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RESEARCH UPDATE

REPORTS ON RECENT DRUG COURT RESEARCH

**Compiled By Michelle Shaw and
Dr. Kenneth Robinson**

This issue of the NDCI Review synthesizes reports on five new studies in the field of drug court research: recidivism and Utah's Juvenile Drug Court; a baseline evaluation of the Delaware Drug Court; an evaluation of treatment-based drug courts in Florida's First Judicial Circuit; a first-year evaluation of the Monterey County, California Drug Court; and an evaluation of the Riverside County, California Drug Court.

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ARTICLE SUMMARIES

RECIDIVISM AND THE UTAH JUVENILE COURT

[27] Compared to a statistically similar group of non-Juvenile Drug Court youths, the participants had significantly lower recidivism rates based on a one-year post-service follow-up.

DELAWARE DRUG COURT EVALUATION

[28] Delaware's urban and the rural drug courts are perceived as well defined, well implemented, and effective. The urban court is having a positive post-program impact on criminal recidivism; the more recently implemented rural court is still too new to generate conclusive results.

FLORIDA'S FIRST JUDICIAL CIRCUIT DRUG COURT EVALUATION

[29] This 30-month follow-up study showed that a comparison group of non-drug court participants are twice as likely to be rearrested as graduates of these Florida drug courts.

MONTEREY COUNTY FIRST-YEAR DRUG COURT EVALUATION

[30] The challenges to this court include engaging and retaining offenders. Still, its graduates have considerably lower rearrest rates than a comparison group, and the cost savings associated with this court are substantial.

RIVERSIDE COUNTY DRUG COURT EVALUATION

[31] Participants in the Recovery Opportunity Center, a California day treatment program, showed significantly greater reductions in arrest rates when compared to nonparticipants.

UTAH'S JUVENILE DRUG COURT AND RECIDIVISM

By Edward I. Byrnes, M.S.W. and Bruce V. Parsons, Ph.D.

This study examines recidivism for alcohol and drug arrests and other crimes for participants in Utah's Juvenile Drug Court (JDC) for a one-year period following program discharge. The study is part of a three-year JDC evaluation effort being conducted by the University of Utah Social Research Institute. It is funded through a BJA Byrne Evaluation Partnership Grant.

DESCRIPTION/METHODOLOGY

[27] This study compares recidivism rates for the 74 JDC participants with those of a comparison group of juvenile offenders who were not JDC participants. Of the 74 JDC participants, 73 had successfully completed the program, and all were involved with the program between October 1995 and April 1997. The participants ranged in age from 12 to 18, with an average age of 15. Nearly three-fourths (74 percent) were white; 9 percent were Latino, 3 percent Native American, 2 percent African-American, and 2 percent Asian/Pacific Islander. Most (71 percent) were male, and according to their Substance Abuse Subtle Screening Inventory (SASSI) profiles, 25 percent were chemically dependent. The average number of alcohol or drug charges prior to entering the program was 1.4, within a range of from 1 to 4; only 5 percent had felony drug charges.

JDC is in Salt Lake City; the youths in the comparison group were from the Ogden, Utah area, which has demographic and social characteristics similar to Salt Lake City. The evalua-

tors identified 243 youths who were similar to the JDC youths in terms of age, ethnicity, and other personal characteristics, and who were referred to juvenile court in the same time frame as the JDC group's involvement with the program. From among these 243 youths, the evaluators randomly selected 74 for the comparison group.

OUTCOMES AND FINDINGS

Both groups showed decreases in their average numbers of criminal and alcohol and drug offenses, but the JDC group's reduction was of significantly greater magnitude. The JDC youths had a one-year general criminal charge recidivism rate of 29 percent, and an alcohol and drug offense recidivism rate of 16 percent. The average number of general criminal charges for the JDC group was 1.8 in the year prior to participation and 0.7 in the year after termination. For the comparison group the average was 1.1 general criminal charge in their one-year pre-service comparison period and 0.5 during the one-year post-service comparison period. As for alcohol and drug offenses, the average number of alcohol and drug offenses in the year prior to participation and the year following participation were 1.4 and 0.2, respectively, for the JDC group. For the comparison group, the numbers were 1.1 in their one-year pre-service comparison period and 0.1 in their one-year post-service comparison period.

THE DELAWARE DRUG COURT:

A BASELINE EVALUATION

BY STEPHEN A. WILLHITE AND JOHN P. O'CONNELL

This two-part evaluation was the first effort to study the Delaware Drug Courts. Part I of the evaluation focused on the qualitative aspects of court implementation. Part II explored offender characteristics and outcomes. "The Delaware

Drug Court: A Baseline Evaluation” was prepared by the Statistical Analysis Center, State of Delaware, and Anova Associates. It was funded by the Administrative Office of the Delaware Superior Court.

DESCRIPTION/METHODOLOGY

[28] The evaluation had two components. One was a process component, designed as a series of comprehensive interviews with 33 individuals intimately involved in program design and implementation. Process evaluation interviews were conducted with various drug court “actors,” including, but not limited to, Delaware Superior Court judges, judicial administration, the offices of the Delaware Attorney General and the Public Defender, the private defense bar, the Department of Corrections, addiction intervention private service providers, and Treatment Access Services Center staff.

The second component was empirical in design. Its purpose was to determine if there was support for the perceived effectiveness of the overall program in reducing future drug use and criminal behavior. It combined and utilized the substantial databases available from the Delaware Superior Court, the Treatment Access Services Center, and the Delaware Criminal Justice Information System to present a view of participating offenders in the context of offender characteristics, treatment outcomes, and criminal behavior.

A pilot study group of 100 randomly selected offenders was defined for each of three offender groups: 1) Track I offenders (violators of the conditions of previously imposed probation) within the urban New Castle County implementation; 2) Track II offenders (diversion) within the urban New Castle County program; and 3) Track I and II offenders across the rural Kent and Sussex County programs. For comparison purposes, measures of criminal activity were observed during 1) a defined pre-Drug Court admission period; 2) the period of Drug Court participation; and 3) a follow-up post-participation period.

OUTCOMES AND FINDINGS

Virtually all active participants viewed the Delaware Drug Court program as well designed, well implemented, and effective in reaching desired outcomes. Beyond the expected startup difficulties inherent in complex, cross-agency implementations, they expressed no substantial concerns regarding current or future programmatic viability. Benefits were perceived as accruing to each of the program components, to the offenders involved, and to society in general.

Data reliability and validity issues precluded a definitive program assessment; nevertheless, patterns within the data tended to support an interpretation that the drug court program had a positive impact on the reduction of criminal behavior as it relates to substance abuse. This was most clearly demonstrated in the urban New Castle Track I. Track I participants who completed their programs had less criminal involvement than their terminated counterparts both during and following program participation. Additionally, the level of criminal involvement (crime seriousness) was substantially lower for program graduates than for those who were unsuccessful in drug court program treatment.

The data were not as robust for the Track II urban offenders, but patterns suggested a strong positive relationship between successful program completion and diminished post-program criminal involvement. Program graduates exhibited a 19 percent rearrest rate; those who were terminated had a 55 percent rearrest rate. The severity of crimes at post-program rearrest was also lower for program graduates than for those who did not complete their programs.

The analysis of the rural (Kent and Sussex Counties) offender group was inconclusive because the court had only recently been implemented and the post-program period was therefore insufficient.

SUMMARY OF EVALUATION OF TREATMENT-BASED DRUG COURTS IN FLORIDA'S FIRST JUDICIAL CIRCUIT

By Roger H. Peters, Ph.D. and Mary R. Murrin, M.A.

This report summarizes an evaluation of outcomes for two treatment-based drug court programs in Escambia and Okaloosa Counties in Florida's First Judicial Circuit, in which the outcomes for program graduates were contrasted with those of both non-graduates and comparison groups of individuals who did not participate in a drug court program. Implications for clinical practice and needs for additional drug court outcome research are discussed.¹⁰

Funding for the study came from a Justice Institute Grant to the Florida Office of the State Courts Administrator.

DESCRIPTION/METHODOLOGY

[29] The evaluators reviewed outcomes during a 30-month follow-up period for Escambia and Okaloosa drug court program participants. The individuals included in the study either graduated or were discharged from one of the two programs between June 1994 and June 1996.

The study contrasted the outcomes for drug court with outcomes for non-graduates and comparison groups of offenders who were placed on probation supervision during the same period, and who did not receive drug court services. Separate comparison groups were selected for each program, and were individually matched to the drug court groups according to demographic and criminal history characteristics.

¹⁰ For a detailed examination of the portion of this study focusing on predictors of retention and arrest in Escambia County, see "Predictors of Retention and Arrest in Drug Courts" in this issue of the *NDCI Review*.

OUTCOMES AND FINDINGS

Using state and national criminal justice databases to collect data, the evaluators reviewed outcome measures that included frequency, rates, and types of follow-up arrests. They also examined rates of graduation from the drug court programs and rates of substance abuse detected among drug court participants.

*The study found that drug court graduates from both programs were significantly less likely to be arrested and had fewer arrests during the 30-month follow-up period than either the non-graduate group or the comparison group of matched probationers. **During the follow-up, graduates were arrested about half as frequently as their matched comparisons.** For both the Escambia and the Okaloosa drug courts, arrest rates during the 30-month follow-up period declined in direct relationship to the duration of drug court involvement. Drug court graduates also had lower rates of substance abuse than comparable groups of treated offenders.*

MONTEREY COUNTY, CALIFORNIA DRUG COURT FIRST YEAR EVALUATION REPORT SUMMARY

By Jan Roehl, Ph.D.

This comprehensive evaluation describes the policies and procedures of the Monterey program; presents information on the characteristics and progress of participants in the Drug Court's 18 months of operation (1995-1996); and compares the outcomes of drug court participants to a similar group of offenders adjudicated prior to the creation of the drug court. The evaluation was conducted by the Justice Research Center, with funding from the State Justice Institute.

DESCRIPTION/METHODOLOGY

[30] State and local criminal justice records were used to compare the criminal behavior of drug court graduates, par-

participants dismissed prior to graduation, and a randomly selected comparison group of nonviolent, drug-involved offenders. Recidivism was assessed by the number of arrests and convictions for drug-related, violent, and nonviolent offenses during the 12 months after graduation, termination, or adjudication.

The Monterey Drug Court is a 12-month program of treatment, 12-step meetings, and other recovery steps, with frequent urinalysis testing, staff monitoring, and close judicial supervision. Of the participants, 45 percent are Hispanic, 39 percent are white, and 11 percent are African-American. Most are unemployed and have a high school education, and 25 percent were homeless when arrested. Cocaine and heroin are the primary drugs of choice, followed by marijuana and alcohol; methamphetamine use is increasing. Although it is now a post-plea program, the Monterey court was a pre-plea program at the time of the evaluation.

OUTCOMES AND FINDINGS

Obstacles for the Court. The major obstacles encountered by the court were substantial turnover in the Treatment Coordinator's position, which limited client services at times, and difficulty locating residential treatment.

Engagement and Retention. Engaging more referrals in the drug court program and retaining more of those who start the program are the court's major challenges. About 25 percent of all offenders referred to the court completed the program successfully and graduated. Another 25 percent entered the program but dropped out or were dismissed due to continuing drug use or failure to comply with drug court requirements; on average, these participants spent five months in drug court and treatment programs. The remainder never officially entered drug court or treatment services.

Recidivism. A comparison of arrest/conviction rates one year after program discharge showed that graduates do substantially better than a comparison group of nonparticipating offenders arrested on similar charges. Among graduates, two

of 18 (11 percent) were arrested on misdemeanor drug charges, and one (6 percent) was arrested on felony drug charges, compared to 37 percent and 47 percent of the comparison group, respectively. The majority of the graduates reported no illicit substance abuse, and most reported positive outcomes in other areas, e.g., births of drug-free babies, families reunited, stable living situations, and full-time employment. Drug court dropouts had higher arrest rates than either the graduates or the comparison group.

Cost Benefits. Preliminary data on cost benefits (i.e., cost savings) indicate that the program pays for itself several times over, in financial benefits to the criminal justice, health, and welfare systems, human and financial savings due to reduced criminal behavior, and the increased productivity and contributions of drug court graduates. This leads to the conclusion that the drug court should continue and be expanded

RIVERSIDE COUNTY DRUG COURT EVALUATION

BY DALE K. SECHREST AND DAVID SHICHOR

In 1995 Riverside County (California) opened a drug court with a day treatment program called the Recovery Opportunity Center (ROC). Program goals included successful graduation, significant reductions in drug usage, employment, completion of a vocational training program or the GED, reductions in local and state incarceration rates, and reduced court involvement and the resultant cost savings. To determine success rates and relate them to various background and performance attributes of drug court participants, 102 cases were followed for up to 20 months from program admission.

DESCRIPTION/METHODOLOGY

[31] Graduates were compared to removals, and both groups were compared with a group of “identically-charged and institutionally-committed pre-drug court baseline population.”

The comparison group of 243 drug offenders was selected at random from a field of almost 4,000 individuals who might have been candidates for the drug court.

FINDINGS AND OUTCOMES

The program was evaluated in a number of areas. The findings include the following.

Recidivism. Of the 102 drug court admissions included in the study, 26 were still in the program at the time of the study. Out of the 76 who had either graduated or left the program without graduating, 15 (or 14.7 percent) re-offended during the evaluation period. Among the re-offenders were two of the 38 graduates (5.3 percent) and 13 of the 38 removals (34.2 percent). For the comparison group, 25.5 percent re-offended over a period of 2.5 years. Neither of the two graduates who re-offended was involved in drug crime or violent crime. Ten of the re-offending removals were involved in possession and possession for sale, with two property offenders and a probation violator.

Interestingly, the drug court admissions had twice the mean number of prior offenses as the comparison group, and the program graduates had higher rates of prior arrests for drug sales than either the removals or the comparison subjects. Still, the drug court participants showed a 20.2 percent improvement in recidivism rates over a comparison group. Drug court graduates had a 30.3 percent improvement in recidivism over the comparison group, and removals had an 8.1 percent improvement over the comparison group.

Program Completion Goals. The goal of the program was to graduate 65 percent of participants. In actuality, 62.7 percent (62 out of 102 admissions) had either graduated ($n = 38$) or were still in the program ($n = 26$) over an average follow-up period of about 18 months.

Drug Use. No positive (dirty) urine tests were recorded for 43.9 percent of all admissions during their involvement in the program. In total, 57.9 percent of graduates had no positive urine tests compared to 25 percent of the removals.

Cost Benefits. Rough calculations of potential savings to the community and the criminal justice system in relation to program costs were \$1.5 million for the 102 subjects studied. Recommendations have been made regarding program operation, drug court expansion and long-term funding, and the creation of additional drug courts in the county.

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Subject and Topic Index Notes

Subject and Topic Index

The following cumulative Subject and Topic Index is designed to provide easy access to both subject and topic references. Each reference can be located by:

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Administrative Office of the Delaware Superior Court...II1(111)

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