

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.

Adjudication

Bornstein, Tomkins, and Neeley conducted a randomized experiment to examine the effectiveness of using different kinds of written reminders to reduce misdemeanants' failure-to-appear (FTA) rates. Misdemeanants (n=7865) in 14 Nebraska counties were randomly assigned to one of four conditions prior to their court date: no reminder (control), reminder-only, reminder with information on the negative consequences of FTA (reminder-sanctions), or reminder with information on sanctions as well as the procedural justice benefits of appearing (reminder-combined). The results show that reminders significantly reduced FTA overall and more substantive reminders were significantly more effective than a simple reminder. Specifically, the FTA rate was 12.6% in the control condition, 10.9% in the reminder-only condition, 8.3% in the reminder-sanctions condition, and 9.8% in the reminder-combined condition. The FTA rate was higher for some categories of misdemeanors than others, and for defendants with multiple charges (15.4% if multiple charges, versus 5.4% for one charge). In addition, a subset of individuals (n=452) was surveyed after their scheduled court date to assess their perceptions of procedural fairness and their level of trust/confidence in the courts. Survey results indicated that misdemeanants' trust/confidence assessments, as well as their perceptions of procedural justice, were related to their appearance in court. Defendants who appeared in court had higher institutional confidence and felt they had been treated more fairly by the criminal justice system than those who failed to appear in court. The study, "Reducing Courts' Failure to Appear Rate: A Procedural Justice Approach" is available at: <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/234370.pdf>

Corrections

Bohmert and Duwe evaluated the impact of the Affordable Homes Program (AHP), a prison work crew program managed by the Minnesota Department of Corrections (MNDOC). AHP trains offenders in the construction trade while they are serving time in prison. The two key objectives of the program are to increase affordable housing in Minnesota, and to provide inmates with occupational skills to help them secure employment following their release from prison. The main focus of this study was whether the program had a significant impact on postrelease employment. The authors also examined the impact of AHP on recidivism and cost. Using a retrospective quasi-experimental design the authors compared AHP participants (n=224) with a comparison group of similar offenders (n=224). The three measures of postrelease employment were: 1) whether the offender obtained employment, 2) the total number of hours an offender worked, and 3) the amount of money an offender earned during employment. Recidivism was defined as a rearrest for a new offense, a felony reconviction, or a return to prison for a new crime. Data collection ran from April 1998 through December 2008. The average follow-up period was 5.9 years, with a minimum of 3 years and a maximum of 10. The results suggest that participation in AHP significantly increased the chances of

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obtaining employment in a construction-related field but did not significantly increase the odds of obtaining postrelease employment in other fields. Although AHP participants had lower rates of recidivism, the program did not significantly reduce the risk of recidivism. The authors hypothesize that this occurred because the program is not intended to address recidivism and provides no aftercare programming for participants. The cost benefit analysis estimated that the AHP has produced approximately \$13.1 million in costs avoided to the state. Given that this estimate was based on a sample of 224 AHP participants, the results suggest the program produced a reduction of \$58,491 in costs to the state per participant. The Study, "Minnesota's Affordable Homes Program: Evaluating the Effects of a Prison Work Program on Recidivism, Employment and Cost Avoidance" was published in *Criminal Justice Policy Review*, and the abstract is available at: <http://cjp.sagepub.com/content/early/2011/06/15/0887403411411911>

Adjudication

Pyrooz, Wolfe, and Spohn examined prosecutorial decisions in gang-related homicide. Specifically, the authors investigated the effect of victim, suspect, and incident characteristics on the likelihood of case rejection for 614 homicide cases over a five-year period. The study was based on data collected by the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office for the evaluation of *Operation Hardcore*, a specialized gang prosecution unit. The analysis focused on two questions: 1) what are the victim, offender, and incident characteristics that affect the likelihood of case rejection in gang-related homicide cases? 2) Is the likelihood of case rejection lower for gang-related cases prosecuted by a specialized gang unit? The authors hypothesized that prosecutors would be less likely to file charges in cases that involve stereotypical participants (e.g., males, minorities, and gang members); as the number of victims increase, the likelihood of case rejection will decrease; and that cases not prosecuted by the specialized unit will be more likely to be rejected than cases prosecuted by the specialized unit. The results indicate that several variables influenced the likelihood of charge rejection. In a gang-related violent crime multiple victims was found to be a robust predictor that a case will move forward. The probability of case rejection changed from 64% for one victim, to 27% for 2 victims, to 7% for 3 victims, and 2% for 4 victims. Prosecutors were also more likely to reject charging suspects in cases where the suspect was female and in cases where the suspect was gang-affiliated. Finally, gang-related homicide cases that were assigned to the specialized unit were more likely to move forward to the next stage of adjudication than cases that were not assigned to the specialized prosecution unit. The study, "Gang-Related Homicide Charging Decisions: The Implementation of a Specialized Prosecution Unit in Los Angeles" was published in *Criminal Justice Policy Review*, and the abstract is available at: <http://cjp.sagepub.com/content/22/1/3>

Announcement

The Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy has announced their fifth congressional briefing, "Reducing Gun Violence: Lessons from Research and Practice." The briefing will be led by George Mason University's Dr. Christopher Koper, and will include top experts in the firearms and crime research field including Anthony Braga, Catherine Gallagher, Jens Ludwig, Ed McGarrell, Glenn Pierce, Daniel Webster, Charles Wellford and Garen Wintemute. The event will be held at the U.S. House of Representatives Rayburn Building in Washington, DC on Wednesday, February 22nd from 10:00am - 12:15pm. For more information and to register for this free event, go to: <http://gemini.gmu.edu/cebcp/Briefings/gunviolence.html>

Tip of the Month

Have you obtained informed consent?

Evaluations often involve the collection of information from individuals. In these cases it is important that researchers obtain informed consent from the individuals that are participating in the evaluation. This process involves explaining to participants the purpose of the research, research procedures, description of any anticipated harms and potential benefits, how their confidentiality will be safe guarded, and obtaining their consent to participate. For more information on informed consent see the Social Psychology Network - <http://www.socialpsychology.org/consent.htm> And the Department of Health and Human Services' Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) - <http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/>.

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