



Multi-Site Adult Drug Court Evaluation

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Professional backgrounds of RTI researchers span a wide variety of disciplines including criminology, economics, law, psychology, public health, and sociology. Crime, violence, and justice staff are located in RTI's main office in Research Triangle Park, NC, and in offices throughout the United States. RTI maintains a presence in Washington, DC, for consultation on crime, violence, justice, and behavioral health topics.

Overview

The number of drug courts in the United States has grown rapidly, with more than 1,500 drug courts for juvenile and adult offenders in operation by the end of 2005 and another 391 courts planned. Drug courts seek to reduce recidivism by assisting offenders to stop using drugs through treatment, testing, legal pressure, judicial review, and the systematic use of sanctions and rewards. However, efforts to determine the efficacy of drug courts have been limited by methodological challenges and inconsistent implementation of key drug court strategies. The Urban Institute (UI), RTI International, and the Center for Court Innovation (CCI) are currently conducting a comprehensive, rigorous, 5-year national evaluation of drug court impact on behalf of the National Institute of Justice (NIJ). The objective of the **Multi-Site Adult Drug Court Evaluation** is to analyze the effects of different drug court models on participant outcomes. Main data collection components of this drug court evaluation include (1) a Web-based survey of all adult drug courts currently operating in the United States, (2) a longitudinal study of drug court participants and comparison offenders in selected jurisdictions, and (3) a process evaluation of drug courts selected for the study. The evaluation will accomplish the following:



- Test the hypothesis that drug court participants have lower rates of drug use and criminal activity and show improved functioning compared to similar offenders not offered drug courts
- Assess the effects of variation in drug courts on the outcomes of participants
- Present a formal evaluation of drug court costs and benefits

Approach

The Multi-Site Adult Drug Court Evaluation utilizes a quasi-experimental design that compares drug court participants to offenders with similar addiction and drug use profiles and criminal history in comparison jurisdictions that do not offer drug courts. Twenty-eight courts and five comparison sites located in nine states were purposively selected to represent diversity in policies, practices, context, and target populations.

As a subgrantee to UI, RTI's primary responsibility is to lead the data collection for the longitudinal study of approximately 1,800 drug court participants and comparison offenders. The offender study includes in-person, computer-assisted interviews at baseline,

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6 months post-baseline, and 18 months post-baseline. At the final interview, an oral fluid swab is obtained to test for the presence of illegal substances. Although the study is primarily a community-based study (with most study participants on probation or another form of community supervision), many study respondents are incarcerated or in residential treatment programs at any given interview period.

Analyses will examine the influence of both individual- and court-level characteristics in testing the hypothesis that drug court participants have lower rates of drug use and criminal activity and show improved functioning compared to similar offenders not offered drug court.

Findings and Products Generated

Analyses from the initial Web-based survey have characterized hundreds of adult drug court programs. Preliminary analyses from the longitudinal study of drug court participants and comparison offenders confirm the comparability of drug court and comparison group members. Future analyses will analyze differences between drug court and comparison offenders on a variety of intermediate and long-term outcomes, including recidivism.

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