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**RESEARCH BRIEFING 2:
Impact of Diversion Programs on Consumers
of Mental Health Services**

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Research Briefing 2

Impact of Diversion Programs on Consumers of Mental Health Services

Objectives: Mental health courts and outpatient civil commitment are two approaches that have been suggested to help keep people with severe and persistent mental illnesses in the community and out of jails and hospitals. The main objectives of this research are to determine if, how, and for whom these programs work. We also wanted to determine whether these programs led to any unintended consequences.

Methods: Data are from the Summit County Alcohol, Drug Addiction, and Mental Health Services Board, Summit County Jail, Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections, and Akron Municipal Court. The number of incarcerations (jail and prison) and hospitalizations (local and state), as well as the days incarcerated and hospitalized, were collected from January 1, 2000 through December 31, 2003 for 595 individuals who had come to the attention of the courts.

Four groups were compared. Those who either declined or were ineligible for mental health court were designated as the non-program group. These individuals had an encounter with the police which brought them to the attention of the court but did not receive any court mandated services. The second group, the outpatient civil committed group, were individuals involuntarily committed for at least six months to the local mental health services board through the Probate Court. Those who accepted mental health court and successfully completed the program were the third group. Successful completion meant that the participant met all the requirements of the court and completed the two year probationary period. Those who accepted mental health court and did not successfully complete the program were the last group.

In order to arrive at the results shown below, we calculated incarcerations and hospitalizations by taking into account the number of days incarcerated or hospitalized for at least a year prior to the start of the program or, in the case of the non-program group, the number of days incarcerated or hospitalized for at least a year prior to the police contact bringing them to the attention of the court. We evaluated these before incarcerated and hospitalized days with the days incarcerated and hospitalized after separation. For the program groups, their date of separation was when they ended program treatment. For the non-program group, their date of separation began after their police contact.

Results:

- In comparison to those who were in the non-program group, successful completers of mental health court and completers of outpatient commitment experienced reduced incarcerations after separation from their program.
- Regardless of program group, those treated for depressive disorders had fewer incarcerations after their separation date.
- Regardless of program group, those treated for adjustment disorders had increased incarcerations after their separation date.

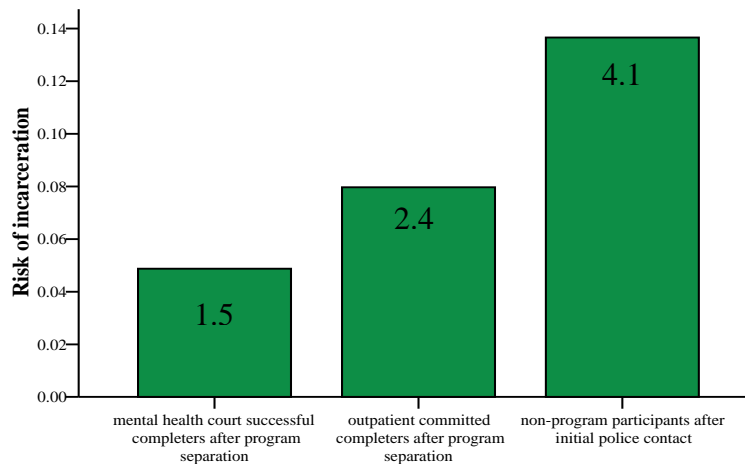
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- Outpatient commitment program participants experienced reduced hospitalizations after program completion in comparison to their hospitalizations before they were in the program.
- In comparison to successful completers of mental health court and taking into account incarcerations before program participation, unsuccessful mental health court completers experienced increased incarcerations after they were separated from the treatment program.

Figure 1 compares the risk of subsequent incarceration for two program groups in comparison to the non-program group. The program groups had fewer average days per month of incarceration than those who did not participate in a program. The successful mental health court participants averaged 1.5 days of incarceration per month; the outpatient committed participants averaged 2.4 days per month; while the individuals with mental illness who had police contact but no diversion program averaged 4.1 days incarcerated per month.

Note: “Risk of Incarceration” indicates the odds of someone being incarcerated. For example, the mental health court group has a risk of incarceration of .047 which means that out of every 100 days, on average a member of this group would be incarcerated 4.7 days. To calculate the average days per month incarcerated, we multiplied .047 times 30 days per month to equal 1.5.

Figure 1. Risk of Incarceration



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