

Lesson learned from 14-year intensive technical assistance for psycho-social counselling services to substance use offenders under Thailand's Court of Justice

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Introduction

In 2002, Thailand's Narcotic Act reclassified people who use drugs as "patients" rather than "criminals". Still, drugs consumption and possession remained illegal causing the country's prison population rise to the sixth-largest in the world, mostly related to drug use offences. In 2009, Thonburi Criminal Court initiated a program to divert persons charged with drug use offences to outpatient psychosocial counselling as an alternative to incarceration.

Results

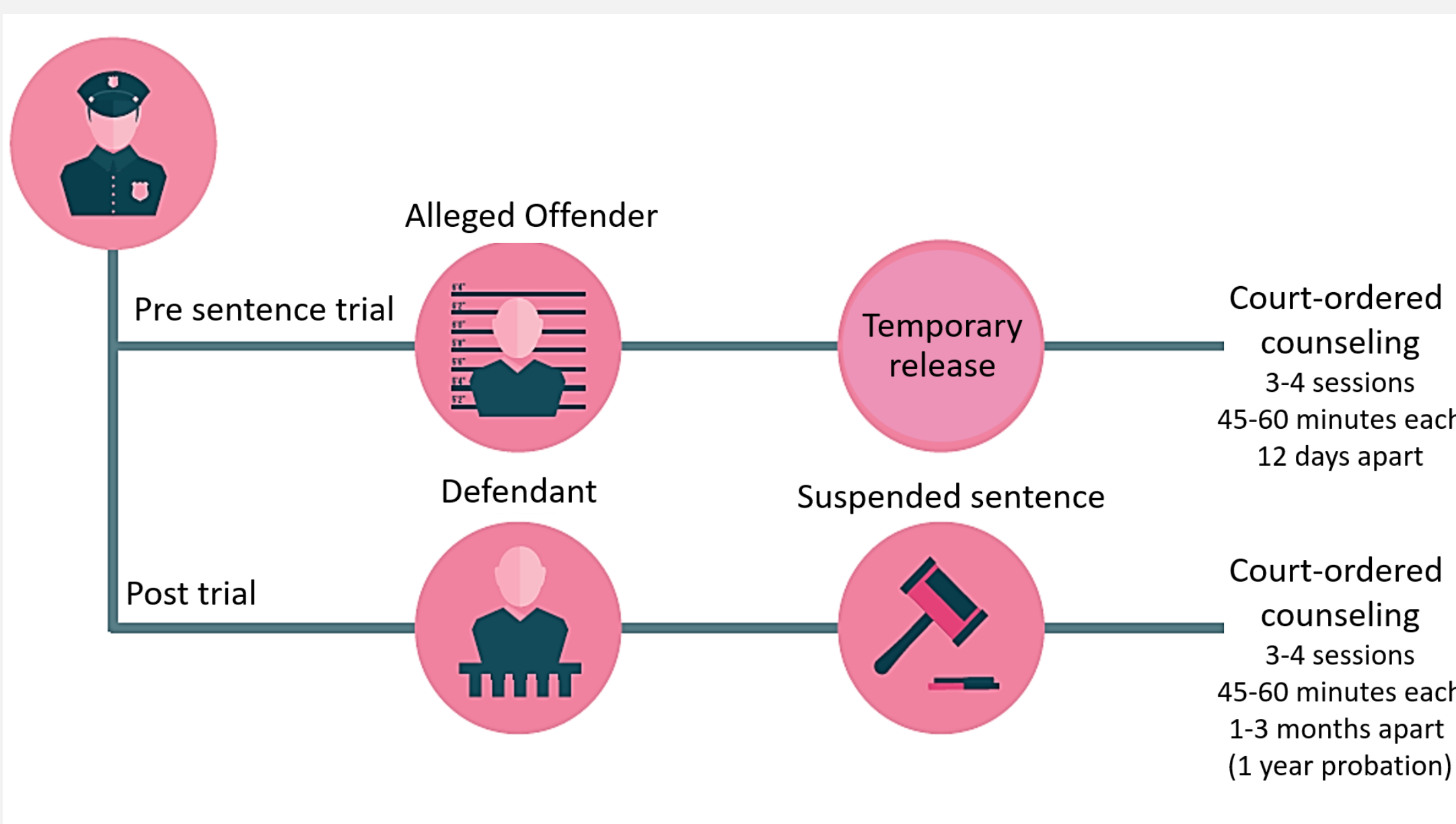
In 2023 the psychosocial counseling had been scaled up to 165 courts nationwide, covering juvenile, adult, and district courts. Crude statistics for 36,781 clients during October 2022 – June 2023 in 2023 showed 1% area-based recidivism rate. UNODC and UNAIDS endorsed the program as voluntary CBTx, harm reduction, complementary health, and social support services.



Scan to ITTC Network Resources and learn more about this 14-year interagency collaboration for diversion sentencing option for alcohol/drug related cases including abuse, domestic violence, and other minor crimes.

Methods

Multi-agency collaborative approach has been applied through the 4 MOUs from 2012 to 2025 between the Office of the Narcotics Control Board, Office of the Judiciary, Department of Mental Health, and Thai Health Promotion Foundation.



SBIRT has been used to keep low risk offenders/defendants in the counselling. Intensive TA including training, coaching, mentoring, refreshing, case formulation and case conference have been applied along a continuum basic TA to reduce drug use and recidivism.

The psychosocial counseling in criminal court is a free of charge, one-on-one, court ordered service provided in two stages of criminal proceedings in the premises of the court staffed by psychologists, social workers and qualified volunteers trained to assess substance use severity and provide basic addiction counseling and onward healthcare referrals.



Conclusion

Key success factors are judge's knowledge of the science of addiction and psychosocial counselling intervention; trained volunteer counselors; assistance from a full-time psychologist and social worker; as well as management supports from the court administration. In summary as academic partnership, ongoing intensive relationship-based TA from in-class training to in-clinic implementation results in change of attitude towards addicts and addiction fostering a sense of empowerment and ownership.

Acknowledge

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