

# Colorado Probation Research in Brief

## *Program Completion, Behavior Change, and Re-arrest for Participants in Batterer Intervention System*

**Source Document:** Bennett, L., Call, C., Flett, H., & Stoops, C. (2005). *Program Completion, Behavioral Change, and Re-Arrest for the Batterer Intervention System of Cook County Illinois: Final Report to the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority*. Chicago.

**Key Words:** domestic violence, DV, DV treatment, recidivism, treatment completion, treatment failure

### Summary/Conclusions

Through a Bureau of Justice Assistance grant, researchers at the University of Chicago examined the outcomes of Cook County's batterer intervention programs. The researchers reviewed records and conducted interviews of 31 programs to determine the completion rates, rearrest rates, behavior change rates, and factors associated with various outcome types. They discovered a substantially higher completion rate for their programs, compared to national data, as well as a "number of variables were statistically associated with program completion." Also, the rates of rearrest for drop-outs were twice as high as completers.

### Limitations of Information

There were several challenges associated with the completion of this project. There were raw data problems, as "a substantial proportion of reasons for non-referral and non-completion were assigned codes by workers which were not appropriate for the category." Data from records were limited to those participants who gave permission, so motivation may have influenced outcomes. Also, the sample size was not adequate and there was no control group for comparison.

**Caveat:** The information presented here is intended to summarize and inform readers of research and information relevant to probation work. It can provide a framework for carrying out the business of probation as well as suggestions for practical application of the material. While it may, in some instances, lead to further exploration and result in *future* decisions, it is *not* intended to prescribe policy and is not necessarily conclusive in its findings. Some of its limitations are described above.

### DV Intervention Results

The researchers had four questions driving their project: What is the completion rate in Cook County's batterer programs? What is the rearrest rate for non-completers? Do participants change behavior? Are there factors related to completion, rearrest, and change? To explore the questions, the study subjects included males, age 17 or older, who were "ordered to a batterer intervention program subsequent to receiving either supervision or a conditional discharge for a domestic violence crime." Data was collected from the prosecutor's database, an assessment tool, individual treatment records, and arrest records.

The batterer programs in Cook County are standardized, delivering a minimum of 24 weeks of programming, and operating under the same state standards with a "unified completion criteria linked to a single county court system." It should be noted that about one-third of the programs did not have participants represented in the final study sample.

The researchers found completion rates of over 70%, which "is much higher than the often-quoted figure of 50% from the domestic violence literature."

Researchers used several measures evaluated by agency staff to determine competencies as behavioral change. They found statistically significant positive movement on all competencies, when measuring from the beginning of treatment and the end of treatment.

The researchers explored recidivism for completers of treatment and non-completers. "The recidivism rate for the 128 men who dropped out of the bat-

terer programs is 37.6%, over twice as high as the 15.4% recidivism rate for the 384 completers, suggesting a significant association between program drop-out and re-arrest for domestic violence."

Regarding variables, which impact completion, the study found that lower income, drug abuse, frequent alcohol use, number of prior arrests, and unemployment status were associated with non-completers. However, a full-time job was the best predictor of program completion, while completion "reduced the likelihood of re-arrest by 63%."

### Practical Applications

- √ Maintaining or obtaining employment is crucial for success. For unemployed persons under DV supervision, include referrals to a Workforce Center and job search activities as a priority on the case plan.
- √ Discuss possible barriers to the completion of treatment, prior to enrollment. Use the case plan to mitigate these barriers before having the person enroll in treatment.
- √ Completers do better, so work with people in treatment who are struggling to maintain their enrollment. Consider being open to changing providers, if necessary.
- √ Outcomes seem to improve, when the system works together to provide treatment and supervision. Probation can act as a common thread between the courts, the service providers, and victim services by maintaining communication and having regular contact on each case.