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Supervising Dahmer - Then and Now

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As one of history's most infamous serial killers, Jeffrey Dahmer continues to intrigue all walks of society to this day. Netflix's "Dahmer-Monster: The Jeffrey Dahmer Story" again pushed the case into the spotlight, which included much criticism for its lack of sensitivity towards the victims and their families. In media portrayals like Netflix's production, as well as podcasts, news articles, etc., a consistent theme regarding the case has been the failure of law enforcement leading up to the discovery of Dahmer's behaviors and crimes. Often packaged into the overall "failure of law enforcement" theme or peripherally glossed over is the fact that Dahmer was under community supervision by probation and parole for the State of Wisconsin from early 1990 until his arrest in July

1991. And while the sources that even bother to discuss his community supervision only point out the failures, Dahmer was not totally neglected by Wisconsin's probation and parole office.

The details cited below (slightly edited for length and clarity) are directly taken from the civil case Weinberger v. State of Wisconsin, 906 F. Supp. 485 (W.D. Wis. 1995):

In January 1990, Donna Chester assumed the position of probation and parole agent for the State of Wisconsin. After initial agent's training, Officer Chester was placed in the Sex Offender Unit in Milwaukee. On March 9, 1990, Officer Chester was assigned the caseload of a departing agent. One of the 121 active cases was the case of Jeffrey Dahmer. Dahmer had been convicted of second degree sexual assault and of enticing a child for immoral purposes (the victim was a thirteen year-old boy). For these crimes, Dahmer had been sentenced, on May 24, 1989, to one year in the Milwaukee House of Correction (with work release privileges) and to five years of probation. Dahmer's probation required alcohol treatment and forbade contact with anyone under the age of 18. Dahmer was released from custody to supervision in March 1990.

Officer Chester arranged Dahmer's enrollment into an out-patient alcohol treatment program at the DePaul Rehabilitation Hospital, which lasted from May 22 to November 10, 1990. Dahmer met the DePaul counselor from one to three times a week and had access to a psychiatrist and psychologist. The counselor reported regularly to Officer Chester that Dahmer was fully cooperative and seemed to be making progress. Officer Chester also arranged for Dahmer to be seen in the probation officer's clinical services program, which included appointments with a psychiatrist, and in the

Milwaukee Mental Health Complex. However, her attempt to enroll Dahmer in a sex offender treatment program failed. He was rejected because his crime did not fit the typical scenario of the child molester.

Overall, Dahmer was considered a compliant client, he was employed at the Ambrosia Chocolate Company nearly the entire time Officer Chester was in contact with him. He missed or was late for only one or two appointments and his urine tests were always negative for alcohol. In October 1990, Officer Chester arranged for Dahmer to see a psychiatrist at DePaul. As usual, he complied, but told Officer Chester that he could not afford the anti-depressant medication prescribed. She then advised him concerning his money-spending habits, his lack of priorities and negative attitude.

On May 27, 1991, Officer Chester arranged an evaluation of Dahmer with a consulting psychiatrist, Dr. Crowley. The assessment revealed no serious mental disorder, no indication of dangerousness to himself or others, and no suggestion that she should spend additional effort with Dahmer. Dahmer continued to see Dr. Crowley and at his July 8 appointment with Officer Chester, Dahmer told her that he was making progress with the psychiatrist. He did report a concern that he might be fired for missing work and talked about suicide. Officer Chester counseled him regarding his employment problem, however, because he seemed fully functional, she believed she did not have grounds to seek commitment or otherwise to detain him.

On July 10, 1991, Dahmer missed his appointment with Dr. Crowley, and did not immediately notify Officer Chester.. When he called Officer Chester on July 16 to tell her that he had lost his job two days before and that he was depressed and drinking beer,

she ordered him to report to her office as soon as possible and made an appointment for him to see Dr. Crowley the same day. Dahmer called Officer Chester to tell her that he had slept through his appointment with Dr. Crowley; however, he did report to Officer Chester's office on July 18 and again talked about committing suicide. Dahmer then went to his make-up appointment with Dr. Crowley that day. Dr. Crowley's progress notes indicated that Dahmer had been feeling better before he was terminated from his job. The physician prescribed medication for anxiety and advised Dahmer to return in a week. He did not recommend that Officer Chester supervise Dahmer more closely or take any other actions.

On July 23, 1991, Officer Chester was informed that Dahmer had been arrested the day before for various homicides. In her affidavit, the probation officer states: "Up to this point in time I had no legitimate or lawful grounds under departmental policies and rules to take Dahmer into custody or to revoke his probation." After Dahmer's arrest, Officer Chester learned, for the first time, that he had violated his parole by failing to report a contact with the police on May 27, 1991 and by making an unauthorized trip to Chicago on June 30, 1991. These two violations were the basis for the revocation of Dahmer's parole. Officer Chester also stated that she "never had any grounds to take any disciplinary action against Dahmer or to suspect that home visits would have been of material benefit in his supervision."

Officer Chester did not make any home visits to Dahmer. She requested permission to forego these visitations from her supervisor and received the requisite permission.

While it is easy to "Monday morning quarterback" the supervision of Dahmer and dissect every

decision made by Officer Chester, who was notably supervising a caseload of 121, details indicate she did take steps to monitor his progress and address his mental health needs. It is noted again, as stated above, that he was rejected from a sex offender treatment program. Various mental health evaluations did not diagnose any serious issues. It is also important to consider the state of sex offender supervision and treatment at the time (late 1980s-early 1990s). I asked Kathleen Castro, MA, LMHC, (KatCastro@SeekingSolaceNYC.org), an experienced mental health professional with a demonstrated history of working in the forensic and mental health field which includes working as a therapist for mental health/sex offender treatment providers who provide contracted treatment services to both federal and state probation and parole agencies, for her insight on this issue.

"Sex offender evaluation and treatment was not as advanced as it is today which is an important factor in considering why Dahmer was found not in need of sex offender treatment at the time of his evaluation. Decades of research has afforded us the understanding that an offenders risk increases when they have a male victim. Had this research been where it is today at the time of Dahmer's evaluation, he would have likely been found in need of sex offender treatment. While the Netflix series presents Dahmer as someone in need of help, but unable to receive it, Dahmer did engage in treatment for 6 months at a substance abuse facility where he had access to an individual counselor and psychiatrist. Being a substance abuse treatment facility, it is likely that the focus of treatment was related to his excessive alcohol use and substance abuse. If Dahmer proved his sobriety through urine testing and met his AOD (alcohol and other drug) goals, he would have been considered compliant and successful in treatment. This would have redirected from actual issues taking place, such as his deviant

arousal patterns and his offense cycle which would have provided insight into the potential for his sexually offending behavior to progress. Unfortunately his sexually deviant behavior not only progressed, but it led to years of him victimizing individuals and changing the lives of their families forever. Therapy, albeit for sexually offending behavior, substance abuse, or psychiatric treatment, can be extremely effective and helpful. One of the biggest factors is the individuals engagement with the treatment being provided, their level of honesty about issues they are facing, and their willingness to work on themselves. It appears that Dahmer did express an increased need for mental health intervention, specifically suicidal ideations, but little is known about his follow up with a provider. Did he continue to report thoughts of harm to himself? We don't know for sure, but it is possible that when addressed further, his response indicated he was no longer a threat to himself. As therapists, we rely heavily on self-report which isn't always accurate in the early stages of therapy; as trust develops, this can improve. Resistance and presenting as overly good are some of the many barriers that occur in mandated treatment, but it does not remove Dahmer's responsibility to himself and his level of engagement in treatment. If Dahmer reported to be well and it was evident by other factors in his life such as maintaining employment, it would be unethical to dismiss his self-reporting and assume that something much worse was going on. Dahmer appears to have presented well in many areas of his life, which is likely how he presented during the evaluations he was referred to and in his 6 months of treatment. We do not know this for sure, but the information we are privy to points to this more so than it does to someone who was dedicated to treatment and making changes in his life."

In regards to Dahmer's community supervision, one of the most concerning decisions was the request to

suspend home visits. Home contacts and walk throughs of Dahmer's residence may have uncovered evidence of Dahmer's behaviors and crimes. But this decision is not unprecedented as during the COVID-19 pandemic, many community supervision agencies suspended home contacts and/or precluded officers from entering the home of a person under supervision (PUS).

What if Dahmer were being supervised today? Information and tools relating to sex offender supervision and treatment are readily available to officers and proven effective. This includes the regular use of polygraph examinations during sex offender treatment. More than likely, Dahmer's crime that resulted in supervision, and his non-compliant/criminal behavior, would have had a significant technology component. As an officer, I previously supervised a sex offender case which included special conditions for computer/Internet monitoring and restrictions. There were parallels between that case and Dahmer. On the surface, the PUS presented as very compliant; employed, attending treatment, etc. But non-compliant behavior was discovered following a deceptive polygraph examination, follow-up home contact, seizure of digital storage (USB drives) which were examined and evidence was uncovered of the possession and use of an unauthorized Internet-capable device. The unauthorized device was recovered during a subsequent search of the residence. On the drives and unauthorized device, sexual images were discovered of various individuals in the PUS's residence, one who was suspected of being a minor. Thankfully, that case did not reach the heinous levels of Dahmer's crimes, but showed the importance of supervision and treatment tools, especially computer/Internet monitoring and digital forensics, as well as continued diligence even at the appearance of compliance.

IPPC Technologies' computer & Internet monitoring solutions, which include robust artificial intelligence tools, and services such as Spotlight and Express Scan, will assist officers throughout the supervision process. IPPC Technologies continues to strive towards predictive and proactive solutions so officers can intervene early and address areas of concern. For more information on IPPC's services such as Spotlight, please call IPPC at (888)-WEB-IPPC or contact me directly at bkelly@ippctech.net or by calling (516)341-4201.

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