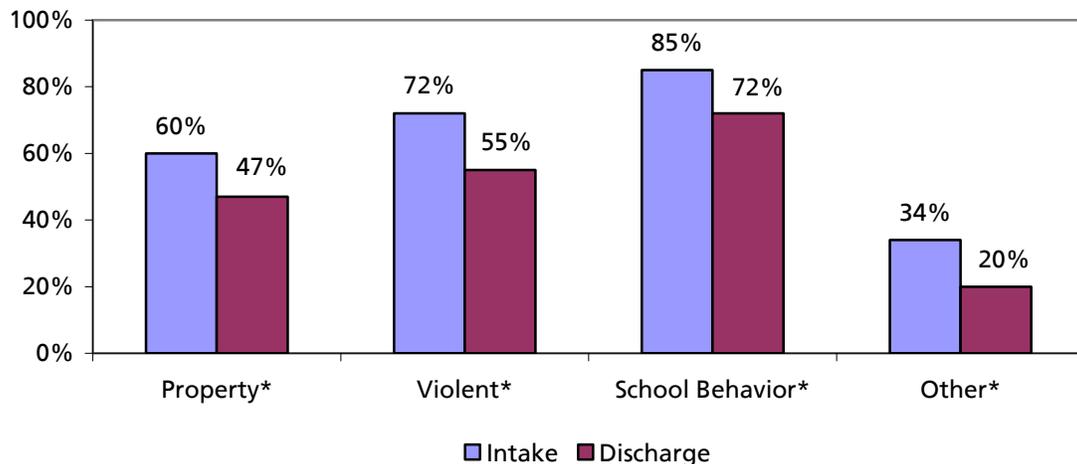


Multisystemic Therapy Helps At-Risk Youth Address Their Mental Health Needs

Addressing the mental health needs of youth at risk of, or involved in, the juvenile justice system is a complex issue requiring a multi-pronged approach. Through a Title V grant received from the California Standards Authority (CSA), the San Diego County Probation Department partnered with the San Diego Unified School District (SDUSD) to provide Multisystemic Therapy (MST) to youth demonstrating anti-social behaviors. MST is a “best practice” family-based intervention model that provides mental health treatment in environments accessible to youth and their families (e.g., home, school). A principal goal of MST is to strengthen family functioning and improve a youth’s behavior. The target population for this three-year grant was at-risk youth or first-time non-violent offenders, who attended either Monroe Clark Middle School or Alternative Learning Behavior and Attitude High School, and also had a conduct disorder diagnosis. SDUSD’s Mental Health Resource Center (MHRC) provided MST services to 155 youth between 2005 and 2008. Data gathered from standardized assessments indicated that after MST participation, positive changes were realized in the youth’s social development, family relations, and delinquency behaviors. For example, youth reported engaging in significantly fewer delinquent acts, such as property (e.g., theft) and violent (e.g., fighting) crime, displaying fewer negative school behaviors (e.g., truancy or cheating), and decreasing the commitment of other crimes (e.g., carrying weapons) (Figure 1).

Figure 1
YOUTH REPORTED DECREASED ENGAGEMENT IN DELINQUENT AND CRIMINAL ACTS AFTER MST PARTICIPATION



*Significant at $p < .05$

SOURCE: SANDAG Title V Report, 2008

Improved family relations included higher levels of trust, better communication and more openness with their parents. Although the grant has ended, Probation and SDUSD are motivated by the success of the project and will continue their partnership to offer MST to youth involved in the juvenile justice system.