



Onderzoek – Advies – Management

Halt Updated

Process evaluation study of the updated Halt programme

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SUMMARY



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Amsterdam, 19 februari 2013

Dit onderzoek is uitgevoerd door DSP-groep, in opdracht van het Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek- en Documentatiecentrum (WODC) van het ministerie van Veiligheid en Justitie.

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Summary

Halt updated

Halt programme (Halt-afdoening in Dutch)

Juveniles aged from 12 to 18, who have been apprehended by the police for, for example, vandalism, shoplifting, firework offences or truant, may be given a choice between the criminal justice system and - via a conditional *nolle prosequi* - the Halt programme. The aim of the Halt programme is to hand out an alternative punishment – *Het ALTERNatief in Dutch* – to make these juveniles aware of their behaviour, to give them the chance to right their wrongs and to make it clear to them that criminal behaviour is unacceptable. If they take part in the Halt programme, juveniles can also avoid having a criminal record. In addition to the police and the Dutch Public Prosecution Service (*OM*), special investigating officers (*BOAs*) with special powers can refer juveniles to the Halt programme.

In 2006 a study was carried out into the effects of the Halt programme. The study showed that in most cases the Halt programme did not reduce recidivism. The recidivism pattern of juveniles who were given a Halt programme was no different to that of juveniles who had been exempted from the Halt programme; the seriousness and frequency of criminal offences committed by juveniles were similar in both groups. It was only in the sub-group of 'hardly problematic' juveniles (the 'less serious' group for whom the Halt programme was originally intended) that the Halt programme had a positive (albeit small) effect on recidivism. In the case of juveniles with a 'more problematic' profile the Halt programme did not have an effect on recidivism (Ferwerda et al., 2006).

Following this evaluation the Halt programme was therefore thoroughly updated. Key elements of the novel programme are: young offenders being obliged to offer apologies and closer parental involvement. The work assignment (*werkstraf*), previously regarded by many as the trademark of Halt, is imposed only if the Halt programme involves a significant¹ number of hours or in the case of a firework offence.

The standard updated Halt programme consists of an initial meeting, a follow-up meeting and a final meeting and involves a time period from 6 hours (minimum) to 20 hours (maximum). Juveniles are in any case given offence-related or behaviour-related learning assignments and will have to apologise (in person or by letter). Parents are involved in the Halt programme, a recently developed signalling tool is used, and the juveniles are, if necessary, referred on. Alongside the standard Halt programme

Note 1 I.e. more hours than are necessary for the compulsory parts: meetings and learning assignments. The total number of hours of the programme are determined using the sentence and depend on the offence committed and the age of the juvenile.

there is also a short Halt programme. The short Halt programme lasts for between 2 hours (minimum) and 6 hours (maximum) and consists of an initial meeting, a final meeting and a learning assignment. A firework offence is a special type of short Halt programme and consists of an initial meeting and a work assignment.

Process evaluation

The updated Halt programme has been implemented by all the Halt offices since 1 January 2010. In 2009 a promise was made to the Second Chamber that the updated Halt programme would be evaluated (process evaluation) after a period of at least two years of full implementation. If the updated Halt programme is implemented as described in the programme guide, this could lead to a new effect evaluation.

DSP-groep was commissioned by the Scientific Research and Documentation Centre (WODC) of the Ministry of Security and Justice to carry out the process evaluation of the updated Halt programme between July 2012 and January 2013.

The questions to be examined were:

Is the updated Halt programme being implemented as intended? Which points are being implemented as intended and which are not? What are the causes of any problems in the implementation?

The core questions of the study are:

- Is the target population being reached?
- Are the Halt programmes being implemented in accordance with the programme guide?
- Are there regional differences with regard to the above two questions?
- What are the bottlenecks, if any, in the implementation of the updated Halt programme?
- Can it be assumed that the updated Halt implementation is more effective than the 'old' one?

The study was restricted to the standard Halt programme and the short, standardised variant. This evaluation did not cover the specific Halt programme relating to school absenteeism, offences related to (drugs or) alcohol, and local, project-based programs. However, it did cover Halt programmes relating to fireworks (a type of short, standardised Halt programme).

Various methods of research were used for the evaluation. The records of juveniles in the registration systems of Halt (AuraH) and of the Public Prosecution Service (JDS) were analysed. All the 6,146 Halt programmes were studied, that were issued to juveniles who were registered with Halt between January 2012 and July 2012 for a standard or short Halt programme, from all the 16 Halt regions. In the case of 4,691 Halt programmes data were linked to data from the Public Prosecution Service. In addition, in 14 of the 16 Halt regions a total of 70 meetings between Halt employees and juveniles were observed, follow-up meetings were held with employees (41) and interviews were held with team leaders (14).

Results of the process evaluation

Target population

The Halt target population is reached if all the criteria of the regulations relating to the Halt programme of the Dutch Public Prosecution Service (as summarised below) have been met, or if the Public Prosecutor grants permits an exception to these standard inclusion criteria(). This was the case in virtually all (99%) of the 6,146 Halt programmes initiated in the first half of 2012. In 82% of the Halt programmes the juveniles met all the inclusion criteria. They had committed a Halt-worthy offence, they admitted the offence, they were between 12 and 18 years old, and they had a limited criminal (justiciable and Halt) past. In the case of the 18% where this was not the case there was almost always a consideration by the Public Prosecutor underlying the referral to Halt. In 1% of the Halt juveniles there was an earlier conviction for a criminal offence without a referral (permission) by the Public Prosecutor. It should be noted here that the earlier effect evaluation showed that the Halt programme is not effective for juveniles with a 'problematic' profile and especially not with recidivists (Ferwerda, 2006).

Work process

With regard to the work process we have ascertained that the key-element 'offering an apology' occurs in a more varied form than set out on the basis of the guide. The element 'apology' occurs in 73% of the Halt programmes in some form (in person, writing a letter of apology, – with or without a practice beforehand; and/or writing a report of an apology already made). In 68% of the Halt programmes an apology was made in person (44%) and/or in writing (32%). It should be noted here that only if actual apologies were made to the victim, an effect could be expected (Ferwerda et al., 2006). Possible reasons for no apology of any kind being part of the Halt programme were that the process was ended earlier (6%) or that, for example, the Halt programme did not lend itself (according to the employee) to the proffering of an apology.

As regards the key-element 'parental involvement', parents were present at 92% of the Halt programme at (at least) one of the initial meetings, follow-up meetings or final meetings, which suggests a high degree of parental involvement .

The key-element 'learning assignment' also formed part of most of the Halt programmes in accordance with the guide. In 85% of the Halt programmes a learning assignment was carried out. Possible reasons for a learning assignment not being carried out (in 15%) were that the process was ended earlier (5%) or that the learning assignment did not form part of the arrangement proposal as standard (for example in the case of firework offences). Other reasons for not carrying out a learning assignment are unknown.

Almost all of the Halt programmes consist of an initial meeting (97%), a follow-up meeting (73%) and a final meeting (85%), with the exception of the short arrangements that consist of two (or, in the case of firework offences, one) meetings. The Halt employees have some freedom to deviate from the prescribed order of the meeting topics. In 41% of the meetings observed the prescribed meeting structure was adhered to.

In 94% of cases the Halt programme was successfully completed. In the other cases the arrangement was not successfully completed and the cases were transferred back to the referrer (the police or Public Prosecutor). The 6% failure can be divided up as follows: 4% of the Halt programmes ended because the juveniles did not agree with the Halt proposal and 2% ended later on in the Halt process as the juveniles did not adhere to the agreements concluded.

There are differences between regions with regard to the extent to which learning assignments and work assignments are carried out, the extent to which an apology is proffered, the extent to which the proffering of an apology is practised, and the extent to which initial meetings, follow-up meetings and final meetings are held. We are not able to draw conclusions about the reasons why regions differ greatly.

Signalling and further referrals

The signalling tool is above all used in the initial meetings in accordance with the guide. Employees use the signalling tool freely: questions asked are spread over one or more meetings and/or not all questions are covered. In a small number of cases (7%) the outcomes result in a further referral to a care facility; help or care are recommended for these juveniles. Incidentally, it is only to a limited extent that the number of further referrals indicate the personal problems of the Halt juveniles. They can be in care at the time that they enrol the Halt programme. Further referrals by Halt are then not (or are no longer) necessary. This is not recorded.

There are differences in the extent to which regions refer juveniles on and the extent to which regions record signals in the Reference Index for youth at Risk². These referrals occur above all in several regions. These are characterised, according to the team leaders involved, by a good anchoring of Halt in local networks, as a result of which the lines are short and/or the transfer can be done rapidly.

Procedure times

The procedure times to complete various parts of the Halt process, set in the guide, were achieved in 66% of cases (procedure time from referral to initial meetings), 60% of cases (procedure time from initial meeting to follow-up meeting) or 66% of cases (procedure time from final meeting to final report).

Note 2 The Reference Index for youth at Risk (VIR) is a digital system that collates risk signals from care providers about young people (up to 23 years). The reports in the referral index inform care providers more quickly about whether a child is also known to a colleague so that they can discuss the best approach.

There are regional differences in the extent to which the completion periods meet the set standard. The main differences are those in the time between referral to Halt and the initial meeting. Main causes given for the (non-)compliance with the standard are (varying between the regions): the ratio of employees to case load (including combination of local projects and preventive activities), personnel illness, location of the meetings, cancelling of meetings by parents and juveniles, administrative load in the case of damage mediation and involvement of third parties.

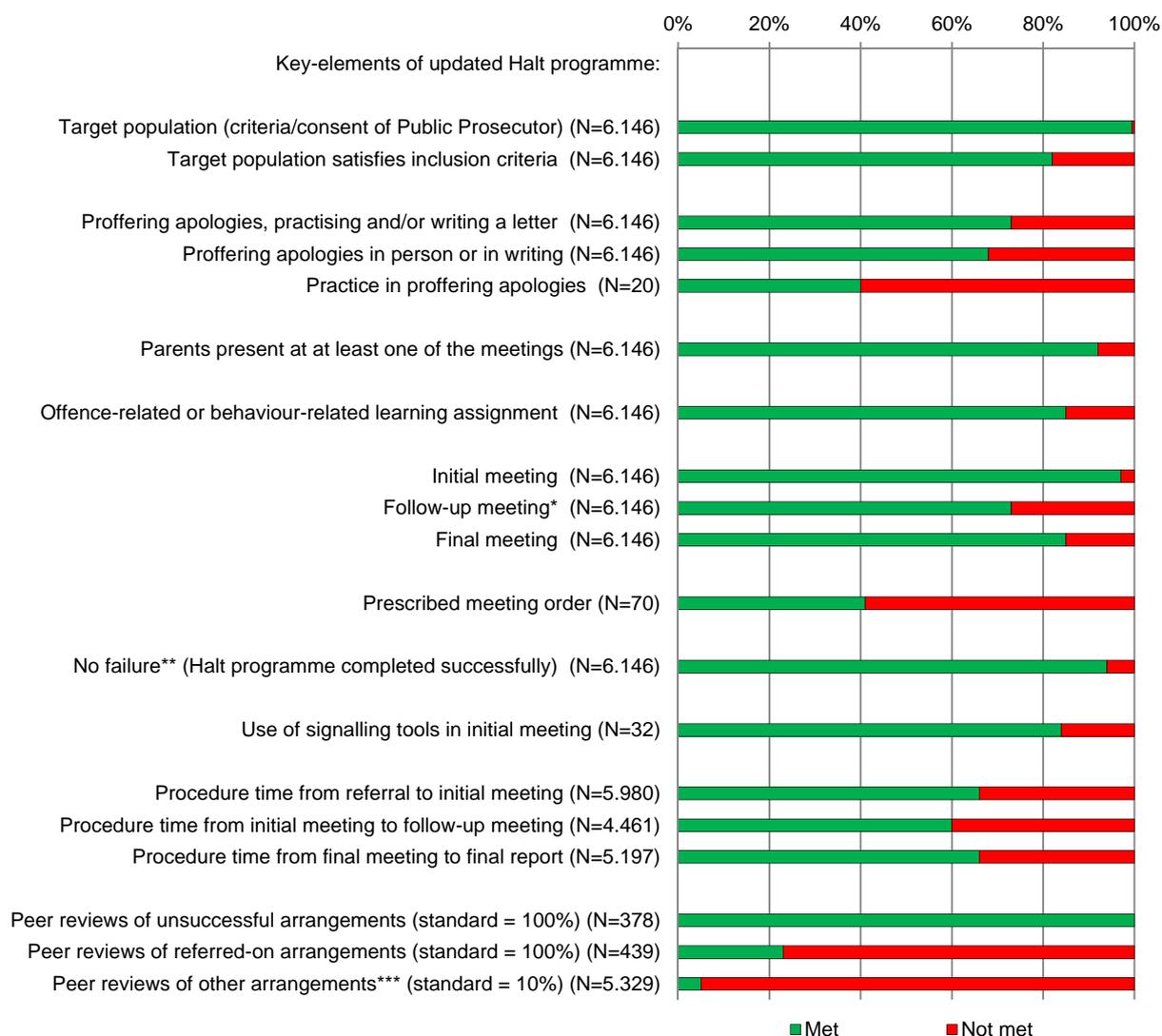
Quality assurance

The study shows that the quality of the work process is in part assured as prescribed. Peer reviews of unsuccessful cases are carried out in accordance with the guide, but this is not done in the case of referred-on and successful cases. Evaluation forms are filled in by juveniles and parents but are not discussed as standard in team meetings. Employees wish a national standard for processing the evaluation forms. Peer reviews and case-consultations are held in accordance with the guide. There are differences between the regions with regard to peer reviews of the successful cases and the extent to which the information on the evaluation form is used.

Summary: key-elements

Overall, some parts of the Halt programme are carried out in accordance with the guide and some are not. The target population is reached well, but the input of updated/new parts (in particular apologies), the speed of the chain and the peer reviews can clearly be improved. The results are summarised in figure 1.

Figure 1 Extent to which key- elements of the updated Halt programme are carried out in accordance with the programme guide (first half of 2012)



*Short Halt programmes have no follow-up meeting according to the guide. The percentages, broken down, are as follows: standard Halt programmes: 91% have a follow-up meeting; short Halt programmes: 4% have a follow-up meeting.

**In the case of failure the young person is referred back to the referrer (transferred to police or Public Prosecutor).

***The guide prescribes that 10% of the successful Halt programmes where the young person is not referred on to a care provider should undergo a peer review. The bar in the graph indicates the extent to which peer reviews are carried out in similar Halt programmes. A percentage of 10% is therefore in accordance with the guide. The percentage shown here (5%) is not.

Discussion

The question now is whether the way in which the Halt programme is implemented is sufficiently sound for the targeted effects to be achieved. There are different opinions about the extent to which deviations in the protocol are permitted. Van Ooyen et al. (2011) state that it is not realistic to expect an (almost) perfect implementation in accordance with the protocol. Durlak and Dupre (2008) adopt a standard of 60%; an intervention that is carried out within to standard is regarded as being carried out in accordance with the guide.

An intervention programme such as the Halt programme contains so-called theoretical or proven active elements as well as procedural requirements that are necessary for, for example, a good administrative settlement of a case. Our assumption is that deviations with regard to procedural requirements (for example the order of the parts of the Halt programme and the order of the parts of a meeting) have less impact on the effectiveness of the Halt programme than deviations in the (assumed or proven) active elements of the intervention - as long as no information is missing that is needed for a subsequent step, e.g. because a part has been moved.

According to the theoretical guide, the following elements can be regarded as assumed active elements: the right target population, the involvement of parents, a tailor-made approach, and making apologies or repairing damage. The effect evaluation shows in particular that the actual proffering of an apology is an effective part of the Halt programme. It has an effect on recidivism. (Effects on other results can also be measured; these are not considered here.)

Expectations regarding the effectiveness of the updated Halt

Looking at the assumed active elements (as explained further below) we conclude that in general the way in which the Halt programme is implemented is such that a positive effect can be expected, with the exception of making apologies / repairing damage. So the way in which the Halt programme is carried out is not optimum.

Virtually all the Halt juveniles (99%) belong to the target population. A total of 82% of these juveniles belong to the group that meets all the inclusion criteria of the Public Prosecution Service regulations. Earlier research has shown that it is precisely with this 'less problematic' group and in particular the group of first offenders, that a positive effect can be expected from the Halt programme (Ferwerda, 2006). In 92% of the Halt programmes the parent(s) or guardian were present at (one of) the meetings, which suggests a high degree of parental involvement. The evaluation shows that an individual approach has become an important part of the implementation. Halt employees take into account a wide range of characteristics of the Halt juveniles and the offence when drawing up the programme and selecting the education measure. For learning assignments employees can choose from a large range of tailor-made assignments. No selection tool is used for this. Making an apology (in person or in writing) – a key-element of the updated Halt programme – occurs in by no means all of the cases (68%). Sometimes understandable reasons are given for this, such as in the case of offences without a victim. In other cases the reasons are unknown. In only 7% of the Halt programmes there is compensation. Again there may be understandable reasons for this: if there is no damage, no damage can be compensated (it is not known in what cases there was actual damage). In other cases the reasons are not known.

We conclude on the basis of these findings that the way in which the Halt programme is currently implemented, the Halt programme can be expected to have a positive effect. However, it could be more effective by a better ensuring that apologies are made and damage is compensated. After all, if we look at all the Halt programmes, this active element is relatively seldom deployed. This is true in particular for compensation. We also expect the effectiveness to be increased by increasing the percentage of juveniles who meet the inclusion criteria. An effect can be expected for the 'less problematic group and in particular for the group of first offenders.

In any effect measurement, it is therefore advisable to draw a distinction between the group of juveniles who meet the inclusion criteria and the group who are referred to Halt on Public Prosecutor's permission, and between cases in which an apology was actually proffered and those in which that did not happen.

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