage County never met its home/field visit standard during the study period.

Face-to-face office contact standards were met slightly more often in each county. DuPage County met its office contact standard for one month, exceeded it in another month and nearly met expectations in six other months. Winnebago County met its office contact standard during two months, exceeded it in one month, and was one visit below standard in nine other months. Lake County did not achieve its standard during the period studied, but was close to meeting the standard in three months.

Successful completion of these projects required offenders to get through probation without serious violations or new arrests that lead to probation revocation by the court. A high rate of offenders completed two of the specialized probation projects. The DuPage County project had a successful completion rate of 80 percent and Lake County had a 75 percent successful completion rate. Winnebago County's data were incomplete since a majority of the offenders studied were still under supervision at the end of the study period. However, a review of active case notes suggests that the majority of offenders will successfully complete their probation.

About 10 percent of all offenders participating in specialized probation were terminated for not complying with treatment rules. Sixty-two percent of DuPage offenders and 61 percent of Lake offenders in treatment made at least one positive lifestyle change, such as strengthening social relationships, maintaining sobriety, and improving employment status. Thirty-eight percent of Winnebago County offenders made at least one positive lifestyle change.

Some offenders did not respond to treatment. The Lake County program averaged four new arrests per month. Of the 68 new arrests recorded during the period studied (October 1997 to February 1999), 20 were for new sex offenses. Also during that period, 16 offenders in Lake County were sentenced to serve time with the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC), and five offenders were re-sentenced to intensive supervision probation. In DuPage County, eight offenders were sentenced to IDOC or county jail, were deported, or were on

fugitive status between November 1997 and February 1999. Also, four offenders who had reached, but not completed, Level III supervision were ordered to repeat participation in the specialized project for probation violations.

In Winnebago County, seven re-arrests occurred between August 1997 and February 1999 with no arrests for a new sex offense. The offenders were arrested for disorderly conduct, DUI, a drug offense, traffic offenses, retail theft, battery of a police officer, resisting a peace officer, and possession of marijuana.

### Recommendations

Evaluators found that the sex offender treatment component in all three projects was exceptionally well implemented. Each county did fairly well in meeting face-to-face standards, and short-term outcomes indicate that the majority of sex offenders in all three projects complied with or are complying with probation and treatment conditions.

Despite this successful implementation, the project in each county was unable to meet the individual home/field visit standards. Evaluators offered the following recommendations:

- Case selection and identification for sex offender projects should be made at the probation department level, rather than by the courts, to ensure the appropriate target population is identified.
- The Administrative Office of Illinois Courts Probation Division should continue to implement sex offender training programs throughout the state.
- An increase in the number of field/home visits could be achieved by an additional officer in each county. ♦

