



RICHMOND CITY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

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Program Evaluation Findings (2014-2015)

REAL Program
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Introduction

The Recovering from Everyday Addictive Lifestyles (REAL) Program serves men and women in the Richmond City Justice Center (RCJC). The curriculum takes a behavioral modification approach, coupled with education and skills training designed to reduce the likelihood of program participants returning to a correctional setting following release. Although the curriculum is drawn from evidence-based principles of recovery, the curriculum has not been fully evaluated with individuals in a correctional setting, nor has the implementation of this program at RCJC been evaluated. The purpose of this evaluation is to better understand the return rates (recidivism) of individuals in the program, as compared to individuals who do not take part in the REAL program. This evaluation is based on REAL program enrollees between August 2014 and April 2015, and who then were released from incarceration for at least a year prior to the evaluation occurring.

Method

Sample

The sample of program participants included those individuals participating in the program between the dates of August 2014 (start of The REAL Program) and April, 2015. The sample was limited to those individuals who were released from RCJC (that is, not transferred to prison or elsewhere) by April 30, 2015. Full data were available on 232 program participants. On average, program participants were incarcerated for 81.46 days (SD=126.32). Program participants were enrolled in the program for a broad range of time: 0-1,096 days, with an average stay of 51.25 days (SD = 93.56).

A comparison sample was drawn from individuals incarcerated at RCJC during the same time period. A random number generator was used to select a similarly-sized sample. Individuals who were randomly selected who were also program enrollees were removed from the sample, to ensure that the comparison sample was comprised of individuals incarcerated at RCJC during the same time period who did not enroll in the REAL program (final N = 220). On average, individuals in the comparison sample were incarcerated for 134.24 days (SD = 133.45).

Recidivism

The current evaluation focuses on one-year state-wide recidivism as the primary outcome. Local Inmate Data System (LIDS) was queried to identify whether or not each individual had returned to a correctional setting anywhere in Virginia during the one-year period following their release. Data were coded to indicate (1) did return or (0) did not return. Length of time between release and return was also calculated.

Analysis Plan

Based on the available data, three analyses were conducted. First, a comparison of recidivism (0/1) was completed between program enrollees and non-enrollees, regardless of time

spent in the program (two group comparison). Second, enrollees were classified based on their time spent in the program. Recidivism (0/1) for individuals who spent at least 90 days in the program were compared to individuals who spent less than 90 days in the program, as well as program non-enrollees (three group comparison). Finally, these comparisons were conducted using length of time between release and return as the outcome of interest (two group comparison and three group comparison).

Results

Binary Two Group Comparison

A chi-square analysis was used to compare the binary return (yes/no) of program enrollees vs. non-enrollees. Results indicated no significant difference between these two groups ($\chi^2 = .03, p = .92$). Individuals in these two groups (enrollees vs. non-enrollees) did not differ from one another, and both returned to a correctional setting approximately *50% of the time within the year following release*.

Binary Three Group Comparison

A chi-square analysis was also used to compare the binary return (yes/no) of three groups of individuals: individuals who participated in the program for at least 90 days, individuals who participated in the program for less than 90 days, and non-enrollees. Results indicated that individuals who participated in the program for at least 90 days *were significantly less likely to return to a correctional setting within the year* ($\chi^2 = 7.39, p < .05$). *Whereas individuals participating in the program for less than 90 days and non-enrollees both returned 55.4% and 51.4% of the time, individuals who participated in the program for at least 90 days returned only 30.6% of the time.*

Length of Time (release to return) Comparisons

A t-test indicated that program enrollees and non-enrollees who did return to a correctional setting did not differ on length of time between release and return. The 50% of people who returned, returned on average about 140 days later (program mean: 137.11 days, non-program mean: 149.45 days). An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to compare time between release and return for individuals in the three groups (at least 90 days, less than 90 days, and non-enrollees), and results indicated similar lengths of time between release and return for those who returned in all three groups.

Exploratory Analyses

Given this pattern of findings, as well as the time-limited nature of programming in a jail-based setting, exploratory analyses were conducted to evaluate briefer periods of time in the program (40 days and 60 days). Results indicated that 40 days in the program did not significantly reduce likelihood of returning to a correctional setting with the year, and 60 days in the program reduced likelihood of returning to a correctional setting within the year to 40%.

Discussion

Individuals being released from correctional settings face a number of occupational, financial, and social stressors, which are extremely challenging to navigate. *The results of the present evaluation indicate that 90 days of recovery-based programming can significantly reduce the likelihood of returning to a correctional setting in the year following release.* This finding is extremely promising. Behavioral modification principles necessitate specific behavioral changes, including new schedules, new social networks, and other changes to support recovery from drug and alcohol use and illicit activity. While in the confines of the jail settings, the individual is removed from the context of these behaviors. Thus, program administrators have the difficult task of supporting *future* behavior change, engaging individuals in skill-building and educational programming that will hopefully support their future endeavors upon release.

The findings of the present evaluation are consistent with the complexities of supporting behavioral change following release from a correctional setting. Individuals self-select to participate in the program, thus, it could be hypothesized that individuals who choose to participate are more motivated and overall less likely to return following release. Yet, the results of this evaluation indicate that simply enrolling in the program (for example, many individuals participated in the program for less than one week) did not significantly decrease likelihood of returning during the year following release. Instead, meaningful participation (defined here as 90 days) was required to reduce likelihood of return.

Limitations

This program evaluation was based on available data. To fully evaluate such a program in an experimental sense, it would be necessary to randomize potential participants to receive or not receive the program. Instead, this was a naturalistic study comparing individuals who chose to enroll in the program compared to those who did not.

Future Directions

The results of this evaluation would be bolstered in the future by integrating additional assessment of program participation. In the present evaluation, we used days enrolled in the program as a proxy for program participation. Yet, more nuanced assessments such as educational attainment while in program, phases of program completed, and self-report measures of participation would assist program administrators in understanding specific aspects of program participation as it relates to likelihood of return. The findings of the present study are consistent with current program efforts to support re-entry. Given the identified complexities of behavioral change, as well as the evidence that a significant amount of time is needed in the program, this evaluation indicates that program support during the re-entry period would likely decrease likelihood of return. Future evaluation may aim to integrate technology-based programming to assist individuals in applying program information and learning to the real-life situations they face following release.