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FACT SHEET

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Research Study of Batterer Intervention Systems

In California, persons convicted of a criminal domestic violence offense must attend a 52-week batterer intervention program as a condition of probation. The Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) has received funding to study the system response to domestic violence in five counties: Los Angeles, Riverside, San Joaquin, Santa Clara, and Solano.

Study Purpose and Background

In December 2005, the AOC Office of Court Research was awarded a research grant from the National Institute of Justice to study batterer intervention systems in California. As specified in Penal Code section 1203.097, batterers convicted of a domestic violence offense must attend a 52-week batterer intervention program, one of the longest mandated programs in the United States. But while batterer intervention programs (BIPs) have become one of the preferred methods of addressing domestic violence throughout the United States, there are few conclusive analyses of their effectiveness.

The common statutory framework in California, combined with the variation in operation of courts and BIPs within that framework, provides an ideal environment to study the “system” response to domestic violence.

Data Collection

Seventy-three certified BIPs in five counties (Los Angeles, Riverside, San Joaquin, Santa Clara, and Solano) were recruited to participate in the study. At present, nearly 1,500 batterers from the 73 programs are enrolled in the study. Study subjects must be male, have been convicted of a domestic violence offense against a female victim (current or former spouse or girlfriend), and have been ordered to attend a 52-week BIP as a condition of probation.

BIPs have been asked to collect various types of client-level data, including basic demographic data and attendance records. The client data will later be matched to data from the courts, probation departments, and the state Department of Justice in order to construct client-level typologies.

Jurisdictional Typologies

In addition to client-level data, the study will document jurisdictional policies and procedures that apply to criminal domestic violence offenders. Though Penal Code section 1203.097 specifies many requirements that the courts, probation departments, and city/district attorney's offices must follow, there are slight procedural differences among the jurisdictions. A series of interviews, site visits, and data collection instruments will be used to gather this data from justice system partners.

Batterer Intervention Programs

BIPs must be certified by the county probation department before they can accept clients for the 52-week court-ordered treatment program. Additionally, Penal Code section 1203.097 and any local requirements set by the probation department mandate certain course content. Despite this apparent uniformity, in practice BIPS vary widely in their therapeutic and educational emphases, as well as differ in how their programs operate.

To better understand these differences, BIPs were asked to respond to a survey assessing the educational concepts, coping skills, and teaching strategies they are currently employing, as well as the frequency with which they use these approaches and the importance they place on them. This data will be used in a larger and more comprehensive analysis of client, program, and system characteristics, in relation to program outcomes.

Next Steps

A final report to the funder is expected in late summer 2008.

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Additional Resources:

Task Force on Local Criminal Justice Response to Domestic Violence, Rep. to Cal. Atty. Gen., *Keeping the Promise: Victim Safety and Batterer Accountability* (June 2005)

Cal. State Auditor, Bur. of State Audits, *Batterer Intervention Programs: County Probation Departments Could Improve Their Compliance With State Law, but Progress in Batterer Accountability Also Depends on the Courts* (Nov. 2006)