BJA JRSA

Evaluation News

Expanding Knowledge Through Information Exchange

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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.

Announcements

The Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) will be conducting free regional trainings on the Performance Measurement Tool (PMT) for 2009 Justice Assistance Grants (JAG) and Recovery Act JAG Grant recipients. JRSA will be participating in these trainings that will be held in November and December. The dates, locations and additional information on these trainings can be found at the link below:
http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/BJA/pmt.html

Courts

The Council of State Governments Justice Center recently released a report on mental health courts. This report is based on an examination of existing research and presents the findings as they relate to the design, function and success of mental health courts. Their review of the research shows that these courts may produce positive outcomes for their participants and for the public. When compared to traditional courts, participants in mental health courts were found to have lower rates of recidivism. Further, mental health courts were more effective than traditional courts and jails at linking offenders to mental health treatment services and they have the potential to save money by reducing recidivism. Nevertheless, the authors believe that more studies are needed to increase the confidence in these findings and to answer other important questions, including, which aspects of mental health courts have the greatest positive effects, why, and for whom. The report, *Mental Health Courts: A Guide to Research-Informed Policy and Practice*, is available at:
http://consensusproject.org/jc_publications/mental-health-courts-a-guide-to-research-informed-policy-and-practice

The Center for Court Innovation recently released a report on lessons learned from several process evaluations of courts. It primarily examines failures of implementation, meaning missteps in the planning or execution, rather than failures stemming from a fundamentally flawed theory. The analysis is based largely on problem-solving court initiatives, many of which the Center was involved in planning. The report identifies four major areas from which the lessons learned were drawn: 1) The importance of comprehensive planning, having a shared vision and identifying program goals, identifying quantifiable objectives, planning to collect data, and formalizing the program model. 2) The role of key stakeholders - knowing how and when to engage stakeholders and facilitating buy-in from line staff. 3) Being able to respond to emerging challenges - being realistic about goals and objectives, setting realistic targets, and be-

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.

ing able to adapt the program in response to early implementation experiences. 4) Recognizing the need for leadership - designating a project director and attempting to find a political champion. The full report, *Avoiding Failures of Implementation: Lessons Learned from Process Evaluations*, is available at: http://www.courtinnovation.org/_uploads/documents/Failure%20Final.pdf

CORRECTIONS

Manchak, Skeem, Douglas, and Siranosian examined the utility of the Level of Service Inventory-Revised (LSI-R) in predicting recidivism for females convicted of serious violent offenses, such as murder, rape, kidnapping, and arson. While risk assessment tools have been studied extensively, the authors argue that few have been validated with women offenders. In an effort to test the utility of the LSI-R to predict recidivism among women, this study compared its ability to predict recidivism for 70 females and 1,035 male offenders. The results of their analysis suggest that the LSI-R predicts general recidivism as well for women as it does for men. However, the authors suggest more research is needed to determine whether a risk assessment tool developed explicitly for women would be more applicable and useful than the LSI-R. They argue that the LSI-R may not capture dynamic risk factors that may be uniquely predictive of recidivism for women. The study, *Does Gender Moderate the Predictive Utility of the Level of Service Inventory-Revised (LSI-R) for Serious Violent Offenders*, is available at: http://cjb.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/36/5/425

SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Listwan, Shaffer, and Hartman recently completed a study that examined whether community-based drug courts were a reasonable option for methamphetamine users. Participants included individuals convicted of felony drug or drug-related offense(s) who entered the drug court between March 1999 and June 2002. This drug court consisted of court-supervised, comprehensive outpatient treatment. The participants were separated into groups of meth users (n = 129) and non-meth users (n=101) based on self-reported drug of choice. The results of their analysis showed that the recidivism rates for meth and non-meth users were similar for arrests and drug-related arrests. Additionally, they found that drug of choice was not a significant predictor of recidivism. An examination of gender revealed that it was significant. Specifically, whereas men were more likely to be arrested overall, women were more likely to be meth users and they were more likely to be arrested for a drug-related charge. Other significant predictors of recidivism and program completion included education and employment. Those who were unemployed were more likely to be arrested and less likely to graduate. The authors state that these findings suggest that officials should consider drug courts as an option for effectively dealing with methamphetamine use. The study, *Combating Methamphetamine Use in the Community: The Efficacy of the Drug Court Model*, is available at: http://cad.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/55/4/627

TIP OF THE MONTH

Not all questions can be answered by exclusively using quantitative research (use of numbers and statistical analyses). Depending on the type of program being evaluated or questions being asked, it may be appropriate to use qualitative research. One type of approach used in qualitative research is focus groups. Focus groups generally consist of six to twelve people who are similar in one or more way. A facilitator guides the group through a discussion of a clearly defined topic, while at the same time encouraging the participants to share their experiences and/or opinions. Focus groups can be particularly useful for gathering information pertaining to program improvement, customer satisfaction, as well as other areas. For more information on focus groups see the following: www.ca.uky.edu/AgPSD/Focus.pdf

www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/evaluation/pdf/brief13.pdf