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*National Institute for Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention*



# **National Evaluation of the Deinstitutionalization of Status Offender Programs: Executive Summary**

**138278**

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U.S. Department of Justice  
National Institute of Justice

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## Preface to the Executive Summary

The Final Report of the DSO National Evaluation comprises two volumes, almost 1,200 pages of written material. In this summary, no attempt is made to reflect any but the most salient findings detailed in that two-volume set. We have deliberately chosen, instead, to highlight what we see as the major points of discussion which have arisen in this effort at social programming and evaluation. From the executive summary, the reader will obtain the broad features of program aims, implementation, and outcome. However, we urge interested parties not to settle for a perusal of a mere summary but to read pertinent sections of the Final Report as well. Included therein are:

**Volume I:** Three chapters on the background of the program and the evaluation; eight chapters describing the programs and their contexts in each evaluated site; two chapters describing the program populations and evaluation samples; and three chapters detailing the major analyses and findings concerning client recidivism and treatment and other variables related to recidivism.

**Volume II:** Seven special studies, carried out by independent investigators in concert with the national evaluation staff, on (1) an analysis of status offender offense patterns, (2) changes in justice system flow rates, (3) organizational properties of the DSO programs, (4) a multiattribute approach to DSO evaluation, (5) cost estimates of DSO vs. standard programming, (6) an extensive analysis, by individual site across all sites, of levels of de-carceration and de-detention achieved and attributable to the program or to other factors, and (7) a legal analysis of the juvenile codes in the evaluated sites.

For a full description of the initial evaluation design and data collection instruments utilized, see National Evaluation Design for the Deinstitutionalization of Status Offender Program (National Institute for Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, U.S. Department of Justice). It is available from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402. Specify stock number 027-000-00514-4.

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## I. Introduction

Summarized in this report are the highlights of a two-volume evaluation study of a national, federally funded program to foster and encourage the deinstitutionalization of status offenders (hereinafter referred to as the DSO program). Status offenders are juveniles whose acts would not be criminal if committed by adults. They include such offenses as incorrigibility, truancy, runaway, and similar juvenile offenses.

Presented first is the history of Federal effort to assist State and local jurisdictions in their delinquency control activities, the effort out of which the DSO program emerged. Program objectives are then described. Their clarity and specificity are examined, as well as problems of their theoretical and conceptual grounding. The impact of goal specificity issues on program structure and design are considered next, together with effects on the organization and conduct of the evaluation study. Attention is then given to the selection of State and local sites funded to conduct and test the effectiveness of their deinstitutionalization efforts, with consideration of the criteria used in their selection. This is followed by an account of youth served, and program success in reaching the targeted offender population is examined.

The next two sections point out as the basic shortcoming of program execution its failure to tie its activities to underlying assumptions, those of labeling theory, and, as a consequence, failure to lead to the intended outcome of delinquency reduction. A final section presents in summary form the implications of the evaluation study for efforts to deinstitutionalize status offenders, for program strategies required to deal with the obstacles and constraints that hinder progress in this effort, and for the design of social programs, including status offender deinstitutionalization, to enhance their evaluability and therefore to build the knowledge base needed for program improvement.

The Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974 opened a new era of Federal concern with the problem of delinquency control and the rising movement for reform of juvenile justice. During the prior decade, Federal action on delinquency was restricted to relatively small budget support of State and local demonstration projects. The 1974 Act asserted a need for a comprehensive, sustained, and liberally financed approach. To this end, Congress created the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention as a semiautonomous agency within the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration. Based on extensive hearings that solicited the views of leaders in the youth services field and others, the language of the Act specified the shortcomings of existing delinquency control practices and defined the remedies that States and localities would be encouraged to develop with Federal funding assistance.

Serious deficits of the juvenile justice system, according to the Act, include excessive use of secure confinement in detention centers and juvenile institutions, compounded in many jurisdictions by indiscriminate mixing of serious and minor offenders in these facilities, as well as mixing of juvenile and adult inmates. The Act was to encourage programs to divert minor juvenile offenders from formal police and court processing, to substitute nonsecure community-based facilities for secure confinement, and to assist in the development of local youth services that reabsorb delinquent youth into the normal life of the community. Included in the set of "advanced techniques" for the prevention of juvenile delinquency to be fostered was the avoidance of the use of juvenile detention or correctional facilities for juveniles "who are charged with or have committed offenses that would not be criminal if committed by an adult," i.e., "status offenses."

In addition to providing grants to States prepared to undertake comprehensive programs of this character, OJJDP was mandated to engage in four other activities:

- (a) Develop a "special emphasis program" of direct grants to States and localities for programs consistent with the purposes of the Act;
- (b) Furnish technical assistance to participants in grant programs;
- (c) Coordinate activities of other Federal agencies that bear on youth and delinquency problems; and
- (d) Compile statistical and other information related to the treatment and control of juvenile offenders, but also conduct, encourage, and support research and evaluation studies to determine the results and effectiveness of juvenile delinquency programs, particularly special emphasis programs funded under the aegis of the Act. This function was to be administered by the research branch of OJJDP, the National Institute for Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (NIJJDP).

Under its special emphasis program, OJJDP undertook, as its initial effort, to place in the field a program for the deinstitutionalization of status offenders. In the light of the Act's mandate that the effectiveness of its program be evaluated, the deinstitutionalization of status offenders program (DSO) was developed jointly by the Special Emphasis Program staff and the staff of NIJJDP.

As is true in the first efforts of all novel programs, difficulties were encountered which were bound to restrict the reach of program evaluation. From its inception, the evaluation effort became embroiled in the problem of specifying its objectives. The Act had defined as a desirable and "advanced technique" the deinstitutionalization of status offenders, in effect directing OJJDP to undertake an effort to reduce the use of secure confinement and to encourage the development of alternative community-based treatment facilities for dealing with the problems of status offenders.

As elaborated by the Special Emphasis Program staff, the directive was seen as supported by two quite distinct justifications. The first was drawn from labeling theory, which holds that for minor or first offenders the experience



of formal processing by police, courts, and correctional agencies induces the young person to see himself as a delinquent, increasing the likelihood of subsequent offense. The second justification stemmed from ideas of equity and justice embedded in legal doctrine, holding that it is both unwarranted and inhumane to subject persons to secure confinement as a response to the non-criminal behavior represented by status offenders. The program could therefore be seen as concerned primarily with deinstitutionalizing status offenders; that is, with diverting them from detention and correctional institutions and, having done so, hopefully with bringing about a reduction in their subsequent offense behavior by providing the backup of community-based remedial services. These purposes could reasonably be regarded as setting the evaluation agenda.

However, the Act also charged NIJJDP with the task of determining, through evaluation studies, the results of effectiveness of OJJDP programs in the control and prevention of delinquency. In the light of the first directive, to which the Special Emphasis Program staff was responsive, the evaluation objective was reasonably confined to an assessment in status offense cases in the test sites funded, and the discovery of effective implementation models for dissemination to State and local jurisdictions. Calling for a research and development approach, the second and disjunctive directive implied a need to field programs which were designed as quasi-experiments in order to determine their effectiveness in the control and prevention of delinquency.

The incongruence of the two approaches to the evaluation of the DSO program could not be entirely reconciled. Each had its proponents on the OJJDP staff. The Special Emphasis Program staff, resting its case on the clear language of the Act, found itself in full accord with the doctrine that the deinstitutionalization of status offenders in fact represented an "advanced technique" of delinquency control and prevention. Members of the NIJJDP staff, committed to the doctrine of scientific skepticism and directed by equally clear provisions of the Act to "determine the effectiveness" of the proposed advanced technique of delinquency prevention, pressed for the selection of State and local programs designed to yield valid and conclusive findings respecting effectiveness. In the end, as formulated in the guideline document soliciting program proposals for potential funding, something of a compromise was reached.

As will be seen in subsequent sections of this report, the effect of the compromise was to reduce the prospect of obtaining the conditions for as satisfactory a test of program effectiveness as would otherwise have been possible, and to produce less than a full account of program implementation experience. With respect to the latter, the reader is referred to Chapters 4 through 11 of Volume I of the Final Report. Presented there are detailed narrative accounts of program implementation experience at the program sites selected for inclusion in the evaluation study.

However, the test of deinstitutionalization coupled with the provision of community-based youth services as a method of reducing the offense behavior of status offenders required a program structure having a number of important features. First, it would have been necessary to specify a theory or rationale that justifies the expected linkage between program input and the desired program outcome. Second, in placing a program in field test sites, it is

important to exercise care in selecting only those which have made adequate provision for program implementation.

For the DSO program, this would have required that (a) the target population be clearly and consistently differentiated from delinquent youth who include status offenses in their behavior repertoire; (b) effective assurance be obtained from juvenile justice personnel that such youth would be diverted from preadjudication detention and postadjudication commitment to correctional institutions; (c) a network of youth service agencies be in place and prepared to accept and serve status offender cases referred to them; and (d) provision be made for the use of a research design establishing a comparison or control group not exposed to a DSO type of program. A final requirement was the availability, in the jurisdictions of program proposals accepted for funding, of the data resources needed to measure program impact on status offender behavior, and firm assurance of evaluation access to these data.

However, because field test sites were not selected by these criteria, an examination of the effectiveness of the DSO program could not be assessed with complete rigor. Nonetheless, the evaluation findings on this matter, qualified as they must be, will prove useful at the very least as suggesting the likely limits of deinstitutionalization as the treatment of choice in dealing with status offenders. The findings may also point to the need for much greater precision than is reflected in DSO type programs in differentiating status offenders from essentially nondelinquent youth who commit status offenses from time to time, as well as from delinquent youth who intersperse their status offenses among the more serious violations.

This report is organized with a view, first, to describing the development of the DSO program and, second, within the context furnished by its development, to assessing its effects with respect to the problems and prospects of status offender deinstitutionalization as well as to its delinquency control objective. Section II describes the aims of the program and the procedures employed in identifying the field sites in which programs were selected for funding. This is followed in Section III by a detailed discussion of the constraints on the evaluation of the program outcome imposed by the selection procedures, pointing to the cautions that should be observed in future deinstitutionalization programming. Section IV describes the specific criteria employed in the selection of program proposals for funding, and calls attention to the problem of incongruence between the criteria and the program rationale. The extent to which the program succeeded in implementing DSO objectives is summarized in Section V. Following in Section VI is a description of program achievement in altering the flow of delinquent and status offender cases through the juvenile justice systems at program sites, the degree to which the program reduced the number of status offenders detained and institutionalized at the several field sites, and measures of program effects on the recidivism of program clients. Section VII examines the implicit rationale of the DSO program in relation to the selection of clients and the organizational focus of program control in the field sites, noting in particular the disjunction between program rationale and program activity and some of the consequence of the discontinuity. Similarly, in Section VII, reduced client recidivism as an intended program outcome is examined in relation to various features of the program, including the range of alternative community-based services extended to its clients. Finally,

Section IX summarizes the general observations respecting status offender deinstitutionalization warranted by the DSO experience as well as the more specific conclusions that may be drawn respecting deinstitutionalization as means of dealing with the status offender problem.

## II. The DSO Program: Aims, Location, and Funding

Aims--The aims of the national DSO program can be recovered from the content of the Federal legislation (the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974), from the "program initiative" issued by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) which elicited over 300 preliminary applications for Federal funding, and from the content of the 12 programs funded by OJJDP as operationalizing the aims of the program. Aims can also be derived from many written and oral statements made by OJJDP staff during the troubled process of translating original legislative intent into local program design.

Significant, however, and clearly predictive of problems to come, is the fact that these various sources of the explication of program aims yielded often conflicting or ambiguous specifications of aims. Perhaps the least arguable statement of these would be that the general aim of the program was to develop information respecting the most workable approaches at State and local levels to reduce the use of secure confinement in the treatment of status offenders. This information was sought in order to assist State and local jurisdictions in planning and implementing similar programs in the future in order to meet OJJDP requirements for funding assistance. Programming to meet this general goal was to be aimed at three categories of status offenders: (a) those currently incarcerated in secure institutions as postadjudication placements, (b) those currently being securely detained temporarily while awaiting adjudication, and (c) those who, in the absence of a DSO program, would be placed in either preadjudication detention or postadjudication confinement in the future.

Seen in these terms, DSO was in fact to be a combined deinstitutionalization and diversion program.\* It was to arrange for the emptying from all secure places of confinement of the majority of (and eventually all) status offenders and to provide a program to prevent any future secure detention of status offenders by diverting them to nonsecure and/or total release options. This double character of deinstitutionalization and diversion with the associated specification of three target groups of youngsters was specified and clarified in the early stages of Federal planning (OJJDP) and was to be the basis for critical aspects of the national evaluation. However, as the program moved into its implementation stage, the distinctions among target groups and between deinstitutionalization and diversion receded from attention, with negative consequences for comprehensive program planning and coordinated evaluation.

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\*See Volume I, Chapter 1 of the Final Report for a detailed treatment of the distinctions among deinstitutionalization, diversion, and decarceration.

Another view of program aims is to understand that they derive from a significant shift in Federal policy which emerged in the 1960's. The "new federalism" of this recent period involved the active participation of the Federal establishment in State and local delinquency programming. This has occurred through the development of federally endorsed "theories" of delinquency, the development of Federal guidelines, and the provision of substantial sums of money for the development of local programs (see Vol. I, Chapter 1). For the DSO program and its evaluation, several aspects of this new federalism are worth noting.

**First**, the spirit of the Federal approach is featured by a lag in conceptualization, as exemplified in the 1974 Act which led to DSO. The Federal rationale placed considerable faith in a therapeutic model of delinquency prevention and treatment, a model which lost much of its empirical basis in the 1960's and early 1970's. The Act therefore backed a horse which was possibly losing its mount.

**Second**, the new federalism was based on the value assumption that institutionalization was, in and of itself, an evil to be avoided wherever possible. Thus, success of a program such as DSO could be claimed on humane grounds alone, irrespective of other considerations, if the numbers of incarcerated offenders could be shown to have been reduced. Given this value stance, the seemingly ancillary success criteria of cost, side-effects, and recidivism could be regarded as irrelevant.

**Third**, the use of Federal support (i.e., special funds for the DSO programs and State eligibility for Federal delinquency funds contingent upon levels of decarceration achieved) provides another set of criteria for program evaluation: how well is the Federal funding applied (programs actually mounted in the field) and how well is it used (levels of decarceration related to levels of programming achieved). From this viewpoint, we have an exercise in the application and use of Federal funds that mandates an accounting of the proper use of those funds. It is this mandate for accountability that underlies the national evaluation funded by OJJDP and justifies the breadth of the evaluation study. Accountability is a far broader mandate than mere evaluation.

**Finally**, there is the issue, to which we shall return later, of the conceptual validity of the program aims. The Federal legislation reveals a reliance on elements of labeling and differential association theories, but stated so as to provide few program guidelines. Similarly, the theoretical underpinnings of the program planning in OJJDP were ambiguous at best and provided no consistent conceptual guidelines. What guidelines did emerge were based primarily on the conventional wisdom of social work practice with little questioning of the applicability of such guidelines specifically to delinquency prevention practice.

Faced with no clearly stated conceptual guidelines which might determine evaluation decisions, the national evaluation staff suggested four variables to the program staff which might impinge strongly on success in program

implementation. Researchers in NIJJDP\* suggested a fifth variable. These five variables were:

- (a) the statutory basis of status offenders in State codes;
- (b) community tolerance for status offender behavior;
- (c) community resources for absorption and treatment of status offenders;
- (d) level of justice system control over status offender programs;
- (e) level of program control over status offender behavior.

It was felt that these five variables should impact significantly on program implementation and acceptance, and that funded programs should therefore be somewhat heterogeneous with respect to their placement on these dimensions. External validity of evaluation findings would be considerably strengthened by funding programs which were arrayed generously across these five dimensions. These suggestions were accepted by OJJDP program staff and built into the program initiative. Their significance is two-fold. They promised to provide more grist for the evaluation mill, and they symbolized the conceptual ambiguity of the program planning. These five variables represented the only theoretical specification in the guidelines for program selection, the only operational statement of variables for which there appeared to be conceptual grounds as determinants of variation in the achievement of program aims. They were implied by materials in the program announcement suggesting a mix of labeling and differential association theory as the theoretical underpinning of the program.

Location and Funding--Eight sites eventually were included in the national program evaluation study: Spokane and Clark Counties in Washington, Alameda County in California, Pima County in Arizona, and the States of Delaware, Connecticut, Illinois, and South Carolina. In a series of separate grants, research units were funded at each site to develop data required in the national evaluation study and to provide information feedback to program personnel.

The eight evaluated programs were initially funded for the two-year period 1976-77, with a few continued through 1978.\*\* Total funds granted are displayed tabularly on the next page:

\*NIJJDP was responsible for funding and monitoring the national evaluation effort.

\*\*It should be noted that several of the programs were funded as part of the DSO initiative. They were not included in the national evaluation and, aside from a few comments on their exclusion, they will not be discussed.

<u>Site</u>	<u>Program Funds</u>	<u>Evaluation Funds</u>	<u>Total</u>
Pima County	\$ 1,727,590	\$ 342,696	\$ 2,070,286
Alameda County	1,971,796	225,000	2,196,796
Connecticut	1,405,641	211,638	1,617,279
Delaware	987,083	256,136	1,243,219
Illinois	1,493,300	415,391	1,908,691
South Carolina	1,500,000	224,970	1,724,970
Clark County	104,799		
Spokane County	358,224	169,019	632,042
Arkansas	904,381	189,816	1,094,197
Eldorado County	95,332	29,125	124,457
Newark County	114,000	--	114,000
National Assembly National Program	2,380,062	*	2,380,062
Evaluation	--	1,063,044	1,063,044
Totals - Program & Evaluation	\$13,042,208	\$3,126,835	\$16,196,043

\*The National Assembly programs were evaluated independent of the National Evaluation. Funding amount is not available.

### III. Context and Constraints

The Experience Base--Both the DSO program and the national evaluation were limited in achieving their goals by elements of their natural context and by the constraints placed upon them. Some of these limitations were unavoidable and represent the sort to which most social programs may expect to be subject. Others, while understandable, might well have been avoided and certainly should be thoroughly considered in the design of similar programmatic and evaluative attempts in the future.

To begin with, DSO was a "guinea pig" in delinquency programming. Although large projects had been attempted in earlier years, most notably during the Kennedy and Johnson eras, DSO was the first to be launched under the 1974 Delinquency Act, the first to consist of coordinated projects in various sites across the nation, and the first of many to be launched by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. For the administration and staff of OJJDP, this was unexplored territory; the mounting of such a coordinated effort was based on no prior experience. This was as true of the program phase as it was of the evaluation phase; the national evaluation staff had never before been involved in such a massive, complex exercise.

There are many kinds of evidence to show just how much of a guinea pig DSO was. Inadequate provision was made for program startup time, and because many programs failed to begin operations on schedule, the organization and timing of data collection were thrown out of phase. Procedures for obtaining and guaranteeing the cooperation of local justice and community agency officials were piecemeal, misleading, and, as it turned out in some sites, inadequate. Criteria for program selection were oriented largely to indications of the organizational and administrative competence of program proponents, the weights assigned to them determined as much by group process as by prior knowledge. Created initially to obtain uniform data across all program sites, evaluation instrumentation and computer software design required repeated modification to accommodate the differences among sites in the content and availability of their data sources. In an effort to achieve economies of funds and effort, an unwise use was made of an updated version of machine-readable forms as the basic data record. The effort to create a data system sensitive to variation in site data, and responsive to the needs of site evaluators as well as to evaluation research needs, overreached itself in complexity and led to serious difficulties in providing feedback to site evaluators and program directors.



Finally, and most pronounced during the early stages of the enterprise, relations between the program and research staffs of OJJDP were marked by disagreements concerning the level of priority to be accorded evaluation aims, with drastic consequences for collaboration. This was a classic instance of the suspicion and conflict that frequently characterizes relations between the program and the research establishments. The ill feeling was translated into the program-research relations in many of the sites, and produced such a baroque communication structure between OJJDP staffs, local staffs, and the national evaluation staff that serious rifts in viewpoint and sense of priorities could not be entirely surmounted. Among other more positive things, DSO became an exercise in interpersonal and interorganizational frustration and aggression. The program and the worth of the evaluation suffered equally.

Mixed Messages--Partly because DSO was an enterprise based on so little experience and partly because the legislation leading to it was far from informative as to goals and rationale, much room for interpretation existed. The OJJDP guidelines specified that status offenders were to be removed from incarceration, that alternatives to secure detention were established, and that procedures for accomplishing these goals were to be tested as models for future programs. The guidelines stressed community-based services, heterogeneity of services, and "per-child" accountability. Beyond this, however, great latitude was left to program proponents in terms of goals, rationales, and specific practices. OJJDP was not itself of a single mind with respect to these matters.

The same was true of the evaluation design. Research and program staffs within OJJDP differed fundamentally on the appropriate level of research input in program planning and project selection. They differed on the degree to which DSO was to experiment, demonstrate, control, explore, or document procedures developed in the field. They differed on the uses to which evaluation data were to be put, whether in the form of experimental, process, or formative evaluation. Even within the OJJDP program staff, there was a wide range of tolerance for research inputs and program accommodations to evaluation needs. Overall, however, evaluation needs were given low priority.

The most immediate result of this ambiguity in program and evaluation elements was the delivery of mixed and inconsistent messages to local program and evaluation staffs. Coupled with the wide latitude in goals and practices elicited in program proposals, this resulted, not in a set of deinstitutionalization programs whose evaluation could provide clear guidelines for future deinstitutionalization programming, but a dozen community intervention programs having uncoordinated mixes of prevention, diversion, and decarceration and which would sorely test the establishment of any generalizations for future programming.

Site-Selection--Of several hundred preliminary proposals submitted to OJJDP under the DSO initiative, approximately 70 were selected by OJJDP staff as having most promise. The national evaluation staff was asked to judge these for their evaluability so that program awards would enhance the

likelihood of obtaining reasonable evaluations. Their evaluability was carefully reviewed in the light of the following:

- a. availability and quality of local data capabilities;
- b. proponent willingness and ability to undertake evaluation design accommodations (e.g. control groups, comparison areas, youth interviews, access to agency records, etc.);
- c. level of data-based input into the program proposal;
- d. site position on the five conceptual variables (see page 9) on which heterogeneity was sought to enhance generalization of findings.

Of the 70 preliminary proposals, only 26 were found by the evaluators to offer even the most meager promise of useful evaluations. These were divided into three groups: recommended sites, a second group of rather poor alternatives, and a third group of barely acceptable sites. The remainder--about 45 proposals--were rejected as having no utility for evaluation.

It was noted earlier that the evaluation needs were accorded a subordinate position in the OJJDP strategy. Nowhere did this become more obvious than in the use made of the recommendations of national evaluation staff. Of the 12 projects eventually funded, only one was in the recommended group of 11 sites, with a second funded project being the one suggested by the evaluators as a substitute for the first if the first could not, for some reason, be funded. Two sites were selected from the group of 9 poor alternatives and one from the barely acceptable group. The remaining 7 projects eventually funded included 5 that were rejected outright by the evaluation staff, and 2 which had not even been included in the first cut of 70 program-acceptable projects.\*

It was with the announcement of these final funding decisions that the national evaluation group and the OJJDP research staff realized the full scope of the evaluative limitations within which they would be working. Of the 12 funded programs, the "capacity building" project was excluded from the evaluation (it was evaluated separately), two more were excluded later for the very reasons they had not been recommended earlier, and a fourth was eliminated after the first year because its local evaluation inadequacies provided in time to be insurmountable.

Added to low influence of evaluation considerations in site selection was the unwillingness of OJJDP program staff to argue for any of a number of alternative research designs. These were provided to the staff at its request but had little impact on either site selection or contractual relationships within the funded projects. The alternatives suggested to staff by the evaluators, representing a truly wide range of possibilities (in order of decreasing utility), were stated as follows:

\*The 12th, a "capacity building" program to support national youth service organizations (scouting, boys' clubs, etc.) was included in the evaluability assessment, but later separated out by OJJDP staff for a different form of evaluation.

### "Illustrations of Possible Quasi-Experimental Designs

- A. Systematic assignment of juveniles to treatment and no-treatment conditions; assignment determined by research rather than program criteria.
- B. Systematic assignment of juveniles to several treatment alternatives (with or without a no-treatment alternative); assignment determined by research rather than program criteria.
- C. Placement of similar program activities in experimental and control areas (similar parts of city, similar cities, similar parts of State, etc.).
- D. Placement of different program activities in similar areas (as above).
- E. Placement of similar programs in different areas (as above)."

While the matter of alternative research designs was discussed in the program solicitation to which applicants responded, it became clear that little encouragement of their consideration actually followed. Site visits to the finalists in the competition often included assurances from OJJDP program staff that evaluation design considerations were not to stand in the way of implementing approved program procedures. And so, indeed, they did not. (Although one site did agree to a randomly assigned control group, program staff at that site failed to maintain the randomization procedure).

The problems that accompanied the site selection process and the downgrading of alternative research designs should not be lightly dismissed. They affected the attitudes of national evaluation staff and its monitors in OJJDP, they deepened the already existent rift within OJJDP, they put a pall on the relationships between national and local evaluators, and they sorely limited the level of accommodation between program and research groups both nationally and locally.

Hoped-for levels of cooperation were not legitimized, and a series of compromises emerged which inevitably detracted from the value of the final evaluation. Research controls were abandoned. Collection of social adjustment data immediately following program referral was in many instances not facilitated, resulting in a serious loss of the very data so greatly desired by OJJDP program staff. As is so often the case, the short-term detriment in such situations is to the research teams. In the long run, however, the damage to the evaluation process is clearly most harmful to program staffs who are deprived of useful measures of effectiveness, and to program clients in years to come whose services received will benefit minimally from the assessment of their greatest utility.

Gaps in the Data Base--A program such as DSO is based on a mixture of myths, assumptions, accumulated experiences, and shareable data. In the case of DSO, assumptions and accumulated experiences predominated where reliable data either did not exist, or were not employed.

In a number of sites, the actual numbers of status offenders who had been institutionalized and detained prior to the inception of the program simply could not be assessed, given the state of the local data systems. This had a detrimental impact on careful planning in those sites. Another obstacle

revolved around the very definition of "status offender" as judged by State code and local practice. Since an operational definition was not supplied by the OJJDP guidelines,\* local programs had to struggle with the problem in a series of unique situations, each of which tended to yield unique (and evaluation-defying) solutions. The decisions on what behaviors would be considered status offenses, what incidents of mixed status and delinquent charges would be included, and what patterns of prior offenses would yield status offenders were made locally, idiosyncratically, and to some extent, arbitrarily.

As another note of considerable significance, the 1974 Act assumed the existence of a type of youth known as status offender. Although the OJJDP guidelines specifically questioned this assumption on the basis of the review of prior studies, and although some research throws into question the existence of status offenders as a discriminable category of youths, the DSO program assumed the existence of status offenders. These are youths separable from, and therefore different from, delinquent offenders.

What would happen if the assumption were incorrect, that today's status offender is tomorrow's delinquent and vice versa? If this interchangeability of offenses were to be the rule, then an antidetention or deinstitutionalization program based on one set of behaviors alone could be meaningless, an arbitrary response to an occasional symptom of a broader syndrome. One would have to reorient programming to a status offense, not a status offender program, a program rationalized primarily on legal grounds rather than humanitarian or treatment philosophies. These latter grounds, however, were the foundation of DSO. Our own analysis of this issue (Chapter XVII, Volume 2) suggests on the contrary that a relatively small proportion of youth cited for a status offense are of a special status offender "type." Thus, it cannot be known whether many of the treatment rationales applied to them have been altogether appropriate, a fact to be taken into account in assessing the impact of the program on client recidivism.

Summary--The preceding sections have described the principal constraints that operated to limit the definitiveness of the DSO program evaluation. Every evaluator would prefer a setting conducive to the effective management of a carefully conceptualized evaluation design with cooperative relations between program and research staffs. Such situations have existed, of course, although they are less common than one would hope. DSO was not one of those. DSO was characterized by ambivalence, frustration, time and resource limitations, inadequacies in thought and design, and constant accommodations to the context and constraints of its implementation. To understand what the evaluation has to offer, it is necessary to understand the context and constraints we have described. To maximize its contribution to future enterprises of this sort, the DSO evaluation as a process must be described in

\*OJJDP did commission a separate study which developed a uniform and consistent definition of "status offender." The problem of persuading jurisdictions with diverse views of this category was regarded as too formidable to overcome. See the reference to the White Study, Volume I, Chapter 1 of the Final Report.

terms such as the foregoing. Other OJJDP national evaluations--of diversion, of prevention, of school violence, of restitution programs--have already benefited from the DSO experience; the guinea pig has served its purpose for those who would listen. We move now to a brief discussion of the basis on which program proposals were selected for funding, examining the problem of convergence between the selection criteria and the DSO program rationale.

#### IV. Adequacy of Rationale for Program Proposal Selection

Ideally, a social program is based upon and guided by elements of a logically sound conceptual framework. Hopefully, it is also informed by relevant prior research and experience so that action options will not be weighted and chosen in accordance with arbitrary or simply convenient criteria. The absence of such a framework invites program inconsistency, inconclusive results, and capricious adoptions of inadequate alternative rationales.

DSO was loosely based on labeling theory and, to a far smaller extent, differential association theory. It was also infused by a spirit of humaneness in that the incarceration of noncriminal juveniles was felt to be unwarranted and potentially damaging to them.

Neither the legislation nor the program guidelines provided by OJJDP offered anything but the most cursory analysis of the structure or propositions of labeling theory. Program proposals, understandably, did not therefore reflect action programs based on theory, nor were they selected in terms of their theoretical articulations. Instead, a series of 12 mixed criteria were employed in site selection,\* in three stages as follows (Volume I, Chapter 2):

##### A. First Cut

1. Agreements with justice agencies.
2. Agreements with community youth agencies.

##### B. Second Cut

3. Allocation of local funds.
4. Likelihood of program continuation following termination of Federal support.
5. Number and quality of service agencies.
6. Program quality; e.g., administrative acumen and sophistication of leadership.
7. Provision for accountability of program funds.
8. Likelihood of obtaining public support.
9. Evaluability.

\*These were the explicit criteria. Political considerations were involved in several of the choices, and the need for regionalization affected some other choices.

### C. Third Cut

10. Number of status offenders likely to be benefited.
11. Likelihood of changing justice system procedures and policies favorable to deinstitutionalization.
12. Likelihood of affecting the jurisdiction's disadvantaged youth population.

It would be hard to argue that these are inappropriate site selection criteria. Indeed, they represent a good deal of experimental evidence for variables related to success or failure of program implementations. But it would be equally hard to argue that they represent a consistent conceptual framework. If program designs met only the above criteria--no matter how adequately--they could not be expected to shed much light on our understanding of delinquency, status offenders or offense behavior, organizational response to program interventions, or the value of alternative treatment approaches. And, because the OJJDP guidelines demanded no consistent conceptual framework, the programs on site yielded none. Instead, they provided a series of relatively uncoordinated beliefs about juveniles, juvenile offenders, and treatment modalities, and values concerning humaneness, family life, community responsibility, and equity. From its very inception, therefore, the DSO program was flawed by its failure to provide the kind of sound conceptual underpinning that could generate, in its field test sites, useful knowledge about the effects of deinstitutionalization on status offense behavior.

## V. Level of Implementation

The extent to which the eight evaluated programs achieved adequate levels of implementation varies considerably, but overall a set of quite active programs eventually emerged which provided services to about 16,000 youths during the 2-year Federal support period (Volume I, Chapters 4-11). Did DSO "pass" the test of program implementation? In terms of activity level, overcoming some rather formidable obstacles, and establishing viable program structures, the answer is clearly yes. In terms of achieving some intermediate goals of program acceptance, the answer again is yes, but with some significant qualifications. In terms of applying program activities to the appropriate population of youngsters, the answer is far more mixed. There is some evidence for "net-widening" and "creaming"; i.e., many of the juveniles served by the program probably were not those for whom the programs were funded nor the legislative provisions enacted. Application of "treatments" to a clientele not demonstrably in need of help cannot be credited in favor of implementation.

Let us look briefly at those factors which detract from the otherwise successful picture of implementation.

A. Net-Widening--Perhaps most significant with respect to program implementation is the matter of client targeting. Each of the eight programs established its own criteria regarding the eligibility of status offending youth to receive program services, usually though not uniformly in response to court-imposed restrictions. These criteria ranged at one extreme from the acceptance of anyone who committed a status offense without regard to other offense characteristics (Pima County), to the other extreme of excluding all except "pure" status offenders sufficiently chronic to warrant actual detention under prevailing court practices. Between these extremes, eligibility requirements variously excluded those on probation for a prior status offense, those arrested for combined status and criminal offenses, and those with extensive records of prior criminal offenses. Such eligibility restrictions inevitably biased the DSO program population in the direction of the less intractable offenders, probably including many who would not have been caught up in the referral network had the program services not been available.

Further evidence of probable net-widening and "creaming" was found in comparing evaluated program clients to a group of clients from a pre-program period when, in many of the sites, status offenders were in principle if not always in practice subject to detention in locked facilities (Volume I, Chapter 15). The comparison indicated that the program clients constituted a less serious set of cases. Compared with the preprogram group, they were more likely to be female, to come from intact parental situations, less likely to have delinquency charges included in their instant offense and, most importantly, to have had less serious prior offense records. The mean number of



prior offenses recorded by the police for the preprogram group was 1.88, while for program clients it was 1.33. The mean number of prior offense charges for program clients in the eight sites separately were 2.79, 1.53, 1.41, 1.33, 1.09, 0.99, 0.39, and 0.16.\*

In only the first of these sites is there a mean prior record which strongly suggests compliance with the selection from the appropriate population, and even in that site, evidence for substantial net-widening has been reported independently by the site evaluator. The seven other sites reveal a less serious set of clients than the mean of the preprogram group. Several of them evidence a balance of detainable and nondetainable offenders that yields strikingly low prior offense means. These problems speak to that difficulty of identifying an appropriate target population of status offenders for de-institutionalization, a matter of serious neglect in the conceptualization and planning of the DSO program.

**B. Receptivity to Deinstitutionalizing Objectives**--The DSO program achieved very real gains in this respect among court personnel, primarily by demonstrating the feasibility of eliminating the use of preadjudication detention as a means of assuring the subsequent appearance of the youth for further case processing. The gain was particularly notable in the program jurisdictions that had been least receptive to deinstitutionalizing objectives (see Volume I, Chapters 7 and 9). This achievement was limited, however, by a general insistence on the part of court personnel to retain jurisdiction in status offense cases, largely frustrating the destigmatization aims of the DSO program.

**C. Cooperation of Juvenile Justice Agencies**--While it was possible to obtain some level of cooperation from court personnel at each site, this was not the case generally for police agencies. With few exceptions, the police viewed the status offender program as undermining the deterrent effect of their work. In the planning phase of each program, it was possible to obtain initial agreements of cooperation for juvenile justice agencies during the period of program proposal development. In many instances, however, these agreements were not fully honored in practice, impeding planned and expected forms of implementation.

**D. Development of Alternative Youth Service Networks**--Over the 2-year period of its life, the DSO program succeeded in developing some very effective service networks (see Volume II, Chapter 19). However, implementation of this objective was hampered by failure to provide sufficient time for program startup. In some instances, contracting arrangements were protracted by difficulties in resolving disagreements about the choice of clients for referral. Where local government units were the program proponents, delays were caused by the extensive technical requirements imposed by fiscal regulations.

\*In this latter case, some irregularities in data collection by the local evaluator may have distorted the picture, but not enough to invalidate that State's admitted approach to selecting minor offenses.

**E. Range of Services Provided**--A substantial volume of services was provided by the eight funded programs. However, their variety was extraordinarily narrow. They were restricted almost entirely to individual and family counseling and to residential placement, despite rather strong urging by OJJDP that youth advocacy be included in the repertory of services. In only two of the eight sites was youth advocacy included. One form of advocacy was the centerpiece of the Cook County segment of the Illinois program (Volume I, Chapter 8), and a number of youth service bureaus in the Alameda County program emphasized this service approach (Volume I, Chapter 5). The restricted range of services is particularly regrettable, since this offered little opportunity to evaluate possible differences in behavior outcome in relation to differences in services (Volume I, Chapter 16).

**F. Program Models for Deinstitutionalization**--A subordinate but important objective of the DSO program was to test the capacity of various program designs to achieve progress in the face of field realities. On the basis of the descriptive materials presented in Chapters 4 through 11 of Volume I, attention is directed to features both positive and negative for progress in status offender deinstitutionalization.

1. Community support for the program is most effectively mobilized by enlisting the participation of those public officials in the jurisdiction who are identified as leaders in the informal power structure of the community. Their commitment to the support of the program becomes real to the extent that they themselves rather than their subordinate surrogates take an active part in program planning and continue their activity by accepting membership in an organization created specifically to promote and monitor the program. Such commitment endows the program with a public and visible legitimacy. This design feature was notably exemplified in the Spokane County Program (Volume I, Chapter 11).

2. In jurisdictions without deinstitutionalizing legislation, whose courts may nominally accept the value of status offender deinstitutionalization, but which insist on retaining their discretion in selecting cases for diversion from detention and institutional commitment, programs designed to exercise influence close to the "front end" of status offender entry in the juvenile justice system tended to be relatively more effective in implementing their objectives. This is the case as well in jurisdictions which deinstitutionalize status offenders on the basis of administrative practice in the absence of a compelling statute. The critical design point is most commonly at court intake. In several of the court-sponsored programs (Alameda, Pima, and Clark Counties), as well as in the single non-court-sponsored program that positioned program personnel in the court (Delaware), special court intake units were established with court-granted authority to divert status offenders from detention (Volume I, Chapters 5 and 7). A contrasting case is represented by the South Carolina program, where DSO program staff had access only to a locked diagnostic facility that served the entire state (Volume I, Chapter 9).

3. Extremely innovative programs which took a "grass roots" approach in providing alternative youth services paid a heavy price in lost credibility and support from juvenile justice personnel and the highly professionalized

youth service agencies. Such programs attempted to reduce the social distance between clients and service providers, or to engage local residents in the task of normalizing the behavior of status offenders. Problems of eroded credibility arose in the programs funded in Pima County, Alameda County, to a substantial extent in the Connecticut program, and in the Cook County Detention Alternatives program in Illinois (Volume I, Chapters 4, 5, 6, and 8). There is clearly a need either to balance the requirements of program innovation with those of professional competence, or to locate innovative programs to the extent possible in the "mainline" youth service agencies.

4. The designs represented in the DSO program illuminate a central dilemma in efforts to deinstitutionalize status offenders. If it is assumed that the two major objectives of this effort are their decarceration and destigmatization, the DSO experience suggests that the first objective can be achieved at some sacrifice of the second. The diversion of status offenders from secure detention and from institutional commitment was on the whole most fully effected in programs centered in and sponsored by juvenile justice agencies, principally courts. However, this inevitably entailed substantial exposure to pre-adjudication processing, first by the police and subsequently by court intake staff. Subsequent outright release or referral to a youth service agency cannot be expected to counteract completely the stigmatizing experience of "front end" formal processing, even though the admittedly more severe experience of actual detention is avoided. So far, then, as jurisdiction in status offense cases is retained in the juvenile court, progress in decarceration in these cases may be expected to outstrip progress in destigmatization. If the aim of the decarceration objective is the destigmatization of status offenders, their retention under the jurisdiction of the court becomes problematic.

## VI. Outcome Achievement

Three major sets of outcome measures were planned by the national evaluators. One of these, changes in social adjustment as measured by a variety of individual-level scales, was invalidated by the delayed interview schedules used in a number of sites. Due to program staff resistance, fears of "contaminating" crisis intervention procedures in particular, and the extremely short-term and low-level service given to many clients, interviews often occurred after treatment or service had been terminated. Thus, no "before-treatment" measure was obtained in many instances, and a satisfactory program-related social adjustment change measure became impossible to develop.

Two other forms of outcome measurement are available, recidivism and decarceration levels. Since removing status offenders from secure placement was central to the legislative intent which led to DSO, program success in achieving their removal from detention and from institutions is obviously a pivotal issue. Two approaches were taken to evaluating this form of outcome (Volume II, Chapters 18 and 22). In both cases, problems of the data bases available at the sites have enormously complicated the task while site selection by OJJDP has made an overall definitive conclusion impossible to draw.

The reason for this latter comment is rather simple. Legislation often reflects, rather than initiates, social change. In the case of the 1974 Juvenile Delinquency Act, the DSO provisions reflect a trend already in place in many States. By the time of DSO implementation in 1976, 15 States had already prohibited postadjudication commitment of status offenders, and another 21 did so during the program year. In addition, 5 had prohibited all or some preadjudication detention prior to program initiation, and another 14 did so during the program period (Volume I, Chapter 1). The challenge to OJJDP was to locate program sites in light of this dominant trend. Six of the eight selected sites were placed where the trend had already been initiated either by legislative act or by administrative practice.

OJJDP had the choice of locating programs in amenable sites, where the trend was well under way and additional funds were most likely to yield salutary effects, or of locating them where the trend was not visible and the need as well as the obstacles were greatest. Perhaps because the focus in site selection was on the organizational and administrative competence of project proponents, and on their expressed enthusiasm for the undertaking, the choice fell on sites representing the full range of advancement toward deinstitutionalization.

The first approach to outcome measurement on this issue was to perform a "System Rates" analysis (Volume II, Chapter 18). The basic rationale underlying this approach is that the juvenile justice system is just that, a system, such that major changes in one of its components would result in

adjustment in other, adjacent or dependent components. Thus, if status offenders are removed from institutions (and if their number was substantial), one should see changes in offender flow and perhaps length of stay in those institutions. If status offenders are no longer detained, the same should be true in the case of juvenile detention centers, police holding tanks, and so on. There might also be reductions in arrest rates as a police reaction to the loss of the detention "hammer." Finally, if diversion of detainable status offenders to community facilities is achieved, then one could expect adjustment in rates of arrest, petitioning to court, and other local processing alternatives.

The national evaluators sought from each local evaluator a system diagram (following a specified generic model) and rate data associated with each major processing point in the system for two points in time, one prior to and one during the program period. The request, in time, caused considerable consternation as it was discovered that a number of sites did not have data systems capable of reflecting case inventories. This was especially true at the "front end" of the system, in rates of referral to the police, rates of police dispositions, and characteristics of these offenders. In a word, the sites chosen for program funding reflected the low priority given to evaluation criteria, being unable to provide sufficiently reliable data to allow a useful analysis of program impact on system rates.

With the data that were obtainable, it seemed that there were as many sites with an increase of offenders associated with the program as there were sites with a decrease. This general trend characterized each investigated point in the system, referrals to enforcement and initial detention and court intake and probation as a disposition and institutionalization as a disposition. Although the data systems were often inadequate to the task and the procedure yielded inventories at two points in time rather than cohort flows, one might have expected DSO to have resulted in some consistent pattern of rate change. It did not, and the implication is that rate changes were not of sufficient magnitude (given the initial preprogram levels) to be reflected by a system rates methodology which is ordinarily quite sensitive to change.

The second approach to assessing success in decarceration is provided by a separate study of total numbers of status offenders detained and institutionalized during the program and the comparable preprogram periods (Volume II, Chapter 22). The data were supplied in different ways and from different sources in the various sites. In several instances, counties within program sites presented separate tallies, so that our data are for a larger number of units than our eight composite sites.

With respect to status offender detention, we find seven jurisdictions with detention reductions and five jurisdictions with an increase. The aggregated level of reduction was 43 percent of the preprogram period. Comparable data were available for institutional rates in only five sites. One of these showed no effective change, but this was on a base of only six cases so that nothing can be made of this. The other four sites showed reductions ranging from 50 to 86 percent. In at least four sites, then, success with respect to reduction in institutionalization was considerably greater (67 percent) than it was for detention (43 percent). Taking these two sets of data together, it seems clear that a reduction in secure placement of status offenders did take

place during the program period. Although this does not constitute proof that the programs caused the reduction, since such reductions were part of a larger national trend in any case, knowledge of particular program activities makes us confident that a substantial portion of the reductions can be credited to the DSO program. But it remains uncertain whether or not the reductions obtained fell short of the levels presumably attainable.

Outcome achievement was also assessed by a third procedure, the comparison of official recidivism rates (number of police charges) of the evaluated program sample with a comparison group of preprogram status offenders identified in each site. While the two groups were designed to be comparable in their characteristics, the tendency of DSO program staffs to select less serious cases produced a client cohort which should have yielded lower recidivism rates even in the absence of the program. Nonetheless, when the records of program and preprogram cohorts were compared with prior offenses and client background variables statistically controlled, both 6 months and 12 months after the charge for which they were selected, program clients showed a slight but statistically higher recidivism rate than the preprogram group.

This higher recidivism rate results from aggregating the data across all eight sites. For each site separately, the difference in recidivism rates between the preprogram and the evaluated program groups was not statistically significant in most of the sites. However, on the basis of the data aggregated for all sites, the DSO program did not appear to have a beneficial effect with respect to client recidivism (see Volume I, Chapter 15 for a detailed discussion of the analytic procedures used in arriving at this finding).

There are two rather different implications of this overall result. First, since there is not all that much difference between results for program clients and the preprogram groups, many of whom were more subject to secure confinement, there is not support here for retaining secure detention or placement of status offenders. This is especially true in view of a cost analysis (Volume II, Chapter 21) that shows lower costs associated with DSO than with justice system processing.

Second, however, is the less satisfactory implication that DSO failed to reduce recidivism rates despite all the time, concern, and funds that went into the development of its various community services. Most DSO funds did not go into the process of deinstitutionalizing clients, the area of greater positive impact. They went into what can best be described as diversion and prevention activities in the majority of sites. That these activities had so little effect on recidivism rates, especially in the face of considerable evidence of net-widening which yields a more "amenable" client group, means that we must look quite closely at the relationship of the program to both its intent and its outcome. If something "went wrong" above and beyond the constraints mentioned earlier, we may best seek it in these relationships. The two following sections deal with these issues.

## VII. Program Integrity

The central question that must be raised in program evaluation is its achievement in integrating its activities with its rationale. To achieve integrity, program activities must articulate its rationale, whose utility may then be assessed by examining how well it was represented operationally by actual program content.

We know from earlier sections of this report that the program rationale was itself not well explicated. Our expectations for its articulation in activities at the eight sites must therefore be tempered. The underlying rationale of labeling theory was not explicated well in the Federal legislation. Neither was it fully elaborated in OJJDP's program guidelines, nor actively solicited in the OJJDP guidance and monitoring of program applications and grant awards. Hence, it is not too surprising that program staffs on site did not mount programs clearly and explicitly based on the premises of labeling theory.

However, it must also be acknowledged that labeling theory itself does not readily yield an obvious paradigm of implementation guidelines. Its propositional structure is ambiguous, its scope arguable, and its implications for action more proscriptive than prescriptive. Nonetheless, labeling theory offers several central tenets that might have been selected to promulgate program activities in the sites selected for OJJDP support. If we look at these, we can, to some extent, gage the potential for program integrity and thereby permit judgments of actual versus possible achievement.

For instance, labeling theorists consistently suggest that stigmatizing labels are disproportionately applied to disadvantaged groups by the agents of social control. We should therefore expect greater levels of detention and institutionalization for members of ethnic minority groups, the poor, and perhaps females, and statistics have generally supported these expectations. DSO, one might expect, would therefore concentrate its efforts disproportionately on serving these groups. Aggregating over all sites, there is no evidence that this was done. The program tended to be applied in greater proportions than found in the preprogram groups to females, but also to whites, and those from intact nuclear families. Such a program directed by labeling theory proponents would have reversed this comparison.

Another prominent feature of the labeling approach is its attention to the role of the agents of social control, in this case the police, courts, and agencies closely aligned with them. Labeling theory would dictate (1) the emptying of detention halls and institutions in a manner to minimize the involvement of control agencies; (2) the diversion of status offenders to agencies or services not associated with the justice system; (3) and, ideally,

great care in avoiding other stigmatizing labels available through mental health services.

Clearly, DSO did not consistently employ these dictates. Some of the programs were in fact run by the court system, under court control. While not uniformly the case in all court controlled programs, in some instances probation officials (Pima County) or employees of correctional units (South Carolina) were primary contact personnel with the clients. Collaboration between public and private agencies was actively sought (although not always achieved) and feedback on client progress at some sites given to the justice agencies. Finally, most DSO programs stressed individual and family counseling as the treatment of choice, which could in many cases lead to the substitution of a negative mental health label for the negative justice label.

Obviously, the eight sites differed considerably in their adherence to labeling theory dictates, both by accident and by design. But equally obviously, in the absence of clearly drawn and clearly mandated guidelines derived from labeling theory, they did not as a group implement central labeling propositions. We can confirm the comment made so far by reference to a third major tenet of labeling theory, which states that the labels applied to the "clients" of a stigmatizing system come to be incorporated in the self-identity of the clients whose behaviors then validate the new identity. In the DSO case, recidivism may result from the acceptance of labels attached to, and accepted by, status offenders. Such labels would fall into two domains, one suggesting delinquency and one suggesting emotional disturbance. DSO programs, overall, did not materialize in a form to prevent this progression, as indicated by the following observations:

- (1) Potentially stigmatizing treatments, counseling in various forms, clearly predominated over less stigmatizing alternatives such as advocacy programs, opportunity enhancement, skills development, and the like.
- (2) The minimal service provision actually achieved (most DSO clients were seen only briefly and seldom referred for other forms of nonstigmatizing aid) could not have been designed for the effective inculcation of conforming, deviance-resistant self-identities.
- (3) Net-widening, the drawing into the DSO network of youngsters whose behavior did not justify their inclusion, was reported by many site evaluators and is clearly evident in the aggregated national analysis (Volume I, Chapter 15). Net-widening is anathema to labeling theorists, who would see it as the first step in the self-fulfilling prophecy which leads from first label application to eventual development of a deviant career.

Summarizing briefly the situation of the labeling rationale, it is clear the DSO programs were not formulated principally to elaborate that approach, nor did they achieve its activation inadvertently. This reflects a comparatively low priority given to such implementation (but not to the rationale, it should be noted) by OJJDP staff. By way of contrast, more emphasis was given to the humane rationale which said simply that the incarceration of youngsters for noncriminal activities, and their exposure to the ills of detention facilities, is bad per se. It is bad for youngsters and morally unacceptable.



This humane rationale, far simpler in conception and given higher priority by OJJDP in its monitoring activities, led more directly to appropriate program activities. Policies were promulgated, edicts written, and a number of status offenders were removed from secure placement while many others were diverted prior to such placements. The data on changes in institutional and detention levels (Volume II, Chapter 22) show clearly that substantial progress was made. Yet it is surprising that federally mandated levels were not achieved overall. The experiences in Massachusetts, Vermont, California, Washington, and even Pima County prior to DSO, make it clear that almost total deinstitutionalization can be achieved, and rather quickly, where there is the will to do so. DSO proved that the humane rationale can be approached at a reasonable pace with available programmatic steps. It also proves that program integrity is not the only requirement: other elements are needed.

One of these is desire. DSO sites did not lack the desire to deinstitutionalize in most cases (Volume I, Chapter 6), but they did lack the will for full and rapid achievement. They faced other problems as well. Data were collected in each site from judges, police, and various community leaders nominated by local program directors as important to the DSO enterprise. In particular, information was sought from these respondents on what they felt DSO should achieve, reflecting one would suppose both their rationales and their preferred program activities and outcomes. Analysis of these data (Volume II, Chapter 22) revealed that there was a general lack of consensus about DSO criteria, on what they wanted to see from DSO. Not only were there differences between practitioner groups (e.g., judges, police); there was no consensus within these groups. Thus DSO program managers were faced with the implementation of program activities that would raise resistance no matter what choices were made. Concerted effort for change would expectably be hampered under these conditions.

Finally, under this heading, we should note that OJJDP and the sites placed considerable emphasis on the development of interagency service networks, understanding that DSO goals required more than a simple array of alternative services. Coordination and collaboration were seen as necessary for successful deinstitutionalization and diversion. We have already noted that the labeling rationale would argue against certain forms of public-private agency collaboration, but such is not true of the humane rationale.

A separate analysis has been undertaken of the interorganizational aspects of the DSO programs in the various sites (Volume II, Chapter 19). It was noted that the coordination task seemed formidable:

Many of the problems that were encountered can be traced to the fact that most of the programs were funded and implemented with only indistinctly drawn organizational features. New projects were combined with or superimposed upon ongoing ones and formerly independent agencies were tied into networks of service delivery with other agencies, both public and private. Methods of coordination, spheres of responsibility, and the division of labor among the parts of these complicated systems were not always apparent. An argument could certainly be made that a flexibly structured approach to the delivery of humane services is preferable to one that requires precisely defined organizational features, on the grounds that such

flexibility will have a payoff in performance that a more bureaucratic approach would sacrifice. However, indistinctly defined boundaries and responsibilities are not synonymous with the flexibility this argument has in mind. The lack of clarity encountered in the DSO programs meant that their activity often took place in an atmosphere of turbulence and uncertainty, a fact that should definitely influence the way the findings are read. The idea of conducting an organizational evaluation was sometimes conceptually out of phase with the somewhat unorganized state of the programs.

Yet despite the very inauspicious start described above, the data from organizational study suggest that effective interagency networks did, indeed, get established and staff morale levels were relatively good. To the extent that DSO programs developed strategies to optimize their interorganizational relationships, to that extent they fostered community contacts, activism on behalf of their status offender clients, and perceived effectiveness.

Once again, then, we have evidence of considerable activity at the eight sites, considerable evidence of overcoming constraints against program implementation, large numbers of clients served--in fact, considerable overall accomplishment of intermediate goals. Had program integrity been higher, i.e., had activities articulated rationales, then perhaps program achievement might also have been higher. As it is, we are faced again, as we are so often in areas of human service delivery, with a heavy investment of human resources whose accomplishments are partially, ambiguously, or not at all related to the guiding ideas or intentions that initiated the program.

## VIII. Outcome Integrity

As a final and crucial mode of program assessment, the intended effects of program activities on program outcome require examination. To the extent that program activities are so designed as to lead to intended outcomes, we may speak of a program's outcome integrity. We have noted that in addition to enhancing humaneness and equity by reducing the use of secure confinement in status offense cases, the control and prevention of delinquency represented the second major, if implicit, goal of the DSO program. In this section, the outcome integrity of the program is assessed with respect to the articulation of program activities with a delinquency control outcome. Here, we suspend the issues related to program integrity, the articulation of program rationale with program activity, and instead take the program at face value.

We have already noted, of course, that outcome levels respecting delinquency reduction were disappointing. Overall, the program was associated with a consistent, statistically significant, if small, increase in recidivism in comparison with preprogram groups. Obviously, a significant decrease could have been reasonably expected. However, this statement is about a mean, an average outcome, so that there must in fact have been a number of successes as well as failures. If we can discern components of the program related to each, we will increase the instructive value of the program experience.

Two approaches to outcome integrity were selected. The first deals with the levels of variables which might relate to outcome, because some of these are more amenable to program manipulation than are others. The second approach looks specifically at types of services offered to clients to ascertain their relative impact on recidivism, if differences exist.

The first analysis pitted four levels of variables against each other as determinants of the variance in recidivism. Site, a "variable" of obviously complex nature, was compared with a large number of client characteristics,<sup>1</sup> along with the 8 categories of services<sup>2</sup> employed throughout the project, and finally with 19 descriptions of the facilities<sup>3</sup> which delivered the services. A series of regression analyses were utilized to assess the relative contribution of these four categories of variables to the subsequent offenses of program clients (Volume I, Chapter 14).

<sup>1</sup>Examples include age, gender, ethnicity, SES, family structure, school data, prior record, and instant offense.

<sup>2</sup>These were diversion/crisis intervention, shelter or foster home care, group home placement, counseling, multiple-service, outreach, and two low-frequency categories: "multiple-impact" therapy and miscellaneous.

<sup>3</sup>Examples include professional level of staff, service diversity, use of community resources, ideologies, and control over clients.

With all other levels held constant, client characteristics emerged as the most potent set of variables. This necessarily increases our concern with the issues of proper client targetting, net-widening, and so on. Next in order came site and facility levels, the ordering dependent upon the form of regression analysis taken. Site, of course, is a given, once a program has been launched, and speaks importantly to issues in the initial selection of projects to be funded. Facility variables, on the other hand, represent many factors which can be manipulated by both selection and organization of functions; thus both funds and monitors on the one hand and program organizers on the other have some leverage in affecting outcome through attention to service deliverers.

Showing the least effect on the subsequent offenses of program clients were the service variables. The significance of this seems great to us. Most practitioners place great weight on service modalities, types of treatments, strategies of intervention, and so on. Within DSO (and in many other programs evaluated in the past), the type of service delivered was apparently of minor importance in affecting the offense behavior of clients.<sup>4</sup> Yet, type of service probably occupies more practitioner time and attention than any of the other categories of variables. Perhaps this is a function of having many clients in no demonstrable need of service. Perhaps it reflects the low level of diversity between the services actually delivered. Most of them turned out to be counseling services whose conceptual distinctions were likely to be less notable than their similarities. Perhaps these services were too minimal to manifest differential effects. Or, it may be that the services we generally offer are simply not powerful. Our data don't permit one to select among such alternatives; they merely highlight the problem and stand as a warning about the appropriateness of concentrating planning efforts on types of service rather than on types of clients in particular.<sup>5</sup>

The second approach to assessing outcome integrity concentrated on the services delivered because of the great weight assigned to these variables by the practitioner community. As we have just seen, service is not a variable category of much moment, but within it our analysis might yet find some modalities to be more effective than others. In particular, we sought interactions between type of service and type of client; in other words, what works for whom? In this analysis, unlike all the others, we are able to look at recidivism measured both by official offense data and by self-report delinquency.

<sup>4</sup>The data base supporting this finding was in part limited by less than full access to the differentiating detail that would have been desirable regarding variations in duration of treatment, and in the competence, experience, and specific intervention approach of the service provider, any or all of which might have identified successful treatment approaches. Confidence in the finding is nonetheless warranted by its congruence with findings on treatment outcome in numerous other studies.

<sup>5</sup>The client characteristics consistently most positively correlated with recidivism levels were prior offenses, male gender, age, and the instant offense of alcohol possession (see Volume I, Chapter 14, Figure 2).

Unfortunately, due to the absence of control groups or random assignment to different forms of service, the analysis has been unable to disentangle important client selection and assignment biases from treatment effects. For instance, larger numbers of services are associated with higher than expected recidivism rates. But this could well be due to the assignment of more serious offenders to more services. The analysis was also hampered by the fact that many sites offered only a few of the service categories. Finally, as we have noted, the absence of strong service effects overall militated against finding many differential relationships.

Two or three interesting trends did emerge nonetheless. One of these is that foster care may be particularly beneficial for runaways and for the very small number of program clients from families so demoralized and conflict ridden that they could not be returned home. A second is that long term residential placement may be beneficial for more serious offenders, those with more extensive prior records. Finally, it appears that standard counseling services may be detrimental overall. None of the effects were overly strong, but these three were of sufficient consistency to merit close attention in the future. Within the constraints of the analysis problems we have described, they provide beacons, however weak, to guide controlled experimentation in future status offender programming where such programming proves justifiable.

## IX. Selected Implications

A project as large and complex as the DSO program naturally yields many implications and suggestions, both minor and major. Some of the more obvious implications to be drawn from the national evaluation are subsumable under the three headings below.

### A. On Status Offender Deinstitutionalization

1. Our data, along with those from prior studies, strongly suggest that the "pure" status offender is a relatively uncommon youngster; most offenders evidence a mixed status/ delinquent offense pattern. Future programs must either aim at the child as target, regardless of the "accidental" charge lodged against him or her, or they must respond to the act along without assumptions that the act signifies special child characteristics.

2. The paternalistic stamp of most treatment programs conflicts somewhat with the liberationist thrust of the Children's Rights Movement of which DSO is a forerunner. Policymakers must consider more fully that if deinstitutionalization is appropriate for youth charged with a status offense, then perhaps their removal from juvenile court jurisdiction is also appropriate. This is certainly the implication of labeling theory, the conceptual framework avowedly underlying the Federal legislation. Policymakers should also consider more fully the precise objective to be served in status offender deinstitutionalization. If the aim is humaneness and equity, programs are perhaps best centered in the courts, where the critical disposition decisions can be made to avoid secure confinement as a response to a noncriminal offense. In the light of this aim, the removal of status offense cases from court jurisdiction may not only be unwarranted, but might well impeded the achievement of this objective.

On the other hand, if delinquency control is the aim, care must be exercised to base a status offender program on soundly validated knowledge respecting the processes that may foster a juvenile career progression from status to criminal offenses. Labeling theory is clearly a weak reed to support the expectation that simple avoidance of juvenile justice processing will effectively prevent delinquency, and is hardly sufficient grounds on which to base a movement to divest the courts of jurisdiction in status offense cases. As seen in the experience of the DSO program, in the current "state of the art" neither juvenile justice processing nor deinstitutionalization in status offense cases offers delinquency control advantages over the other, although the latter may afford some cost reduction. While it is not possible in these cases to justify the use of secure confinement as a delinquency control expedient, claims for decarceration appear equally unwarranted. With respect to the problems of delinquency control, this remains an important finding in the evaluation of the DSO program, and points firmly to the need for well

designed field tests of program approaches to the treatment of status-offending youth based on a thorough assessment of the research in support of existing delinquency theory.

3. The data indicate that alternative services for youth identified, however uncertainly, as status offenders are not necessarily productive. This is especially true of various forms of counseling service. Other projects on delinquency treatment, over many decades, have yielded substantially similar results. Policymakers and treaters must be willing to face and test seriously the proposition that early offenders are not amenable to the treatments in our standard repertoire and may best be left alone. It remains true that half of those arrested for the first time are never arrested again.

4. One tentative, positive finding of DSO is that residential treatment programs may be effective with higher risk offenders. This suggestion fits with data reported for other serious-offender projects in Utah, Los Angeles, and Chicago. Serious attention may be in order to restricting our rehabilitative services to this type, and for high-risk offenders only.

5. DSO was a 2-year plus program, lodged in many instances in highly amenable sites. Yet, the level of deinstitutionalization achieved, while substantial, was not up to the standards required. In other settings--Massachusetts, Vermont, California, Pima County--far more complete deinstitutionalization has been achieved far more rapidly by edict, administrative or legislative. For this type of goal, care and caution may have proved less effective than swift, legally mandated action. Policymakers need to consider the price of "going slow" in jurisdictions prepared to bar secure confinement as a response to status offenses. On the other hand, in jurisdictions not ready to take this step, as was the case in two of the DSO program sites (Delaware and South Carolina), the program apparently paved the way for legislative action promoting the deinstitutionalization of status offenders immediately following termination of Federal funding.

#### B. On Program Constraints

1. Treading on unknown territory requires exploration. Lead time for program development is essential both for local program developers and for funding organizations, the latter to develop adequate conceptual guidelines, and the former to develop adequate operational procedures. DSO had some lead time, but not sufficient to the task.

2. Agreements with local authorities, police and courts in the case of DSO, need to be hammered out in greater detail and with greater assurance against backsliding. The tendency is for project applicants to obtain minimal, non-binding letters of cooperation, where genuine commitments are really needed. Funders must be willing to test levels of commitment among collaborating agencies prior to program awards.

3. Prior analysis of the critical decision points in an operating system would have benefited several DSO projects. The political "clout" of the court and the potential for effective resistance by police proved in some sites to have been underestimated. The administration of a major program should take

into account these critical decisionmaking points in the system. To be effective in diverting status offenders from secure confinement, programs must be so structured as to exert influence on the crucial case disposition points in the justice system. DSO programs with direct access to the police and to court intake units, whether structurally as in the case of Delaware, or informally as in the Spokane County program, were more successful in diverting status offenders from secure confinement. Where such access was much reduced, as in the South Carolina program, there was little diversion from placement in detention facilities.

4. The "disinterested" and questioning stance of independent evaluators, while often disconcerting to program planners, is nonetheless perhaps the best guarantee that untested assumptions will not guide program development. Genuine program and evaluation staff interaction should be required from the very beginning stages of program development, with evaluators as close-to-equal partners rather than as consultants. Site selection, goals, and success criteria, and guidelines for project applicants may all benefit where the program and evaluation inputs are seen as having potentially equal merit.

C. On External Validity--One must assume that programs such as DSO are not designed principally to benefit only the clients involved in the brief 2- or 3-year life span of the program. Rather, they are designed for the long-term benefit of all the clients to follow. The 16,000 youths benefited or harmed by their participation in DSO are but a small portion of the youths across the country who are yet to be served by virtue of committing a status offense. The importance of DSO, then, is as a demonstration of service potentials.

1. Demonstrations cannot demonstrate their worth beyond their own limited time and clientele in the absence of concrete evaluability. DSO had a far lower level of evaluability than was potentially available to it. Elements of reasonable evaluation must be built into social programs of this sort earlier, with greater criterion weight in funding decisions. Issues of comparative designs, data systems, lead time, guarantees of data access, and site selection to maximize generalizability are not extraneous but basic components of the ultimate utility of program efforts. The limitations of the value of DSO should be ample witness to this conclusion.

2. The five tests of (a) adequacy of rationale, (b) level of implementation, (c) outcome achievement, (d) program integrity, and (e) outcome integrity, if considered carefully during planning rather than after program termination, could provide program staffs with a major head start in mounting operations whose outcomes, of whatever sort, will have greater utility. In particular, far greater attention to adequacy of rationale and program integrity seem pivotal to the successful demonstration of what we can and cannot yet accomplish in social programming.



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