Review: Drug Courts
Reviewer: Michael Langenbacher
Date: December 2012

Abstract: Synopsis of your Review

1. Describe the Program or Strategy.
   Drug Courts are a type of court that was pioneered in late 80’s and early 90’s to deal with the failings of the traditional courts to deal with drug dependencies and addictions. While the traditional justice system focused primarily on punishing offenders, Drug Courts focus on providing treatment for offenders, and meting out both rewards and punishments to keep participants on track within the program.

2. What types of crime is it intended to prevent or reduce?
   Drug Courts are intended to prevent, treat and reduce substance abuse, addiction and dependency, along with drug-related crimes.

3. Is the program or something similar reviewed on Blueprints for Violence Prevention (http://www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints/) or Crime Solutions (www.crimesolutions.gov)? Provide Citations.
   Several Drug Courts (including courts located in Baltimore, San Diego, the Bronx, Queens, Oregon, etc.) have been reviewed on Crime Solutions. These programs have been ranked as promising or as effective, with some variation in the effectiveness of the various programs.

4. Is there a clear theoretical foundation?
   Drug courts have a clear theoretical foundation, based on providing participants with treatments and services that have been shown to be effective in helping to treat drug addictions. The program also provides participants with a sense of structure, order and accountability.

5. Is there a direct, indirect or no clear theoretical link to crime reduction?
   Given that a little less than a fifth of state and federal criminals stated that they committed their current offenses to obtain money for drugs in 2004 (BJS Drug and Crime Facts), there is a clear theoretical link to crime reduction, as by treating drug related issues in offenders it stands that drug-related offenses would decrease.

6. Describe the logic model. Diagram it. How is it intended to reduce crime?
   Given that about a fifth of crimes are committed for drugs, drug courts hold that by dealing with the demand for drugs, by treating individuals, it is possible to reduce crime.
Those involved in drug court take part in a multiphase process aimed at treating their addiction and working to better themselves; many drug courts require that participants pursue at least a GED, and are able to either provide other services needed or get the individuals in touch with the agencies that can help them further.

7. **Does this program or strategy exist in this community? If yes, what agency is it run through? How long has it been in existence here? How is it funded?**

   The Rochester Drug Court was one of the first founded in New York State. It is funded, supported and run by a number of private and state agencies.

8. **Does it exist in other communities? If yes, where?**

   Drug Courts have been adopted in communities throughout the United States, with some 2,734 drug courts currently operating in the United States (NADCP).

9. **Does research exist on its effectiveness? Briefly summarize the conclusions. Provide Citations.**

   There have been numerous studies on the effectiveness of drug courts, many of which have found them to be surprisingly effective at treating addiction and reducing recidivism (NADCP; Marlowe, 2010). Some studies have boasted recidivism rates as low as 25% nationwide (NADCP), and crime reductions of 8 to 26% (Marlowe, 2010).

   Drug Courts are not without criticism though. While they are undeniably effective when implemented correctly, some argue that drug courts cherry-pick cases, only placing low level cases where offenders are likely to change or show improvement into drug court.

10. **Provide a review of the research (At least two studies)**

    **Suffolk County Drug Treatment Court (Michael Rempel)**

    a. **What was the research design**
Rempel sought to examine the effectiveness of drug courts at reducing reuse and reoffending (recidivism), by measuring post-program recidivism and comparing it to a comparison group that did not partake in drug court, using a quasi-experimental design.

b. **Describe the data**
Rempel used data from Suffolk county collected the year before the drug court opened as a control group, which he matched with offenses committed by those within the Suffolk drug court. The data included some 234 drug court participants, and 169 offenders who did not receive treatment.

c. **Summarize the findings**
Rempel found that within a year of being released from the criminal justice system 32% of those who did not participate in drug court reoffended, while only 23% of those who graduated drug court recidivated. Those who failed out of drug court were three times more likely to recidivate.

**Multi-site Adult Drug Court Evaluation (Michael Rempel)**

a. **What was the research design**
The Multi-site Adult Drug Court Evaluation (MADCE) used a quasi-experimental design, focusing on several outcome variables, including: further drug use, further criminal activity, amount of time incarcerated, mental health, family support and conflict, homelessness, socioeconomic status, and homelessness.

b. **Describe the data**
The study collected data on a group of 1,156 offenders who received drug court treatment to compare with a group of 625 who did not. The experimental group was mostly male (68%), white (57%), and had an average age of 33.

c. **Summarize the findings**
Findings showed that drug court participants did better than non-drug court participants on a number of outcomes, including drug use, further criminal activity and amount of time incarcerated. Drug court participants were more likely to remain enrolled in school or to complete their GED, were more likely to report themselves as feeling better and healthier, and reported fewer and less serious conflicts with their families in the 18 months following graduation.

11. How would you rate this program or strategy?

   a. Generally recognized as effective
   b. Good likelihood that it is effective
   c. Inconclusive
   d. Probably not effective
   e. Generally recognized as not effective
   f. Harmful or likely to be harmful
12. Explain your Rating

Numerous studies into Drug Courts have shown that the courts have a low recidivism rate, a high graduation rate, and are low cost compared with traditional means of punishment. In addition, the fact that Drug Courts only accept non-violent offenders means that it is a low-risk alternative to traditional punishment. As such, Drug Courts seem to be an effective alternative to traditional courts.

13. One paragraph summary of the program, the findings and your recommendation.

Drug Courts are a type of court that was pioneered in late 80’s and early 90’s to deal with the failings of the traditional courts to deal with drug dependencies and addictions. While the traditional justice system focused primarily on punishing offenders, Drug Courts have focused on providing treatment for offenders, and meting out both rewards and punishments. Numerous studies into the effectiveness of Drug Courts have found that they are an effective alternative to traditional courts, that they have a low recidivism rate, and that they are cost effective.
Work Cited

http://www.courts.state.ny.us/whatsnew/pdf/NYSAdultDrugCourtEvaluation.pdf

Logistics:
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