

SUMMARY

PROGRAM COMPLETION, BEHAVIORAL CHANGE, AND RE-ARREST FOR THE BATTERER INTERVENTION SYSTEM OF COOK COUNTY ILLINOIS:

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The effectiveness of intervention programs for men who batter is an important issue for practice, policy and research. This report summarizes a preliminary examination of outcomes of Cook County batterer intervention programs (BIP). In Cook County, 30 community programs and one court-housed program provide a state standard minimum of 24 weeks of intervention programming for men arrested for domestic violence. This is properly labeled a batterer intervention system because the interventions are delivered under the same state standards with unified completion criteria linked to a single county court system.

The specific questions this evaluation addresses are: (1) What is the completion rate of men referred to batterer programs in Cook County? (2) What is the rate of re-arrest of men completing the batterer program compared with men not completing the program? (3) Do participants change their behavior during the program? (4) Are there identifiable factors associated with program completion, re-arrest, and behavioral change?

Subjects for this program evaluation are males age 17 or older who pled guilty or were found guilty of a domestic violence crime, and ordered by the court to attend a batterer intervention program. Men either attend the in-house program at the court or they are referred to one of 30 community-based batterer programs. Data for this evaluation were available from four sources: (1) the Cook County Prosecutors Management Information System (PROMIS); (2) Research assessment data completed during an interview of the batterer by probation staff; (3) Staff ratings of behavior in individual case records of men attending batterers programs in Cook County; and, (4) Arrest records for men in the research sample (LEADS).

Key Findings

Over three out of every four men (77%) referred to batterer intervention programs within the batterer intervention system for Cook County (Chicago) Illinois 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: employment, income, self-reported drug abuse, frequency of alcohol use, primitive psychological defenses, prior arrests, ethnicity, prior violation of an order of protection, and stage of change. Full time employment, being Latino, and being in the active stage of change all more than double the chances of program completion.

The behavioral competency of men who complete batterer intervention programs in the Cook County Court system improves during the batterer program according to staff ratings, but small sample size make it difficult to analyze these results sufficiently.

The recidivism rate for men who drop out of the batterer programs is 36%, 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 by the frequency of alcohol use, 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.

Conclusion

This quasi-experimental study suggests that men in the Cook County batterer intervention system are completing the program at a better-than-expected rate. Data also suggest that the system may have a role in reducing re-arrest for crimes related to domestic violence. However, caution is warranted because the study lacked a true control group, so we do not know what accounts for the outcomes observed. Furthermore, one in four men dropped out of the program and one in seven men who completed the program re-offended. These facts point to the need for further research and program development.

In addition to the batterer intervention programs which are the focus of this report, there are other elements of the Cook County system which should be identified, even though the current study is unable to estimate the effect of their role. These other system elements include law enforcement, other elements of the court, and victim service agencies. The latter of these elements—shelters, walk-in centers, and advocacy organizations—require special attention, although their role in batterer intervention systems are often unstudied and undervalued; if services to the victims of violence were unavailable, the effectiveness of batterer intervention programs would probably be less. Criminal justice policy would be better served if it promoted research which could account for the multiple components of coordinated community intervention systems. This is a much more complicated research project than the one reported in this paper. Use of clustered and community-level variables at different ecological levels requires better preparation, better measurement, better analysis, and ultimately, much more money. We believe the benefits would far outweigh these costs. Refined interventions and a coordinated court and community response to non-compliance and re-offense are likely to increase the safety of battered women.

One in five men who might batter again *may be* prevented from doing so by the batterer intervention system in Cook County. The fact that both the effects and the effect sizes for our findings are on the same order as those of other studies is intriguing. Other studies often use one or two well established intervention programs; this is not the case in our study. Other studies may use a much more accurate, difficult—and some would say dangerous—method of collecting recidivism data: victim report; our study used only arrest. The convergence of outcomes for our study with other studies suggest not only that batterer intervention systems have a moderate effect, but also that the effects may be a function both of the individual programs which comprise the system as well as the system itself.

For copy of entire report: Program Completion, Behavioral Change, and Re-arrest for the Batterer Intervention System of Cook County, Illinois
<http://www.icjia.state.il.us/public/pdf/ResearchReports/CookCountyDVInt.pdf>