

Evaluation News is produced by BJA's Center for Program Evaluation and Performance Measurement at the Justice Research and Statistics Association.

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Evaluation News provides information on the BJA Center for Program Evaluation and Performance Measurement, promotes the exchange of information on evaluation and performance measurement, and publicizes criminal justice research and evaluation reports for use by state and local criminal justice agencies.

Justice Reinvestment

Justice Reinvestment (http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/BJA/topics/justice_reinvestment.html) is a data-driven approach to reduce corrections spending and reinvest savings in evidence-based strategies that can increase public safety while holding offenders accountable. This and subsequent issues of E-News will highlight research that details these strategies. Though the programs highlighted this month are not explicitly Justice Reinvestment strategies, they share similar objectives. This issue includes reports on reducing probation caseload sizes and a therapeutic technical violator program. Finally, the report on using cost-benefit analysis provides information on a technique used in Justice Reinvestment to determine whether cost-savings were achieved.

Corrections

Abt Associates recently completed a multi-site evaluation that was designed to assess the impact of caseload size on probation outcomes. Specifically, the researchers employed quasi-experimental designs to assess the impact of reduced caseloads on the supervision outcomes of medium to high-risk offenders in three sites. The authors hypothesized that reduced caseload would allow probation officers to better deliver supervision and correctional interventions to those offenders who are thought to be most responsive to correctional programming, thereby reducing recidivism without unduly increasing revocations. The report presents the results from three studies conducted in Oklahoma City, OK, Polk County, IA, and four judicial districts in Colorado. The Oklahoma City study implemented a difference-in-differences design, while the other two other studies implemented a regression discontinuity design study (RDD). The results suggest that reducing probation officer caseloads can reduce criminal recidivism among medium to high-risk offenders when delivered in a setting where these offenders have been identified and targeted for correctional programming. In Oklahoma City there was a significant decrease in criminal recidivism and a modest increase in technical revocation rates among probationers supervised by officers who had reduced caseloads. In Polk County researchers found that intensive supervision with small caseloads reduced the likelihood of criminal recidivism by 26% for all offenses (violent, property, and drug) and by 45% when drug offenses were excluded. The four districts in Colorado were found to have experienced problems implementing these practices. As a result, these districts showed no evidence of reductions in recidivism. The report, *A Multi-Site Evaluation of Reduced Probation Caseload Size in an Evidence-Based Practice Setting*, is available at: <http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/234596.pdf>

White, Mellow, Englander, and Ruffinengo examined a New Jersey program called Halfway Back that offers targeted programming including relapse prevention, mental health, anger management, education, employment counseling, money management, gang deprogramming, and family restoration to select parolees who received technical violations.

Useful resources for criminal justice program evaluation and performance measurement are available at the BJA Center for Program Evaluation and Performance Measurement web site: <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/BJA/evaluation>.

This program serves as an alternative to incarceration for parolees who have not succeeded on ordinary parole release but demonstrated some potential for success in an environment ‘halfway’ between prison and parole. Specifically, this study compared the recidivism outcomes and associated confinement costs among matched random samples of Halfway Back participants (n = 227) and non-program comparison group individuals (n = 392). The Halfway Back sample was drawn from the population of all program completers from 2005 to 2006; the program completion rates exceed 95%. Results suggest that program participants experienced modest though statistically significant reductions in new arrests over the 18-month follow-up period. An examination of incarceration costs related to program participation shows that Halfway Back is a less expensive alternative to state prison; however, the degree to which these savings are realized remains unclear. The article, *Halfway Back: An Alternative to Revocation for Technical Parole Violators*, was published in *Criminal Justice Policy Review* and is available at: <http://cjp.sagepub.com/content/22/2/140>

Cost-Benefit Analysis

Lee and Aos discuss the utility of the Washington State Institute for Public Policy’s (WSIPP) most recent approach to policy research, cost–benefit analysis. In this article they discuss the conditions that are necessary to drive policy change through cost-benefit analysis and they describe the three steps that the WSIPP use to estimate the benefits and costs of programs and policies. These steps are: 1) assessing the evidence, 2) calculating the economics and producing a list of public policy options that detail the relative costs and benefits of each individual option, and 3) providing a “portfolio-level” effect of a set of policy options on outcomes of interest to the legislature. Step one includes reviewing available literature, calculating the effect size, and conducting a meta-analysis. Step two involves assessing the cost, estimating the benefits, linking outcomes (where there is sufficient evidence to establish a causal relationship), and performing a risk analysis to test the robustness of the results. Step three is the analytic step intended to estimate the degree to which a portfolio of adopted policies is likely to affect outcomes. While steps one and two produce Consumer-Reports-like lists of what works and what does not ranked by benefit–cost estimates, step three produces an estimate of how sets of adopted policies are likely to achieve broad public policy goals. The article, *Using Cost-Benefit Analysis to Understand the Value of Social Interventions*, was published in *Research on Social Work Practice* and is available at:

<http://rsw.sagepub.com/content/early/2011/05/31/1049731511410551>

Policing

Ratcliffe, Taniguchi, Groff, and Wood conducted a randomized controlled trial to assess the effectiveness of foot patrols in hotspots of violent crime. The researchers examined 120 hot spots of violent crime in Philadelphia during the summer of 2009. Each target area consisted of an average of 1.3 miles of streets and was patrolled by two pairs of officers. The outcome measure for this study was violent crime, which was defined as homicide, aggravated assault, and robberies not occurring indoors. Comparisons of crime data from the three months prior to implementation and during the operational phase revealed a significant reduction in violent crime in the treatment hot spots. Target areas with the most violent crime before the foot patrols began had significantly less violent crime once the operational period was under way than areas without foot patrols. Additionally, the target areas with foot patrols were found to have 23 percent less violent crime than control target areas. According to the researchers, these results suggest that targeted foot patrols in violent crime hotspots can significantly reduce violent crime levels in areas with greater levels of violent crime. Further, there is some evidence that the foot patrols prevented crimes in areas adjacent/near the areas receiving foot patrols. The article, *The Philadelphia Foot Patrol Experiment: a randomized controlled trial of police patrol effectiveness in violent crime hotspots* was published in the August 2011 issue of *Criminology* and is available at:

<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1745-9125.2011.00240.x/abstract>

Tip of the Month

What are your program participants saying? Working with Qualitative Data

Program evaluations often include the collection and analysis of qualitative data. When working with data it is important to have a plan for the analysis process. This plan will not only help you to better understand the data, but it will also help with

the organization and analysis processes. Some recommended steps for working with qualitative data include: getting to know the data, focusing the analysis, categorizing information, identifying patterns and connection within and between categories, and interpreting the data. Getting to know the data and focusing the analysis are preliminary steps that are useful in making judgments about the quality of the data and developing approaches to categorize and analyze the data. Two approaches to categorizing qualitative data include using predefined categories or creating categories as they emerge. Then, identifying patterns and connection within and between categories can be useful in making determination about the relative importance of certain categories and how various categories may relate to other categories. One approach to analyzing the data is to focus on topics, time periods, or events, while another approach may focus on cases, individuals or groups. Categorizing information refers to the process of identifying coherent themes or categories. Finally, interpreting the data refers to the process of attaching meaning and significance to the analysis. A useful approach is to create a list of key findings and develop an outline for presenting the findings.

For more information see: University of Wisconsin-Extension - Analyzing Qualitative Data

- <http://learningstore.uwex.edu/assets/pdfs/g3658-12.pdf>
- <http://learningstore.uwex.edu/assets/pdfs/g3658-6.pdf>