

Beyond Recidivism: Budgeting For Results

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* Disclaimer: All perspectives are mine, information is based on research & data, and are not associated with those of my employer.

What is recidivism? What are challenges to recidivism as a measure of program effect?

Recidivism Defined...

- Rearrests
 - Violations
 - New alleged offenses
- New case filings
- Convictions
- (Re)Commitment to IDOC, IDJJ

Inconsistency in how recidivism is captured & measured.

Other things may be impacting the measure. May not be captured in a cost-benefit analysis or impact evaluation – why process evaluations are vital.

What Impacts the Measure?

- Different policing strategies
- Accounting for cases dropped, dismissed, acquittals
- May not measure the key program goals
- Recidivism may be the product of something else
 - poor implementation, low quality service, lack of access to resources
- Disproportionately impacts individuals with longer criminal histories - e.g., “churn”
- Disregards prevention of more serious crime

How should we look at program outcomes?



Use **multiple measures of success**

- Looking more at desistance from crime
- Based on program goals
 - job attainment, housing stability
- Using a harm reduction approach - any positive change
- Consideration of nuances of program



Create **consistent, ongoing performance monitoring** as part & parcel of program implementation & sustainability

- Program performance monitoring - program quality
- Client performance monitoring
- Solidification of SOP
- Identification of areas for optimization



Consideration of **which program works best & for whom**

- Catering to individuals' - responsiveness
- Culture, language
- Cognitive &/or intellectual functioning/capacity
- Individual vs group
- Accessibility of program

Additional Considerations on Measuring Recidivism After Incarceration

- **Looking at programs within or post-release from a correctional facility**
 - Research indicates **incarceration has few benefits on criminal activity**; has disruptive effects on the life-course of individuals
 - How might incarceration impact recidivism related to a correctional or post-release program?
- **Collateral consequences of criminal legal system contact & incarceration**
 - Upon release from jail or prison, there are **various barriers to reintegration**
 - Finding (stable) housing, employment, SS benefits, health insurance, basic documentation
 - Meeting restrictive conditions of supervision - especially considering these barriers (e.g., movement restriction)

**Think about anyone you know who
smokes cigarettes.**

**Think about those individuals and whether
they have ever tried to stop smoking.**

**Now think about whether they may have had different
ways of quitting or their journey to attempting to (or
actually) quitting.**

Specialized Populations - Substance Use & Mental Health

Substance use *is a chronic, relapsing condition.*

- Consideration of harm reduction – any positive change
 - Treating it as a chronic condition rather than willful defiance of programming
 - Implementing evidence-based practices, including access to all medications
 - Being responsive to what may work best for individual
 - Positive life changes – e.g., activities, social connectedness, safer use, using less, identifying barriers to success, what success is to clients, the community

Mental health *can be crisis situations or chronic conditions*

- Consideration of obtaining SSDI or other benefits for those who cannot work as measures of success
- Positive life changes – e.g., activities, social connectedness, accessibility to treatment & services (e.g., identifying barriers)
- What success is to clients, the community

If we measure success based on what is accessible, but not appropriate for an individual, we may be setting them up for failure; however, this is challenging due to the limited access & quality of treatment programs (or unknown - in that they have not been evaluated by a third party).

Considerations for BFR

- Use more than one measure of success to identify program efficacy - one measure is insufficient
- While recidivism can be used as a measure more generally, **ensure it's consistency in how it is being measured & used** – but do not use it as the sole measure of program success or even the sole measure of public safety
- Consider **there are likely other factors impacting program success** – poor implementation, quality of services, accessibility of services, responsiveness to individual barriers, client motivation, etc...
- Desistance is **not a straightforward path**, but comes with ups and downs – also why rearrest is not always an accurate measure of program success
- **Cost-benefit analysis may be flawed** – potential benefit shortfalls, extent of cost overruns; can significantly distort effective allocation of resources
- Obtaining **feedback from those receiving the programming or service** – how they view success
- Measuring **social determinants of health** – economic stability, health status, housing stability & living environment, educational or training needs
- Thinking of **measurement of the broader social and community context** – impact of programming on families, communities

References

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