

LEO CASE STUDY

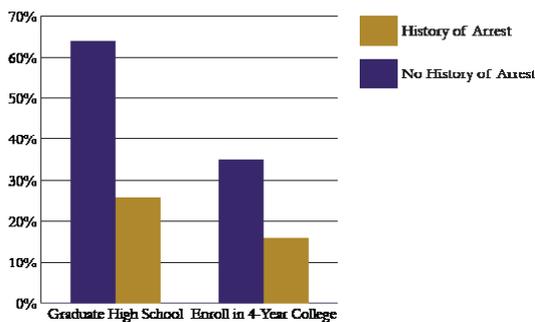
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DIVERSION AND JUVENILE JUSTICE: LAUNCHING AN OBJECTIVE IMPACT EVALUATION

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Contact with the criminal justice system in adolescence carries lifelong consequences. For example, arrested and incarcerated youth are less likely to graduate from high school or enroll in a four-year college (see graph below). Juvenile criminal activity is also a strong predictor of adult criminal activity (McCord and Esminger, 1997; Nagin and Paternoster, 2000).

History of Arrest Affects Education Outcomes



Source: Kirk and Sampson, 2013

WHY EVALUATE?

The **Reading for Life** program diverts non-violent juvenile offenders ages 11 to 17 from court adjudication to a virtue-based program studying works of literature. Youth participate in small groups led by trained volunteer mentors and meet for 10 weeks. Stakeholders commissioned the study to learn more about the program's impact on outcomes such as **future arrests** and **prosecuted felonies** after one and two years.

COLLABORATORS

The evaluation was conducted in a medium-sized midwestern county in partnership with the program provider, Reading for Life, Inc., and the county's Juvenile Justice Center.

1. COMPARING OUTCOMES

LEO studies isolate the impact of a particular program by comparing outcomes for two groups of individuals who are the same, on average, except for the program of interest (i.e., "treatment" and "control" groups). In this case, there is **excess demand** for the Reading for Life program: more need than available program openings. Given this, LEO helped stakeholders set up an enrollment system where all eligible juveniles have a fair and **equal chance** of being offered an available program opening. This, in turn, has enabled a rigorous **randomized controlled trial** (RCT) evaluation design to study program impact. Juveniles unable to be served due to program capacity constraints participate in the standard alternative of 25 hours of community service.

2. STUDY SIZE & TIMELINE

The study consisted of **449 juveniles** entering the juvenile justice system from 2010 to 2013: 224 eligible individuals who participated in Reading for Life and 225 in a comparison group.

3. DATA

LEO worked with the county's Juvenile Justice Center to access and analyze **administrative data** already being collected, including arrest records, class of offense, and prosecuted offenses. LEO is now conducting a study to examine the program's impact on educational outcomes. In addition, the program is being replicated in two other counties, with LEO partnering on evaluations.



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About LEO: The Wilson Sheehan Lab for Economic Opportunities (LEO) is a nonpartisan research center at the University of Notre Dame. LEO works with nonprofit and government agencies to build objective evidence about programs designed to reduce poverty and improve lives in the U.S. To learn more, please contact us at leo@nd.edu.