



Offender Management and Sentencing Analytical Services exist to improve policy making, decision taking and practice in support of the Ministry of Justice purpose and aims to provide the public and Parliament with information necessary for informed debate and to publish information for future use.

© Crown copyright 2009
Extracts from this document may be reproduced for non-commercial purposes on condition that the source is acknowledged.

First published March 2009

ISBN 978 1 84099 231 1

Contact info:
research@justice.gsi.gov.uk

The views expressed in this Research Summary are those of the authors, not necessarily those of the Ministry of Justice (nor do they reflect Government policy)

Findings from the measurement of OASys completion rates

Sarah Morton

The aim of the project was to monitor and report on the completion rates of OASys assessments performed at the start of custodial and community sentences. OASys data informs practitioners and managers in making decisions about offenders' risks and needs and is also used in management information and research. The completion rate affects the value of this information and points to improvements to practice required.

Key points

- Completion rates of the Offender Assessment System's (OASys) items/components have been measured since April 2005 for assessments completed at the start of community and custodial sentences.
- The completion rates in 2006/07 were generally good with the majority of items complete in over 85% of assessments.
- Completion rates have improved since April 2005 but should be further raised so all items are complete in 90% of assessments.
- Probation assessments had poor completion rates for sentence type and self-assessment questions. This limits profile analysis based on sentence type and information from the Self-Assessment Questionnaire (SAQ).
- Prison assessments had fewer scored OASys questions completed than probation assessments. This potentially limits the accuracy of the OASys likelihood of reconviction score.
- The relationships section had the poorest completion rate in both prison and probation assessments. Family and partner criminal records as well as experience of childhood were the most problematic.
- Managers should explore the reasons for components with poor completion quality and establish improvement plans.
- Individuals using OASys data to inform policy decisions, research or resource allocation should be aware of which OASys components are potentially less accurate because of poor completion rates.
- Monitoring of OASys completion should be continued to maintain data knowledge and identify where further improvements may be necessary.

OASys completion rates were measured in 198,994 probation and 25,240 prison assessments completed between 1 April 2005 and 31 March 2007 where the purpose was 'start of community sentence' for probation assessments or 'start of custody' for prison assessments. The analysis measured what percentage of these assessments had the following data completed: offender basic demographics; sentence type; offence type; all section links to risk; all section links to offending behaviour; all scored questions; all section scores valid; any risk of serious harm (RoSH) screening questions; all RoSH screening questions; all risks to the community; any SAQs; all SAQs; any of each type of sentence plan item (need, objective and intervention) together and separately; and supervision arrangements.¹

OASys completion rates were generally good in 2006/07 for both probation and prisons with the majority of items complete in over 85% of assessments. There were some differences in completion between the two services. Probation had more assessments where all scored OASys questions were completed and where all the section scores in the core assessment were valid. Section 6 (relationships) of the core assessment had the poorest completion for both prison and probation assessments. Family and partner criminal records and experience of childhood were most problematic.

Prison assessments had better completion rates than probation for offender demographics, Police National Computer (PNC) numbers and sentence types. Prison assessments had over twice as great a proportion of assessments with all SAQ questions completed. Probation assessments had a low percentage of assessments (28%) with all SAQ questions completed.

OASys completion rates have improved over time. Both probation and prison increased the proportion of assessments between 2005/06 and 2006/07 that met the minimum completion criteria to be included in management information.

The largest improvements in probation assessments were for primary needs, objectives and interventions recorded in sentence plans which increased by over ten percentage points (up from 81%). The percentage

1 The analysis does not provide a measure of the accuracy of the data recorded and therefore only provides a partial answer to the quality of data completion in OASys assessments. This is currently being addressed elsewhere in the review of the OASys Quality Management Plan.

of probation assessments with any SAQ questions completed improved by nine percentage points in 2006/07 (up from 42%) compared with the previous year.

The largest improvement in prison assessments was an increase of 12 percentage points for the proportion of assessments meeting minimum validity criteria² (up from 71%).

Regional variation was only evident for a few OASys components. For assessments of prisons, the West Midlands had the highest percentage meeting minimum validity criteria (90%) while the South West had the lowest percentage (71%). There was variation between the regions in the percentage of probation assessments with all SAQ questions completed. The region with the highest completion rate was the East Midlands (42%) and the lowest rate was in the North West (18%).

Implications

Whilst completion rates have improved since April 2005, further improvement to complete all components in over 90% of assessments is desirable to increase the accuracy of OASys profiling and management information. Local managers and the OASys business team should explore with individual probation areas and prisons the reasons for poor completion and establish plans to drive improvement (in particular Section 6 and sentence types).

Individuals using OASys data to inform policy decisions, research or resource allocation should be aware of sections of OASys and types of analysis that are potentially less accurate due to poorer completion rates.

Monitoring of OASys completion rates should continue to maintain data knowledge and identify where further improvements may be necessary. Where relevant this should include monitoring of individual practitioner performance to highlight any areas of difficulty.

Note: A full report of this research is included in the OASys Data Evaluation and Analysis Team: *Compendium of research and analysis on the Offender Assessment system 2006-2008*.

2 The minimum criteria are: 1) each of the scored sections (1 to 12) within the core assessment have at least four-fifths of the scored items completed; and 2) in the RoSH sections, the screening must have been completed, the decision whether to complete a full risk analysis should have been consistent with the information provided, and the four ratings of RoSH in the community must have been recorded in those cases where a full analysis was required.