

Overview

Study Protocol for the Trauma-Informed Diversion Program



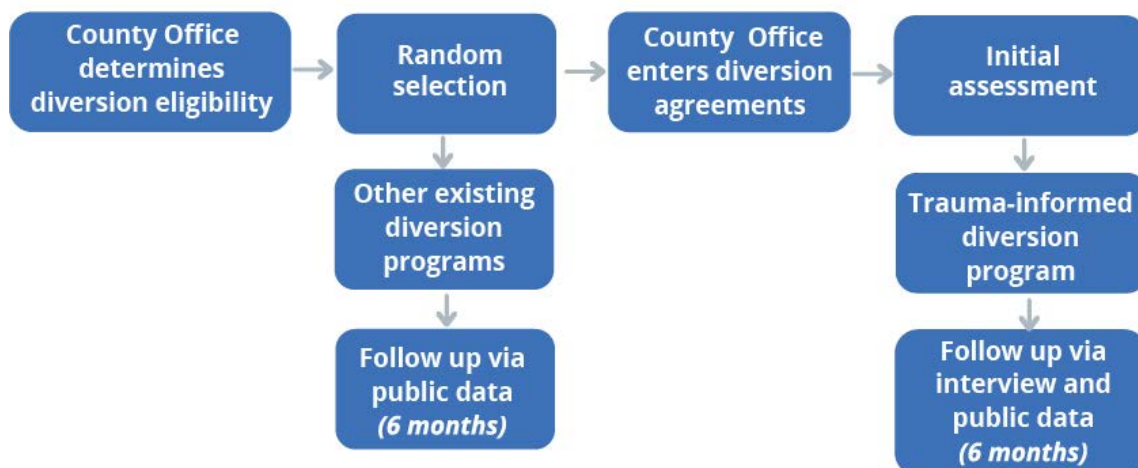
Through a collaboration between **Wellbeing & Equity Innovations (WEI)** and the County Prosecutor’s Office, we aim to disrupt the accelerating cycle of violence in a mid-western state by creating a novel trauma-informed diversion program that engages young adult defendants who have previously experienced gun violence in critically needed trauma therapy, thereby reducing the chances that those defendants engage in gun violence themselves.

We are conducting a longitudinal, mixed-methods trial using random selection. We will collect quantitative and qualitative data to evaluate the implementation and impact of the trauma-informed diversion program on key outcomes, including recidivism and subsequent gun activity, racial equity, and feasibility and acceptability of the program.

We anticipate enrolling approximately 100 eligible defendants. Sixty percent of enrolled defendants will be randomly selected to be considered for trauma-informed diversion, and forty percent of defendants will be randomly selected to be considered for other existing diversion programs currently offered at the DAs office (e.g., misdemeanor diversion, felony diversion, mental health diversion, veteran diversion). For the comparison group and trauma-informed diversion groups, we will collect data from public records, such as demographic information, time since victimization, criminal history, and current case result. In addition, we will collect data from the trauma-informed group about their experiences with the program regarding its feasibility and acceptability, we will ask similar questions and feedback from the prosecutors, program specialists, and other stakeholders.

Random selection is critical to ensure participants in both groups have similar characteristics; this ensures outcomes are compared between equivalent groups of defendants and increases confidence that the program is driving changes in outcomes. Random selection occurs after the Prosecutor’s Office has determined they are eligible for diversion but before the defendant has signed a legally binding diversion agreement. This means that participants will be eligible for study participation based on whether they are eligible for diversion, not based on whether they choose diversion as the legal outcome of their case. In this way, study participation is separated from the legal process.

Research Flow





*Through a collaboration between **Wellbeing & Equity Innovations (WEI)** and a County Prosecutor's Office, we aim to disrupt the accelerating cycle of violence in a mid-western state by implementing a highly innovative, evidence-driven, trauma-informed Diversion Program. This program is for individuals who have, in their recent history, been victims of a nonfatal shooting and subsequently become defendants in County Superior Court.*

About The Program

Diversion programs offer alternatives to prosecution and conviction that focus on treating the root of the behavior that led to the arrest. These programs have been shown to decrease the probability of future convictions by up to 48%¹. Participants are identified for participation by law enforcement, prosecution, or the defense attorney. The program specialist then screens the participants for eligibility and assesses their individual needs for support. Once the prosecuting attorney approves their participation, defendants attend both individual and group sessions where trauma-informed approaches are used to educate on violence avoidance techniques and coping strategies in addition to connecting them with positive social supports that promote their stability within the community, including employment, housing, and mental health resources. Successful completion of the program would allow defendants to receive a dismissal, downgrade, or expungement of their conviction.

Why Trauma-Informed?

Trauma-informed approaches enhance public safety and can prevent future crime and gun violence by providing critical supports to those most at risk of committing future gun violence. Untreated trauma symptoms are associated with those factors that contribute to crime such as impulsivity and aggression. When trauma is treated, problematic behaviors can be replaced with healthy coping strategies, techniques to regulate emotions, and more flexible thinking patterns to navigate life through non-violent means.

How Do I Refer My Client To The Program?

The prosecutor's office will be screening all new filings for potential inclusion in this diversion program. However, nonfatal shooting data has not been reliably tracked in the past and it is very likely that many new criminal case filings involve defendants who are eligible candidates for diversion. Therefore, MCPO welcomes referrals from defense attorneys, case managers, and members of our community partner organizations.

¹ Mueller-Smith, M., & Schnepel, K. T. (2018). Diversion in the Criminal Justice System - University of Michigan. <https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/mgms/wp-content/uploads/sites/283/2018/08/Diversion.pdf>