



Drug Court Policy Analysis

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Introduction

Drug Treatment Courts are a semi-common practice across the United States. Drug courts follow similar practices, some of which being intensive supervision, regular drug testing, drug treatment, and meetings with parole officers, attorneys, and a judge.

The main goal of drug court is to reduce recidivism of non-violent drug offenders through accountability and evidence-based practices. Various studies have found that drug treatment courts successfully reduce recidivism through the fifteen-year mark and are extremely cost effective when compared to control groups. The Baltimore City, Maryland Drug Treatment Court and Woodbury County, IA Drug Court are assessed through this analysis and serve as active examples for the success of drug courts. Drug courts are an effective evidence-based practice and should be implemented as a specialty court in areas of the nation with high rates of drug crime.

Policy

Three major studies on the implementation of drug court serve to prove its community and cost effectiveness. Baltimore City Drug Court (BDTC), Woodbury County Drug Court, and the Office of National Drug Control Policy are among various courts in action across the country. Rather than incarceration, a substance abuse related offender may be sentenced to drug court if it is provided in their city or county. Upon meeting criteria that maximizes effectiveness, drug court participants are subjected to four major components of the courts, including, intensive probation supervision, drug testing, drug treatment, and judicial monitoring. The participants are assigned to a home panel that oversees their matter from start to finish. There are various phases that a participant must advance through in order to graduate from drug court. The phases are uniquely designed to meet the needs of each participant in order to promote sobriety and all-around well being.

In the case of a failed drug test, the participant is immediately incarcerated for a period of up to seventy-two hours. The participant must complete twenty hours of community service, be actively participating in the program for a minimum of twelve months, have at least nine consecutive months of clean urine analysis samples, and be employed or enrolled in an educational program in order to graduate and be released from supervision. Without following the guidelines set forth by the courts, the client will not successfully complete the program and may be subjected to further sentencing.

Analysis

Baltimore City Drug Treatment Court

- All BDTC's participants (approximately 145 in 1997) were delivering promising results when being compared to traditional drug probation offenders.
- 50% decrease in the odds of arrest for a new offense.
- At a one year follow up, BDTC participants were far less likely to be rearrested than control group members.
- BDTC did not deter use of drugs altogether, at least 40% of participants did reoffend within the same year as leaving the program. However, these numbers pale in comparison to a control group.
- BDTC was highly successful at targeting their intended audience by reducing recidivism.
- Reduced total number of days incarcerated by 187 days compared to a control group.
- Participants scored lower in alcohol addiction severity and drug addiction severity, and higher in employment and mental health.
- BDTC saved \$2,945 per participant over a ten-year span (even if program completion was unsuccessful).
- Average annual savings of \$58,900 in comparison to the control group.

Iowa 3rd Judicial District Drug Court (Woodbury County)

- Employed additional volunteer members from substance abuse support groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous to supplement the home panel.
- At the time of the study, there were twenty-nine active participants. Eighteen out of the twenty-nine successfully completed drug court. Five participants were unsuccessful due to cited reasons such as full-time residential placement and absconding. Six participants cited administrative circumstances for the unsuccessful completion.
- Woodbury County drug court has maintained some of the lowest recidivism rates across all drug courts in the country.

Office of National Drug Control Policy

- Found that majority of drug courts operate at a local level in order to divert offenders from substance abuse and connect various aspects of the criminal justice system with the participant.
- 84% of all program participants were not rearrested within the one-year mark.
- At the two-year mark, 72% were still clean of rearrest.

Conclusion

The Baltimore City, Maryland Drug Treatment Court has proven itself to be an effective and worthwhile community investment. Their early implementation has served their community well and will continue to do so for years to come. Various other drug courts across the nation, like those of Woodbury County, Iowa have proven the same. Cost effectiveness is a major benefit to these programs as they provide two positive outcomes for the communities that they are implemented in. As noted, these practices are extremely beneficial and should be expanded upon in communities that have a demand for reduction in drug-related crimes.

Future Directions

Drug treatment courts are a community and cost-effective treatment to substance abuse. The main factor that hinders its implementation is buy-in from stakeholder parties. In order for drug court to be successful, probation officers, judges, attorneys, community representatives, and participants must be willing and able to allocate their time and funding towards it. The benefits of this program are starting to become widely understood in the criminal justice field. In the future, it can reasonably be suspected that drug courts will continue to be implemented across the states, especially in rural areas that may suffer from drug abuse offenses and have demand for a low-stakes treatment option.

Sources

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