

2.10 Arrest referral breaks drugs-crime cycle

Findings A Home Office report has clarified what makes for a successful arrest referral scheme. It reports outcomes from three schemes previously covered in **FINDINGS** (► *Nuggets 1.9*) and adds data from offenders referred to treatment by probation. All were 'proactive' schemes in which drug workers initiate contact with arrestees or offenders thought to be problem drug users with a view to referral to treatment.

205 clients were interviewed six to nine months after contacting the schemes and asked to recall their drug use and criminal behaviour in the past month and in the month before arrest. Typically they were young men with long criminal careers who injected illicit opiates. For 41% this was their first contact with a drug project. 77% were referred to drug services, 51% attended, and about 37% completed treatment or stayed for at least six months. Before arrest clients typically spent £375 a week on drugs raised mainly through property crime and drug dealing. At follow up this had fallen to £70, and 8 in 10 property offenders had cut their offending. Injecting and the proportion overdosing fell, the latter from 26% to 5%. Improvements persisted for at least another year.

Interviews with workers suggested that the schemes were vulnerable due to strains on participating agencies. Reports on two other proactive schemes (► *Secondary sources 1, 2*) offer detailed confirmation of the client characteristics and managerial issues documented in the main study.

In context Proactive schemes contact the most criminal of drug users seen by treatment services generally, many arrested for offences committed to fund opiate/stimulant dependence. Reduced crime among these types of clients accounts for most of the known social benefits of treatment ► [pages 20 and 22](#).

The study could not prove the schemes *caused* the outcomes, but for most clients adding treatment to the criminal process (itself ineffective in preventing reoffending) seems to have helped break a long standing drugs-crime-conviction cycle. Offenders referred to treatment by probation under conditions imposed by the court were particularly pleased with their disposal and did particularly well. However, clients the study was unable to contact would probably have shown poorer outcomes. Recollections of behaviour six or more months ago may have been unreliable.

Practice implications By 2002 government wants arrest referral schemes in all police custody suites and to double their throughput of offenders into treatment. The featured study includes detailed, well founded recommendations on how these schemes might be run, as does another Home Office report (► *Secondary sources 3*); only a few points can be mentioned here.

The proactive approach most efficiently funnels high-rate offenders into treatment, tackling both crime and dependent drug use, though schemes might also offer diversion (► *Nuggets 2.11*) to less serious offenders. For worthwhile outcomes and to prevent 'referral' workers having to take on caseloads, schemes require suitable drug services to refer on to. Ideally they employ a dedicated drug worker managed by a drug service (to distance them from the legal process) under conditions which encourage them to stay long enough to build relationships of sufficient depth and trust to harmonise the disparate goals of participating agencies. For the same reason, schemes should be physically and managerially structured to foster cooperation. Also needed are measures to overcome the supervisory difficulties inherent in detached work and to create simple and supportive lines of accountability.

Main sources Edmunds M., et al. *Doing justice to treatment: referring offenders to drug services*. Drugs Prevention Advisory Service, 1999. Copies: apply DPAS, phone 020 7217 8631, e-mail public_enquiry.dpas@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk.

Secondary sources ① Galvin K., et al. *An evaluation of the Second Chance arrest referral scheme*. Institute of Health & Community Studies, 1999. Copies: apply Institute etc, phone 01202 504184 ② Shah K., et al. *Drugline arrest referral. Report June 1998*. Copies: apply Drugline Lancashire, phone 01772 253840 ③ *Drugs interventions in the criminal justice system: guidance manual*. Drugs Prevention Advisory Service, 1999. Copies: apply DPAS ► *Main sources*.

Contacts Criminal Policy Research Unit, South Bank University, Erlang House, 103 Borough Road, London SE1 0AA. **LINKS** [Nuggets 1.9, 2.11](#). [Pressure pays](#). p. 4