
Additional Notes on Research Methods

APPENDIX

The introduction of this report provided a brief overview of our research methods. This appendix provides some additional details regarding our reviews of individual case records and several surveys we conducted.

REVIEWS OF CASE RECORDS FOR A SAMPLE OF INDIVIDUAL OFFENDERS

To help us examine the nature and extent of supervision, we reviewed a random sample of cases involving individual adult sex offenders who were under the supervision of six corrections agencies as of June 2004. The six supervising agencies were Hennepin, Ramsey, and Dakota counties, Dodge-Fillmore-Olmsted Community Corrections, Arrowhead Regional Community Corrections, and the Minnesota Department of Corrections (DOC). These agencies accounted for about 80 percent of the adult sex offenders under community correctional supervision in Minnesota in June 2004.

We initially selected a random sample of about 350 cases that was representative, in aggregate, of all sex offender cases supervised by these agencies. We subsequently found that some of these “open” cases had little or no recent supervision activity to examine—for example, in cases where the offender had absconded, was awaiting release from prison, had transferred to the supervision of another jurisdiction, was deported, or had been civilly committed. However, in nearly 300 cases, we examined the conditions of supervision, the number and types of agent-offender contacts, and records of treatment, polygraphs, and drug/alcohol tests.

Offenders under correctional supervision are subject to “special conditions” of supervision imposed by courts (for offenders sentenced to probation) or DOC (for offenders on supervised release following a prison sentence). To review these special conditions, we examined prison release plans, court sentencing orders, or summaries of the special conditions recorded by corrections agencies on their electronic case management systems. For each offender whose case we reviewed, we examined chronological notes recorded by the supervising agents. These notes provided information on individual contacts that agents had with offenders, treatment providers, and others (such as family members or victims). They also contained information on treatment, drug/alcohol tests, polygraphs, and violations, although the consistency of this documentation varied. In selected cases, we examined the supervising agencies’ paper records on offenders or spoke with the supervising agents. For offenders who received sex offender treatment from a state-funded program, we examined information on treatment and polygraphs from the department’s sex offender treatment database.

Where possible, we analyzed information on agent-offender contacts for periods ranging from 3 to 12 months, usually during the offender's most recent period of supervision since the beginning of 2003. We collected information on agent-offender contacts for up to 6 months in the case of persons under "Intensive Supervised Release" and up to 12 months in other cases. To adjust for the varying lengths of time that we reviewed agent-offender contacts for individual cases, we computed the average number of monthly and yearly contacts for each offender.

SURVEYS

In June 2004, we surveyed directors of Community Corrections Act (CCA) agencies and DOC field offices to determine which of their individual staff were supervising sex offenders. We also asked the directors to indicate whether these staff were Intensive Supervised Release agents, specialized sex offender agents, or regular agents. We sent surveys to directors of 11 DOC district offices, DOC's Intensive Supervised Release unit, and 16 CCA agencies. All 28 directors responded to our survey.

In June 2004, we surveyed the directors of halfway houses with whom DOC contracted for services during calendar year 2003. The survey asked for summary-level information regarding the offenders on supervised release who lived at these facilities during calendar year 2003. For sex offenders at these facilities, we requested information regarding the counties to which they were discharged, their prison release risk ratings (Levels I, II, or III), and the circumstances under which they left the halfway house program. We sent surveys to four agency directors, and we received responses from all of them.

In August 2004, we surveyed the directors of CCA agencies and DOC district offices about the nature of their agencies' sex offender supervision activities and their perceptions about supervision, treatment, and other services. We sent surveys to directors of 11 DOC district offices, DOC's Intensive Supervised Release unit, and 16 CCA agencies. All of these agencies responded to our survey, although one CCA agency—representing Rock and Nobles counties—told us that it contracts with DOC for supervision of adult, felony-level sex offenders. Thus, the director of this agency deferred to DOC for this survey.