

**Recommendations for Improving Drug Court Programs to Help Further Reduce Recidivism
Rates for Non-Violent Drug Offenders**

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Recommendations for Improving Drug Court Programs to Help Further Reduce
Recidivism Rates for Non-Violent Drug Offenders

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Abstract

Purpose of the Study

This paper will review previous research and evaluations of drug courts as well as another effective specialty court model, the mental health court program. The purpose of this paper is to identify areas within current drug court programs that can be improved and provide recommendations to help further reduce recidivism rates among drug offenders. Drug court programs were established as a result of prison overcrowding from drug-related offenses in the late 1980's. This program provides an alternative approach to incarceration and reduces recidivism rates by offering rehabilitative, individualized treatment programs for non-violent drug offenders. It is essential that the drug court program continues to evolve and expand as they have a beneficial role in the criminal justice system.

Methodology

This paper will review previous research and evaluations of drug courts as well as another effective specialty court model, the mental health court program. The successful components of these programs will be compiled to provide recommendations for improving drug court programs and to help further reduce recidivism rates among its participants.

Summary of Key Findings

The drug court program has become one of the more popular specialty courts within the criminal justice system. This paper details current successes and challenges found within the drug court program. The success of the drug court program stems from individualized treatment plans designed by multi-disciplinary team collaborations and is seen through low recidivism rates among its participants. These challenges include limitations within the program such as access to medical resources and services as well as a need for a broader scope of treatment options. By expanding these components of drug

courts, the program can continue to evolve and further reduce recidivism among its participants by providing them with effective skills and substance abuse coping mechanisms.

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Section I: INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Drug court programs were initially established to provide individualized treatment for minimal risk, non-violent drug offenders (Heck & Russell, 2007). Individuals who engage in criminal activity are up to four times more likely to suffer from substance abuse than the general public (Shannon, Jones & Newell, 2019). The success of these initial drug court programs was exhibited through providing individualized treatment to offenders while still holding them accountable for their actions. In the late 1980's, the success led to additional funding for and expansion of drug courts throughout the country (Schmallegger, 2017). As of August 2021, there were 3,500 drug courts in the U.S. (U.S. Department of Justice, 2021). While drug courts have expanded throughout the country, they are still not available in every county despite the critical need for them. In addition, societal changes such as overcrowding in prisons and limited resources in the judicial system have resulted in drug court programs being unable to provide the same successful treatment as before (Walker, 2015). Successful treatment of these offenders is dependent upon adequate staffing and accessible resources (Walker, 2015). Drug court programs face limitations such as the offenders in the program not meeting the requirements of the program as well as the programs themselves being inconsistent throughout the U.S. (Gallagher, 2014), to include inconsistency in the way in which recidivism is defined when measuring the success of these programs (Kaye & Boeri, December 2020). It is important to review evaluations of drug court programs to identify what works and what does not.

The considerable number of non-violent drug offenses committed each year continues to contribute to high recidivism rates (Walker, 2015). Recidivism issues run rampant throughout

communities, yet the basic building blocks of successful treatment programs are in places such as drug courts. These building blocks are based off of specialized and individualized treatment options that drug courts offer. By reviewing evaluations of current drug court programs, recommendations can be provided to highlight what can work in 2023 and beyond. These recommendations can then be implemented to provide more specialized and individualized treatment to drug offenders and further reduce recidivism rates for non-violent drug offenses in juvenile and adult offenders.

Purpose of the Study

This research paper will summarize evaluations of current drug court programs used for adults and highlight limitations faced in implementing them. This study can then be used to provide recommendations for counties looking to implement these in their jurisdiction or improve the ones they currently operate.

Method of Approach

This paper will consist of a review of literature from academic journals, government agencies, and state and federal organizations. These research outlets will be utilized to locate and summarize evaluations of drug courts and the mental health specialty court model, which has been shown to be effective. The most successful components of these programs will then be compiled and analyzed to create recommendations and guidance for improving the current drug court program.

Significance or Implications of the Study

This study is significant because of the mass amount of drug offenders in the judicial system. These offenders not only make up many offenders in the judicial system, but are often not receiving treatment that is effective due to the method in which it is delivered (Walker, 2015). Drug court programs have the potential to offer specialized and individualized treatment to drug offenders. Since being implemented in the late 1980's, drug court programs have grown and evolved drastically. This program has expanded its network of partners and resources for over 35 years to better meet the needs of each individual participant. Drug court programs are unique in their ability to provide treatment on a continuum while remaining fluid in the type of treatment provided (Lurigio,2008). This provides opportunities for further evolution of these programs by having the flexibility to alter and change aspects as needed. With the various facets of drug court programs, the opportunity for lessons to be learned and adapted from other problem-solving court programs is available and will help further grow the program to continue to be successful. Recommendations and alternatives to the current drug court program can lead to not only more successful drug court outcomes, but also lower recidivism rates for non-violent drug offenses.

Limitations

There will be no original research conducted for this paper. As a result, research for this paper is limited to what is publicly available regarding the success and failures of drug courts.

Section II: LITERATURE REVIEW

The following literature review begins with the establishment and general characteristics of the drug court program, followed by a look at successful and unsuccessful experiences in evaluations of drug courts. The next section will explain some of the challenges found within drug courts and how they impact the program. The subsequent section will identify influences and barriers faced by drug courts with the final section taking a further look at another specialty court program that is used as a model for problem solving court programs in the criminal justice system, the mental health court program.

Establishment and General Characteristics of Drug Courts

In the 1980's involvement with illegal drugs was at an all-time high and becoming an epidemic throughout the U.S. (Lurigio, 2008). A war on drugs was declared and a zero-tolerance policy went into full effect. This harsher stance led to a drastic incline in incarceration rates for drug offenses. From 1980 to 2000 alone, arrest rates for drug offenses had more than doubled and were continuing to rise (Lurigio, 2008). As arrest rates increased, space in the prisons did not, causing overcrowding. More charges were being filed and less drug offenders were in the communities, however, the court systems ultimately became overwhelmed as well. The belief behind taking a more aggressive approach on drug-related offenses was that drug addiction leads to engaging in crimes (Lurigio, 2008).

With overcrowded prisons being filled with non-violent drug offenders, there became a dire need to develop a new approach at handling these offenders that not only held them accountable but provided individualized forms of treatment and reduced recidivism rates (Heck & Russell, 2007). This approach was found in the courts.

In 1989, the country's first drug court program was established in Miami, Florida (Lurigio, 2008) and showed that individuals who successfully completed the program had a recidivism

rate that was 15% to 23% less than those who did not (Gallagher, et al., 2019). The success of this drug court drew attention throughout the U.S. and led to funding for expansion through the Violent Crime Control & Law Enforcement Act in 1994 (Schmallegger, 2017). As of July 2022, it is estimated that there are approximately 3,800 drug courts throughout the U.S., and they are continuing to grow (Office of Justice Programs, 2022). Currently all 50 states have drug courts within or plans to have them within them in the future. The placement of these programs and services available within the program vary based on the needs of the population they are serving (Office of Justice Programs, 2022).

Today, drug courts are considered a diversion program that provides more individualized rehabilitation services for non-violent drug offenders with the goal of reducing recidivism rates among these individuals. Unlike traditional sanctions, drug courts are centered on treating individuals based on their needs as opposed to punishing the individuals (Gallagher, et al., 2019). For offenders to participate in drug court programs, they generally must agree to:

- 1). participate in rehabilitation programs recommended for their specific needs
- 2). undergo drug testing as well as routine check-ins, monitoring and assessments (National Institute of Justice, 2020).

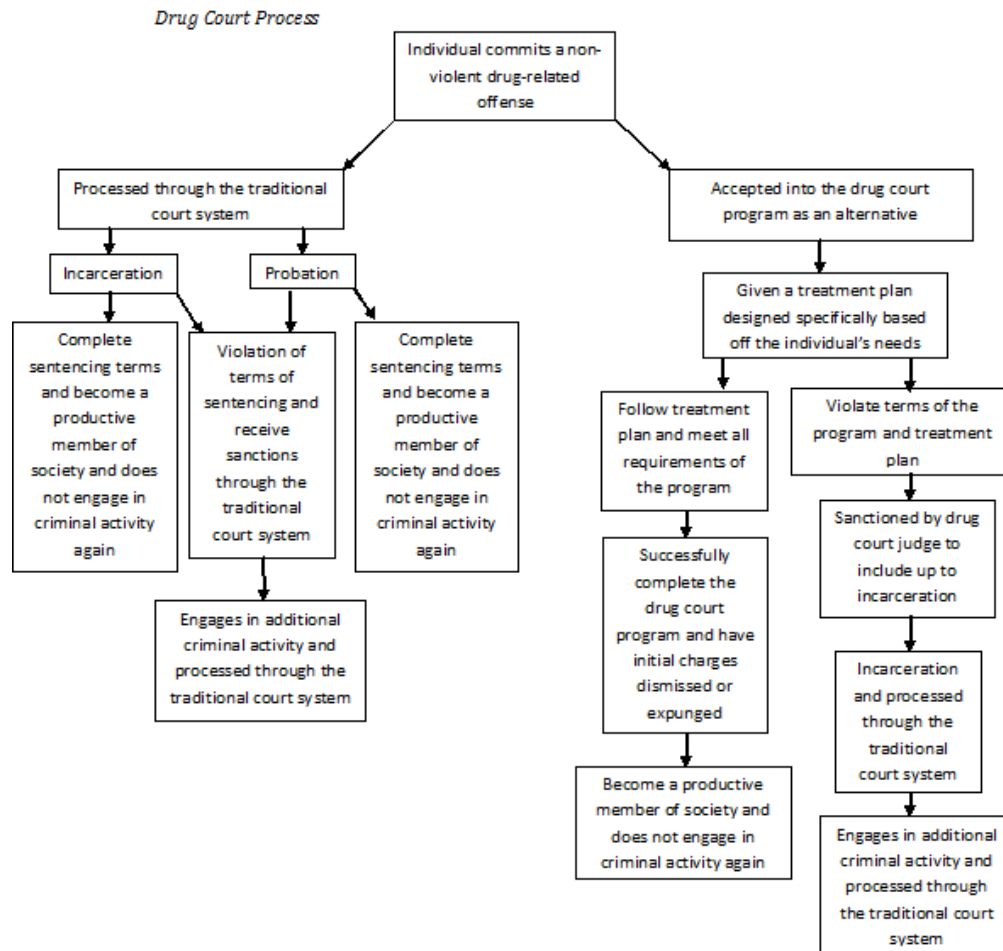
Upon entry into the drug court program the offender is evaluated, and a treatment plan based off their needs is created to help them not only become sober, but to maintain sobriety (National Institute of Justice, 2012). All plans entail continuous check-ins with various members of their multidisciplinary team and consistent of monitoring of their progress. Multidisciplinary teams can include counselors, judges, prosecutors, social workers, and members from various community outreach programs. Each member of the team plays a critical role in ensuring that the balance of treating the offender and public safety is met in a constructive way.

As the offender progresses through their treatment plan incentives such as praise from the judge and modified supervision and treatment requirements are provided as a positive reinforcement for the work, they are doing to better themselves and their community. If the offender fails out of the drug court program their case will return to court and go through the standard judicial process.

Table 1 provides an overview of how a non-violent drug offense is processed through the traditional court system versus through the drug court program. To be accepted into the drug court program, the individual must meet a set of criteria determined within each drug court program. If the individual is considered eligible for the program, the prosecutor and the judge in their case will make the decision of whether that individual would be a good fit for the program (Drug Policy Alliance, 2011). Once in the drug court program, an individualized treatment plan is designed for them, including requirements that must be met. If the requirements are not met sanctions are imposed, similarly to violations of probation within the traditional court system. The drug court program differs from the traditional court system in that their initial charges are dismissed or expunged at completion of their program.

Table 1

Drug Court Process



Successful Experiences in Evaluations of Drug Courts

Drug courts provide a significant shift in how drug-related offenses are handled within the criminal justice system. One case example to illustrate the impact of this model can be seen out of Wisconsin with a case involving a 46-year-old male who had been using marijuana since he was 13 years old and alcohol since he was 15 years. Over the years this individual spent a total of four years in prison as a result of 33 convictions. Upon receiving his ninth charge of operating while intoxicated, he was offered admittance into the drug court program as an alternative to three years in prison (Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation, 2022). This individual not only successfully completed drug court, but he also obtained a driving license and regained custody of his daughter (Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation, 2022). His time, and ultimately success, in drug court came from not only his commitment to the program, but also the support and guidance he received from a multi-disciplinary team. In the county this offender was located, the drug court included drug screening test three times a week, weekly meetings with the judge and attendance at all meetings and court hearings and journal entries and papers detailing their progress in the program for a minimum of one year (Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation, 2022).

While the requirements to successfully complete drug court require effort and commitment from its participants, the program also holds individuals accountable and provides resources that they may not have had access to otherwise. These resources can include improving job readiness skills, vocational training, and assistance in developing healthy coping skills. Much of the success of drug courts is due to the structure and components of the court, such as these resources, compared to traditional courts. Drug courts focus on the most effective rehabilitative components for each offender and developing a treatment plan rather than placing emphasis on

an adversarial and quick process within the court system (Belenko, 2019). The time and attention devoted to each participant's rehabilitation is a major factor in the success of this program.

Success within the drug court program has also led to enhancing family dynamics by providing parents with the support, skills and resources to provide for their children and become positive influences on them rather than losing their children as a result of their involvement in drug-related offenses (Hickey, 2020). Substance abuse by a parent inhibits productive and safe parenting and can result in children being placed in foster care. As part of the drug court program, individuals at risk of having their children removed from their care or who have had their child removed from their care could receive resources such as parenting classes, psychological and substance abuse counseling among others, to help strengthen and improve their ability to handle difficult situations going forward as well as their overall parenting skills. When safe and possible, keeping a child with their caregiver is ideal as the more time a child spends away from their caregiver, the more detrimental the effects of their separation can be on the child (Hickey, 2020). The success of the drug court program has not only resulted in stronger relationships between parents and their children, but also in parents regaining custody of their children and maintaining a healthy and safe environment for them to grow in (Hickey, 2020).

Challenges within Drug Court

While drug courts have received positive recognition for providing rehabilitation resources and services to its participants, not all these services have been beneficial. A major downfall within the drug court program is the often prohibited use of medically prescribed treatment options for individuals (United Nations Human Rights Special Procedures, 2019). While this is not the case in every drug court, it does become difficult for many individuals suffering from opiate and heroin addictions in areas that do prohibit this as often medications such as suboxone

or methadone are used as means of medication-assisted treatment to help further reduce the possibility of relapse (Mehta, 2017).

The drug court program is not recognized as a health care setting which results in many of their treatment services needing to be referred out (United Nations Human Rights Special Procedures, 2019). It is not expected that drug courts will have every possible resource available; however, it is critical that each offender is being evaluated properly to have a treatment plan developed specifically for them and not just to what is available within the program. When the offender's needs are not being adequately addressed and treated, they are placed at a disadvantage which can make success in the program more difficult and even impossible at times. One account of this situation occurred in Arizona, where drug courts banned the use of medication-assisted treatment options within the program. The offender in this case was given the option of jail time or an alternative sentencing option in the form of a court-supervised treatment program for his drug-related offense. The offender chose the alternative sentencing option which in this case was the drug court program. While in the drug court program the individual realized he was unable to stop drugs cold turkey and would need a medication-assisted treatment in order to reduce his risk of relapsing, however, in Arizona this type of treatment was prohibited within drug courts. With his options limited this individual relapsed and was sanctioned jail time due to his inability to successfully follow the rules of the drug court program (Mehta, 2017). This story is one of many that individuals experience due to the limited and prohibited resources within the drug court program. Additionally, when terms of their treatment in drug court are violated, the participants receive sanctions which can include jail time even if the resources they needed to be successful were not available within their drug court.

When an offender is given the option of jail time or an alternative-sentencing program, it is likely the option to avoid jail time will be more favorable, however, that option may not be the most beneficial or ideal program for the offender depending on their specific needs. If an individual is not provided with the tools and skills needed specifically for them, the odds of being unsuccessful are higher (Belenko, 2019). Each participant's experience within the drug court program is specific to them. As such, the drug court program may not be the best fit for everyone the program continues to evolve and adapt to better meet the needs of everyone involved in the drug court process.

Since first being implemented, one of the most common issues is the lack of adequate treatment options for participants in the program (Drug Policy Alliance, 2011). Drug courts are unique in the way that the treatment is focused on the individual's addiction, however, addiction is not one size fits all. This becomes problematic when there are limitations on what is available to help participants of drug court programs. Each state's treatment options are dependent upon their location, financial standings and resources available to them. Areas with more of an urban population as opposed to more rural populations tend to have a larger variety of treatment options available because they have more resources available to them. This leaves participants in more rural areas at a disadvantage as their needs may not be met with the options available in their location.

Limited personnel resources may restrict drug court programs from being developed in areas in need of them as these programs are designed to consist of multidisciplinary teams. If various treatment options or individuals to make up effective multidisciplinary teams are not easily accessible in an area, drug court programs will not have success as these are the fundamentals of

the program. This becomes even more of an issue depending on the extent of the drug problem in the area.

While drug court programs are based on treatment of addiction, a majority of the drug related offenses committed by the participants in drug court programs involve marijuana. In many drug court programs approximately 48% of the participants indicated that marijuana was their drug of choice (Kaye & Boeri, 2020). This becomes problematic when areas in need of drug courts have more of a substance abuse problem with illegal drugs other than marijuana such as prescription pills and heroin because of the various approaches needed to for these types of drug use. With limited resources, implementing drugs court programs can become difficult.

One of the most common hurdles throughout the counties where drug court programs are being implemented is the limited research of long-term effectiveness of these programs. There is a need for strong evidence-based research for these programs. This research should include recidivism rates following the program as this is a key factor that attracts support and funding. The research that is available on the effectiveness of drug courts tends to capture only a short amount of time when examining re-offending rates (Jewell, et al.,2017). This can hinder the implementation of drug court programs as the long-term effectiveness contributes to making the program unique. By having data on recidivism rates five, ten or fifteen years after the program's completion, there will be a better understanding of its long-term effects. While recidivism rates play a large role in instituting drug court programs, the determining factors for its use are often based on risk, need and responsivity (Shannon, et al., 2019). The risk factor is centered on the treatment of the offenders aligning with the risks of re-offending. The need factor is simply the need for treatment within the criminal justice system while the responsively aspect is having the maximum treatment options available to combat the problem (Shannon, et al., 2019).

Another barrier to drug courts is not only little to no change in arrest rates for drug related offenses but in some cases an increase in these arrests (Lilley, 2017). This is attributed to taking a more intense approach on reducing drug-related offenses as the options become intensified law enforcement approaches or more treatment options available for these offenses (Belenko, 2019). Many high crime areas that began implementing the drug court program saw an increase in drug related arrest despite drug courts being established to address prison overcrowding for minor drug offenses. One of the reasons attributed to this increase is the notion that having a successful program in place to address drug related offenses has led to more attention on drug related issues and ultimately more arrests to further combat the issue (Lilley, 2017). This can occur as a result of knowing the program in place to address these specific issues is effective. It is easier to overlook an issue when the resources necessary to enforce sanctions are limited as opposed to having the resources and an effective program in place to meet a variety of offender's needs.

Drug courts have evolved immensely over the years as they have had to adapt to influences and barriers to the program such as the support of the community as they are directly impacted by drug-related offenses. Part of the establishment of the drug court program was to provide rehabilitation services to offenders that result in the individuals becoming productive and upstanding members of their communities (Shannon, et al., 2018). Community support is essential for the success of drug courts due to the large role they have in the drug court program. The communities located in the areas with high rates of drug involvement experience the effects of drug courts, both good and bad. For rehabilitation of the offenders to be effective there must be support from all pillars of that individual's life. Individuals who are engaged in criminal behavior lack a proper bond with society which contributes to their actions (Shannon, et al., 2018). It is important for individuals to form and maintain proper bonds with society as one of

the main pillars of someone's life is the community, they are a part of as they help influence and shape the members of them. If the community does not support the drug court program it not only limits the resources available to the offenders such as community service programs and community policing opportunities, but it also does not provide the offender with the support and guidance they may require through their treatment and rehabilitation to reduce recidivism. Participants in drug court programs reported better relationships with their families and individuals close to them as a result of being in the program (Delen, et al., 2021). These relationships are influential not only in the progress of their treatment but also in reducing recidivisms rates among these individuals.

The demands of drug court require an immense amount of effort, work and dedication to be successful in the program. Requirements of the program often include group therapy, outpatient treatment, and weekly check-ins, which all require time and effort from the offender. If the participant does not have reliable transportation, housing or even a support system it can become difficult and often impossible to meet the requirements of the program. While participation in drug court programs is completely voluntary, if the requirements of their treatment plans are not met, they will be removed from the drug court program and sanctioned with jail time (Mehta, 2017). Offenders are made aware of the extensive requirements of the program prior to their admittance; however, when faced with imprisonment or a treatment program with no jail time, many underestimate the commitment required for success of the treatment program option. Participants in drug court spend more hours attending meetings than individuals who are on traditional probation (Lilley, 2017). It is critical for successful completion of the drug court program that participants are aware and able to commit to the time as well as the financial aspects of their treatment plans. One of the most common requirements of this program is

frequent drug screening tests which can become problematic to the participant as they are responsible for the cost of them (Gallagher, et al., 2019). Participants may find throughout their treatment plan that they are unable to meet the financial obligations associated with frequent drug screening tests. When participants do not follow the requirements of their treatment plan they are removed from the program and other sanctions are placed on them to include possible incarceration. While there are various influences and barriers to the drug court program, the program continues to adapt, evolve and overcome the hurdles they are faced with.

Other Specialized Court Programs

Specialized court programs have become a more commonly used approach within the criminal justice system. Stemming from prison overcrowding, specialized court programs were developed to redesign the criminal justice system (Davis & Cates, 2017). These programs have reached the level of popularity that they have due to their more focused rehabilitative approach and individualized treatment of its participants. The establishment of specialty court programs, also known as problem-solving courts, has grown drastically since the 1990's (Dollar, et al., 2018). As shared earlier, the first specialty drug court program began operating in Florida in 1989 (Yuan & Capriotti, 2019). Other specialty court programs modeled the drug court structure by placing emphasis on providing community-based treatment in conjunction with rewards and sanctions to promote change in the offender's behavior in lieu of incarceration (Dollar, et al., 2018). These specialized court programs utilize their collaborative justice approach to a specific area of interest with the goal of bettering the criminal justice system. While each of these programs differ slightly, they all were designed around identifying a specific issue, identifying the underlying behaviors that contributed to these issues and focusing on everyone's needs related to those issues to produce a better outcome by utilizing tools and resources as opposed to

a punitive approach to the problem (Davis & Cates, 2017). The key to these specialty court programs is changing the offender's behaviors and giving them a strong foundation to continue that path after the completion of the program. In contrast to the traditional court system, specialty courts are a balance of therapeutic jurisprudence and restorative justice (Davis & Cates, 2017). They are a combination of stakeholders who want a better outcome within the criminal justice system while also restoring the offender by providing effective treatment resources.

Mental Health Court Programs

Of the many specialty court programs, the mental health court program is the second most popular program of its kind, following the drug court program (Dollar, et al., 2018). The first mental health court was established in the late 1990's in Florida (Davis & Cates, 2017). These specialized court programs are available in at least 43 of the 50 states and continuing to grow (Yuan & Capriotti, 2019). Similar to the drug court program, mental health courts were established due to the rise in individuals in prison who had been diagnosed with a mental illness. In 2012, the number of individuals in prison with mental illnesses was more than ten times the number of patients in state psychiatric hospitals (Davis & Cates, July 2017). At the establishment of mental health courts, the structure of the program mirrored the structure of the drug court program (Yuan & Capriotti, 2019). Individuals entering the program did so as an alternative sentencing option and were required to agree to a set of terms and conditions for their individualized treatment. Participants received rewards and sanctions depending on their progress in the program and were required to successfully complete the program in lieu of incarceration. This evolved in time by way of the criteria to enter the program, sanctions within the program and resources needed in the program. Within the mental health court program, the mental health counselor is relied on heavily. This individual is considered the expert in implementing current and future treatment options (Davis & Cates, 2017). Individuals in the

mental health court program often enter the program with a wider range of conditions that need to be addressed for them to be successful in the program. Mental health court programs are unique in the way in which some can incorporate substance abuse treatment in their programs depending on the resources available in that area (Davis & Cates, 2017).

Evaluations of mental health court programs have yielded many successful results. According to a 2019 study by Yuan and Capriotti, participants in the mental health court programs were less likely to be re-hospitalized, rearrested and had lower recidivism rates than individuals who did not participate in the program. These courts focus on bettering the participant's life, which can enrich the program. Individuals within the program also reported having a better quality of life after completing the program compared to those who did not.

In another study (Davis & Cates, 2017), high success rates among participants were also linked to the time and effort spent in evaluating and educating the participants by the counselors in the program. The more time spent with these individuals ensuring they understand the goals and steps on the program, the more successful these individuals were in the program.

Like drug courts, mental health courts also experience hurdles in program implementation and delivery that are centered around a lack of support within the community and lack of resources available (Yuan & Capriotti, 2019). These resources could include things such as transportation, staffing or appropriate treatment services. The lack of these resources and support becomes problematic as many of the past participants in the mental health court program attributed their success in the program to the support system they formed while in the program. The collaboration of services within the program, among many others, has contributed to the mental health court programs continuing to gain popularity throughout the U.S. When these pillars of the program are hindered, the effectiveness of the program is threatened.

Section III: EFFECTIVENESS OF DRUG COURTS

Years of research on the drug court program has concluded that drug courts are an effective tool to help reduce recidivism rates among its participants (Jewell, et al., 2017). The approach taken by the drug court program has led to the expansion and utilization of the reparative aspects of the legal system and ultimately the success and effectiveness of the program (Gallagher, et al., 2019). The success of the drug court program is based off of two measures; successful completion of the drug court program and the recidivism of the participants (Jewell, et al., 2017). The completion of the drug court program is defined as the participant completing the requirements of their individualized treatment plan as outlined by the judge proceeding over their case and graduating from the program. The other main measure of the effectiveness of the drug court program is the recidivism of another drug offense by the participants. Upon graduation from the program, the participants have been evaluated by multi-disciplinary teams and deemed to have demonstrated proper use of the skills and tools provided through their treatment plans to continue to be a productive member of society without reoffending in the future. Studies from a National Institute of Justice evaluation of multi-site drug courts found that individuals who had completed the drug court program were 13% less likely to be re-arrested and 20% less likely to have involvement with illegal drugs within a year of completing the program compared to those who did not (Office of Justice Programs, 2022).

Evaluations of drug courts have shown that much of the success of this program stems from the effective management of the multiple systems and information for tracking each case. The management of the information and systems allows for proper evaluations and procedures to be in place to ensure the program is adequately providing services to its participants (Lurigio, 2008). Effectively managing the various systems and information within the program also

ensures all members within the drug court are in coordination with each other, furthering the effectiveness of the program (Lurigio, 2008). While the drug court program is not without flaws, the program's core is based off a network of services that work together to form individualized treatment plans. By using a collaboration of specialized treatment options that combine substance abuse with support services, drug court programs effectively provide the appropriate services for individuals who are at risk for re-offending (Norman, et al., 2015). Some key aspects of drug courts that have contributed to the effectiveness of the program are the random drug testing requirements and the frequent contact that each participant has with the judge (Gallagher, et al., 2019). These aspects were some of the strengths of the program as it resulted in more accountability from the participants while continuously demonstrated the invested interest that the judge had in the case and more importantly the offender's success. As part of the implementation of random drug testing, sanctions are given to participants who do not pass their drug testing. This system of negative and positive reinforcement has contributed to the effectiveness of the program as individuals who receive sanctions for not meeting the requirements of the program face consequences that can include being removed from the program. Further evaluations of drug courts found that the support from not only the judges, but all the drug court staff was attributed to the effectiveness of the program by the participants in the program themselves (Gallagher, et al., 2019). This support was shown through the staff's flexibility and understanding of the participants' schedules and responsibilities. This contributes greatly to the effectiveness of the program as it allows the participants to uphold commitments they've made while still giving them space to grow and evolve into productive members of the community.

Additional analysis of the drug court program found that factors such as age and education level at the start of the program are key components in the effectiveness and success the participant has in the drug court program. Studies found that of the two factors, age is the most influential factor in predicting the success of a participant in the drug court program (Delen, et al., 2021). The older an individual is at the time that they enter the drug court program the higher the likelihood they are successful in the program. Similarly, individuals who have at least a high school diploma upon entering the program are more likely than individuals who do not have a high school diploma to successfully complete the drug court program (Delen, et al., 2021). These factors can contribute greatly to the effectiveness of the drug court program as the program is more likely to resonate and be effective with individuals who are able to understand and grasp the importance of the skills and services available through the program and who can apply them to their lives to ultimately reduce recidivism rates. Evaluations of drug courts, it was found that individuals over the age of 33 and who are employed full time have higher completion rates compared to their peers (Delen, et al., 2021). While no single factor should be the basis for an individual's consideration into the drug court program these factors, among others, do correlate to the effectiveness of the drug court program.

Section IV: RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

While the drug court program is one of the most studied programs within the criminal justice system, there is still a need for continued review. One of the primary areas that needs further review lies within the criteria for entry into the program. Generally, the prosecutor in the case has most of the decision making on whether an offender is an eligible candidate for the drug court program (Drug Policy Alliance, 2011). While entry into the program is based off of criteria, the program could be strengthened by implementing a more collaborative approach when deciding who is eligible. This would also allow for a more objective decision to be made. Another ideal component to strengthen the drug court program is expanding the resources and treatment services available to its participants. Drug court participants are evaluated and assessed to determine the best treatment options for their success, however, some of the offender's needs are unable to be met due to the lack of services available within the program. This expansion of services is particularly needed for offenders who are involved with drugs other than marijuana. Much of the program's current focus is treatment based on marijuana usage as approximately 48% of participants identified marijuana as their primary drug of choice (Kaye & Boeri, 2020). This is problematic as over half of the remaining participants identified another drug as their primary drug of choice. When resources are not as readily available for participants addicted to more intense drugs, they are placed at a disadvantage. The drug court program is based off the principles of prevention, interdiction and treatment in an attempt to reduce recidivism rates (Fulton, et al., 2008). So, while participation in the drug court program is voluntary, if the resources needed to meet the principles of the program are not there it becomes more of a challenge for the offender. Currently, participants in the drug court program who are addicted to crack cocaine and heroin are less likely to successfully complete drug court (Kaye & Boeri, 2020). These types of drugs require a different type and intensity of treatment for the individuals

using them due to the higher level of addiction associated with such drugs. Finding more innovative resources for the participants in the program will allow for growth not only within the program but also in the communities. Additionally, there should also be more focus on services geared towards trauma exposure victims. The treatment plans designed for everyone are multi-disciplinary with services based on their needs, however, many participants, specifically women, often have higher rates of trauma exposure and could benefit from services geared towards these experiences (Shannon, et al., 2018). Each individual handles exposure to trauma differently, however, if the trauma is internalized it can resurface through engaging in risky behaviors and unsafe conditions that can ultimately effect recidivism rates of these individuals. Providing more access to services that can help individuals work through exposure to trauma through their treatment plans in the drug court program can not only help reduce unsuccessful completion of the program but reduce recidivism rates because of the healthy coping mechanisms they can develop from such services.

Furthermore, other studies such as ones conducted by Shannon, et al., (2019) and Delen (2021), have found that the older the participant is and the higher the education level they have at the time of entry into the drug court program, the more likely they are at successfully completing the program, there should be services in places for individuals who are younger and have lower education levels, so they have the same opportunities to be successful. While substance abuse does not discriminate, the ages in which people are experimenting with illegal drugs is continuing to get younger and younger. It is critical to the success of the drug court program that these individuals are being considered and services and treatment plans are available to them to continue to further reduce recidivism rates among this population. While it is impossible to address every problem any individual has faced, considering and implementing these

components will help more participants have an opportunity to be successful in the drug court program and obtain the skills to help further reduce recidivism rates.

Future research of the drug court program should look at the long-term effectiveness of the drug court program, to include recidivism rates among participants five, ten and fifteen years after completion of the program. Having more longitudinal studies of the program will provide more insight into the effectiveness and recidivism rates on a long-term scale. With the continued expansion of drug courts research pertaining to the most effective treatment services and procedural components of the program would not only highlight areas in need of improvement but strengthen the program in the long run. The recommendations provided can assist in reducing recidivism rates in drug related offenses as the drug court program is rejuvenating the way in which the offenders of these crimes are handled within the criminal justice system.

Section VI: REFERENCES

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