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MEASURING EXPERIENCES: An Evaluation of AOT Participant Satisfaction

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Community mental health care has an important role in supporting people with severe mental illness, such as schizophrenia and severe bipolar disorder; however, such programs are as diverse and individualized as the communities in which they operate. Using a standardized tool to evaluate community mental health programs and determine how programs affect participants is critically important. Such evaluations can elicit powerful information about programs that can be used to make data-driven improvements. And when a program evaluation provides evidence of a program's effectiveness, those results can also be used to sustain funding and build awareness of and support for the program.

To gain a more complete picture of the impact of a community mental health program, it is important to ask participants directly about their experiences. Hearing directly from participants provides program staff with important information about how a program is working and can help inform them whether any changes are needed. Measuring participant satisfaction is an essential aspect of any community mental health program evaluation.

Assisted outpatient treatment (AOT) is a community outpatient treatment program for people with severe mental illness who have a history of difficulty with treatment engagement. Under a court order, an individual with severe mental illness is required to adhere to their treatment plan. There is a wealth of evidence supporting the effectiveness of AOT programs regarding a variety of outcomes, including reductions in hospitalizations, avoidance of criminal justice system involvement and savings in public costs attributable to mental illness for the system.¹

Measuring Experiences: An Evaluation of AOT Participant Satisfaction is a product of the efforts of the Treatment Advocacy Center's Office of Research and Public Affairs to develop a survey that AOT programs can use to collect data on participant satisfaction. Through developing this survey, the researchers hope to encourage AOT programs to collect data on the experiences of people currently participating in AOT programs.

Key findings from the pilot study of the AOT Participant Satisfaction Survey in six Ohio counties include these:

- AOT participants reported high levels of satisfaction and feelings of empowerment with regard to both their treatment team and the courts. More than three-quarters of participants agreed that they were satisfied with their treatment team and with the courts.
- Most AOT participants felt they received benefits from the AOT court order and from participating in the program.
- Black participants were significantly more satisfied with their treatment team and the courts than white participants.
- The aspect of the program AOT participants liked best was the people. For some, this was their treatment team, whereas for others this was the judge or magistrate.

These results indicate that despite the court-ordered nature of AOT, people with severe mental illness, on average, were satisfied with their participation in the program and felt that the program provided some benefit in improving their quality of life.

¹ Swartz, M. S., Swanson, J. W., Steadman, H. J., Robbins, P. C., & Monahan, J. (2009). *New York State Assisted Outpatient Treatment Program* evaluation. New York State Office of Mental Health.



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The Treatment Advocacy Center is a national nonprofit organization dedicated exclusively to eliminating barriers to the timely and effective treatment of severe mental illness. The organization promotes laws, policies and practices for the delivery of psychiatric care and supports the development of innovative treatments for and research into the causes of severe and persistent psychiatric illnesses, such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder.

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