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**PERCEPTIONS OF DRUG COURT:
HOW OFFENDERS VIEW EASE OF PROGRAM
COMPLETION, STRENGTHS AND
WEAKNESSES, AND THE IMPACT ON THEIR LIVES**
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In 1992, Maricopa County, Arizona Probation began an experiment that included a post-sentence drug court for first-time felony probationers convicted of drug possession or use. Modeled after the FIRST drug court in Alameda County, California, the Maricopa program combined specialized drug treatments with court supervision and utilized behavioral contracts, including status hearings before the judge, a system of rewards and sanctions, a phased outpatient treatment regimen, and urine monitoring. In interviews conducted three years after initial placement in the program, 29 Maricopa drug court participants offered their perceptions of the difficulty of completing program requirements. They also assessed the program's strengths and weaknesses, as well as its helpfulness in attaining their goals. This article presents the results of those interviews.

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ARTICLE SUMMARIES

EVALUATING THE FTDO PROGRAM IN MARICOPA

[15] This evaluation of the First Time Drug Offender (FTDO) Program is among the first to focus on participants' perceptions of the drug court process.

12-MONTH/36-MONTH OUTCOMES

[16] At 36 months, drug court participants were less likely to receive technical violations than the testing tracks, and fewer were arrested during the follow-up period.

Difficulty of Compliance

[17] Participants found it easier to comply with treatment-related requirements than other requirements.

HELPFULNESS, STRENGTHS/WEAKNESS

[18] Participants split on their perceptions of FTDO's helpfulness and ranked some components stronger than others. Yet, 76 percent would recommend the program to others.

Much of the current focus of drug court research has been on the implementation and effectiveness of drug courts (see, e.g., Goldkamp, 1994; Inciardi, McBride and Rivers, 1996; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 1996). Ongoing surveys of adult, family, and juvenile courts by the Drug Court Clearinghouse and Technical Assistance Project catalog drug court programs along a number of dimensions related to eligibility requirements, participant characteristics, and program components (Cooper, 1995, 1997; Cooper and Bartlett, 1998). The Drug Courts Program Office sets standards for process and outcome data collection as part of the federal funding requirements (DCPO, 1996). A 1998 review of 30 evaluations from 24 drug courts explored drug court process and impact findings (Belenko, 1998), and the National Institute of Justice has funded a national study of 14 drug courts, primarily aimed at developing a typology of drug courts and determining their potential for subsequent outcome evaluations.

[15] The knowledge that this body of work has given us is invaluable; yet it provides only part of the picture. To fully understand any program's effectiveness, we must also be aware of the perceptions of its participants.

Over the years, we have gained insight into the unique role of the judge in the drug court (Satel, 1998; Tauber, 1993; National Association of Drug Court Professionals, 1997), and evidence suggests that drug court participants positively value the increased role of the judge. We have also seen that

participants see drug court as a way to reduce their potential sentences (Satel, 1998). Beyond this, however knowledge of the offender's view of the drug court experience is limited. A better understanding of offender perceptions of drug court programs can help us determine whether specific components of the program model (e.g., personal responsibility, swift and certain sanctions) meet participants' expectations and thus whether theoretical concepts are being implemented correctly. Offender perceptions can also help us gauge the severity of drug court sanctions as seen through the eyes of those who are subject to them. This information is particularly salient as we contend with detractors who claim that drug courts are too lenient (Inciardi et al., 1996; Leen & Van Natta, 1994).

In 1994, the RAND Corporation received a grant from the National Institute on Drug Abuse to conduct a 36-month follow-up study of offenders participating in the Maricopa County, Arizona drug court program and other Maricopa offenders sentenced to standard probation. The follow-up study included personal interviews with approximately 25 percent of the participants from each group. For those in the drug court sample, the interviews included questions designed to garner their perceptions of and attitudes toward the Maricopa drug court program.

This article presents the findings of the RAND interviews pertaining to drug court participants' perceptions of the drug court program. Specifically, it focuses on the interviewees' assessments of^{3/4}

- ◆ The difficulty of drug court program compliance.
- ◆ The helpfulness of the drug court experience.
- ◆ The strengths and weaknesses of the program.
- ◆ Whether they would recommend the program to other first-time drug offenders.

Although our results are based on a relatively small sample of drug court participants in a post-sentence drug court model, they nevertheless provide new insights into how of-

fenders view the drug court experience¹. Results such as these can be useful to program planners and policymakers in their quest to ensure that drug court programs respond to the needs of offenders and serve as sound community supervision options.

THE MARICOPA FTDO PROGRAM

As a post-adjudication program for offenders sentenced to probation for a felony drug offense, the Maricopa County (Phoenix) First Time Drug Offender (FTDO) Program is an unusual variation on the drug court model. Patterned after Oakland, California's FIRST program (Tauber, 1993; Setteberg, 1994), the original FTDO drug court program combined began operations in 1992 and specialized drug treatment with court supervision. The program was designed to last not less than 6 months and not more than 12 months.

To be eligible for the Maricopa program, offenders had to meet several criteria, including: 1) they were sentenced to probation for a first felony conviction for possession of marijuana, dangerous drugs, narcotics; 2) they had no prior felony drug convictions and not more than one non-drug related felony conviction; and 3) they were eligible for standard probation.

Each drug court participant was required to appear before the drug court judge for status hearings at least once per month and more often if the participant was found to be in need of additional motivation or accountability for non-compliance. The drug court program was based on a point system of rewards and punishments and solidified by individ-

³ Funding for the original FTDO project and 12-month evaluation was provided by Grant 91-DD-CX-K050 from the National Institute of Justice; the three-year follow-up funding was provided by the National Institute on Drug Abuse, Grant DA-08627.

ual contracts with each program participant. For every class, process group, or 12-step meeting attended, the participant was awarded one point; for each negative (“clean”) urine test, another point. Based on total points accumulated, the participant received rewards, e.g., reductions in probation sentences and deferred jail time or promotion to the next phase of the program. Participants with unsatisfactory point totals repeated a phase or received a sanction, e.g., jail time. The treatment component of the program was broad-based, combining traditional drug education, counseling, and 12-step techniques with social skills training, relapse prevention, and group therapy. Designed and implemented by a private contractor, the objective of the treatment was to treat the offender as a whole; drug use was regarded as a symptom of other problems. The treatment regimen contained four major components: 1) drug education classes; 2) process groups; 3) case management; and 4) aftercare. Participants were assessed individually upon treatment entry, and individual counseling was also available.

The treatment program had three phases. Each phase lasted two months and could be repeated at any time during the client’s participation in the FTDO program. During the initial phase, known as orientation, which focused on drug education and social skills training, the client was expected to attend one class, one process group, and at least one 12-step meeting per week, to contact his or her probation officer once per week and to submit to random urine tests at a minimum of once per month. The curriculum included: drug education and awareness, treatment modalities—the 12-step method, the psychopharmacology of addiction, relapse prevention, AIDS and sexually transmitted disease, family roles, codependency, conflict resolution, social skills training (e.g., decision making, communication, coping with anxiety, developing empathy, dealing with authority, coping with anger), the developmental model of recovery, spirituality, self-esteem, and goal setting. The focus of the second phase, known as stabilization, was on relapse prevention. The client was expected to

continue to attend one process group and one 12-step meeting per week and to continue to comply with other terms of probation including one contact every other week and random urine testing at a minimum of once per month. During the final or transition phase, the client continued attending 12-step meetings, had at least one contact every other week with probation, and one process group meeting per week, clients were also randomly drug tested at a minimum of once a month. Clients who completed all three phases of the program within 6-12 months could have their probation terminated or were transferred to standard probation if they had probation conditions, such as community service hours or financial obligations, to complete.

After completing the three phases of the treatment program, the client could receive aftercare for up to 9 months. During this phase, clients continued to attend a weekly process group. Booster sessions in drug education, the developmental model of recovery, or relapse prevention were offered for clients experiencing difficulty in becoming or remaining drug free.

12-MONTH FOLLOW-UP

The design of the Maricopa FTDO program incorporated two experiments. The purpose of one experiment was to evaluate the impact of different levels of drug testing; the other tested the drug court model. In 1996, RAND completed a randomized evaluation of the drug testing and treatment experiment. The offenders who took part in the experiments were randomly assigned to one of four alternative interventions. Alternatives 1-3 were variations in the frequency of drug testing during probation (no testing, monthly testing, and bi-weekly testing); the fourth alternative was assignment to the drug court program. Data collection included participant background information (e.g., personal characteristics and prior record); process information on the characteristics of super-

vision and services provided under each experimental condition; and 12-month follow-up data on the prevalence and frequency of probationers' subsequent drug use, crime, and prosocial behaviors.

Based on the results of the 12-month follow-up evaluation, RAND determined that³⁴

- ◆ *Sixty-one percent of drug court participants had either successfully graduated from drug court or were still in the program one year after their initial admission.*
- ◆ *Eighty-five percent of drug court participants received some form of drug treatment (mostly outpatient) in comparison to 46 percent of their counterparts on standard probation.*
- ◆ *Drug court clients were also ten times more likely to participate in individual and group counseling.*
- ◆ *Estimated costs for drug court participants were slightly lower than costs for standard probation (due to the fact that the majority of drug court participants spent less time on probation).*
- ◆ *The drug court succeeded in providing treatment for drug offenders, but had little impact on officially recorded recidivism.*

For the complete results of the 12-month follow-up, see Deschenes et al., 1996.

36-MONTH FOLLOW-UP

At the time the data collection period for RAND's 12-month follow-up evaluation ended, many of the participants were still enrolled in drug court. In addition, data collection was restricted to official-record information only, i.e., documentation in treatment and probation files on the nature and extent of services provided, drug testing, and subsequent contacts with the criminal justice system. No self-reported information on drug use behaviors, crimes committed, drug-related

knowledge, attitudes, intentions, or other psychosocial indicators of program impact was collected or assessed.

The purpose of the 36-month follow-up evaluation was to supplement the 12-month official-record data with two years of additional follow-up, thus providing a more complete and comprehensive view of the long-term outcomes for the study participants. In total, the 36-month follow-up involved 506 participants. Of this number, 143 were drug court participants; the rest were assigned to one of the testing groups. The addition of interviews with a sampling of participants provided an opportunity to gather self-reported information on drug use, criminal behaviors, perceptions, and attitudes that the 12-month evaluators did not have. [16] In terms of officially recorded recidivism measures, few significant differences between the probation testing tracks and the drug court program emerged from the 12-month study.

Between 40 and 55 percent of all probationers included in the follow-up had a technical violation during the 12-month period, and, while it is true that drug court participants were less likely to incur a drug-related technical violation, they were not significantly less likely to incur a technical violation of some kind. In terms of arrests, drug court and testing probationers were equally likely to be arrested^{3/4} with slightly less than one-third of both groups having an arrest for a new criminal offense during the 12-month follow-up.

At 36 months, the picture is different. As shown in Table 1, in the longer time frame drug court participants were less likely to receive a technical violation (particularly drug-related violations) than the testing tracks (64.1 percent vs. 75.2 percent). In addition, significantly fewer drug court participants were arrested in the 36 months following initial assignment than those in the testing conditions (33.1 percent vs. 43.7 percent). The differences in arrest rates do not appear to be the result of fewer arrests for any particular offense category (person, property, or drug offenses).

Table 1. Extent of Recidivism Over 36 Months^a (in Percent of Each Group).

	Drug Testing Conditions	Drug Court
Any technical violation	75.3	64.1 ^b
Fees	30.2	24.6
Community service	23.1	19.0
Employment	14.0	12.7
Alcohol-related	8.8	9.2
Treatment	0.8	0.0
Drug-related	60.0	54.2 ^b
No show/abscond	44.5	41.5
Other ^c	45.9	44.4
Average number of violations	4.0	3.4
Any arrest	43.7	33.1 ^b
Person	11.0	8.5
Property	15.1	9.9
Drug	17.3	13.4
Other	18.1	18.3
Average number of arrests	0.8	0.6
Any conviction	31.0	24.6
Any incarceration	26.1	19.7
Any jail time	23.6	22.5
Any revocation	6.6	4.9
Any prison	14.6	12.7
Of those with technical violations	(274)	(91)
Any jail time	29.6	34.1
Any prison	19.3	18.7
Of those arrested	(159)	(47)
Any jail time	47.8	51.1
Any prison	31.4	31.9

Notes:

^a The measures presented in this table are based on the official record data collection sample for the full study of 506 offenders in the three drug testing conditions and drug court.

^b Significant difference ($p < .05$) between test groups and drug court subject.

^c "Other technical violations" include curfew, weapons, association with minors, and summary charges.

During the 36-month follow-up period, approximately 50 percent of the drug court participants performed community service, and virtually all of them participated in counseling. In total, 86.4 percent participated in group counseling, combined with offender participation in Alcoholics/Narcotics Anonymous (AA/NA) groups (69.3 percent). The numbers receiving individual or family counseling were small (0.7 percent each), and 4.3 percent received other types of counseling. Smaller percentages underwent residential or formal outpatient drug treatment (12.9 and 22.1 percent respectively), and 7.1 percent received drug education. More than two-thirds were employed at some time during follow-up.

PARTICIPANTS' PERCEPTIONS OF DRUG COURT

As part of the 36-month follow-up evaluation of the Maricopa FTDO, RAND conducted individual interviews with a sample of drug court participants. RAND used the interviews to gather self-reported information on offender demographics, drug use, and crime on a monthly basis over the full follow-up period. Information was also gathered on HIV risk behaviors; offender attitudes and perceptions regarding crime, drug abuse treatment, and HIV risk; and the nature of treatment services received (e.g., frequency and duration).⁴ In addition, the interviewers asked the drug court participants a series of questions designed to ascertain their percep-

⁴ The interviews followed a format used successfully in prior studies by NIDA, the University of California at Los Angeles, and RAND (see Anglin *et al.*, 1996).

tions of the drug court program, specifically in terms of its difficulty, helpfulness, strengths, and weaknesses. Of the 143 drug court participants included in the 36-month follow-up, 31 were interviewed. Of these, 29 provided responses to the questions of their perceptions of the drug court.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE INTERVIEWEES⁵

As shown in Table 2, the majority of the drug court participants who were interviewed were male, white, and unemployed. The average age was just under 32 years. About half had not attained a high school education. Almost 55 percent had been in drug treatment prior to their current drug court placement, and 71 percent were polydrug users, with the vast majority having alcohol problems. Other than alcohol, cocaine and marijuana were the most frequent drugs of use/abuse.

The offenders' prior criminal records varied. One-fifth had no prior record of arrests or incarcerations, and an equal proportion had had a prior jail term. Almost one-quarter had been incarcerated in prison. The average number of prior arrests for the sample was 5.8. Approximately one-third of the sample had been convicted of possession of narcotics, and almost four in ten for possession of drug paraphernalia. Although offenders convicted of drug dealing charges as their current offense were excluded from the drug court program, 16 percent had been drug dealers at some time in the past. The average probation sentence imposed for drug court participants was three years. For approximately one-third of the sample, the current probation sentence was accompanied by a term of incarceration in local jail.

⁵ Background information reported in Table 1 was collected from probation files.

Table 2. Characteristics of Drug Court Participants Interviewed.^a

	Sample Size (N)	(31)^b
Demographic/individual	% Male	74.2
	% African-American	9.7
	% Hispanic	29.0
	% Anglo-American	61.3
	% Less than H.S. education	48.4
	% Married	25.8
	% Unemployed at arrest	60.0
Type of occupation	% Prof. Clerical, service	43.3
	% Skilled, semi-skilled	26.7
	% Unskilled, never worked	16.7
	% Unemployed	13.3
Drug history	Age at first drug use	16.0
	Age at first drug abuse	26.1
	% Prior drug treatment	54.8
	% Drug dealer	16.1
History of use/abuse	% Alcohol	77.4
	% Marijuana	38.7
	% Methamphetamines	9.7
	% Cocaine	41.9
	% Crack	3.2
	% Heroin	6.4
	% Other drugs	9.7
Polydrug use	% Alcohol and marijuana	32.3
	% Alcohol and cocaine	38.7
	% Marijuana and cocaine	12.9
	% Marijuana and heroin	3.2
	% Cocaine and heroin	3.2
Prior criminal record	Age at first conviction	23.9
	Mean no. of prior arrests	5.8
	Mean no. prior prob. terms	0.9
	Mean no. prior jail terms	0.7
	Mean no. prior prison terms	0.2
	% No priors	20.0
	% Prior arrests only	16.7
	% Prior probation terms	20.0
	% Prior jail	20.0
	% Prior prison	23.3
	% Low risk (0-9 on scale)	35.5
	% Medium risk (10-14)	32.3
	Average risk score	
Average need score		16.6
Average age, current conviction		31.7
Type of current offense	% Possession of narcotics	35.5
	% Possession of dangerous drugs	6.4
	% Possession of marijuana	19.4
	% Possession of drug paraphernalia	38.7
Type of current sentence	% Probation only	64.5
	% Probation and jail/prison	35.5
	Length term imposed (mos.)	36.8

^a The background information reported in this table was collected from probation files.

^b Of the 31 Drug Court participants who were part of the study, 29 provided evaluators with their perceptions of the drug court program.

INTERVIEWEE PERFORMANCE DURING AND FOLLOWING DRUG COURT

Nearly two-thirds of the sample interviewed (62 percent) reported completing the drug court program successfully. The reasons most frequently reported by the remaining 38 percent for unsuccessful completion were testing positive on urinalysis tests and violating the drug court contract. None of the sample self-reported any arrests for new offenses either during or following drug court participation.

PERCEPTIONS OF THE DRUG COURT PARTICIPANTS

Using rating scales ranging from 1 to 5, the interviewees responded to several questions designed to ascertain their perceptions of the drug court program. Specifically, they responded to questions in which they were asked to

- ◆ *Rate the difficulty level of several key drug court requirements (including both treatment and nontreatment components).*
- ◆ *Assess the helpfulness of the drug court experience (e.g., in staying off drugs, in finding employment).*
- ◆ *Identify the court's strengths and weaknesses.*
- ◆ *Indicate whether they would recommend the program to others.*

TREATMENT-RELATED DRUG COURT REQUIREMENTS

[17] The treatment-related requirements imposed on Maricopa participants varied somewhat depending upon the phase of treatment. The FTDO plan called for participants in all three Treatment Path I to attend an education/treatment group once each week and a 12-step (NA/AA) group twice a week, to submit to random UA testing and to appear before the drug court judge for status hearings once per month.

Using a 1-to-5 scale ranging from “not at all difficult” to “very difficult”, the interviewees assessed the difficulty level of complying with the key requirements of the drug court treatment component. As noted in Figure 1, more than 86 percent of respondents felt that urinalysis (UA) testing requirements were “not at all difficult” to complete, and more than half felt the same way about the difficulty of attending AA/NA meetings and treatment groups. Fewer than 5 percent felt that submitting to UA testing or weekly treatment groups was “very difficult.”⁶

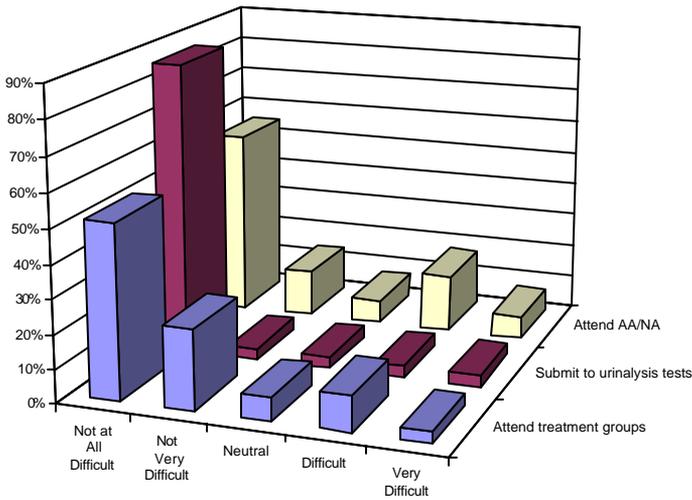


Figure 1. Participants’ Perceptions: Difficulty of Completing Drug Treatment Requirements.

⁶ Analyses tested whether perceptions of drug court differed for successful versus unsuccessful participants using chi-square tests. In none of the results reported in this paper were results significantly different for these two groups. This may be due in part to the small sample sizes of the two groups.

NONTREATMENT-RELATED DRUG COURT REQUIREMENTS

Using the same scale to rank the difficulty of probation terms and conditions not directly related to the drug treatment aspects of their supervision, the respondents indicated that some of the nontreatment-related requirements were more difficult to complete than conditions specifically related to drug treatment and testing. Among the nontreatment requirements in the FTDO plan were community service (throughout all three treatment phases) and maintaining contact with a probation officer (weekly during Treatment Path I, biweekly during Path II, and monthly during Path III.

Displayed in Figure 2 are the interviewees' responses pertaining to the difficulty of performing community service, maintaining contact with probation officers, and payment of financial conditions. More than 20 percent felt it was "very difficult" to meet the financial conditions of the program (which included monthly probation fees, fines, and a mandatory assessment for virtually all drug court participants). Another 20 percent felt that the financial conditions were "difficult" to complete. Similarly, almost 30 percent felt that it was "very difficult" to complete community service. In contrast to responses regarding financial and community service obligations, more than 80 percent indicated that that it was "not at all difficult" to maintain contact with their probation officers.

HELPLESSNESS OF THE DRUG COURT EXPERIENCE

[18] Asked to apply a scale in which 1 = "not at all helpful" and 5 = "very helpful," the drug court participants indicated the extent to which they felt the drug court experience was helpful to them. The results indicate a split among the interviewees as to their overall perceptions of the program. While almost 40 percent of participants felt that the drug court was "very helpful," more than 30 percent felt that it was either "not at all helpful" or "not very helpful."

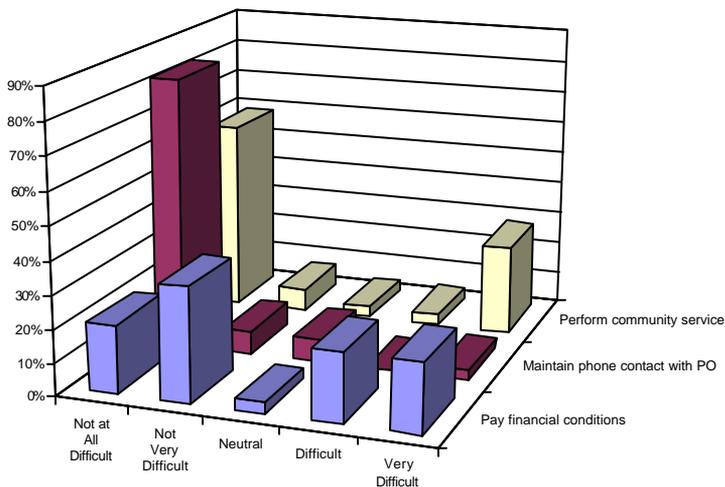


Figure 2. Participants' Perceptions: Difficulty Completing Nontreatment-Related Program Requirements.

Specific perceptions regarding the impact of drug courts on criminal behavior were more positive than those regarding drug use (see Figure 3). Approximately three-quarters of all respondents felt that drug court was “somewhat helpful” or “very helpful” in remaining crime free, but only about 40 percent responded as favorably in their assessment of the helpfulness of drug court in remaining drug free (similarly, about 40 percent also felt that drug court was “somewhat helpful” or “very helpful” in remaining alcohol free). Perceptions regarding the impact of drug court on other life areas were not as positive (Figure 4). More than 65 percent felt that drug court was “not at all” or “not very” helpful in getting a job, and over 50 percent felt it was “not at all” helpful in maintaining a job.⁷

⁷One might not expect to see favorable ratings regarding employment, given that job seeking was not central to the treatment component.

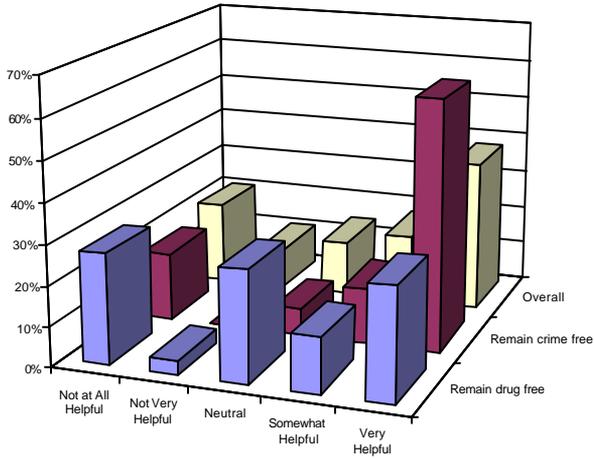


Figure 3. Participants' Perceptions: Helpfulness of the Drug Court Experience – Overall.

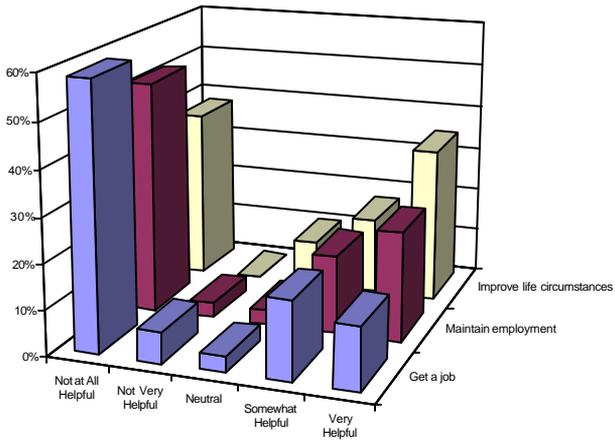


Figure 4. Participants' Perceptions: Helpfulness of the Drug Court Experience – Life Circumstances.

Figure 5 illustrates perceptions related to the more administrative aspects of court and probation interactions. Slightly more than half of all respondents felt that the drug court helped them in complying with the terms and conditions of their probation sentences. Resting at the opposite end of the scale (“not at all helpful”) on the question on court interaction were about one-fourth of the respondents. A slightly smaller number (20 percent) had the same feeling about the court’s helpfulness with the terms and conditions of probation. In contrast to items regarding the difficulty of completing drug court requirements and other areas of helpfulness, a fair percentage of participants were neutral in their evaluations of the drug court’s influence on their probation compliance and interactions with the court.

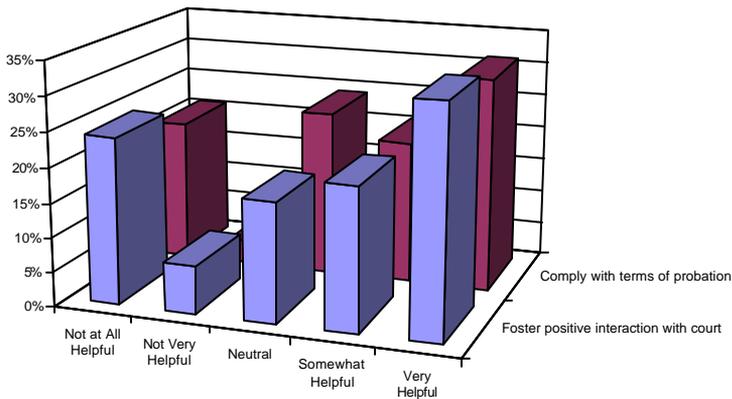


Figure 5. Participants’ Perceptions: Helpfulness of the Drug Court Experience – Interaction With Court and Probation.

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE COURT

Offenders were also asked to share their perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the drug court program, including the program's structural components. They applied a scale ranging from "very strong" to "very weak."

As illustrated in Figure 6, almost 85 percent of responding participants felt that reducing the length of the probation sentence was a strength of the drug court program (rankings of "strong" or "very strong"). Almost 70 percent also viewed monitoring of drug use via urinalysis tests as a strength, and nearly 80 percent felt that structuring probation with a contract was a "strong" or "very strong" component of the program. In addition, slightly over 70 percent felt that the requirement to appear before the judge, once per month throughout the program, was a "strong" or "very strong" component.

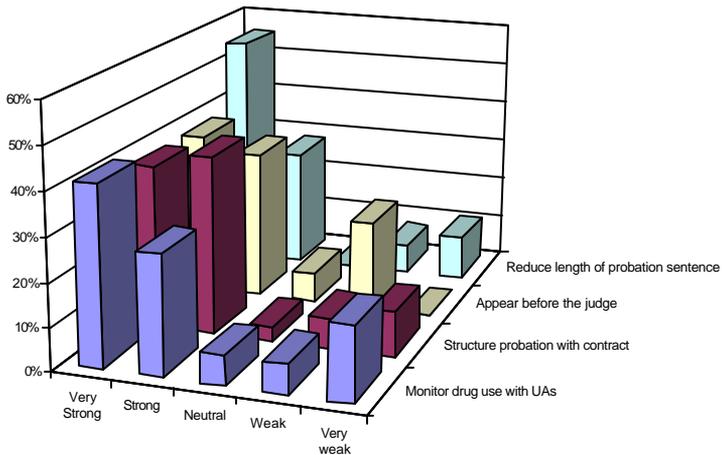


Figure 6. Participants' Perceptions: Strengths and Weaknesses of the Drug Court Program – Supervision/Monitoring.

Five additional program components^{3/4}drug treatment, drug education, AIDS education, attendance at AA/NA meetings, and the requirement to remain in treatment longer^{3/4}were also regarded as program strengths (see Figure 7). However, the responses were not as overwhelmingly positive as those for the structural components depicted in Figure 6.

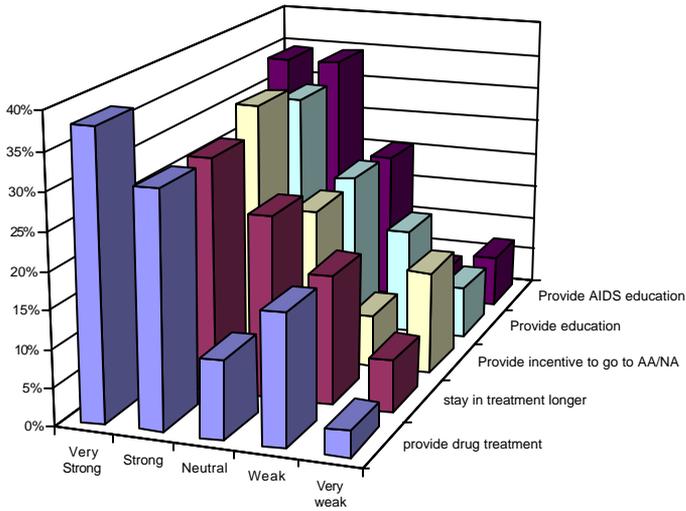


Figure 7. Participants’ Perceptions: Strengths and Weaknesses of the Drug Court Program – Education/Treatment.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO OTHERS

When asked whether they would recommend the program to other first-time drug offenders, 76 percent responded “definitely yes.”

CONCLUSIONS

Overall, the drug court participants who were interviewed^{3/4}both graduates and those who did not complete the program^{3/4}were very positive in their evaluations of the program. An overwhelming majority would recommend the program to other offenders. Their recommendations appear to be

based primarily on perceptions that the drug court 1) helped them remain crime free, and 2) provided them with a means to reduce the length of their probation sentence.⁸

The participants recognized the program components (e.g., appearing before the judge, structuring probation, and UA monitoring) that program planners feel are important to drug court models as strengths. At the same time, however, they did not feel the program had a positive impact on all areas of their lives. Interestingly, despite the primary focus on drug treatment, a greater percentage of offenders felt the drug court was a greater help in remaining “crime free” than “drug free.” Negative perceptions were also particularly apparent in terms of obtaining and maintaining employment.

The difficulty of completing program components provides some unexpected findings. Although one might expect that the focus on monitoring provided by UAs and the intensity of the treatment program requirements would serve as a tough sanction, the monitoring and treatment components of the drug court were actually perceived as relatively easy to complete. A majority of offenders rated these components as either “easy” or “very easy.” The requirements that were perceived as difficult to complete were probation conditions completely unrelated to the drug court program, i.e., payment of financial conditions and, to a lesser extent, completion of community service.

Because the collection of comparable data on offender perceptions of the difficulties in completing routine probation requirements was not a part of the study, a comparison of drug court participant and probationer perceptions is not possible at this time. However, if drug courts are to be a serious intermediate sanction (research has shown that both offenders and staff can rank “equivalencies” of punishment between community-based sanctions and incarceration) (Pe-

⁸Analyses of the drug court participants versus probationers in the testing tracks of the study showed that at one year, a significantly greater percentage of drug court offenders had completed their probation terms than those assigned to routine probation.

tersilia & Deschenes, 1994), we need to improve our understanding of the components of the programs. It may be that offenders do not perceive drug courts in the same way that program planners do.⁹ For this reason, we must not overlook the important role of offender perceptions in the development of intermediate sanctions.

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⁹ In fact, Petersilia and Deschenes found that correctional staff rated conditions of probation as more difficult than inmates did.

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NDCI COMMENTARY

**JAIL-BASED TREATMENT AND RE-ENTRY DRUG COURTS,
A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY FOR COLLABORATION
AND CHANGE**

By C. West Huddleston

With more than two-thirds of the millions of men and women who pass through American jails testing positive for recent drug use, our jails may constitute the best setting for drug screening and assessment, and for getting those in need of treatment on a recovery track. And yet, only 7 percent of the jails house wide-ranging drug assessment and treatment programs.

The success that drug courts have enjoyed to date rests on a foundation of collaboration among the legal, treatment, and law enforcement communities. Helping to build effective jail-based treatment programs can broaden and strengthen that foundation. In this article, NDCI Deputy Director West Huddleston explores the need for jail-based treatment from the drug court perspective, and offers a working model for a jail-based treatment program linked to a re-entry court.

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