

Colorado Probation Research in Brief

Outcomes Among Drug Court Participants: Does Drug of Choice Matter

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Drug of Choice and Success

Summary/Conclusions

In this study, researchers explored the outcomes of drug courts related to the participant's drug of choice. Although there have been several previous studies on the outcomes of methamphetamine using participants, little is known about offenders using other substances. This study tracked outcomes for participants abusing alcohol, cocaine, and marijuana. The outcomes of interest were the likelihood of graduating from drug court and the likelihood of rearrest. Participants were followed for an average of 2.3 years.

Limitations of Information

It was noted that drug of choice does not mean that the participant was not using any other substances, only that they had a preferred substance. The study did not explore the type or dosage of treatment, so its impact is unknown. Also of importance, the sample was composed primarily of low to moderate risk clients, as determined by assessment on the LSI-R. This fact may limit the generalizability of the results for those drug courts that deal with higher risk offenders.

Caveat: The information presented here is intended to summarize and inform readers of research and information relevant to probation work. It can provide a framework for carrying out the business of probation as well as suggestions for practical application of the material. While it may, in some instances, lead to further exploration and result in *future* decisions, it is not intended to prescribe policy and is not necessarily conclusive in its findings. Some of its limitations are described above.

Previous research has shown that methamphetamine users benefit from drug court participation, but there is little research on whether the same benefits can be gained for other substance users. The most commonly used illicit drug is marijuana, and crack/cocaine is the most commonly identified drug of choice, nationally, for drug court participants; so this study looked at outcomes for participants using these two substances, as well as alcohol. Specifically, researchers hypothesized that 1) drug court participants whose drug of choice was crack/cocaine would be less likely to graduate from drug court, and 2) drug court participants whose drug of choice was crack/cocaine would be more likely to be rearrested.

The sample included 302 individuals admitted to a municipal drug court over a period of 18 months. Of the sample, 121 identified crack/cocaine as their drug of choice (self-report preference), 109 identified marijuana, and 73 identified alcohol. The drug court had four phases and successful completion required 70% compliance with treatment, sanctions, case management, and after-care.

The sample was followed for an average of 2.3 years and recidivism was measured as any arrest after intake. Data analyses controlled for demographic variables (e.g., gender, age), as well as LSI score and prior treatment.

Following analysis of collected data, researchers concluded that the results

did not support the original two hypotheses: drug court participants whose drug of choice was crack/cocaine were not less likely to graduate from drug court and were not more likely to be rearrested. However, the study resulted in some other important findings. The results indicated that the risk of recidivism, as measured by the LSI, was significantly related to completing drug court; those with lower LSI scores were more likely to complete the program. Additionally, those who were younger and those who were unemployed were more likely to be rearrested.

Practical Applications

- ✓ Consider eliminating the use of drug of choice as a variable for drug court participation, such as a screening item to include or exclude certain types of participants.
- ✓ Engage a wide variety of resources to assist your unemployed clients to obtain and maintain employment, being mindful of their treatment obligations. Work force centers are a good referral for the unemployed, as well as those who need to build skills.
- ✓ Drug court programs can be effective with a variety of substance users; however, the best outcomes will be reached with fidelity to the 10 key components.
- ✓ Ensure the quality of assessments and adhere to a regular reassessment schedule. Provide differential supervision based on assessed risk level and drug court requirements.

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