

Political Science

Comparison of Participant Opinions Concerning Court Processes in the Troup County DUI/Drug Court Survey and the Multi-Site Adult Drug Court Evaluations

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Introduction

Therapeutic courts, also known as problem solving courts, have emerged in the American judicial system as a hopeful solution to recidivism. Instead of simply jailing people for crimes that they are most likely going to continue to commit, new courts have been created to address the root causes of certain crimes. There are many different types of therapeutic courts. They include, but are not limited to, drug courts, mental health courts, and family violence courts. In these courts, there is a large emphasis placed on the relationship between the participants and the judge. As Richard Boldt and Jana Singer (2006) explain, “the judges who serve on these ‘problem solving’ courts have largely repudiated the classical virtues of restraint, disinterest, and modesty, replacing these features of the traditional judicial role with bold, engaged, action oriented norms”. Additionally, participants are often given treatment specific to their area of need. As noted by Karras, McCarron, Gray, and Adrasinsky (2006), “the aim of these courts is to address the “underlying cause” of the offending behaviour, by fashioning sentences that involve linking offenders to various services, such as drug treatment or mental health services”.

Troup County’s drug court functions as a therapeutic court that aims to rehabilitate its participants and treat the underlying cause of addiction to prevent recidivism in the Troup County area. In 2008, Jeannette Little, the judge of the Troup County drug court, approached the LaGrange College Political Science Department for help in evaluating the effect of the Troup County drug court on recidivism reduction. The first phase of research conducted revealed that the Troup County drug court was quite effective at reducing repeat offenses, especially when compared to other state courts and even national courts.

The second phase of the project evaluates the opinions of the participants toward their experience in the drug court. The opinions of participants in the Troup County drug court were compared to a national study. The national study, The Multi-Site Adult Drug Court Evaluation, was conducted by the United States Department of Justice and contained a very large sample of respondents from drug courts around the United States (Rossman et al. 2011). The MADCE was

used to create a survey to issue to participants in the Troup County drug court (Department of Political Science 2012). The means of four indices of the two studies were then juxtaposed to determine how the opinions of the Troup County drug court participants compared to the national study. Additionally, the means were compared using a t-test to determine if differences in the means of the two studies were statistically different.

Methods and Measures

Comparing the Troup County DUI/Drug Court to the courts in the MADCE is possible. The MADCE courts and Troup County DUI/Drug Court are similar because many of the courts in the MADCE originated at the same time as the Troup County DUI/Drug court. Additionally, like many of the courts in the MADCE, the Troup County DUI/Drug court is located in an urban area. Lastly, the number of participants in the Troup County DUI/Drug Court survey falls in the middle range of respondents in the MADCE survey (Rossman et al. 2011).

Using the index constructions in the MADCE, I compiled the average responses from the four specific indices to compare the Troup County Drug Court Survey to the MADCE. The indices included participants attitudes towards supervisor, participants attitudes toward judge, participants perceptions of procedural justice, and participants perceived undesirability of sanctions. The first three indices, supervisor, judge, and procedural justice, all used a one to five scale for responses. The last index, sanctions, used a 1-3 scale. The numbers of items in the indices are 7,9,18, and 12 respectively. Questions in the supervisor index included things like did your supervisor know you by name, is your supervisor care about your case, and did your supervisor help you to succeed? The Judge index contained questions such as is the judge intimidating and unapproachable, can the judge be trusted to treat you fairly, and did the judge treat you with respect? The index on procedural justice included questions like did you understand what was going on in the court, did all sides have a fair chance to bring out the facts in the court, and did the people in the court speak up on your behalf? Questions in the index on sanctions included questions like how bad would it be to have to do community service, how bad would it be to get a warning from the judge, and how bad would it be to have to take drug tests more often? The means of the indices of the Troup County drug court survey were then calculated and compared to the MADCE indices. The results are analyzed using graphic comparisons and statistically significant differences were tested for, using an un-pooled two sample t-test. The results of these comparisons are displayed in Table 1 and Graphic 1.

Results

Comparing the means of the first two indices, attitudes toward supervisor and attitudes toward judge reveals that the Troup County participants had a higher mean score. This indicates that they felt more respected and cared for by

their judge and supervisor than those of the national survey. Comparison of the third index reveals that Troup County participants had a lower approval of the procedural justice processes of the court. This could range from things such as not feeling like the court got the facts right to feeling as if people with the same charge were not treated equally. Lastly, comparing the means of the severity of sanctions index I found that Troup County participants consider their sanctions as severe as the participants of the national survey. This could mean that the sanctions used in Troup County are seen as a better deterrent for the participants.

Figure 1
Comparison of Defendant Attitude Index Means for
the Troup County Drug Court and the MADCE

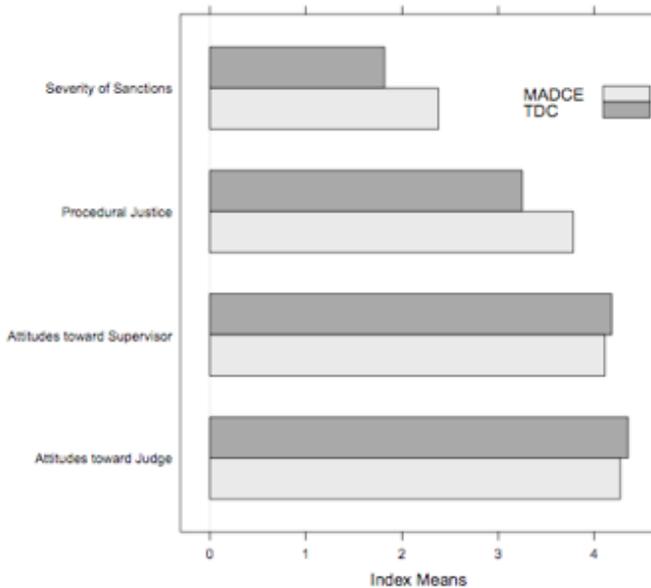


Table 1 presents a comparison of the means evaluated by an un-pooled two sample t-test for differences of means. For the first two indices, Attitudes towards Supervisor and Attitudes towards Judge, the test did not yield a significant result. This is a good indicator for the study. It means that the Troup County Drug court has an approval rating similar to that of the MADCE in terms of opinions of Supervisor and Judge. The third index, Perceptions of Procedural Justice, does show a significant difference in the two surveys. This is not necessarily a bad thing because a closer look at the individual items in the index may yield a different result. The substantive difference (.53) is minimal as well. The fourth index, Perceptions of Undesirability of Sanctions, yielded a highly significant difference. This is due mostly in part to the fact that the Troup County Drug Court does not have as

many sanctions as the MADCE. Specifically, the Troup County drug court does not use electronic monitoring as a sanction.

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Table 1
Comparison of Court Process Index Means:
DUI/Drug Court of Troup County and the MADCE

Indices	Troup County	MADCE	Difference of means	t-Statistic	Statistically Significant
Attitudes toward supervisor	4.35	4.27	.08	.64	NS
Attitudes toward judge	4.18	4.11	.07	.44	NS
Perceptions of Procedural Justice	3.25	3.78	.53	-2.9	p < .05
Perceived Undesirability of Sanctions	1.82	2.38	.56	-4.59	p < .05

Conclusion

The Troup County Drug court is doing a comparable job when it comes to how the judges and the supervisors treat their participants. There are certain areas of procedural justice that the Troup County Drug Court could improve on. A more detailed look at the individual factors affecting that index will reveal more specific areas of influence. Finally, when it comes to severity of sanctions, Troup County might want to look into incorporating things such as electronics into their sanctions if they want to maintain a similar average to that of the national level. The Troup County DUI/Drug court, as a therapeutic court, appears to be highly efficient. The first phase of the evaluation showed the Troup County DUI/Drug Court's ability to reduce recidivism is great, especially when compared to other courts on the national level. This phase shows that the opinions of the participants of the Troup County court feel as if the court is doing a good job of treating them in a manner in which they feel respected by their supervisor and judge. If the Troup County court continues to function as it does, it will have great success in the future.

References

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