

# NEW MEXICO SENTENCING COMMISSION

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## Summary

- The purpose of the current study is to assess the effectiveness of the Recovery Academies in a variety of ways and to serve as a baseline against which more recent Recovery Academy clients can be gauged.
- Both Recovery Academies are intended to be a six-month program designed to reduce recidivism and substance abuse.
- The New Mexico Women's Recovery Academy (NMWRA), located in Albuquerque, offers services to both those with a primary problem of substance abuse and those who have co-occurring mental health and substance abuse problems.
- The New Mexico Men's Recovery Academy (NMMRA), located in Los Lunas, does not accept men with serious mental health problems.

## Key findings

- Women NMWRA clients were less likely to have a new serious offense as measured by adjudication and conviction.
- Women NMWRA clients also took longer to reoffend.
- Men NMMRA clients had significantly longer times to drug or alcohol violations relative to the comparison group.

## *Executive Summary: New Mexico Recovery Academy Evaluation Study*

### Introduction

New Mexico has two Recovery Academies—one for women and one for men. Both provide services to criminal justice-involved individuals with substance abuse problems. The goal is to reduce recidivism through the provision of a variety of services. However, the success of the Recovery Academies had not been evaluated. The purpose of the current study is to assess the effectiveness of the Recovery Academies in a variety of ways and to serve as a baseline against which more recent Recovery Academy clients can be gauged.

### Structure of the Recovery Academies

Both Recovery Academies are intended to be a six-month program (personal communication with NMCD staff member, Oct. 29, 2013). However, based on individual needs and circumstances, and with permission, participants may remain in the program longer (personal communication with NMCD staff member, Aug. 13, 2015). Both Recovery Academies offer individual and group counseling, educational services, parenting classes, substance abuse treatment, and anger management classes ([http://www.cecintl.com/facilities\\_rr\\_nm\\_001.html](http://www.cecintl.com/facilities_rr_nm_001.html);

New Mexico's Recovery Academies function as substance abuse treatment facilities that use Rational-Emotive Behavioral Therapy (REBT) in Therapeutic Communities (TC) with the goal of reducing recidivism and substance use and abuse. REBT is a form of cognitive behavioral therapy—this treatment aims to change one's actions through the process of being aware of one's thoughts and how to change them. This is expected to ultimately lead to healthy behavior. Participants in this form of therapy focus on respect, participation, and confidentiality as

some of their core values. A TC encourages and helps members to work with each other to

promote the desired behavioral change as well as to serve as role models and guidance for each other (Introduction to the Therapeutic Community, 2008). The Recovery Academies are divided into three phases and also have supplemental programs available to participants. Within each phase, participants are required to complete all homework, have it reviewed by a counselor, and pass an exam. In addition, they must display a cooperative attitude at each level.

Supplemental programs and courses are offered to residents during accountability hours and process group hours. Addiction and recovery education, adaptive treatment, and transition skills courses help participants to make self-assessments concerning their addictions. These courses also help individuals manage their recovery and maintain good social networks and healthy communication. In addition to these programs, there are weekly mandatory substance abuse meetings. Participation is determined by the individual's phase: those in Phase I must attend 4 meetings each week, Phase II must attend 3 meetings, and Phase III must attend 2 meetings.

There are some differences, however, between the two Academies. For example, the New Mexico Women's Recovery Academy (NMWRA), located in Albuquerque, offers services to both those with a primary problem of substance abuse and those who have co-occurring mental health and substance abuse problems. Women whose primary problem is substance abuse may be allowed to have their children live on site with them.

The New Mexico Men's Recovery Academy (NMMRA), located in Los Lunas, does not accept men with serious mental health problems. Children are not allowed to live on site with their fathers.

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## Literature Review

A TC provides treatment to substance users with the goal of altering their behavior and attitudes (Robbins, Martin, & Surratt, 2009, 395). Many TCs use a cognitive-behavioral curriculum in order to achieve the program goals (Sacks, Sacks, McKendrick, Banks, Stommel, 2004, 4). The traditional TC focuses on an individual's role within the TC; participants follow a strict daily schedule that emphasizes the creation of practical life skills for the individual to use after release from the program (Sacks, Chaple, Sacks, McKendrick, & Cleland, 2012, 248). However, many programs offer a modified version of the TC, including New Mexico's Recovery Academies.

Overall, the research evaluating TCs shows positive results. The most common factor among successful TC outcomes is program completion (Belenko et al., 2004; Inciardi et al., 2004; Lamb, 2013; Olson, 2011; Robbins et al., 2009; Sacks et al., 2012). Modified TCs featuring cognitive-behavioral therapy through treatment phases has shown decreased recidivism rates in Ohio and Illinois (Lamb, 2013; Olson, 2011). Long-term residential treatment in lieu of incarceration is associated with a reduction in the odds of a new arrest, a new conviction, a new jail sentence, and a new prison sentence (Belenko et al., 2004). In addition, TCs have been found to be an effective approach to addressing co-occurring disorders (Sacks et al., 2008; Sacks et al., 2012), both in terms of reincarceration rates (Sacks et al., 2012) and improvement in psychological symptoms (Sacks et al., 2008).

## Methods

The sample includes individuals who participated in the Recovery Academies between July 2009 and June 2011. Using a quasi-experimental design, we constructed a comparison group with propensity score matching. We chose appropriate matches from the New Mexico Corrections Department's Risk Needs Assessment (RNA) data. These RNA instruments are administered to those who are or will be under community supervision. The population from which the comparison group was drawn included all individuals who had an RNA during the same period as the treatment group. Two different RNAs were administered during this period: the Austin RNA and the Institute for Social Research RNA. Individuals were first matched by RNA type. We then matched by items that were comparable on both RNA forms: gender, age at first offense, prior parole/probation revocations, current drug problem, diagnosed mental illness, gang involvement, and the overall RNA score (i.e., severity score). Most comparison group individuals matched perfectly with the treatment group

on the items detailed above. For the handful that did not match perfectly, the RNA level (low, medium, high, or extreme) was the same. Fourteen Recovery Academy individuals were excluded from the final analyses because a match could not be made. The final sample consists of 489 Recovery Academy clients and 489 matched offenders.

The follow-up period began from either the date individuals began the Recovery Academy, or the date of the RNA for the comparison group. Our primary interest was to determine whether there were any differences in recidivism rates. We examined multiple measures of recidivism: arrests, adjudications, convictions, incarcerations, and probation violations. *Arrests* include both arrests for technical violations of terms of community supervision as well as new offenses. Subsequent *adjudications* include all new felony court filings processed through district court. Subsequent *convictions* include convictions on any new charge for all felony court filings processed through district court. Subsequent *incarceration* includes incarcerations for any reason including both new crimes and violations of supervision conditions. *Probation violations* include any violation of the conditions of community supervision. We also include a measure that encompasses all of these recidivism measures which we call "*any subsequent offenses*." Data are dichotomous and coded as "1" if there was a subsequent offense and "0" if there was not. We also explored whether the total number of subsequent violations differed between the two groups as well as whether there were differences in the time to re-offense by each recidivism measure.

Recidivism data were extracted from the automated administrative records of several sources including: the New Mexico Corrections Department (NMCD), the New Mexico Department of Public Safety (DPS), and the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC). We joined the NMCD data with other NMCD data using an offender number, which is a unique number assigned to each individual. We joined the remaining datasets using common identifiers (last, first, and middle name; date of birth; and/or last four digits of the Social Security number). Any cases that we were unsure about and could not be verified were not considered a good match and were discarded. Thus, if there are matching errors, it is likely that we will have missed one or more recidivism events rather than included ones that were not true matches.

## Analytic approach

We used a variety of statistical approaches. For the purposes of the executive summary, we will focus on

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the logistic regression analyses used to assess whether participation in the Recovery Academy was associated with reductions (or increases) in recidivism while controlling for other factors. Logistic regression is an appropriate technique to use when the outcome of interest is a dichotomous variable (e.g., recidivated or not). The results produce an odds-ratio coefficient for each independent variable. The odds ratio can be interpreted as the change in the odds of an event occurring, in this case, recidivism.

Besides assessing differences in subsequent offending by participation in the Recovery Academy, we also examined time to recidivism. We calculated a series of Cox Proportional Hazards regression equations. This is a type of survival analysis that allows one to consider whether an event has occurred (recidivated or not) along with survival time, while incorporating predictor variables. The survival time is measured as the time until the event occurs, or if the individual did not experience the event, the total exposure time. This results in a regression coefficient for each independent variable, similar to the logistic regression coefficient. A ratio less than one can be interpreted as indicating a decreased hazard of the event occurring; a ratio greater than one indicates increased hazard of the event occurring.

## Results

Generally, we found no statistically significant differences for male Recovery Academy clients relative to the comparison group with the exception of increased time to a subsequent *drug/alcohol violation* probation/parole violation. That is, once both time to violation and whether a violation occurred are taken into account, we found that male Recovery Academy clients fare better than males who did not participate in the Recovery Academy (see full results available in the full-length report) The remaining results are for the females only.

Participation in the Women's Recovery Academy was significantly related to subsequent adjudications and convictions. The odds of a subsequent adjudication were lower for women who participated in the Recovery Academy than for women who did not participate. Participation in the Women's Recovery Academy decreased the odds of a subsequent adjudication by 64% and the odds of a subsequent conviction by 67%.

Next, we examined time to re-offending by recidivism type and calculated a series of Cox Proportional Hazards regression equations measuring subsequent arrests, adjudications, convictions, incarcerations, and

probation violations. Women have a lower hazard rate if they are Recovery Academy clients, consistent with the results from the logistic regression analyses described above. In other words, their time to failure is longer.

Together, these results indicate that participation by women in the Recovery Academy has a statistically significant relationship with a reduction in new, serious criminal court cases, which reflects new serious offending.

However, men did not experience a similar reduction in new offending related to their participation in the Recovery Academy.

## Summary

Taken together, the results from the bivariate and multivariate analyses of recidivism suggest that female Recovery Academy clients may be less likely to commit a new offense or be adjudicated and convicted for a new offense. Further, time to a new adjudication appears to be significantly longer for female Recovery Academy clients. This conclusion is reiterated with the results from the analyses of the probation violation data. Those results indicated that women who participated in the Recovery Academy were less likely to have a probation violation for committing a new offense and that the time to violation was significantly longer than for women in the comparison group once other variables were taken into account.

On the other hand, men who participate in the Recovery Academy may be less likely to have a violation for either a drug or alcohol violation. Although not statistically significant in the bivariate analyses, once other variables were controlled for in the multivariate analyses, we found that males who participated in the Recovery Academy had a lower hazard rate than males who did not. Thus, once both time to failure and failure are considered simultaneously, men who participate in the Recovery Academy were found to fare better than men who did not participate. However, when we examined violations for drugs and alcohol separately, we did not find statistically significant differences.

It is important to note that while not always statistically significant, we found that at least in the bivariate analyses, the time to recidivism and failure on parole/probation were longer for Recovery Academy clients by gender. This suggests that at least while men and women are participating in the Recovery Academy, there is a deterrent effect. Further, this may result in lower levels of new, serious crimes by Recovery

Academy females and lower levels of substance use and abuse by males.

Importantly, there are some limitations to this study. First, we do not have dosage information for the individuals who participated in the Recovery Academy programs. Thus, we cannot determine whether there is a difference between those who complete the program compared to those who did not. This is especially important given that the evaluations described in the literature review often found that individuals who completed TC or modified TC programs often fared better than those who did not complete, and that in some cases, those who participated but did not complete actually fared worse than those who did not participate at all.

In addition, there may be some differences between the Recovery Academy clients and comparison group individuals that we did not identify. For example, it is plausible that the Recovery Academy clients were faring worse on probation when accepted into the Recovery Academy than their counterparts were at the time of the RNA assessment. Further, bivariate analysis suggest that the Recovery Academy group had more serious prior contacts with the criminal justice system. While we controlled for much of this, there could still be some aspects of this we could not control for that contributes to the recidivism rates.

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### The New Mexico Sentencing Commission

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