

THE TENNESSEE SANTA ARRESTEE STUDY

Introduction

Background of Tennessee's SANTA Study

Tennessee is conducting a federally funded family of studies to estimate the statewide need for substance abuse treatment. Data from these studies will support Tennessee's annual State Treatment Needs Assessment Program (STNAP) block grant application for federal funds to support substance abuse initiatives within the state. This report analyzes the results from one of these studies, the Substance Abuse Need for Treatment among Arrestees (SANTA) study, which examines patterns of alcohol and drug use, abuse, and dependence and the prevalence of need for substance abuse treatment among newly arrested persons in Tennessee.

There are good reasons for conducting a separate study of the need for substance abuse treatment among arrestees. Substantial research has documented a strong link between the use of alcohol and illicit drugs and criminal behavior. Arrested and imprisoned persons are much more likely than the general population to use, abuse, or be dependent upon alcohol and drugs. Furthermore, determining the need for substance abuse treatment in these populations and planning to meet that need is an essential aspect of substance abuse treatment policy. This is so because apprehension by the criminal justice system is a singularly effective filter for concentrating persons in need of treatment intervention.

Arrests provide an opportunity for AOD screening and treatment. Newly arrested substance abusers may be particularly amenable to seeking and accepting treatment, since their arrest provides a clear indication of the difficulties that their substance use has created. Furthermore, although coercion is of questionable value long-term, arrested substance abusers can be more readily made to accept conditions of treatment than those who are not within the coercive power of the criminal justice system. Finally, treating the substance use disorders of criminally involved substance users is likely to be a particularly cost-effective use of substance abuse treatment resources. The costs imposed on society by criminally involved substance abusers are likely to be considerably higher than those imposed by non-criminal substance abusers. Treating the substance use disorders of these persons, thereby potentially reducing or eliminating their criminal behavior, is a cost-beneficial and cost-effective use of substance abuse treatment resources.