

Evaluation of the Adult Probation Domestic Violence Unit (DVU)

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Background

In addition to distal goals of crime prevention and community safety, the DVU has two immediate goals: (1) helping to the victims of domestic violence, and (2) helping to the perpetrators of domestic violence currently on probation in their unit. The DVU is one of two in-house domestic violence programs provided to offenders by the Circuit Court of Cook County. The other intervention program is the Social Service Department Batterer Intervention Program (SSDBIP). While SSDBIP focuses on men on supervision and on conditional discharge, DVU is focused on probationers. Most misdemeanor offenders go to SSDBIP, while DVU handles serious misdemeanors (serious by virtue of injury, chronicity, aggravation, or other complicating factors) and felonies. At present, felonies account for 93.6% of the DVU, along with 5.6% misdemeanor and the remainder traffic and DUI cases. There is currently a pre-trial diversion program in place at the Circuit Court in Skokie. These pre-trial cases will not be the subject of this evaluation.

Kathy Leigh is the supervisor of the DVU. The unit is physically located at 1644 W. Walnut, Chicago. Probationers in the DVU are assigned to one of three phases of contact intensity. Phase 1 requires weekly office visits with the probation officer. Phase 2 requires twice-monthly visits, and Phase 3 is monthly visits. For the most part, the phase changes are time-based. After six month's supervision, most probationers move to from Phase I to Phase II. Theoretically, a program participant can graduate to the next phase only after showing some improvement in his or her behavior – i.e., cooperate with the counselor, report to the officer regularly, be compliant with special conditions, and remain arrest free. The data can tell us how the participants moved from one phase to the next.

There are on average, about 250 men in the DVU unit at any time and offenders are directly sentenced to the DVU. The unit can get probationers from any courtroom, but most of the clients, who participated in the program, were sentenced at the DV Court. Probationers who are not eligible for the program can be transferred out to appropriate units.

In addition to normal supervisory activities, specific interventions currently provided by the DVU are assessment and victim support. Staff at DVU are concerned that the assessment tool currently used may not be optimal and, as a result, may not be utilized consistently. The current tool is a hybrid of the Spouse Abuse Risk Assessment (SARA: Kropp, Hart, Webster, & Eaves, 1998), and the regular assessment tool used by the Department. The SARA as used at DVU is not based on victim information, which is the normal protocol. Cook County currently has five service providers on contract for batterer intervention services: (1) Avance, 2334 W. Lawrence, Chicago; (2) LaFamilia Unida, 3047 W. Cermak, Chicago; (3) Universal Family Connection, 1350 103rd, Chicago; (4) West Side Domestic Abuse Program, 2741 N. Spaulding, Chicago; and, (5) Pro-Health Advocates, 5929 W. Roosevelt, Cicero. Contractual BIPs were identified through an RFP process. Probation Department created an RFP that was distributed to local service providers, then held a vendor conference. The selection was made from a list of service providers who responded to the

conference with a proposal. A number of contingencies, except the quality of their services, were considered before contracting services from providers. All local service providers hold valid licenses and comply with the *Illinois Protocol for Partner Abuse Intervention Program*. Service providers were bilingual and evenly spread across the geographical area. The details of these programs and the linkage between the DVU and the agencies have never been examined.

Prior Studies of Batterers and Batterer Programs in Cook County

The evaluator conducted a formative evaluation of the *Illinois Protocol for Partner Abuse Intervention Program* under a contract with the State of Illinois during the period 1997-2000. For this evaluation research we selected 16 Illinois communities and Cook County for intensive data collection. We (1) interviewed 28 judges, 11 prosecutors, 14 probation officers, 43 battered women's advocates, and 45 BIP staff and (2) surveyed 84 staff and 823 participants in 27 batterer intervention programs. One of our conclusions from this study was that probation officers were the criminal justice lynchpins upon which the effectiveness of batterer intervention programs may hinge (Bennett & Vincent, 2002). There was a great deal of variation in the relationships between probation officers and batterer intervention programs. None of the five batterer programs currently under contract with the DVU were included in that study.

The evaluator conducted a recent quasi-experimental study of program completion and re-arrest of 899 men in the Social Service Department of the Circuit Court of Cook County, and found support for the moderate effect of program completion on re-arrest. Nearly three out of every four men (73.4%) referred to 30 court-supervised batterer intervention programs within Cook County complete the program, a substantially higher completion rate than those rates reported in the literature. A number of variables are statistically associated with program completion: income, drug abuse, frequency of alcohol use, primitive psychological defenses, prior arrests, ethnicity, and employment. Full time employment more than triples the odds a man will complete a batterer program, while being Latino nearly doubles the chances of program completion. Prior violation of an order of protection reduces the odds of program completion by 61%. The recidivism rate for men who drop out of Cook County batterer programs is 37%, twice as high as the 15% recidivism rate for completers, suggesting a significant association between program drop-out and re-arrest for domestic violence. The odds of re-arrest for domestic violence are significantly reduced by age, but are increased both by the frequency of alcohol use and by the level of alcohol abuse, after controlling for the effects of employment and prior arrests. Completing a batterer intervention program in the Cook County system reduces the odds of being re-arrested for domestic violence by 63 percent, after controlling for age, employment, prior arrests, and alcohol abuse. This represents a moderate effect size for program completion.

Aims

This evaluation has both formative and summative aims. The summative aim, described in the next section, is to evaluate the outcomes of the DVU in terms of completion and re-offense. The outcomes to be examined in the summative portion of this evaluation are:

1. The probationer completes treatment
2. The probationer is non-recidivate with *any* victim
3. The probationer is terminated successfully with no violations. Violations are twofold: (1) technical violation, such as not paying a fee, or (2) a new charge.

The formative aim includes addressing a number of questions, including these:

1. How do victims of domestic violence view the assistance provided to them by the DVU? What changes would enhance victim safety from the victim perspective? What elements of the program are helpful?
2. How do probationers at DVU regard the unit and the batterer program they attend?
2. How do probation officers view their effectiveness? Are there barriers to their completion of their jobs? How safe do officers feel in their work?
3. What is the level of psychiatric symptoms presented by probationers? How are problems identified and referred? What is the level of compliance with referral for psychiatric and substance abuse treatment?
4. What are the characteristics of the contractual agencies with whom the DVU sub-contract? What elements of the DVU-contractual relationship are working well? How do contractual agencies account to officers for their services, report outcomes, and manage other information?

Data Collection

The formative and summative questions will be addressed by qualitative and quantitative data from the following sources:

1. Existing Data
 - a. Program completion data will be retrieved by Department staff from the PROMIS database and entered into a de-identified electronic dataset.
 - b. Recidivism data will be retrieved by Department staff from the LEADS database and entered into the electronic dataset
 - c. Termination and violation data are already abstracted from client case records and will be entered into the electronic dataset.
 - d. Other demographic and case-relevant data have been retrieved from the case record by Adult Probation staff and will be entered into the electronic dataset.

2. Interview Data
 - a. Dr. Bennett will interview 7 female victims selected by the Victim Assistant Officer. Interviews will occur at a location convenient to the victims. Interviews will be approximately 60 minutes in length. Participants will be paid \$15.
 - b. Dr. Bennett will interview 7 volunteer probationers. Interviews will be approximately 60 minutes in length. Participants will be paid \$15.
 - c. Dr. Bennett will interview the DVU Supervisor and officers assigned to the unit. All SCL staff interviews will last between 30 and 45 minutes.
 - d. Dr. Bennett will interview batterer program directors and staff at the five contractual agencies. A revised version of the BIP Interview protocol used in the statewide evaluation will be used for this purpose (attached)

3. Testing Data
 - a. Probationers will complete the Symptom Check List-90, Revised (SCL) during one of their visits with their probation officer. The SCL is self-administered, requires a 6th-grade reading level, and is completed in 12-15 minutes. The completed SCL will be collected periodically from the DVU secretary and the data entered into an electronic dataset which will later be matched with the electronic chart abstraction file.

Procedures

Collection of existing data is already underway by the Evaluation Unit of the Adult Probation Department, and is independent of Dr. Bennett's evaluation. Dr. Bennett will not have access to these data until the UIC Institutional Review Board has approved the protocol. The Department will provide the de-identified case data in electronic form, along with an identifier which will permit matching with SCL data.

To reduce risk of information being inadvertently shared, interviews must follow this sequence: (1) DVU Supervisor, (2) DVU staff, (3) probationers, (4) victims, and (5) community agency staff. Dr. Bennett will contact DVU Supervisor, Probation Officers, and community staff directly. Probationers and victims will be contacted by the Probation Officer and the Victim Assistance Officer respectively; following the initial contact, the interviewees may call Dr. Bennett or Dr. Bennett may call the interviewees, depending on their preference. Dr. Bennett will secure all consents at the time of the interviews.

SCL data collection will occur throughout the research period. SCL packets will be provided to the DVU for distribution to the probation officers who will give the packets to the probationers, along with an *Information Handout*. On the SCL packet will be the name of the probation officer and a department code for use with matching SCL data with case record data. The PI will not have access to any identifying information. The Probation Officer will follow an *SCL Script* in explaining the procedure, the Information Handout, and the SCL. The SCL data collection will occur in conjunction with a regularly scheduled meeting between probationer and Probation Officer.

Following their meeting, the Probation Officer will ask the probationer if he wishes to participate in a short survey by the University of Illinois at Chicago, following the SCL Script. If the Probationer agrees, the Probation Officer will give him the Information Handout/SCL Packet (the Information Handout is stapled to the SCL Packet). There will be no signed consent, since consent would increase the level of coercion and risk identification of the probationer. The probationer will be instructed that if they do not wish to participate, they should wait until the Probation Officer has left the waiting room, leave the completed SCL in the packet, remove the Informational Handout, seal the packet, and give the packet to the secretary. This is the identical procedure to be followed by probationers who do participate, except they fill out the SCL before they put it in the packet.

Interviews of supervisor and probation officers will occur at their convenience, both in terms of time and place. The interview will begin with discussion and signing the informed consent. Interviews are unstructured, but will include questions about: experience at the DVU; what PO has gained from the experience; experience with the community batterer programs; elements of the job which work well, and elements which do not work well; function and value of home visits; factors contributing to decisions about filing Violation of Probation (VOP); factors contributing to moving probationers from Phase I to Phase II; leadership and teamwork at DVU; job satisfaction and productivity at DVU; role of victim services at DVU; and training needed to do a better job. Interviews will be between 30 and 60 minutes in length.

The next series of interviews will be the probationers. Interviews will be between 45 and 60 minutes. Interviews of probationers will occur at their convenience, both in terms of time and place. The interview will begin with discussion and signing the informed consent. The interview will end with disbursement of the \$15 cash incentive and signing the receipt. Interviews are unstructured, but all will include questions about: experience at the DVU, in terms of how useful it has been; anything gained from the experience; experience with the probation officer; and experience in the community batterer program.

After the probationers have been interviewed, the PI will interview the victims. Interviews will be between 45 and 60 minutes. Interviews of victims will occur at their convenience, both in terms of time and place. The interview will begin with discussion and signing the informed consent. The interview will end with disbursement of the \$15 cash incentive and signing the receipt. Interviews are unstructured, but all will include questions about: experience at the DVU Victim Advocacy program, in terms of how useful it has been, anything gained; experience with the victim advocate and with the criminal justice system in general; usefulness of the packet with information about the victim Assistance Program, safety plan, list of local service providers, and the abuse screening assessment tool.

The final set of interviews will be with staff of the five contractual agencies. Interviews will be between about 60 minutes in length, and will use a group format. Interviews of community staff will occur at their agency and at their convenience. The interview will begin with discussion and signing the informed consent. The PI will use a modification of a group interview protocol used in an earlier study of batterer programs. Questions will include: experience working with the DVU; providing information to the DVU on treatment status; history of program; linkage to the criminal justice system, battered women agencies, other agencies; intake and assessment procedures; program and

program structure; and, documentation procedures.

Analysis

Following the completion of data collection, data analysis will commence. Analysis of interview data will employ a traditional narrative approach, supplemented with coding of notes and use of ATLAS.ti.

Quantitative data analysis will focus of description and prediction of three outcome: (1) successfully termination from probation, (2) program completion, and (3) recidivism. Case record, SCL and census data will be used in multivariate models of different versions of the outcome criteria.

Deliverables

The PI will provide a preliminary status report on the project to the Adult Probation Department on June 30, 2005 and a final report on October 1, 2005.

The provisional time line for the project, contingent primarily of IRB approval and summer scheduling, is as follows:

Task	Projected Finish Date
UIC IRB Approval	May 1, 2005
Probation Officer interviews	June 1, 2005
Interim Report	June 30, 2005
Probationer Interviews	July 1, 2005
Victim Interviews	August 1, 2005
Community Agency Interviews	September 1, 2005
Final Report	October 1, 2005