How to evaluate probation

Lecturer PhD Ioan Durnescu

CEP Unity & Diversity Conference

Tallinn, September 2007

"Probably the best probation system is the one completing its mission "

Main types of mission statements

1. To provide *alternatives to imprisonment* and therefore to promote community measures and sanctions.

2. Some other services have like a mission *to consolidate human rights and assist the courts in making the best decisions regarding sentencing.*

3. Less and less services intend to *rehabilitate offenders* and

4. More and more services set as a target *to protect the public*

Former mission statement of the Romanian Probation Service

"The Romanian Probation Service serves the courts and the public by supervising offenders in the community in order to reduce crime and the cost and consequences of unnecessary imprisonment."

Probation services based on promoting alternatives to incarceration model

Points for discussion:

1. what is the frequency of use

2. two main indicators: a **global frequency index** measuring the ratio of the number of that measure or sanction ordered to the number of prison sentences and the second one a **specific frequency** measured like the first one but including only the prison sentences less than one year.

3. *Net widening effect*

4. One criticism of this approach is that by measuring the incidence of probation sentence or order we actually measure the effectiveness of the courts

5. Distinction between assessing a sanction and assessing a program

Probation services based on the model of assisting the courts in making the best sentences

Points for discussion:

1. These services are the ones which cover the space between imprisonment and monetary sanctions,

2. Primary criteria in measuring the probation effectiveness are those connected to the courts: confirmation rates (the proportion of the sentences taking the route suggested by probation service), prosecutors/judges satisfaction, the quality of the reports submitted to the court, the speed of submitting the reports and so on.

3. Interconnection

4. *Anticipatory effect*

Probation services based on the rehabilitation model

Points for discussion:

1. most criticised,

2. The explicit aim of these services is to support the offenders to lead a crime free life.

3. activities which target what we know about the causes of crime: relationship, job, accommodation, attitude, cognition, substance misuse, personal skills and so on.

4. Questions:

        1. what do we know about offending and re-offending?

        2. to what extend can probation service provide practical help ?

5. survive vs. re-offending

Criticism regarding re-offending as an indicator

Lloyd and others:

- doesn't take into account all the aims of sentencing,
- there is no clear single definition of re-offending (reconviction doesn't measure reoffending),
- what is a correct follow-up period ?

Tournier (2004):

"What period of time will be taken into account with respect to "re-offending" and therefore to speak in terms of failure ? a further conviction? A conviction of certain degree of gravity? A particular type of offence? "

Intermediar indicators

These intermediary indicators could refer to the **probation activity**, like: number of clients included into one particular program, number of clients who terminate that program, client satisfaction, number of incidents during that program and so on.

These indicators measure what probation service **DID** with the clients.

In order to assess the **impact upon the client's behaviour** one can use another set of intermediar indicators which represent those steps taken by the offender in the direction of desirable goals, like: longer intervals between commission of new crimes, more minor forms of offences, pre post test measuring changes in attitudes or cognition, changes in the client social circumstances, greater job stability or satisfaction and so on

Process indicators

Points for discussion:

1. focus on quality

2. use procedural standards

Probation services based on the public protection model

Points for discussion:

1. Traditionally speaking probation services were created to deal with offenders and their needs. Nowadays they are meant to defend the public by controlling the offenders.

2. Mass media's totalitarism and political influence.

3. Uses criteria like: does the public feel safer ? does the service has a good public image ? is the number of crimes dropping? and so on.

4. But how do we assess whether the public feel safer ? how do we deal with the fact that public perception has nothing to do with the level of crime?

Thank you for your attention !!

Ioan Durnescu

University of Bucharest