Addressing Severe Behavior Problems in a "Super- Max" Prison Setting

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Context

Persons convicted of felonies[1] and adjudicated to a prison sentence in Oregon are transported from the county in which the crime occurred to an intake center. From the intake center, the offender is classified by scope of crime, history of incarcerations and other factors. After classification, they are transferred to their respective institutions based on custody level (minimum, medium, and close).

Once transferred to an institution, the majority of offenders proceed to become involved in programming, educational opportunities and work. However, some do not engage in such productive activities. Some problematic behaviors are minor rule violations, such as disobedience of a direct order and disrespect to a staff. While other rule violations have more grave implications such as assault with a weapon, assaulting a staff member, drug smuggling, or possession of contraband (e.g., homemade weapons or a syringe). If a correctional staff observes an offender violating one of the rules of prohibited conduct, the offender will be issued a misconduct report and at the discretion of the Officer In Charge, possibly removed to the Disciplinary Segregation Unit (DSU).

The misconduct report is forwarded to the Hearings Section for due process and further disposition. If found in violation of the rule, the offender may be sanctioned to a fine, loss

[1]For purposes of brevity, hereafter referred to as offender.

of privileges or housed for a determinate number of days in the DSU . If the offense is of the highest category or the offender has accumulated a large number of major misconducts in a short period of time, the offender may have his custody classified maximum.

There currently is only one maximum custody housing unit (commonly referred to as a Super-Max) in the State of Oregon. This maximum custody housing unit is known as the Intensive Management Unit. The Intensive Management Unit (IMU) is a programming unit. Within the context of the IMU, programming assignments include three types of self-guided Anger Management packets, a social thinking skill class, a gang issues class, educational opportunities, and psychiatric services. Offenders classified to this maximum security unit spend 23 hours a day in their one-man cells. During that one hour out of his cell the offender is escorted by two officers. One of the officers holds a tether attached to the hand-cuffs which restrain the offender whenever he is out of his cell. A four-tier behavioral ladder (Dicks & McHenery 1985) provides the IMU with an operational framework.

Offenders enter the behavioral ladder on level two. Upon intake the offender is interviewed by his correctional counselor and assessed by the psychological associate. They are placed on level two, assigned the appropriate IMU programs, given very few privileges and are required to maintain appropriate behavior (no major rule violations) for 60 days. The behavior of the offender is reviewed every 30 days throughout his entire stay

in the IMU. After 60 days of being on level two and with appropriate behavior, the offender may be promoted to level three. At level three, they are given access to increasing amounts of privileges. These privileges are more visits with family, the opportunity for phone calls with family, increased number of personal effects, and a radio with earphones. To promote to level four, the offender is required to complete their assigned IMU program and maintain appropriate behavior for a total of 90 days. Upon completion of level three, the offender is promoted to level four, the final level. To attain level four the offender has had to complete his IMU program and maintain appropriate behavior for 150 days. The offender must maintain his behavior for an additional 30 days and is given access to the greatest number of privileges available at level four. The offender may be transported from the exercise area or the shower from his cell without the use of hand-cuffs or the escorting officers.

Unfortunately, some offenders do not engage in appropriate behavior. Offenders in the IMU who receive a major misconduct report are demoted to level one. Level one is a level with no privileges. To promote from level one the offender must sustain appropriate behavior for 30 days before they are eligible to be promoted to level two. Some offenders, however, have difficulty maintaining appropriate behavior for a sufficient duration to be considered acceptable for level two. These offenders engage in problematic behaviors at a rate of more than one occurrence per eight hour shift.

These behavior problems occur as many topographies (or kinds) of behavior.

Topographies of maladaptive behaviors observed in a maximum security housing unit vary from harassing and provocative to damaging and dangerous. Staff may be physically assaulted or assaulted with a mixture of bodily fluids thrown in their face. Staff may be subjected to hours of seemingly incessant yelling and screaming. A single offender has, with his bare hands, effectively destroyed a super secure cell. Some offenders choose to break sprinkler heads off of the fire suppression system installed in their cells. These tirades may incite other offenders into similar behaviors, thus producing a harsh environment at times.

The question is an empirical one within government agencies, who must provide measurable outcomes. What works? These offenders have engaged in such extreme behavior that the primary mission of a prison, to produce an effective safe environment, is compromised in their presence. They are transferred to a maximum security housing unit and new topographies of maladaptive behavior emerge. A literature review revealed that while there are many articles in the use of some behavior analytic approaches, few address the severe maladaptive behavior often reported in correctional settings. So how does one progress toward shaping an offender into appropriate behaviors? How does one reduce the rate of maladaptive behaviors? Can these two distinct problems be addressed at the same time?

The primary purpose of this analysis was to report the data produced as a result of systematic contingency management through written "behavior plans" of a *pilot project*

(Sidman,1960) placed in effect at Oregon State Penitentiary in July 1998.

METHOD

Officers and Offenders

Offenders selected for participation in this program were selected through a review by the interdisciplinary team (the Inmate Program Committee). The IPC consisted of a captain, lieutenant, sergeant, unit corporal, a correctional counselor, program manager from the psychiatric unit, a psychological associate, education specialist, assistant superintendent, a correctional counselor supervisor and observations from unit staff via a written tracking file. The offender also had to meet the following criteria:

a The offender was on level one in the IMU;

b The offender has more than five months to parole;

c The offender engaged in severe, challenging behavior;

d The behavior presented a substantial risk of imminent harm to the offender or others; and

e The offender had been classified to the IMU for a duration of more than six months (six months is the modal duration of a stay).

WY was a 63-year-old male incarcerated for Sodomy I and Sex Abuse I. He was adjudicated to the Oregon Department of Corrections in August 1989 with an earliest release date of July 1999. He was classified to the IMU in July 1997 for staff assault. His

Individualized Behavior Plan began on May 1998. WY was observed having thrown feces and urine, disrupted the unit at night by yelling and screaming, was noncompliant with staff directives and had assaulted a correctional staff [2].

AA was a 20-year-old male incarcerated for Kidnaping I and Robbery I. He was adjudicated to the Oregon Department of Corrections in July 1996 with an earliest release date of February 2013. He was classified to the IMU in April 1998 for staff assault. His Individualized Behavior Plan began in March 1999. Subject AA had engaged in increasingly disruptive behavior to include destruction of a sprinkler in his cell causing it to flood, yelling and screaming obscenities at staff, and inciting other inmates into engaging in an escalating rate of disruptive behaviors.

CS is a 21-year-old male incarcerated for two counts of Burglary, one count Theft, and one count Arson. He was adjudicated to the Oregon Department of Corrections in September 1997 with an earliest release date of March 2000. He was classified to the IMU in June 1998 for staff assault. His Individualized Behavior Plan began in March 1999. Subject CS had engaged in disruptive behaviors including throwing feces and urine onto a staff and inmate, yelling and screaming obscenities, threatening and harassing verbalizations, and destroying a sprinkler in his cell causing it to flood.

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[2] WY stated that the disruptive behaviors were in response to fellow offenders who had kept him awake the previous day.

PR was a 23-year-old male incarcerated for Theft I, Possession of a Controlled Substance, and seven counts of Unlawful Use of a Motor vehicle. He was adjudicated to the Oregon Department of Corrections on December 1997 with an earliest release date of March 2002. He was classified to the IMU in October 1998 for staff assault. His Individualized Behavior Plan began in March 1999. Subject PR had engaged in increasingly disruptive behavior to include placing fecal matter on a piece of paper and sliding it underneath his cell door out onto the tier, yelling and screaming obscenities directed at staff, inciting other inmates into engaging in an escalating rate of disruptive behaviors, and fashioning a weapon out of toilet paper layered with baking soda fashioning a crude but very effective knife.

The correctional officers participating in the Individualized Behavior Plan were all state certified with a range of experience from one to more than twenty years. None were familiar with behavior analysis, functional analysis or contingency management procedures. Correctional officers were trained by the author to effectively implement the contingency plan through the use of written protocol (Taylor & Romancyzk, 1994).

Settings and Materials

All assessments and interventions were conducted in each offender's housing area. A paper and pen recording system was used to record data.

Response Definitions

Two different classes of responses are recorded for each subject:

1. Aggressive or disruptive behavior
2. Appropriate behavior

The topographies of the aggressive or disruptive behavior were individually defined for each participant. *Appropriate behavior* was defined as active involvement with a program, book or other material, compliance with request, or any positive social interaction.

Data Collection

Correctional officers were trained to collect data using a full-interval data recording system. Each shift recorded the occurrence or nonconcurrence of the operationally defined targeted behaviors. Because of the high level of security, more time-consuming yet empirical systems were not chosen. Also hindering a completely empirical application was the need to acquire a cohesive methodology quickly yet proficiently. With the rate of expression of the offender's repertoire of dangerous behaviors increasing dramatically and beginning to serve as antecedents to similar behaviors elicited from offenders in the same housing unit, there was not sufficient time to train a more explicit methodology. To gain reliability quickly, professional correctional terminology was used. The correctional staff had

previously been trained these terms and were reliable in the use of the terms, though due to the immediacy of need, no assessment for inter-rater reliability was performed. This methodology also served as a common language between correctional staff and offender. Disruptive behavior was defined for these plans as any inappropriate volume, harassing, threatening, or abusive language or gestures (Rule on prohibited conduct - Disrespect). Any audible hitting, kicking or slamming doors or cell fronts. The occurrence and non-occurrence of disruptive behaviors were tallied on data sheets with a brief written description in the tracking file. The offender's behavior would be described in that brief descriptive note, which served to adjunctively validate the data tally.

Design

A non-technical assessment was preformed in the case of WY. Visual interpretation of a graph produced as a result of the data allowed some guarded conclusions. A reversal was not conducted because the possible increase in maladaptive behaviors was considered unacceptable. A multiple-base line was not conducted as in cases AA, CC, and PR as escalation of targeted maladaptive behaviors began within days of each other, a prompt response was incompatible with the time necessary to develop a pure experimental design.

Training

All correctional officers attended a one-hour training on behavioral assessment and

treatment of severe behavior disorders. The training consisted primarily of a lecture and discussion by the author in each of the following areas:

a Identifying observable and objective behaviors which to monitor;

b Reinforcing stimuli for severe behavior problems;

c Behavioral assessment including objective recording of target behaviors, antecedent-behavior-consequence (A-B-C) assessment, and functional analysis.

Following the presentation, the correctional officers were encouraged to provide descriptions and observations about the problematic behaviors of the inmates. Officers were also trained an average of once per week pre-and post-session with each individual subject.

Pre-Assessment

A brief functional analysis was completed on in the case of WY. A functional analysis is a structured observation of the contingencies that are the probable reason for the maintenance or increase in the rate, duration or magnitude of the specific target behavior. The brief functional analysis is a less time consuming yet as valid and reliable as the more extensive version. Due to the immediacy of need for reduction in the rate, duration and magnitude of the targeted behaviors, formal brief functional analyses were not conducted

in the cases of AA, CS and PR. A-B-C recording indicated that in over 90% of observed trials the condition existed and could quite possibly serve as the maintaining variable. Baseline observation was conducted for over 30 days in the case of WY. Baseline conditions for AA, CS and PR were conducted for 14 days.

Treatment

The conditions for treatment are similar to those used in Bornstein, et al., 1980:

> At the completion of the baseline condition the [author] visited the inmate's cell, explained the program to him, and asked if was interested in participating in the project. Inmates were fully informed that their behavior would be monitored on a daily basis and that if improvement over baseline occurred, selected privileges and reinforcers could be earned. Amount of improvement necessary for reward was purposefully left vague so as to promote generalized improvement rather that attainment of a specific goal per se.

Case WY. The brief functional analysis for WY described two conditions as being reinforcing. During a baseline these conditions varied over the three shifts. Shift one had been responding to the targeted behaviors of WY by ignoring or not responding verbally, with eye contact or physically to WY. Shift two was responding to WY's maladaptive

behavior by providing verbal interaction contingently. Shift three had been responding to WY's inappropriate behavior by providing escape (removal from his assigned cell to a holding area) contingently. The brief functional analysis described the conditions imposed by shifts two and three as reinforcing the rate of the targeted behaviors. That is, the rate of the target behavior increased after social attention or escape[3] was contingently applied. The individualized behavior plan (Krapfl and Vargas, 1977) written for WY included these data. The behavior plan was simple, remove attention and escape as possible contingencies for maladaptive behavior.

Cases AA, CS, and PR. The offenders had engaged in behaviors of different topographies but of the same response class. A response class is a group of responses that elicit the same type of consequence. The formulation of the response class was substantiated through A-B-C recording. Inadvertently, application of social attention, tangibles (magazines) and escape from current environment were applied contingently for maladaptive behavior. The consequences were reinforcing (increasing or maintaining the rate, duration or magnitude) these behaviors. The individualized behavior plans that were written in the cases of AA, CS and PR removed these variables contingently upon expression of the targeted behaviors. Again, social attention by correctional officers (applied during their shift) and by the author (twice per week) were applied as a

[3] Johnson 1977, described social reinforcers as "verbal and non-verbal responses that people make to each other, such as smiles, frowns, compliments and scolding. Escape may be defined as seeking a different environment

contingency for appropriate behavior.

RESULTS

Case of WY (Fig 1). After implementation of the intervention the rate of maladaptive behavior decreased significantly. This process involves the careful non-reinforcement (e.g., ignoring) of problem behaviors along with careful and clear reinforcement of target behaviors whenever they occur. This specific schedule of reinforcement is known to behavior analysts as DRO or

differential *r*einforcement of *o*ther behavior (Masters, Burish, et al.,1987). In this intervention it is not a specific behavior but rather a type of behavior that is reinforced. For example, a person out shopping with his or her child who does not respond to verbal requests by the child even as they become louder and more disruptive, finally "gives-in" and purchases the requested item. The child has learned that a high rate, loud, insistent, rude verbal behavior will result in tangible reinforcement. This is not unlike the case studied in this analysis. The

procedures goal was to decrease the rate of a particular problem behavior and reinforce an alternative, desired behavior or behavior(s). Within 90 days, WY had engaged in sufficient appropriate behavior and reduced the rate of disruptive behavior to be promoted out of the IMU.

Cases AA, CS, and PR (Fig's 2-4 respectively): A-B-C data recording described the three

offenders' targeted behaviors as being in the same response class; therefore, similar yet individualized plans were developed and placed into effect. Their individual maladaptive behaviors had started within a week of one another, therefore, the plans were initiated the same day. The rapid escalation of maladaptive behaviors ethically denied a more extensive baseline period. Again, problematic behaviors were systematically ignored and adaptive responses were socially reinforced. The objective was to reduce the rate of disruptive behavior to a rate of "0" by the end of two weeks. A distinct downward trend of targeted maladaptive behaviors had developed by the end of the second week in the cases of AA, and CS. In the case of PR, the rate had decreased by the third week. Treatment is ongoing for the subjects of AA, CS, and PR, none of which remained at level two for more than the required 30 days.

DISCUSSION

Though this paper represents a very cursory review (Sidman,1960) of data produced as a result of individually designed behavior plans which sought to manage the contingencies of behaviors elicited in a "super-max" facility, the results are promising. The correctional setting in which these behaviors are elicited can make much use of the empiricism offered

though applied behavior analysis in several ways. One example is the data collection components are custom tailored to meet specific needs. The IPC has used behavior plans to describe an offender's behavior who was choosing to remain in the IMU for protective custody reasons. Some offenders "choose" to remain in the IMU where they are quite safe from other offenders (the IMU does not have the stigma that a protective custody unit such as Administrative Segregation does) by engaging in behaviors that will result in their continued placement in the IMU. The majority[4] of offenders engaging in problematic behavior, however, verbally report not being able to control the targeted behaviors. With the help of structured data collection self-defeating behaviors were assessed and an appropriate individualized plan formulated to address the issue at a point where the individuals' *wants* intersected the institutional *needs*. The data collection components used in the plans described in this paper required the entry of only one piece of datum per shift. If a targeted behavior occurred on that shift a "/" was marked. If it didn't a "0" was marked. This allows for timely, effective analysis of data which lends itself to the implementation of effective programs and does not interfere with the daily flow of events such as count procedure, feeding, self-care opportunities, and institutional appointments.

Further analysis is indicated. The results presented in this paper are far from the strict methodologies required in behavior analysis. The behavior plans investigated in this paper sought to control the following:

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[4] In all of the cases (WY, AA, CS, PR) reviewed in this analysis.

- Reduction in the rate of maladaptive behavior:
    - Destructive behaviors
    - Violent behaviors
    - Disruptive behaviors
- Increasing the rate of adaptive behaviors
    - completing the assigned program
    - pro-social interactions

While the rate of maladaptive behaviors decreased significantly after the implementation of the behavior plans the rate of acquiring adaptive responses was not measured. The next generation of behavior plans will track both responses.

Other effects worthy of further investigation:

- Correctional Staff recognizing that they are directly involved in controlling the rate, duration and magnitude of many targeted behaviors:
    - Encouraging the “floor”or unit correctional officers to be directly involved in the analysis, development and intervention of plans for

targeted behaviors, allows them to exercise professional rather than custodial behaviors.

- Generalization (the ability of a trained behavior to be maintained in different environments) (Stokes and Baer, '77)

    - Training offered to staff has been reported as being beneficial to staff after they transfer out of the IMU and begin to work in general housing.
    - In the year since the inception of the behavior plans, no Inmate who has participated in the behavior plans have returned to IMU. The rate of return to the IMU for offenders who do not engage in these problematic behaviors is 25%.

- Expansion

    - Oregon State Penitentiary has begun to expand the contingency management pilot project to other or in conjunction with other housing units:

        - Disciplinary Segregation

- Infirmary
- Special Management Unit

- Inmate Management System: A systematic approach to dealing with offenders serving a life without parole sentence or difficult to manage offenders housed in general population. These offenders may pose a risk to security, so how an institution manages these offenders including housing, work, programming, recreation is a primary need. Dealing with objective definitions and data collection is quite beneficial.

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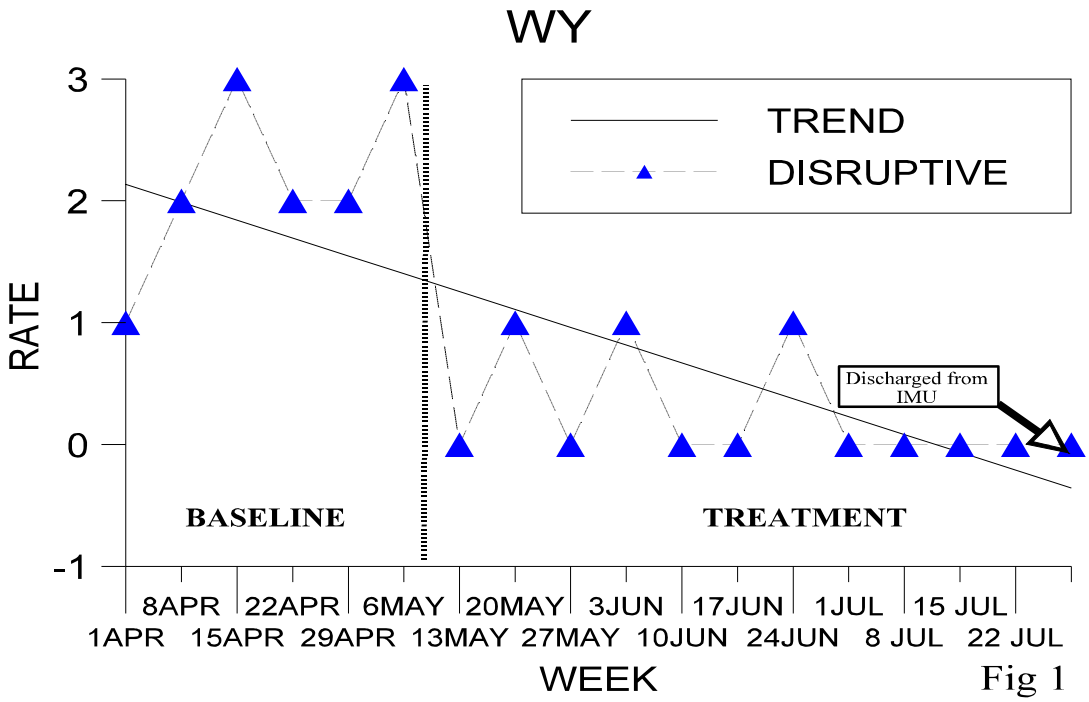
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Fig 1

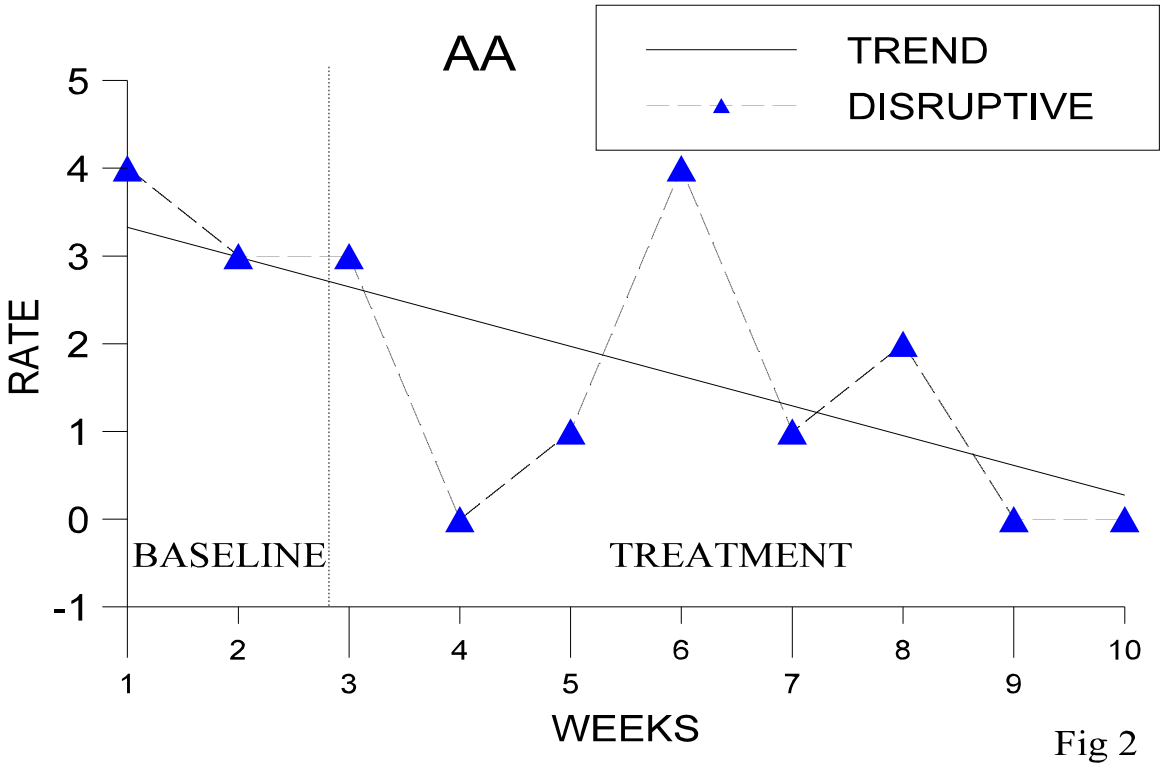
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Fig 2

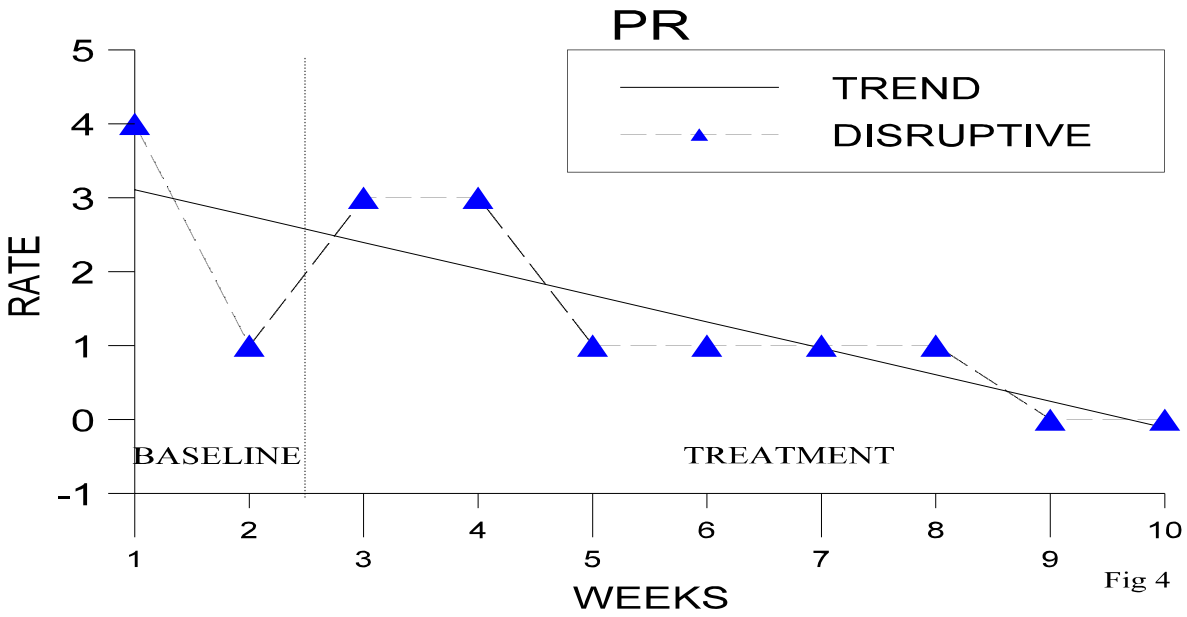
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Fig 4

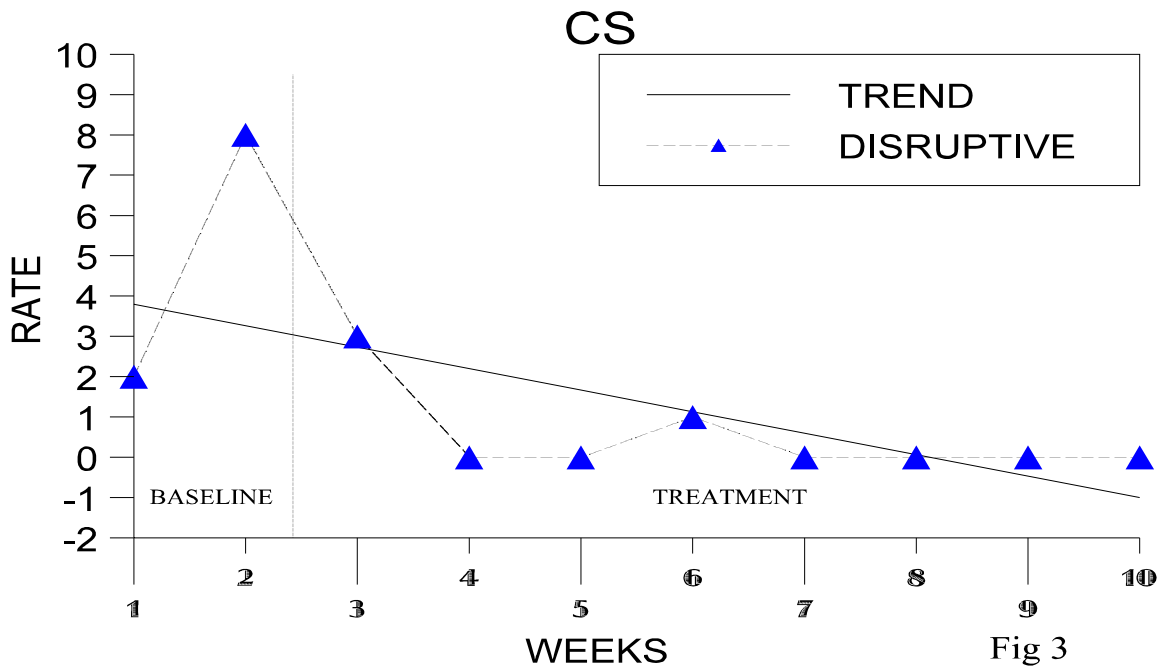
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Fig 3