Victim Offender Reconciliation Program Recidivism Study

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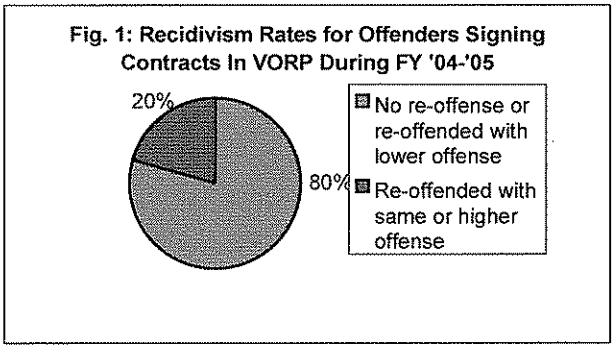
18 June 2008

The Victim Offender Reconciliation Program (VORP) at the Center for Community Justice (CCJ) has conducted a recidivism study in fulfillment of the Department of Corrections grant stipulations. Recidivism was defined in this study as being convicted or adjudicated of a misdemeanor or felony charge in Elkhart County within two years of signing a contract through the VORP program during the 2004-2005 fiscal year.

Studies of recidivism rates may be helpful in determining program efficacy and descriptive recidivism studies can be useful in informing evidence based policy development. Repeated studies also allow for program analysis over a period of time.

The recidivism study sample consisted of all people signing contracts in VORP through either face-to-face mediation or indirect mediation during FY '04-'05. For each person in the sample, the following information was recorded: demographic information (age and sex), offense type, offense class, referring court, and close status. Recidivism data for all adult offenders was determined through Doxpop, and included all misdemeanor and felony offenses convicted in Elkhart County during the two years following contract signing. For each offense, the offense class was recorded. Recidivism data for all juvenile offenders was determined through a request to access juvenile records from the Elkhart County Juvenile Court; the number of adjudicated criminal re-offenses and the offense class were recorded.

A vast majority of agreements made in FY '04-'05 were found to be fulfilled within two years of contract signing, or 86% of contracts signed. This is on par with a study of mediation programs serving adults and juveniles that found 89% of contracts to be successfully completed (Gehm, 1990 as cited in Levin, 2007), showing that the Victim Offender Reconciliation Program at the Center for Community Justice has comparable success rates with similar programs nationwide.



For all offenders signing contracts during FY '04-'05 through VORP, only 35% were found to be convicted or adjudicated of crimes in Elkhart County within the following two years, and 80% of offenders either didn't re-offend or re-offended with a lesser offense (Fig. 1). Additionally, the recidivism rate for offenders successfully completing their VORP contract, 34%, was lower than for offenders not completing their contracts, 48%.

Differing definitions of recidivism amongst programs hinders the ability to compare this recidivism rate to rates at other victim-offender mediation programs or in the criminal justice system. Nevertheless, it is notable that a majority of offenders signing contracts with their victims through the VORP program do not re-offend during the following two years. Repeating this study for subsequent years will additionally allow the recidivism rate for VORP to be monitored and compared over several years. Such data will be useful in informing future program development.

Levin, M. (2007). Testimony on House Bill 2291 Relating to Victim-Offender Mediation. *Center for Effective Justice.* Retrieved 6 May 2008 from http://www.texaspolicy.com/pdf/2007-03-28-ML-testimony.pdf.

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Acknowledgements

The Elkhart County Juvenile Court staff assisted in pulling files of juvenile offenders included in the study.

Introduction

The Victim Offender Reconciliation Program (VORP) at the Center for Community Justice (CCJ) has conducted a recidivism study in fulfillment of the Indiana Department of Corrections grant stipulations. Recidivism, broadly defined, refers to any secondary event occurring subsequent to an index event and is used to describe repetitious criminal activity (Payne, 2007). More specifically, recidivism was defined in this study as being convicted or adjudicated of a misdemeanor or felony charge in Elkhart County within two years of signing a contract through the VORP program during the 2004-2005 fiscal year. The signing of a contract within the VORP program, either during a face-to-face mediation or during indirect mediation, was thus the index event and conviction or adjudication of a misdemeanor or felony in Elkhart County within two years of the index event was labeled as a secondary event.

Studies of recidivism rates may be helpful in determining program efficacy, although comparisons of recidivism rates amongst programs are generally not viable due to differing working definitions of recidivism (Payne, 2007; Bradshaw and Roseborough, 2005). Descriptive recidivism studies can, however, be useful in informing evidence based policy development, and repeated studies allow for program analysis over a period of time.

Method

VORP is a program that seeks to allow offenders the possibility of making things right with their victims and that gives victims a place in the process and the opportunity to express their thoughts and emotions directly to the offender. Cases are generally referred to VORP by the courts or the probation department. Once a referral is received and accepted, VORP contacts the victims to explain the program, listen to their experience, determine any restitution needs, and solicit their participation in the VORP process. VORP then meets with the offender to explain the program, hear how and why they committed the offense, and ask what they are willing to do to make things right with their victim. If both parties are willing to meet, then a face-to-face mediation is held and a contract outlining the nature and amount of restitution is signed. If the parties are not interested in meeting, then a contract may be facilitated indirectly (indirect mediation).

The recidivism study sample consisted of all people signing contracts in VORP through either face-to-face mediation or indirect mediation during FY '04-'05. For each person in the sample, the following information was recorded: demographic information (age and sex), offense type, offense class, referring court, and close status. Recidivism data for all adult offenders was determined through Doxpop, and included all misdemeanor and felony offenses convicted in Elkhart County during the two years following contract signing. For each offense, the offense class

was recorded. Recidivism data for all juvenile offenders was determined through a request to access juvenile records from the Elkhart County Juvenile Court; the number of adjudicated criminal re-offenses and the offense class were recorded.

Results

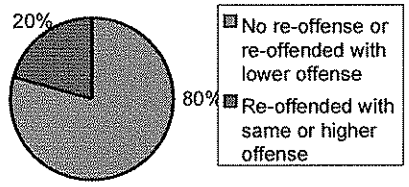
For all offenders signing contracts during FY '04-'05, 35% (74 out of 209; unduplicated) re-offended and 65% (135 out of 209; unduplicated) did not re-offend. For all offenders signing contracts during FY '04-'05, 80% (171 out of 215; duplicated) did not re-offend or re-offended with a lesser offense. For all cases with contracts signed during FY '04-'05, 86% (188 of 221 contracts) were closed successfully within two years from contract signing, meaning that the contract was completed as agreed upon; 12% (26 of 221 contracts) were closed unsuccessfully within two years from contract signing, meaning that the contract was not completed as agreed upon; 3% (7 of 221 contracts) are still active within two years from contract signing, meaning that the contract is still being completed. For offenders successfully completing contracts signed during FY '04-'05, 34% (61 of 181) re-offended, while for those unsuccessful at completing contracts signed during FY '04-'05, 48% (11 of 23) re-offended.

Discussion

A vast majority of agreements made in FY '04-'05 were found to be fulfilled within two years of contract signing, or 86% of contracts signed. This is on par with a study of mediation programs serving adults and juveniles that found 89% of contracts to be successfully completed (Gehm, 1990 as cited in Levin, 2007), showing that the Victim Offender Reconciliation Program at the Center for Community Justice has comparable success rates with similar programs nationwide.

For all offenders signing contracts during FY '04-'05 through VORP, only 35% were found to be convicted or adjudicated of crimes in Elkhart County within the following two years, and 80% of offenders either didn't re-offend or re-offended with a lesser offense (Fig. 1). Additionally, the recidivism rate for offenders successfully completing their VORP contract, 34%, was lower than for those not completing their contracts, 48%.

Fig. 1: Recidivism Rates for Offenders Signing Contracts In VORP During FY '04-'05



Differing definitions of recidivism amongst programs hinders the ability to compare this recidivism rate to rates at other victim-offender mediation programs or in the criminal justice system. Nevertheless, it is notable that a majority of offenders signing contracts with their victims through the VORP program do not re-offend during the following two years. Repeating this study for subsequent years will additionally allow the recidivism rate for VORP to be monitored and compared over several years. Such data will be useful in informing future program development.

References

Bradshaw, W. & Roseborough, D. (2005). Restorative Justice Dialogue: The Impact of Mediation and Conferencing on Juvenile Recidivism. *Federal Probation, 69*(20), 15-21.

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