

CSSD Chronicle

State of Connecticut Judicial Branch

Court Support Services Division

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Evaluation of Court-Mandated Family Violence Programs—FVEP, EXPLORE, and EVOLVE

(Editor's Note: The summary information below was taken directly from the report "Evaluation of Three Court-Mandated Family Violence Interventions: FVEP, EXPLORE, and EVOLVE," conducted by the Institute for the Study of Crime and Justice at Central Connecticut State University.)



The number of family violence incidents in Connecticut has remained stable over the past two decades, with approximately 19,000 to 21,000 incidents leading to an arrest each year. In 2012, there were 19,804 family violence arrest incidents involving 41,393 individuals, including 17,411 victims and 16,073 arrested offenders. In the majority of cases offenders were arrested for assault, breach of peace or disorderly conduct.

Twenty of these cases were classified as homicides.

The Connecticut Judicial Branch, through its Court Support Services Division (CSSD), funds three court-mandated program options for family violence offenders: the FVEP (pre-trial), EXPLORE (post-plea), and EVOLVE (post-plea). In addition to these three court-mandated programs, a number of providers and agencies outside of JB-CSSD engage in individual counseling and group work with family violence offenders.

The FVEP is a 9-week pre-trial program that meets once per week for 1.5 hours. Its purpose is to educate defendants (male and female) on how violence affects relationships and to provide them with basic interpersonal skills to develop violence-free relationships. The FVEP is currently in all 20 Geographical Area court locations.

EXPLORE is a 26-session post-conviction and post-plea program for male family violence offenders (1.5 hour sessions, once per

week for 26 weeks), based on a cognitive behavioral therapeutic framework. Its purpose is to foster behavioral change through developing awareness, building positive interpersonal skills, and promoting an understanding of the harmful effects family violence has on victims and children. EXPLORE is currently available in all court locations.

EVOLVE is a 52-session (2-hour sessions, twice a week for 26 weeks) post-conviction program. It is an intensive cognitive behavioral intervention designed for high-risk family violence offenders (male only), centering on victims and children, behavior change, interrelation and communication skill building, and responsible parenting/fatherhood. EVOLVE is currently available in four court locations (Bridgeport, New Haven, New London, and Waterbury).

In 2013, the General Assembly passed legislation (Public Act 13-247) that mandated an evaluation to assess the effectiveness of these domestic violence programs, along with a cost-benefit analysis to determine if program changes were necessary.

Research was conducted by Steven M. Cox, Ph.D. and Pierre M. Rivolta, Ph.D. of The Institute for the Study of Crime and Justice at Central Connecticut State University, and the study used data electronically downloaded from CSSD's Case Management Information System (CMIS), Contractor Data Collection System (CDCS), and the Criminal History database. It looked at program completion rates, one year arrest rates

following program completion, and statistically calculated “effect sizes” of each program.

Below are the research questions and findings:

1. What were the completion rates for each program and were there any statistically significant differences between program completers and non-completers?

FVEP=84%, EXPLORE=68%, and EVOLVE=65%

Non-Completers were generally younger, high risk, and had extensive criminal histories.

2. Was the one-year arrest rate for any new offense or family violence offense of offenders who participated in the program statistically different from those offenders who did not participate in the program?

•Any new arrest within 12 months

◦FVEP: 26% of program participants vs. 36% of the comparison group

◦EXPLORE: 30% of program participants vs. 51% of the comparison group

◦EVOLVE: 35% of program participants vs. 55% of the comparison group

•Family violence arrests within 12 months:

◦FVEP: 16% of program participants vs. 18% of the comparison group

◦EXPLORE: 16% of program participants vs. 27% of the comparison group

◦EVOLVE: 22% of program participants vs. 29% of the comparison group

3. Were there measurable program effect sizes?

•Any new arrest within 12 months:

◦FVEP: Small to moderate effects (comparison group was 1.6 times more likely to be arrested)

◦EXPLORE: Moderate effects (comparison group was 2.4 times more likely to be arrested)

◦EVOLVE: Moderate effects (comparison group was 1.9 times more likely to be arrested)

Overall, the findings are small to moderate, but promising, given the results of prior research of other domestic violence program evaluations that have shown court-mandated batterer interventions are rarely effective. The recommendations of the study include:

- ◆ Continued legislative support of these family violence programs.
- ◆ Legislation requiring that all non-judicial programs be grounded in evidence-based practices.
- ◆ Consideration of legislation mandating that all family violence programs be state-certified; prohibit the substitution of alternative approaches to family violence treatment in lieu of state-certified programming.
- ◆ The Judicial Branch should collect arrest data for all study groups to monitor 18-24 month recidivism.
- ◆ State-sponsored research in coordination with victim’s organizations that is more in-depth and broad to better understand why these programs are effective as well as their ability to positively affect the lives of family violence victims.

JB-CSSD Executive Director Stephen Grant was encouraged by the evaluation results of the DV programs and commented, “This research, using a stringent and rigorous methodology, has positive implications for practice in Connecticut as well as the field of domestic violence.”

For more information on family violence intervention programs, or a copy of the complete report, please contact Joseph DiTunno, Deputy Director I at Joseph.DiTunno@jud.ct.gov.

*The **CSSD Chronicle** is a regular publication of information and news about the Court Support Services Division. Questions or comments on this edition, or suggestions for future articles, can be directed to Linda.Grzeika@jud.ct.gov*