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The Impact of Treatment and Monitoring on DWI Recidivism

The State of Maryland maintains an intensive monitoring system for convicted drinking drivers. The Maryland Drinking Driver Monitor Program (DDMP), a component of the State Division of Parole and Probation, has 97 monitors who manage a case load of over 23,000 drivers convicted of driving while intoxicated (DWI). Each offender placed in the program by the court is required to attend a face-to-face interview with the monitor once a week. At this meeting, the offender provides attendance slips demonstrating attendance at an outpatient treatment and/or Alcoholics Anonymous program as prescribed by the court. Monitors can return an offender to court for failure to attend the treatment programs or for violation of any other condition of probation.

In addition to the Monitor Program, judges in Prince George's County, Maryland have the option of sentencing convicted drivers to 1-4 weeks attendance at a county DWI Facility. This 60 bed low-security unit conducts an intensive, group-based, diagnostic and therapy program leading to an individually tailored referral to an alcohol and/or drug treatment program during the year following release. A client who has a job may be placed on work-release during working hours, but he or she is required to spend over-night and weekend periods at the Facility. The Facility program was designed to be followed by the DDMP as a condition of probation, so that the individually tailored treatment program could be carried out under the supervision of a monitor. An offender can be returned to court for failure to attend the treatment programs, failure to attend the DDMP interviews, or for not maintaining abstinence or any other condition of probation imposed by the court. Convicted DWI's in Prince George's County can be divided into four groups: (1) those who are placed in the DDMP as a condition of probation, (2) those who are sentenced to the DWI Facility only, (3) those who are placed in both programs, and (4) those who receive neither. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the impact on recidivism of each of these four outcomes.

Study Design:

The driving records of all Prince George's County residents who were convicted of a drunk driving offense (including BAC test refusal) between August 1985 (when the DWI Facility opened) and December 1988 were obtained from the Maryland Motor Vehicles Administration (MVA). Driving records for these individuals were obtained back to January 1982 when the Maryland MVA was automated. Lists of the name, license number and date of entry for individuals who had been sentenced to the County DWI Facility were obtained from the Facility records and matched with the driver license numbers from the Maryland MVA file. Similarly, the DDMP files were examined to obtain the names of Prince George's County residents who were placed in in the DDMP by the courts between August 1985 through December 1988. These names were also matched with the DWI sample from the Maryland MVA files. The file contained 1,181 offenders who received only the Facility program, 4,032 who received only the DDMP program, 858 who received both programs, and 2,867 who received neither program for a total of 8,938 cases studied.

Major Evaluation Results:

- o Offenders who received both the DWI Facility and the DDMP program had the highest proportion of individuals with one or more prior offenses (38%).
- o Twenty-nine percent of those assigned to only the DWI Facility and 24% assigned to only the State Monitor Program had prior offenses. Only 15% of those not assigned to either treatment program had one or more priors.
- o Despite differences in prior offenses, which indicated that problem drivers were assigned to both DDMP and the DWI Facility, recidivism rates for offenders not assigned to either of these programs were considerably higher than for offenders assigned to either the DWI Facility or DDMP Programs.
- o For the first offenders who had no prior offenses, the group that received neither treatment had a recidivism rate of over 35% during the first year, compared with 15% or less for the three treated groups (DWI Facility only, DDMP only, and both).

In part, the high first-year recidivism for the neither group with no prior offenses may be attributable to the fact that this group less frequently received a driver's license suspension, whereas those who were assigned to the DWI Facility or DDMP or both were more likely to be suspended. For the multiple offenders, suspension was more likely for all individuals whether they were sentenced to treatment or not. Thus avoidance of suspension principally impacts first offenders in the neither group during the first year. Since the effects of being sentenced to the Monitor Program or the DWI Facility persist into the second year for the first offender group, there is evidence that the differences demonstrated in recidivism are not simply due to license suspension. Therefore, even if the first offender program group has the "advantage" over the neither group of being suspended, this does not account fully for the measured differences in the recidivism criterion.

Conclusions:

While the current comparison combines at least to some extent, the impact of both a suspension and treatment, the results of this study suggest that almost all offenders coming through the Prince George's County court system would benefit from being assigned to the Drinking Driver Monitor Program or the DWI Facility Program or both.

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