

**Reductions in Drug Use and Criminal Activity
among Women Treated at VOA's Residential Program**

Project WORTH

Final Report

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Methodology

The VOA Sample

- Project WORTH conducted comprehensive baseline interviews with 172 women within two weeks after they were mandated to treatment in VOA's residential center.
- By the end of 1999, in-depth follow-up interviews were completed with about 125 of the women one-year after they left VOA.
- This represents an 85 percent follow-up rate, which is extremely high for research with criminal populations.

Data Validity

All data are based on the women's self-reports. We believe the data are reasonably accurate, reflecting the reality of their drug use and criminal activities because:

- the interview had built in checks to correct serious inaccuracies and misrepresentations;
- the interviewers were highly sensitive to the women's issues and skillful in building rapport and instilling confidence;
- the interviewers assisted the women in developing a month-by-month events timeline (showing birthdays, holidays, and other memorable events in their lives) to aid them in accurately recalling their drug use, criminal behaviors and life circumstances (e.g., time in jail, prison, and residential drug treatment) during each of the past 12 months;
- the women were assured that their confidentiality would be protected with a Federal Certificate of Confidentiality;
- and urine tests were performed whenever possible to ascertain recent drug use.

Client Characteristics

VOA provides drug treatment to chronic substance abusers with extensive criminal histories and serious psychological and social deficits. VOA's client population consists mainly of women who are:

- hardcore polydrug users—the women started using drugs regularly (meaning three or more days a week for a month or more) when they were about 17 years old, and most of them were still regularly using a variety of hard drugs (mainly methamphetamine, crack, and heroin) when they entered treatment about 15 years later.

- heavily involved in criminal activity—73 percent of the women have been arrested at least five times as an adult.
- victims of physical and sexual abuse in adulthood—about 75 percent reported that they had been physically abused by a partner and 45 percent reported they had been sexually abused (because of the highly sensitive nature of abuse and the stigma associated with it, it is likely that these figures understate the true extent of abuse among VOA clients).
- in poor health, lack education and work experience, and have serious mental health problems.

Reductions in Drug Use

- In the year before entering VOA, 46 percent of the women used illegal drugs or drank alcohol to intoxication more than *three out of four* days that they were at risk in the community. (By “at risk” we mean that the women were not incarcerated or in residential drug treatment.) There was a substantial decline in substance abuse during the year after treatment: 75 percent of the women used substance on fewer than *one out of every four* days at risk (Chart 1).
- Many of the women were successful in either stopping their use of substances or substantially reducing their substance use after treatment: one third were abstinent for the entire year, and another third cut their substance use more than in half (Chart 2).
- Most of the women who abstained after treatment reduced their substance use substantially: during the year before treatment, 45 percent of them had abused substances at least three out of four days, and another 17 percent had abused substances at least every other day (Chart 3).

Reductions in Criminal Activity

- There was a substantial reduction in criminal activity after the women left VOA. During the year before treatment, the women committed crimes on about half the days that they were at risk. By adding up all of their “crime-days,” we find that the group of women as a whole were involved in criminal activity on 19,400 days. The total number of crime days declined to 7,900 during the year after treatment. Thus, the amount of time that the women were involved in crime was cut more than in half, from 50 percent of their days at risk before treatment down to only 22 percent of the days at risk after treatment. From a public safety perspective, there was a substantial bottom line reduction of 11,500 crime days (Chart 4).
- In the year before entering VOA, 50 percent of the women were involved in illegal activities more than half the days that they were at risk in the community. There was

a substantial decline in criminal activity during the year after treatment: 40 percent of the women did not commit any crimes at all (Chart 5).

Treatment Effectiveness

- Women who completed VOA treatment were significantly more likely to reduce their drug use than those who either dropped out or were discharged by the program: program completers reduced their drug use from about two thirds of the days at risk before treatment to only 10 percent after treatment, whereas non-completers only reduced their drug use to 27 percent of their days at risk (Chart 6).
- Program completers were significantly more likely to reduce their involvement in illegal activities than non-completers: 48 percent of completers did not commit any crimes during the year after treatment, whereas only 26 percent of the non-completers were crime-free the entire year; non-completers were significantly more likely to commit crimes than were program completers (Chart 7).
- It should be noted that VOA treatment had a positive effect on women who left the program early as well as those who stayed to completion (Charts 6 and 7).
- Among the women who reduced their drug use and criminal involvement after completing VOA, over half of them said that the program helped them “a lot” to reduce these behaviors. Relatively few of the non-completers who reduced their substance use or criminal activity said that VOA helped them a lot (Chart 8).

The Drugs-Crime Connection

- There is an extremely high correlation between drug use and criminal activity: women who used drugs rarely (up to two percent of their days at risk) did not commit any crimes, whereas those who used drugs more frequently (e.g., more than half the days of the week) also committed crimes more frequently (more than half the days of the week) (Chart 9).
- Women who used drugs more frequently (i.e., at least one third their days at risk) were also more likely to say that they committed crimes to support their drug habits, whereas women who used drugs infrequently (one tenth of their days at risk) said that they did not commit crimes to support their drug use (Chart 10).

Conclusions

- Given their lifestyles, long histories of substance abuse, extensive involvement in criminal activities, and their psychological and social deficits, it is remarkable to observe as much success after drug treatment as occurred among the women who received treatment in VOA. Many women completely stopped using substances and

being involved in illegal activities, and many more substantially reduced these behaviors.

- Given that women who completed treatment in VOA reduced their involvement in drug use and crime significantly more than those who failed to complete treatment, it is reasonable to infer that there is considerable success as a result of women receiving treatment at VOA. It is hard to know exactly how much the change in their behaviors was influenced by drug treatment and how much other factors, such as the threat of criminal justice sanctions and their own intrinsic desire to change their lifestyles, also influenced the women. Because women who do not complete treatment are significantly more likely to relapse and recidivate than those who complete the program, it is fair to say that without treatment, drug use and criminal activity would likely continue largely unabated. Thus, we believe that treatment in VOA, in conjunction with criminal justice sanctions, is effective in reducing drug use and criminal activity.
- VOA treatment appears to have a direct effect on reductions in both drug use and criminal activity. Criminal activity also declines indirectly as a result of the drug-crime connection (e.g., women have less need to commit crimes to support their drug habits, they may have greater impulse control, and they may stop associating with others involved in the criminal subculture). Thus, to the extent that drug treatment influences reductions in drug use, it also influences reductions in criminal activity above and beyond any reductions in crime that are directly influenced by the therapeutic process.
- Because of the high follow-up rate, one can be confident that the sample is representative of the VOA client population and that the previous conclusions about the effectiveness of drug treatment are sound.

Recommendations

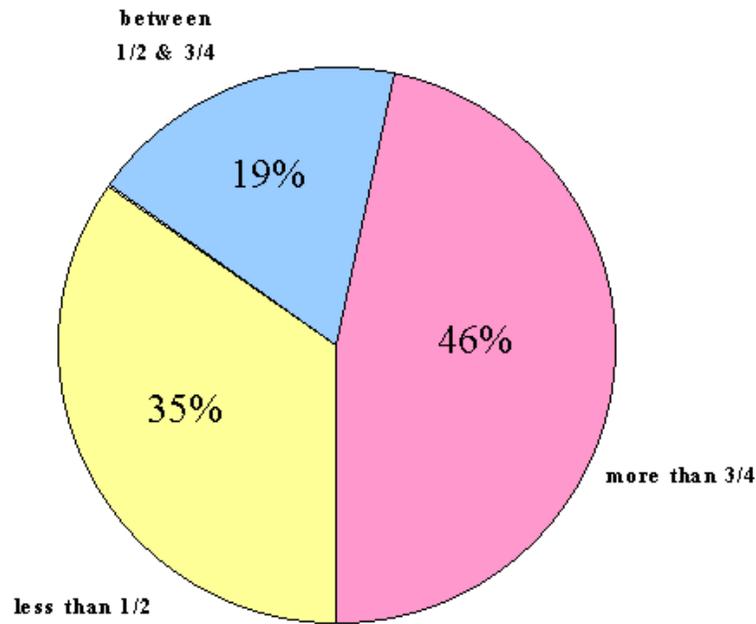
We recommend that the Multnomah County Department of Community Justice:

- continue to mandate substance-abusing women offenders to treatment at VOA;
- allocate sufficient resources to VOA so that it can provide appropriate treatment services to its clients;
- and ideally provide additional support to enable VOA to expand and enhance treatment-related services (e.g., mental health services, childcare, transitional services) for its clients.

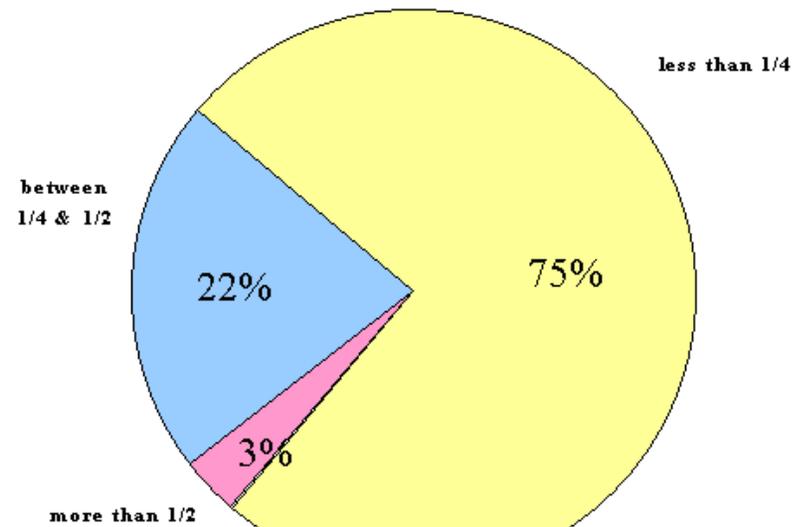
Chart 1

Days of Drug Use: VOA Clients

Before Treatment



After Treatment

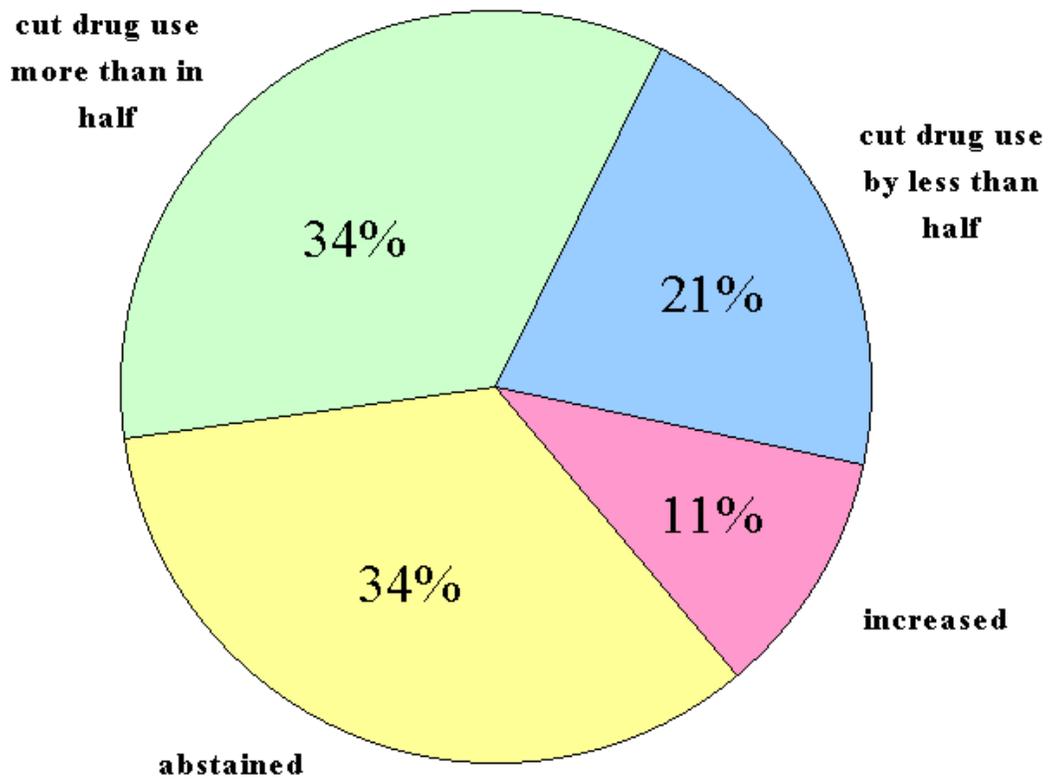


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Chart 2

Changes in Drug Use after Treatment: VOA Clients (N=124)

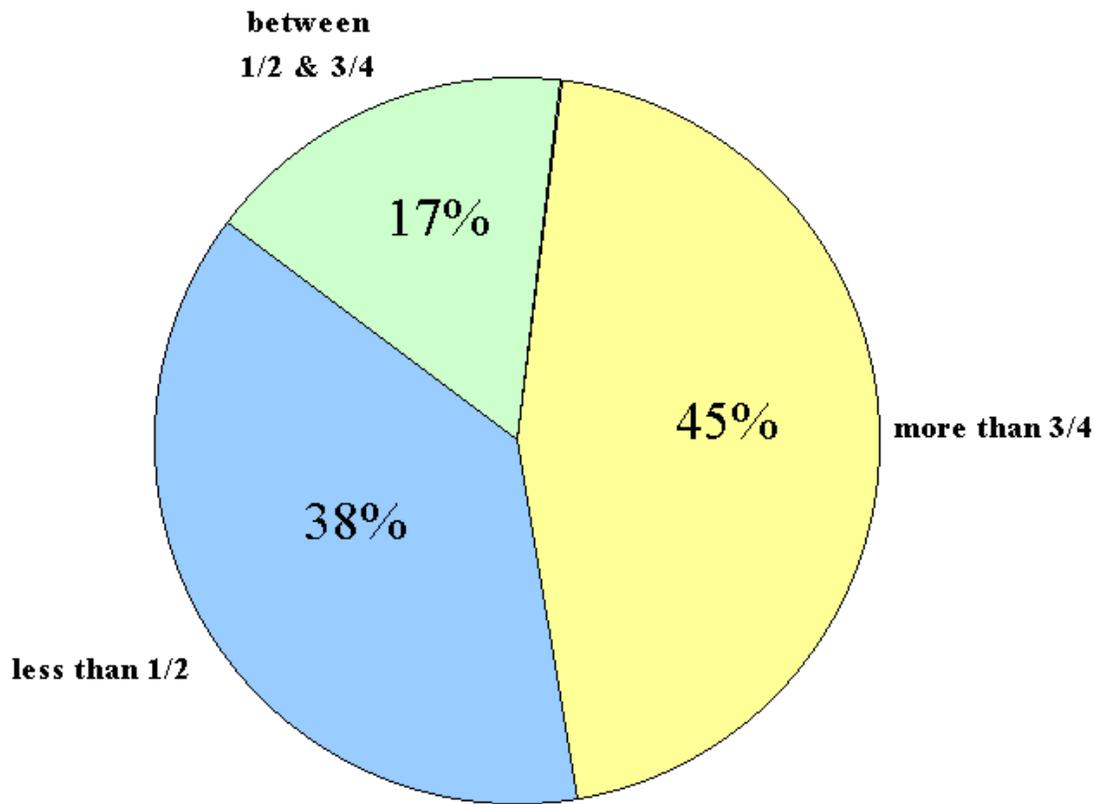


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Chart 3

Days of Drug Use before Treatment: VOA Abstainers (N=42)



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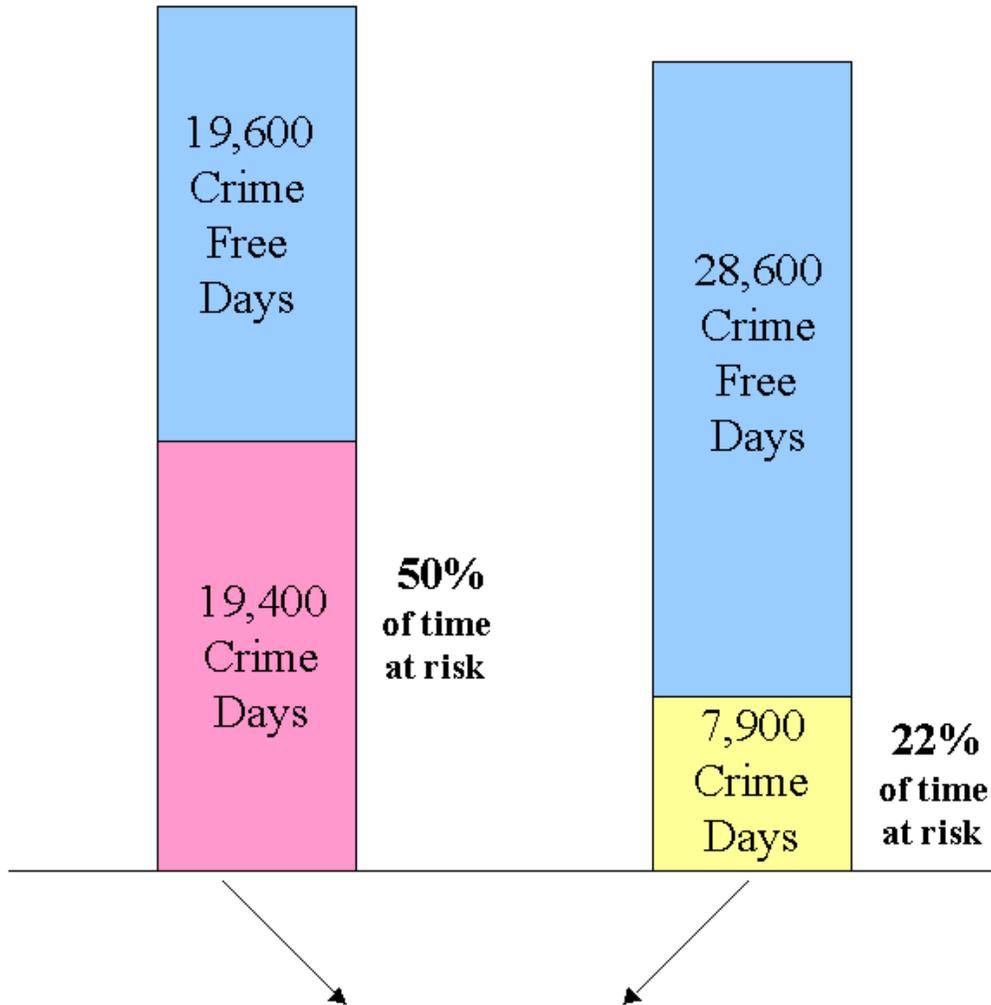
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Chart 4

Crime Days: VOA Clients

Before Treatment

After Treatment



Reduction of 11,500 Crime Days

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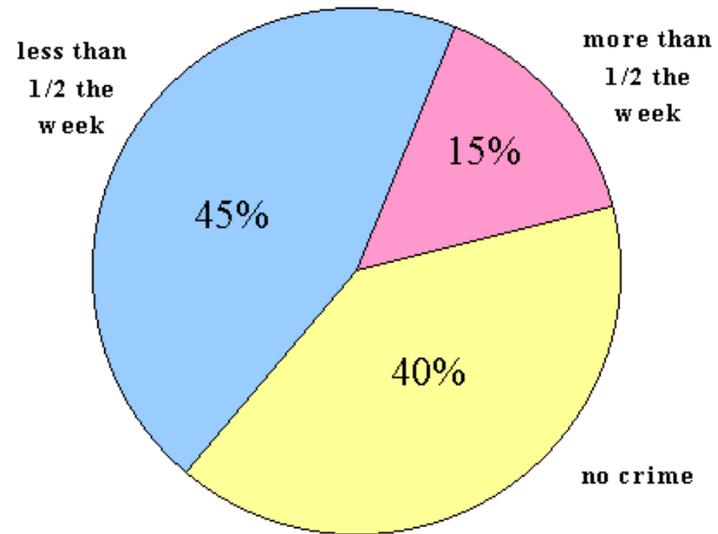
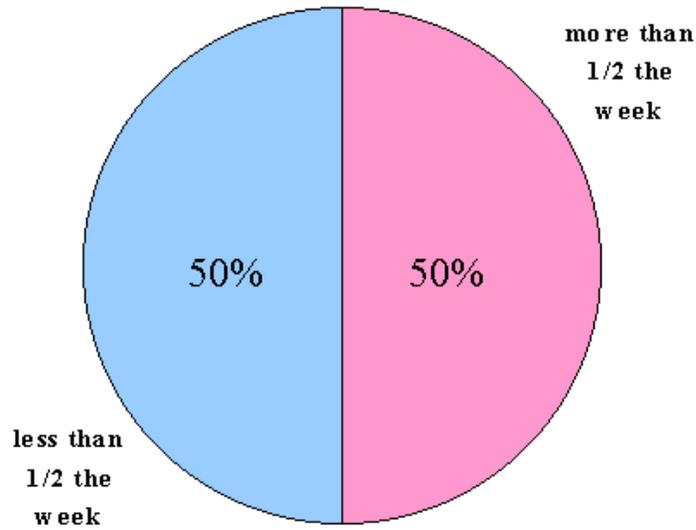
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Chart 5

Amount of Crime: VOA Clients

Before Treatment

After Treatment

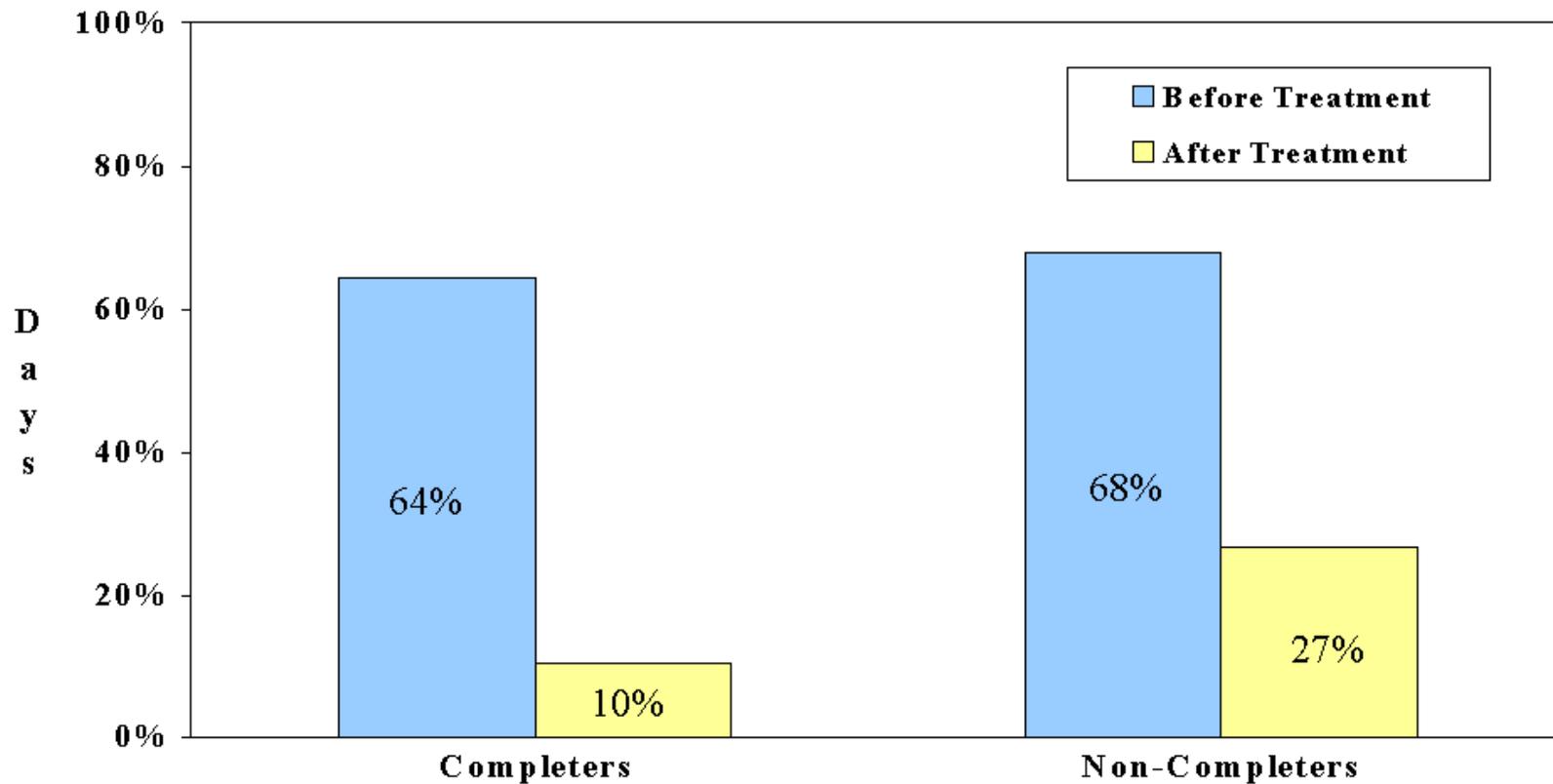


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Chart 6

Percent of Days that Drugs Were Used: VOA Completers and Non-Completers

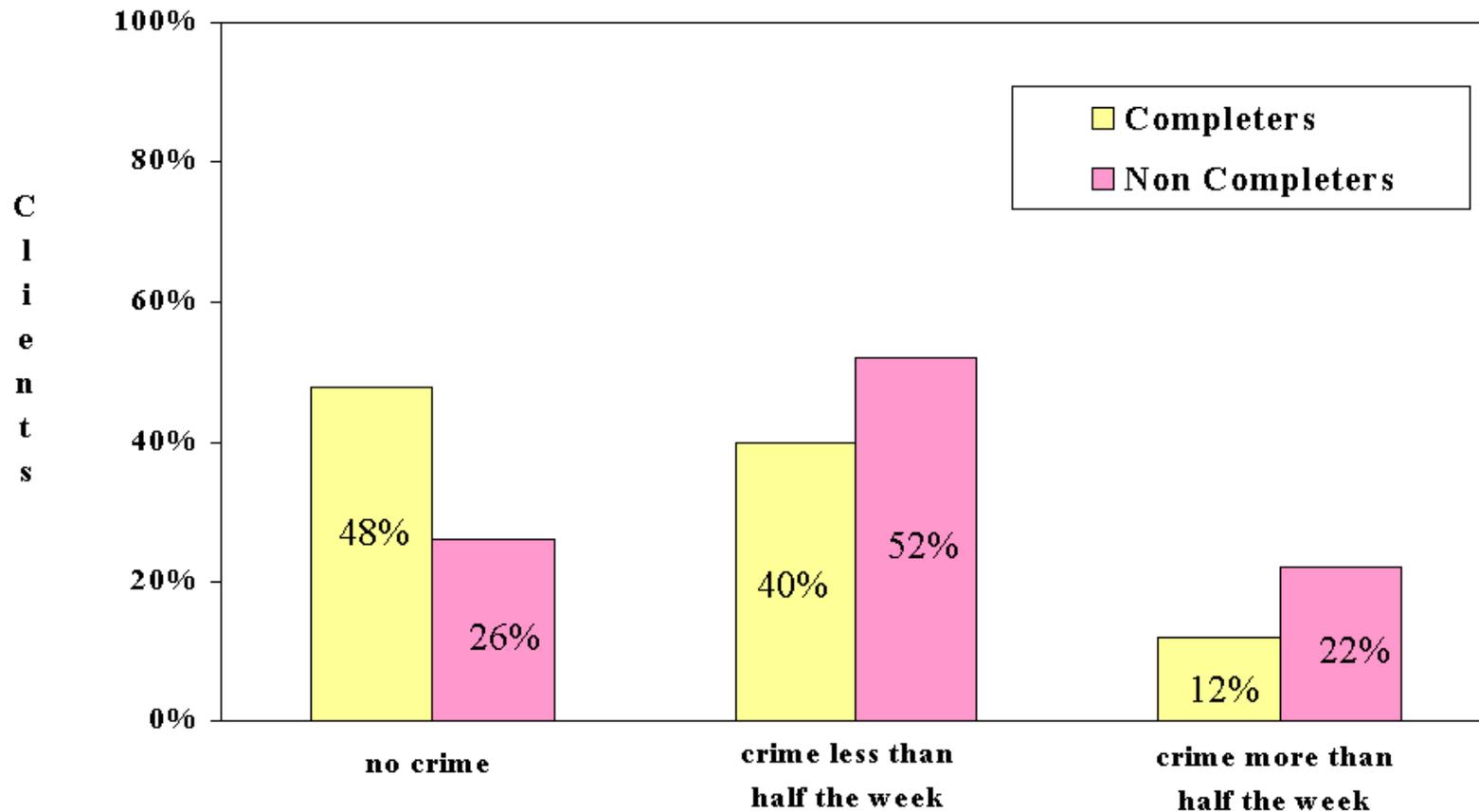


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Chart 7

Comparison of Criminal Activity: VOA Completers and Non-Completers

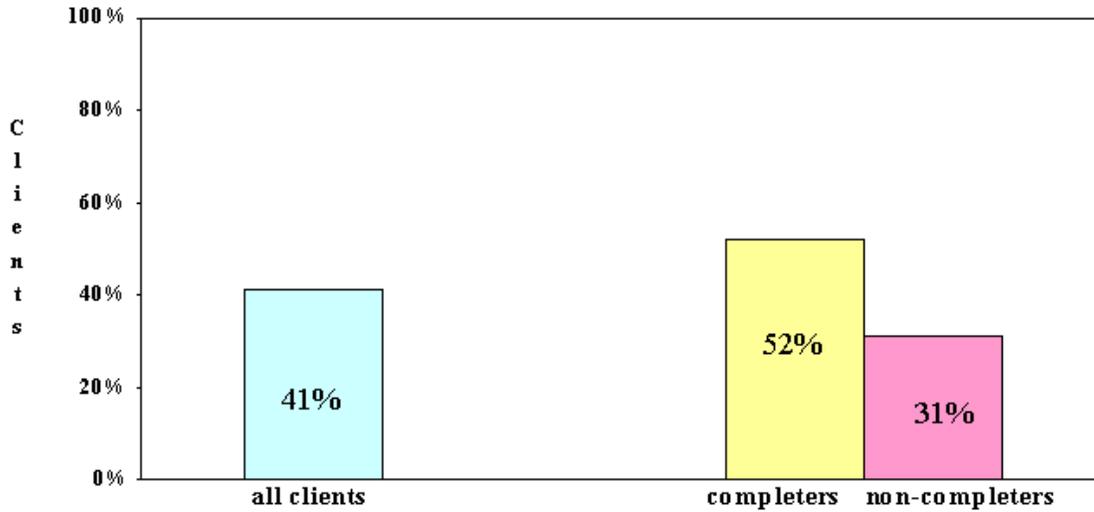


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Chart 8
**Clients Who Said VOA Helped Them
A LOT to Reduce Their...**

Drug Use



Criminal Activity

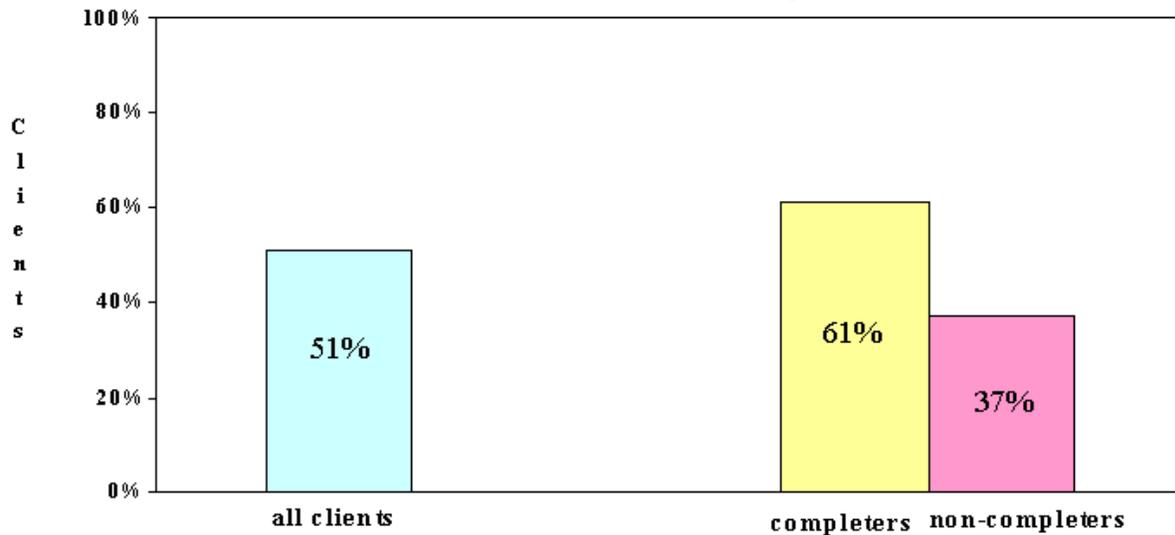
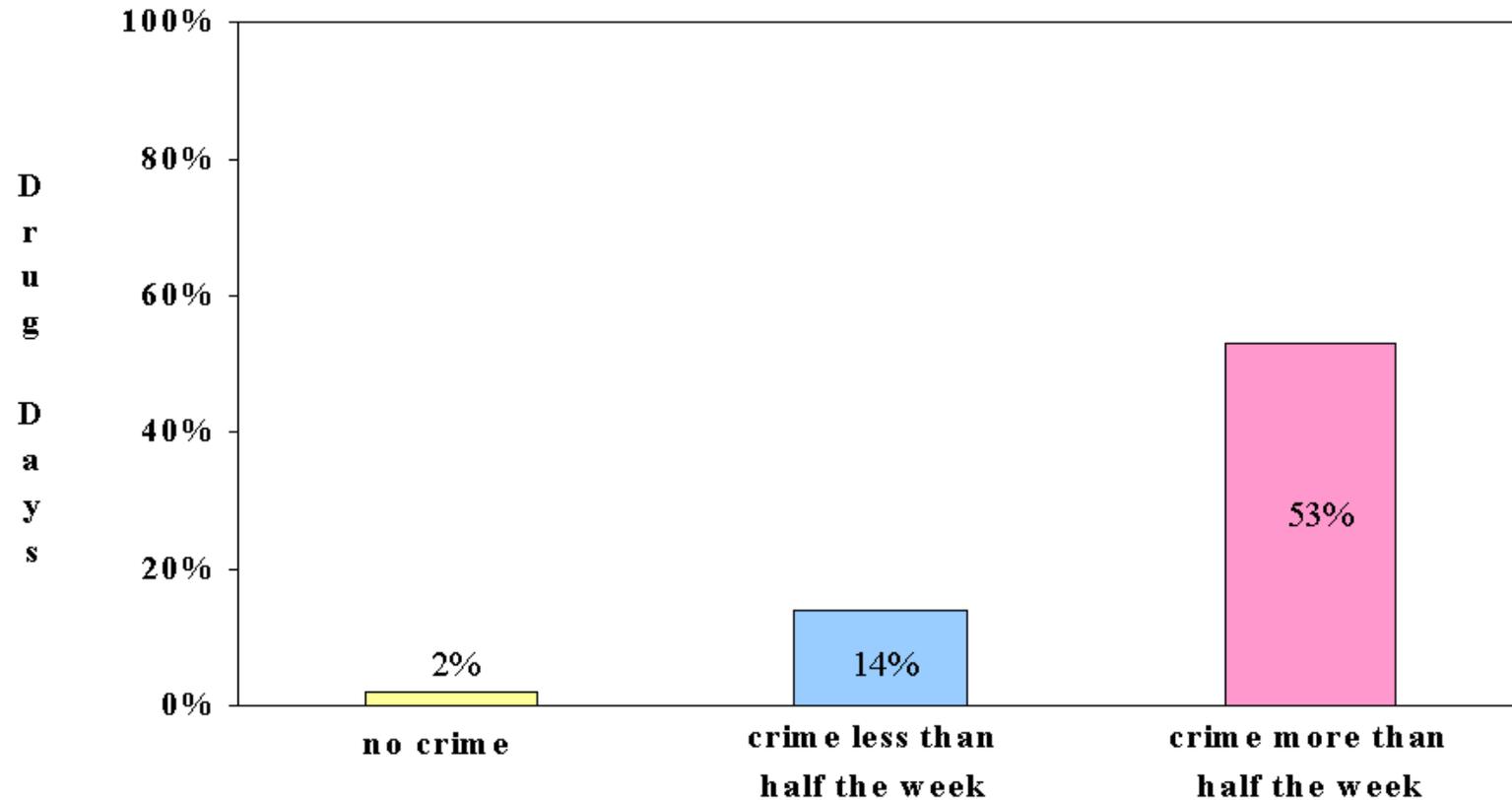


Chart 9

The Drug-Crime Connection: VOA Clients

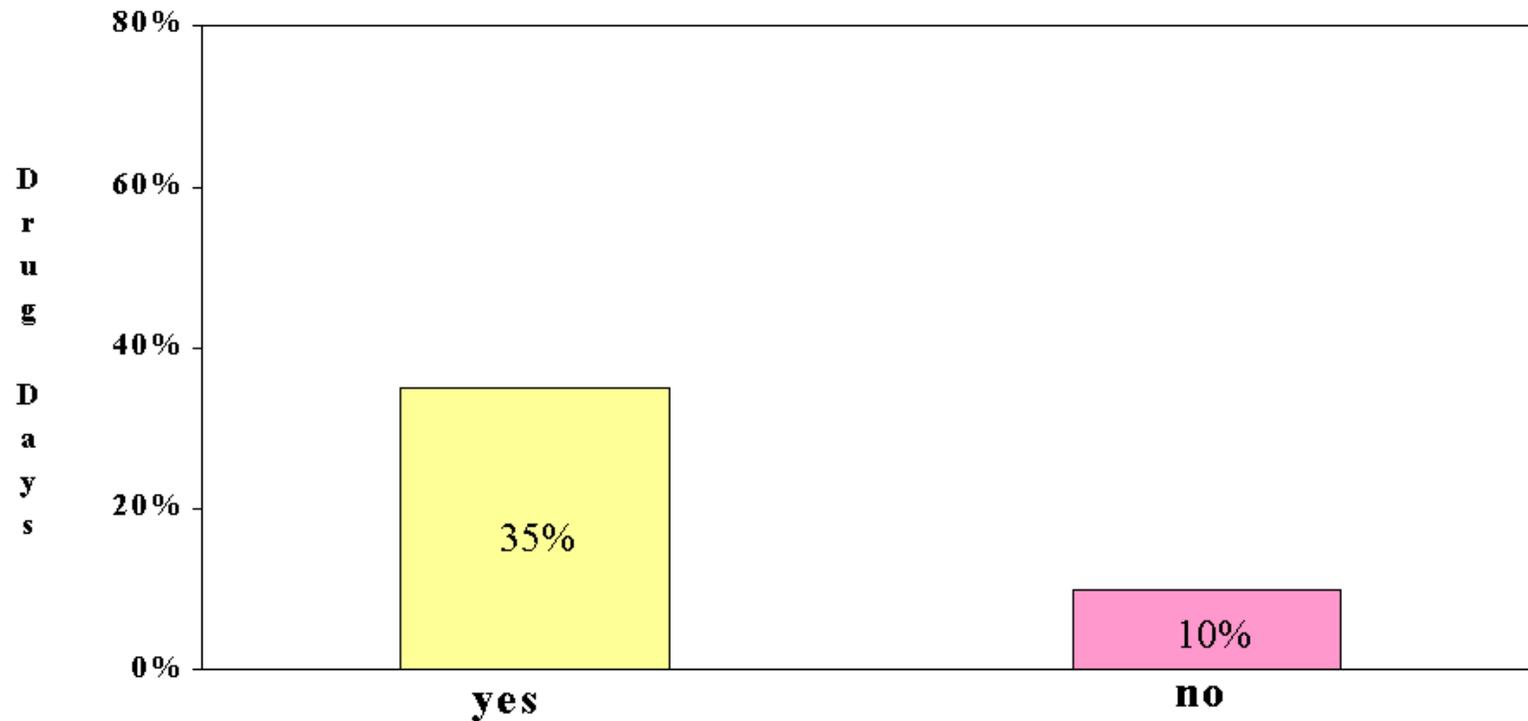


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Chart 10

Committing Crimes to Support Drug Use BY Amount of Drug Use among VOA Clients



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