

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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This project is supported by Grant No. 2010-D2-BX-K0 awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance. The Bureau of Justice Assistance is a component of the Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, and the Office for Victims of Crime. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the author and do not represent the official position or policies of the United States Department of Justice. Privacy Statement and Disclaimer: www.usdoj.gov/privacy-file.htm.

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

Announcements

The Bureau of Justice Assistance's National Training and Technical Assistance Center (NTTAC) has posted its January Second Tuesdays Webinar on evidence-based practices and programs online. The webinar was moderated by Dr. Mary Poulin and was supported by the Justice Research and Statistics Association. Panelists include: Mr. Craig Prins, Mr. Roger Przybylski, and Mr. Phillip Stevenson. The webinar is available at: <http://vimeo.com/18677334>

For more information about all of BJA's Second Tuesdays Webinars please see: <http://bjatraining.org/>

Recidivism

Parent, Guay, and Knight evaluated the long-term predictive accuracy of several well-known risk assessment tools. Specifically, they evaluated the ability of nine risk assessment instruments (VRAG, SORAG, RRASOR, Static-99, Static-2002, RM2000, MnSOST-R, SVR-20, PCL-R) to accurately predict various types of recidivism (sexual nuisance recidivism, sexual recidivism, nonsexual violent recidivism and nonsexual nonviolent recidivism) among three groups of sexual offenders (174 rapists, 275 child molesters and 54 "mixed" offenders) over a 15-year follow-up period. The study included 503 sexual offenders who had been evaluated at the Massachusetts Treatment Center for Sexually Dangerous Persons. These offenders were more dangerous, and therefore, not representative of the typical adjudicated sexual offender. For the purposes of this study, recidivism was defined as any new charge. The findings suggest that all of the instruments predicted three of the four types of recidivism—none of the instruments significantly predicted sexual nuisance recidivism. Additionally, the long-term predictive accuracy of the instruments was found to be dependent upon the type of offender and type of recidivism. The entire report, *An Assessment of Long-Term Risk of Recidivism by Adult Sex Offenders: One Size Doesn't Fit All*, is available in the February 2011 issue of *Criminal Justice and Behavior* at:

<http://cjb.sagepub.com/content/38/2/188.abstract>

Sex Offenders

Sperber et al. examined Ohio's tiered assignment process, which is a common element of many sex offender registration and notification procedures. Tiered assign-

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>.

ment places offenders into categories (low, middle, High) based on their perceived risk of reoffending. Specifically, the authors sought to determine whether there is a statistically significant relationship between a sex offender's probability of reoffending and his or her registration and notification category. Their non-random sample consisted of 210 male offenders (mostly child molesters) admitted to two residential facilities in Southwestern Ohio between September 1998 and May 2007. The offender's assigned registration information was obtained from the facilities' shared intake database, while their actuarial risk scores were obtained from their completed Level of Service Inventory-Revised (LSI-R) and Static-99 risk assessment tools. The results of this study indicate that the efforts to identify sex offenders that pose the greatest risk and designate them as such have fallen short. Analyses revealed that there was no statistical relationship between the offender's overall predicted probability of committing a future sex offense (based on actuarial risk assessment) and his assigned registration and notification category. These analyses also revealed that many sex offenders are given a higher classification than would be assumed based on the results of validated actuarial assessments. The complete results and a discussion of policy implications can be found in: *A Sheep in Wolf's Clothing or a Wolf in Sheep's Clothing? Ohio Sex Offender Registration and the Role of Science*, published in *Criminal Justice and Policy Review*.

<http://cjp.sagepub.com/content/21/4/500>

Corrections

Matejkowski, Caplan, and Cullen assessed the impact of severe mental illness (SMI) on parole release decisions. They hypothesized that inmates with SMI would: 1) be less likely to be granted parole; 2) display higher rates of disciplinary infractions and job turnover, and lower program participation and less adequate social networks; and that these factors will predict negative parole release decisions. The authors expected these relationships to hold when controlling for other factors that have been shown to have an impact on parole release decisions, such as incarceration length, severity of current offense, criminal history, and offender demographics. A sample of 407 inmates, SMI (n=200) and non-SMI (n=207), was drawn from all New Jersey inmates that had a parole release decision in 2007. The analyses revealed that there were few differences between the two groups. It also revealed that the hypotheses that the presence of SMI would be related to parole release decision and that this relationship would be mediated by social integration factors while incarcerated were not supported. The lack of a significant relationship between SMI and parole decisions was surprising in that it was counter to the findings of prior research. The full report, *Impact of Severe Mental Illness on Parole Decisions: Social Integration within a Prison Setting*, is available at: <http://cjb.sagepub.com/content/37/9/1005>

Tip of the Month

Are you measuring an actual program effect or a natural fluctuation?

It is fairly common for a program's effectiveness to be discussed in terms of improvement on measurements taken before and again after program participation. While this may seem reasonable, it could be introducing a type of statistical bias known as selection-regression artifact, or regression to the mean (i.e., average). Selection-regression artifact is a term used to describe the natural tendency for scores to be clustered around their mean. When an unusually high or low score is received it is likely that following scores will be closer, or in other words, regress to the mean. For example, an observed decline in criminal behavior among program participants may simply be a regression to their mean level of criminal behavior, rather than a result of the program of interest. This is a particularly important consideration when program participants are selected based on pretest scores. As

a result, it is important to use stronger research designs than a simple pre and post-test design. For more information see:

Reclaiming Futures Blog

<http://ht.ly/3Gzlx>

Web Center for Social Research Methods

<http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/intsing.php>