



NATIONAL CRIME PREVENTION CENTRE

Building the Evidence – **EVALUATION SUMMARIES**

2007-ES-3

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE TREATMENT OPTION PROJECT

The Domestic Violence Treatment Option court (DVT0) was created in 2000 as a response to the high rates of domestic violence, the victimization First Nations felt from the criminal justice system and the sense that many victims were not reporting domestic violence to police.

The Domestic Violence Treatment Option (DVT0) in Yukon, Whitehorse is a specialized court and treatment program for dealing with domestic violence cases. The DVT0 court sought to engage multiple stakeholders, including police, probation officers, a specialized Crown attorney, victim services and women's groups.



For cases of spousal or partner violence, it represented a comprehensive intervention system rather than traditional sentencing in a criminal court. The DVT0 also provided the offender and, indirectly, the victim with an opportunity to choose a Spousal Abuse Program (SAP).

The SAP provided treatment to assist men and women change their abusive attitudes and behaviours. The treatment program consisted of ten weeks of group therapy held twice a week for two hours. It was followed by six weeks of aftercare. In addition to helping offenders examine the underlying factors behind their abusive actions, the treatment program taught clients new skills for preventing and reducing the violence.

There were three groups that went through the SAP:

- DVT0 clients;
- sentencing requirement clients (who did not go through DVT0);
- self-referred clients.

The goals of the project were to:

- encourage more disclosures of domestic violence;
- provide early intervention and therapeutic alternatives to the formal court;
- reduce the high collapse rate of domestic violence charges;
- hold offenders accountable in a meaningful way;

- provide a therapeutic sentencing option to offenders under close supervision;
- incorporate restorative principles in sentencing;
- provide protection, information and support to victims.

Project assessment

A process and outcome evaluation was conducted. Comparisons were drawn between the three groups who went through the *Spousal Abuse Program*.

Re-assault rates of these groups were compared with studies on domestic violence courts conducted by Palmer (1992) and Gondolf (2001). During the evaluation period, 318 clients were involved in the DVT0. Follow-up reports of re-offences continued until the end of the project using a variety of police information systems. A combination of methodologies and techniques were used including observation, standardized instruments, program forms/information systems and data from other agencies that provide, directly or indirectly, domestic violence services.

Key findings

The process evaluation indicated that:

- The program structure, components, roles, goals and objectives were all clearly documented and well developed.
- The Project Steering Committee changed its role during the course of the project, moving from initiation and development of the project to monitoring and sustaining the DVT0 system.
- The SAP program underwent changes in response to new problems and issues that emerged, such as changes to the relapse prevention program, the continued development of a special program for female offenders and the development of special approaches for offenders who were identified as cognitively impaired.
- Approximately 40% of all cases were referred to the SAP program by the DVT0. Additionally, 32% of the SAP participants were as a result of a sentencing requirement, 17% were self-referred cases and 9% were referred by Family and Children Services.
- Approximately 70% of the cases involved First Nations clients.
- Approximately 20% involved female offenders.
- The DVT0 resulted in the fast tracking of cases into the courts with first appearances occurring within two weeks after charges were laid.
- The DVT0 was not very successful in connecting with victims.

The outcome evaluation indicated that:

- The DVT0 system and the SAP program were effective interventions to prevent domestic violence and reduce re-offending.
- The DVT0 system decreased relapse rates from 28% to 20% among offenders.
- Overall, clients showed an improvement in their attitudes, personality and self-esteem. However, clients classified as 'other,' including the self-referred clients, did not show the same improvements over time.
- DVT0 and sentencing requirement clients had extensive histories of assault and involvement in other criminal activities prior to their involvement with the DVT0.
- Twelve months after completing the treatment program, 9% of DVT0 clients re-assaulted compared to 10% of the sentencing requirement clients and none of the 'other' cases. This compared favorably with the results obtained in a study by Palmer (1992) that showed a 10% rate of re-assaults.
- 45% of the re-assaults occurred within two months after the case was completed or closed.
- Fifteen months after project completion, rates of re-offending were very similar for the DVT0 group (18%) and the sentencing requirement group (16%). The 'other' group was very low at 3%. However, the DVT0 group and the sentencing requirement group had more prior involvement in violence and other criminal activities.

Lessons learned

Important lessons learned included:

- It is important to ensure that the project is thoroughly established and prepared for an evaluation.
- All partners involved in the project need to have a clear understanding of the process and an adherence to relevant protocols.
- Formalizing the relapse prevention program in project protocols will help clients and probation officers take the program more seriously.
- Clients who are sent back to the DVT0 two or three times after dropping out are much more difficult to deal with and often non-compliant. It may be more appropriate for them to face alternative criminal justice consequences such as jail terms combined with treatment.
- The SAP program would benefit from having a relationship counselling component for those clients wishing to return to their prior relationship.
- The programming used with male offenders was not as effective with females. Work needs to be put into the development of gender-based offender treatment programs.
- Victim Services and SAP should continue to explore methods for motivating the victims to make use of the appropriate services.

Conclusion

The positive results from the evaluation support the DVT0 model and suggest that a specialized court is a good alternative to the traditional court system in the Whitehorse region.

The DVT0 model, which combines a comprehensive justice system approach with a treatment program for batterers, provides a promising model for dealing with offenders and victims of domestic violence.

For more information or to receive a copy of the final evaluation report please contact the National Crime Prevention Centre at 1-877-302-6272 or visit our website at: www.publicsafety.gc.ca/ncpc

Or visit the Canadian Research Institute for Law and the Family's website at: www.ucalgary.ca/~crilf/index.html