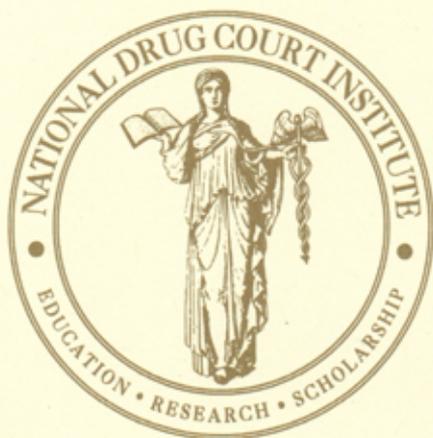


# DRUG COURT REVIEW



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NATIONAL DRUG COURT INSTITUTE  
ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA

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**DRUG COURT PARTICIPANTS' SATISFACTION  
WITH TREATMENT AND THE COURT  
EXPERIENCE<sup>1</sup>**

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*This paper examines clients' opinions of their treatment and courtroom experiences in a Delaware drug treatment court. There is a scarcity of research assessing the impact of drug court programs on the participants, yet learning what works and what doesn't for clients may relate to retention and to a myriad of drug court outcomes. Moreover, programming in drug courts can be improved to meet the needs of the participants if the specific program components that they believe to be effective and the components that require change are more completely understood.*

*The authors present data from 312 interviews with drug court clients which were conducted shortly after discharge. Questions were designed to examine general satisfaction with drug court, reasons for drug court entry, and to elicit participants' opinions of logistical issues, treatment staff and service delivery, judicial interactions, and a variety of program components. Overall, most drug court clients were satisfied with their treatment and courtroom experiences; however, statistically significant differences were appreciable between those who completed the drug court program and those who did not. For example, graduates were more likely to enter drug court to avoid criminal justice consequences, to feel that treatment staff were supportive, to trust the judges, and to*

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*believe that the program would reduce their likelihood of relapse and recidivism. Data were also used to examine factors associated with a satisfying drug court experience. The authors found that marital status, frequency of drug use, and treatment history were related to level of satisfaction. The implication of these findings for drug court programming and client outcomes is discussed.*

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**ARTICLE SUMMARIES****OTHER STUDIES**

[11] Past studies examine participants' perceptions of drug court efficacy.

**CDAS/NIDA  
DRUG COURT****PARTICIPANT STUDY**

[12] The CDAS/NIDA study tracks 720 outpatient clients, 540 of whom come from drug court and 180 of whom come from a control group, for two years post program.

**CDAS STUDY FORMAT**

[13] The researchers developed a 49 question survey on client satisfaction in treatment and court-related functions of drug court.

**BASIC CLIENT  
INFORMATION**

[14] The study creates a profile of clients through demographic and behavioral characteristics. Therefore, client perceptions may be compared to profile characteristics.

**MOTIVATION FOR  
DRUG COURT**

[15] More clients entered drug court to avoid jail or prison, as opposed to seeking treatment, or for other reasons.

**CLIENTS' THOUGHTS ON  
TREATMENT**

[16] Most program completers and non-completers had favorable responses in relation to treatment and would recommend drug court to others.

**CLIENTS' OPINIONS ON  
THE COURT**

[17] Most clients had positive views of the court, but within groups, specifics differed; more non-completers wanted additional time with the judge than completers.

**CLIENT PERCEPTIONS**

[18] Differences in demographics, behavior, and perceptions show that characteristics such as marital status, history in treatment, and frequency of substance abuse were better indicators of satisfaction than other demographics and behaviors.

**CONCLUSIONS ON**

## INTRODUCTION

Though research on drug treatment courts is proliferating, little of this work has focused on participants' opinions of their experiences. To date, most drug court research has involved assessing outcomes such as criminal recidivism in efforts to determine the overall effectiveness of the programs. However, these impact studies need to be complemented by examining factors which may contribute to a drug court's success or failure. Thus, it is important to determine what specific components of drug court programs' clients believe are most effective (Cresswell and Deschenes, 2001).

By tapping the perceptions of drug court participants, assumptions underlying the drug court model can be tested. Exploring how experiences, attitudes, and opinions of clients correspond to the goals intended by those who operate drug courts is vital (Goldkamp, 2002). Indeed, if one better understands offender perceptions of drug court, one may determine whether program models meet participants' expectations and thus whether theoretical concepts are being implemented correctly (Turner, et al., 1999).

It is believed that levels of participant satisfaction with drug court can influence motivation to change, program participation, and treatment retention rates (Johnson, Shaffer, and Latessa, 2000). Learning what works and what doesn't for participants may relate to a myriad of drug court outcomes. Moreover, by examining drug court client perceptions more comprehensively, one may do a better job of evaluating the legitimacy of the drug court as a model of therapeutic jurisprudence.

In his most recent report, Belenko (2001) found that

eighteen of the 37 drug court evaluations he reviewed included interviews with drug court participants or staff. These evaluations “yielded useful suggestions for improving drug court operations or identifying strong or weak points of the drug court program” (Belenko, 2001:10). For example, program graduates indicated that the most important components of drug court were the judicial interaction and monitoring, staff support, urine testing, sanctions, and the opportunity to have charges dismissed. However, Belenko (2001) noted that overall, relatively few of the evaluations formally surveyed participants or used a quantitative approach to their studies of client perceptions. In addition, the majority of studies utilized small sample sizes, and most limited their study to successful participants: either those who had graduated or active clients who were progressing through the program.

### **CONTRIBUTION OF THIS RESEARCH**

The primary focus of this article involves an investigation of clients’ opinions of treatment program components and clients’ opinions of courtroom experiences and their relationship to drug court outcome. After being discharged from drug court, 312 participants were interviewed using surveys which asked for their perspectives on their treatment and courtroom experiences. Clients who graduated from the program, as well as those who did not complete the program, were interviewed. Thus, this study is among the first to examine a large and inclusive sample of drug court clients in the post drug court period. This is also the first study of which the authors are aware that investigates the association between participants’ satisfaction and success in drug court. In this regard, this study examines client opinions about their drug court experience related to their drug court completion status. The authors also analyze participants’ reasons for drug court entry and their association with completion of the program. In addition, the demographic, substance use, treatment experience

and criminal history characteristics of the clients which relate to satisfaction in drug court are examined.

#### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

[11] Studies which examine drug court clients' perceptions of their programs are briefly reviewed here. Most of these studies are designed to elicit participants' general ratings of the effectiveness of the programs. Clients are asked to discuss strengths and weakness of drug court treatment programs and offer recommendations for improvement. Only a few evaluations have asked participants about their satisfaction with the specific elements of the drug court experience. These studies are not generalizable to the larger drug court population: bias likely results from insufficiently large samples and from the typical exclusion of failed clients or program dropouts.

Clients' opinion of their drug court experience was examined across a national sample by the Drug Court Clearinghouse and Technical Assistance Project at American University. Two surveys of over 400 participants in the final treatment phases of more than 50 different programs indicated that the close supervision and encouragement provided by the judge, along with the treatment services and on-going monitoring, were the critical factors which promoted their success (Cooper, et al.,1997).

Other drug court program evaluations have found similar results regarding the importance of the judge and treatment, as well as the sanctions and rewards for progress. For example, focus groups with drug court clients in six cities were held to examine their experiences and impressions of drug court. Participants confirmed the judge to be a critical element of the treatment experience. Participants also indicated that drug testing and accountability were key elements of the treatment process and that they were strongly motivated by incentives and penalties employed by the court (Goldkamp, 2002). The author of this study suggests that although focus

groups are a less systematic method of gaining feedback on the drug court experience, they are a useful way to gather knowledge on the actual, rather than the intended effects of these programs.

In Kentucky, 22 active drug court clients and 47 key drug court personnel (judges, treatment providers, etc.) were interviewed as to differences between previous treatment programs and their drug court program. Respondents believed that drug courts facilitated success through the judges' supervision, sanctions for noncompliance with program rules, and the reinstatement of criminal proceedings for not completing the program (Logan, et al., 2000). The researchers indicated the importance of updating process evaluations on an annual basis so that changes may be tracked over time.

Three years after beginning their program, 29 participants in the Maricopa County, Arizona drug court were asked about strengths and weaknesses of the program. The greatest strengths were thought to be shortened probation, urine monitoring, and being required to appear before the judge once per month (Turner, et al., 1999). Overall, both graduates and those who did not complete the program were very positive in their evaluations of the program. The majority indicated that they would recommend the program to others and that the program was helpful in remaining crime free. Less positive perceptions were found regarding the impact of drug court on other life areas, including remaining drug free and helpfulness in getting a job.

In the Orange County, California drug court, the majority of the 227 participants who were surveyed indicated that the program was helpful in keeping them drug, alcohol, and crime free (Cresswell and Deschenes, 2001). However, the drug court was ranked less effective in helping the clients to obtain a job or remain employed. Drug testing and the

provision of drug treatment were determined to be the strongest program components.

A drug court participant survey was also conducted in the Hennepin County, Minnesota drug court. Almost 300 active clients (nearly half of whom had been in the program over 6 months) completed a survey which asked them to rate various components of the drug court. Two-thirds indicated that meetings with the judge and random drug testing were effective in keeping them from using drugs. Over 80 percent of those who completed their program believed that the treatment they received was effective (Minnesota Supreme Court, 1999).

Program satisfaction among 99 participants across eight drug courts in Ohio was measured using self-report questionnaires. Overall satisfaction was very high: 97 percent of respondents reported being either satisfied or very satisfied with the drug court process (Johnson, Shaffer, and Latessa, 2000). Most agreed that appearing in court regularly was beneficial and that attending treatment on a regular basis was helpful. Almost the entire sample believed that their participation in drug court would help them avoid drug use in the future.

An international study examined client satisfaction as part of a larger project evaluating the health and well-being of drug court participants. Clients (N=110) in a New South Wales drug court diversion program were interviewed four months after beginning drug court. Results indicated that the majority of participants were very satisfied with their treatment services (Freeman, 2001). Respondents' satisfaction with the program was related to their health and well being: clients who experienced greater difficulties with their general health, social functioning, mental health, or emotional problems were more likely to find drug court difficult than were participants in a better state of health.

Overall, research on drug court participants' opinions has been limited. To date, clients primarily have been asked to rate the strongest components of the drug court program, but have not been questioned about specific drug court components or their levels of satisfaction. When satisfaction has been measured, it has generally been very high. As stated earlier, however, these studies have involved active clients who are successfully proceeding through the program or those who have graduated, and they often utilize small sample sizes.

Consequently, in terms of clients' perceptions of their experiences, the drug court field has been exposed to a myopic view of drug courts. Undoubtedly, the opinions of drug court graduates are important so that we know what it is about the drug court that is working, but the perceptions and experiences of non-graduates are critical. Programming in drug courts can be enhanced if the needs of participants more closely match the aims of the drug court model.

## **RESEARCH DESIGN AND PROCEDURE**

### **The Larger Project**

[12] In 1999 the Center for Drug and Alcohol Studies (CDAS) at the University of Delaware received a grant from the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) to examine drug court offenders in outpatient treatment. This five-year study is designed to measure the influence of drug courts on treatment retention and post drug court outcomes. The project aims to interview 720 outpatient clients: 540 of whom have been ordered to treatment by the Delaware Superior Court's drug court and a control group of 180 who are attending treatment but have not been ordered to do so by the drug court.

Study participants are assigned to one of two drug court tracks: a diversion program for first-time offenders arrested for

drug offenses not carrying mandatory sentences or a post-adjudicatory program for probation violators who are arrested for a new offense. Clients in each program attend treatment at one of five state-contracted providers located in New Castle County, Delaware. Treatment for most clients includes psychoeducational programming (which consists primarily of substance abuse education), urine monitoring, group therapy, and individual counseling if required. Clients must remain in the program for a minimum of six to nine months. All participants attend bi-weekly or monthly status hearings with their regular drug court judge. Graduation from the drug court program is contingent upon successful completion of treatment and the approval of the drug court judge. For a more complete description of the Delaware Superior Court drug court programs please see Butzin, Saum and Scarpitti (2002).

Clients eligible for the study are recruited by treatment program staff upon entry into the drug court program. At this time, those who are interested in participating in the project sign a consent form so that, upon discharge, CDAS staff can gather data from their treatment files, which includes the Addiction Severity Index (ASI), admission and discharge reports, program details and locating information. At the end of their program participation, treatment records are collected, clients are contacted, and CDAS researchers conduct the Client Satisfaction Survey (CSS) interview with the respondents. The CSS contains questions that elicit participants' opinions regarding their treatment and courtroom experiences. One- and two-year follow-up interviews are scheduled 12 and 24 months after treatment discharge. Multiple post-program outcomes (including relapse, recidivism, employment, relationships, and health status) are assessed at these follow-up periods.

All the interviews are voluntary and were conducted by trained CDAS interviewers. Clients are protected by a grant of confidentiality from NIDA. Participants are paid \$20.00 for the CSS interview and \$35.00 for each of the follow-up interviews.

An additional \$15.00 is paid to respondents who submit urine samples at follow up.

### **The Current Study**

[13] This article presents findings from the first 312 drug court study participants to be interviewed with the Client Satisfaction Survey (CSS). These clients entered the drug court program beginning in January 2000 and were discharged as of September 2002. All interviews included in the data for this article were completed between March 2000 and October 2002.

The CSS is a 49 question instrument developed by CDAS researchers and designed to elicit the opinion of drug court treatment program clients. Most of the questions were formatted using a five-item scale ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. The survey is divided into two sections: the first section contains questions related to the treatment program components and the second section contains questions related to the status hearings and courtroom experiences.

There are five categories of questions on the CSS in the treatment program section: Location and Time, Program Staff, Parts of the Program, General Satisfaction, and Help from the Program. There are three categories of questions on the CSS in the drug court section: Reasons for Drug Court Entry, the Drug Court Judge, and the Drug Court Experience. The CSS also contains several questions which asked clients about personal background and previous treatment experience. In addition, demographic and behavioral data gathered from the treatment center files of project participants were utilized for this study.

Two primary outcome variables are examined in this study: satisfaction with drug court and completion of drug court. Clients' demographic, substance use, previous treatment experience, criminal history, and current program variables are

examined in relation to their overall drug court satisfaction. Overall drug court satisfaction was conceptualized by a broad measure utilized to capture participants' general impression of their experience. After a series of questions asking about specific program components, clients were asked to, in effect, sum up their overall experience. Thus, general drug court satisfaction was conceptualized by the following question on the CSS survey: Overall, I was satisfied with what happened to me at drug court. Agree and Strongly Agree responses were combined to provide the measure of percent satisfied. Chi-square statistics were utilized to determine any statistically significant differences between variables.

Participants' opinions of the drug court program were examined in relation to their completion status. Clients who graduated from the drug court program are referred to as graduates or completers, and clients who are terminated from the drug court program and those who are out on *capias* are referred to as non-completers<sup>2</sup>. Agree and Strongly Agree responses to the client opinion questions were combined and percentages are provided for the total sample and separately for completers and non-completers. Again, chi-square statistics were utilized to determine any statistically significant differences between variables.

## **FINDINGS**

### **Client Characteristics**

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<sup>2</sup> Clients who fail to appear in court for a status hearing are issued a *capias* or warrant for their arrest. At that point, these participants are not officially considered to be terminated from drug court because the client must be physically present at the termination hearing (which is also attended by defense lawyers and state prosecutors). However, when clients are no longer active in the drug court treatment program and remain on an unreturned *capias* they are included in the non-completers group.

[14] The first column of Table 1 presents information on the demographic and behavioral characteristics of the drug court participants. With the exception of the treatment outcome data (length of stay and graduation status), all data were self-reported at program entry.

Most participants are male (73.7%), the average age is 28, and the sample contains more non-whites (53.5%) than whites. About two-thirds (66.8%) of the respondents are employed either full or part-time and about three-fifths (59.2%) have a high school diploma or more. With regard to marital status, 11.9 percent of the sample is married and 88.1 percent of the sample is single, divorced, or separated.

The most common primary drug of choice is marijuana (48.2%), followed by alcohol (20.5%), cocaine/crack (17.8 %) and heroin (8.3%). Slightly over one-fifth of the clients reported that they used these drugs daily, about 13 percent used drugs weekly and the majority (65.6%) indicated their drug use frequency to be monthly or less. Nearly equivalent proportions of the clients interviewed believed that they had a substance abuse problem at the point of program entry (46.9%) as believed that they did not have a problem (46.5%), while the remaining (6.5%) were not sure. For most of the respondents (62.5%), the drug court program was their first experience with substance abuse treatment.

The majority (63.7%) of the program clients reported to have had at least one criminal conviction prior to drug court entry. The mean number of lifetime convictions for this group was 1.81. Almost one-third (31.4%) of the respondents had a history of incarceration, with the average length of time spent incarcerated being just under one year (11.3 months).

Program outcome data were collected from the

participants' files upon program discharge. The mean length of stay in the drug court treatment program was about seven months (203.6 days). Slightly over two-thirds (67.3%) of the drug court clients graduated (completed) the program.

Relationships between participants' characteristics and overall drug court satisfaction were examined and the results are presented in the second column of Table 1. Four of the participant characteristics: marital status, drug use frequency, treatment experience, and completion status were significantly related to satisfaction. More specifically, clients who were not married, those who used drugs daily, those who had previous treatment experience, and those who did not complete the program were less satisfied with drug court. There were no significant differences in terms of drug court satisfaction based on gender, age, race, employment status, education, primary drug of choice, perceived need for treatment, or criminal history.

### **Reasons for Drug Court Entry**

[15] Drug court clients in this study were asked why they agreed to enter the drug court program (Table 2). The highest percentage of respondents indicated that their decision was based on the avoidance of criminal justice consequences. For example, 89.1 percent of the clients entered the program to avert prison or jail and 86.0 percent entered for the chance to have their charges dropped. Getting treatment for their drug problem (79.4%), keeping their driver's license (73.4%), and getting back with family (61.2%) were chosen by fewer clients as reasons for drug court entry.

Table 2 also examines reasons for drug court entry broken down by whether or not participants completed the drug court program. There are statistically significant differences between graduates and non graduates for all five entry reasons. Overall, program completers were more likely to indicate that they entered the program to get back with family, obtain

treatment, and keep their driver's licenses in addition to avoiding criminal justice consequences, than were non completers.

Participants' criminal background was examined to explore the relationship between having any convictions prior to drug court entry and the desire to have charges dropped as a reason for program entry. This analysis (not reported here) revealed that clients who graduated were significantly more likely to be first-time offenders than clients who did not complete the program. Thus, there may be an important association between having a criminal record, motivation for program entry, and drug court outcomes.

### **Clients' Opinions of Treatment Components**

[16] Study participants were asked their opinions of the treatment program they attended. Table 3 contains the statements posed to the drug court clients and the percent who responded affirmatively. In general, results indicate that clients were satisfied with their treatment experience. Transportation, session times, and safety were not problematic for most program participants. The majority of clients appear to be pleased with the quality and fairness of treatment staff and believed that the treatment they received was good. For example, most of the clients (82.0%) indicated that the program helped to improve their lives and a large majority indicated that they would recommend the treatment agency to a friend or family member with a substance abuse problem.

When the authors examined any divergence in opinion between clients who completed the treatment program versus clients who did not, in almost all cases, there were statistically significant differences. With regard to logistical issues, it is apparent that transportation and the timing of treatment sessions were problematic for many of those who did not complete the program. Other concerns for non-completers included less

confidence in the quality, fairness, and supportiveness of the staff. Non-completers also placed less importance on the drug education, individual and group counseling, and urine monitoring than did their successful counterparts.

In general, program graduates believed that the treatment program helped to improve areas of their lives which included family and employment and taught them to deal better with problems. It is interesting, however, that few participants expressed a desire to have been in the program sooner. Indeed, only a very small percentage (6.3%) of program graduates agreed with this statement. Finally, it is a positive finding for the treatment programs that there were no statistical differences between completers and non-completers in terms of clients' perceptions of how they were treated with regard to gender, race/ethnicity, and safety issues. For example, both women and men indicated a belief that they were respected by the treatment program staff regardless of their outcome in the program.

#### **Clients' Opinions of Courtroom Components**

[17] Respondents also were asked their opinions of their experiences in the courtroom. Table 4 contains the statements posed to participants and the percent who responded affirmatively. In general, it appears that clients believed the drug court to be worthwhile. Results indicate that the majority of drug court participants were satisfied with the judge and the courtroom processes. Most clients indicated that the judge was fair, respectful, and trustworthy. Moreover, the judge was believed by the majority to be influential in terms of their progress. For example, praise and warnings from the judge were found to be helpful by a large percentage of the participants. However, despite the noted positive influence of the judge, only one-third of respondents indicated that they would have preferred to spend more time with the judge.

When the authors compared drug court opinions

between clients who completed drug court versus clients who did not, it was apparent that non-graduates were less satisfied with their drug court experience than were graduates. This is perhaps not surprising, but the more specific questions posed to the respondents about program components help to shed light on the discrepancy in levels of satisfaction between these clients.

For example, over half of the participants who did not complete the program reported that things that happened to them at drug court did not make sense to them, compared with less than one-fifth of the completers. Moreover, about three times as many non-completers as completers believed that the judge was biased against them and that the judge was too hard on them. Further, almost all of the graduates believed the judge to have treated them fairly, compared with about 20 percent fewer of the non-graduates.

Several other interesting findings should be noted. Over 95 percent of the completers indicated that praise from the judge for their progress was helpful, while only 71 percent of non-completers answered similarly. Thus, it is somewhat surprising that upwards of half of the non-completers expressed that they would have liked to spend additional time with the judge, while only about one-quarter of the completers expressed a comparable interest. Finally, the only question which did not result in statistically different responses from the completers and non-completers involved advice to friends or relatives regarding drug court. It appears that even the majority of clients who did not complete the program would still recommend participation in drug court to others.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

[18] This research contributes to a gap in the drug court research literature: that of the participants' opinions of their

drug court experience. Evaluating clients' perceptions of drug court, including their treatment and courtroom experiences, as well as examining demographic, drug use, treatment, criminal history, and other characteristics will help the field do a better job of identifying participant needs and factors which may facilitate engagement, program compliance, retention, and other positive drug court outcomes.

This study takes a step in that direction by interviewing 312 drug court participants about their drug court experience shortly after discharge. Unlike other drug court evaluations, clients were included in the project regardless of whether or not they completed the drug court program. As a result, the sample reflects a diversity of opinion on the drug court experience. Indeed, opinions differed and satisfaction levels varied according to program outcomes and client characteristics.

Clients who were most satisfied with drug court were married, infrequent substance users for whom the drug court program was their first experience with treatment. The stability and support within the context of a marital relationship may contribute to a more satisfying drug court experience. The fact that drug court was found to be least satisfying for daily substance abusers with prior treatment experience indicates that the program did not meet the needs and/or expectations of the more serious drug user who likely requires more intensive treatment and/or services than were available. Increased regular interaction with the drug court judge, so that the progress of chronic drug users is more closely monitored, could prove beneficial. However, it is difficult to surmise how modifications of this sort would alter participants' levels of satisfaction.

Logistical issues, which included transportation and program timing, were more likely to negatively affect non-completers than completers. Remedying transportation problems and untimely program sessions is a relatively simple

(though likely costly) modification that a court system could implement in order to improve program access, retention, and other outcomes. These same logistical issues relate to attendance problems at status hearings. While attending numerous drug court hearings, CDAS project staff have observed multiple clients pleading with the judges to excuse their absence in court due to transportation obstacles or to court sessions which conflicted with work schedules.

Probing clients as to why they entered the drug court program uncovered some meaningful information. The authors found that avoiding jail/prison and having charges dropped were the primary reasons for program entry, while fewer participants indicated getting treatment as an important reason to enter drug court. These results generally pattern those of other studies which have also questioned drug court offenders on this issue (Goldkamp, 2002). In the Minnesota drug court participant survey (Minnesota Supreme Court, 1999) discussed earlier, two-thirds of those surveyed indicated that they participated in order to stay out of jail or prison, about 62 percent indicated a hope to have their drug charges dropped, and only 18 percent of the clients chose to participate to receive drug treatment. Similarly, in Kentucky, (Logan, et al., 2000) the main reasons cited for drug court entry were to avoid jail time, get charges dropped, or have probation sentences shortened; only a small percentage entered to get help for their substance abuse problems.

Going a step further, the authors examined reasons for drug court entry based on completion status. It appears that graduates had more incentive than did non-completers for entering the program: program completers were more likely to cite the importance of retaining their driver's licenses, getting back with their families, obtaining treatment, and especially avoiding criminal charges or jail time (recall the finding that graduates were likely to have had clean criminal records at drug

court entry). This suggests that participants who have more of an investment in society, and thus have more to lose if they do not complete the program, are more likely to be successful in drug court.

Along these lines, although most of the respondents believed that the treatment they received while in drug court helped to improve areas of their lives, including family, employment, and dealing with problems, graduates were more likely to indicate this type of belief. As well, most participants felt that going through drug court made it more likely that they will not use drugs or commit crimes in the future, but graduates were more likely to support this statement. Thus, there is some evidence that for completers, their incentive to do well along with their satisfaction with the program, may relate to positive drug court outcomes.

It may be that because the non-completers had less impetus for success, they did not take the program as seriously as did the completers and did not actively engage in the recovery process. For example, drug court graduates indicated that they had believed in the staff and placed much importance on the various components of treatment, including education, group and individual therapy, and urine monitoring. On the contrary, non-completers were more likely to indicate that they had misgivings about treatment staff and to dismiss the importance of the treatment components.

Research on drug courts points towards the central role of the judge in the success of drug court participants (Satel, 1998; Goldkamp, 2002). Indeed, almost all of the respondents in the authors' study who graduated indicated that praise from the judge for their progress was helpful and almost 90 percent believed that warnings from the judge were helpful as well. Though significantly less, upwards of 70 percent of the non-completers also indicated the helpfulness of both the judge's praise and warnings. It may be that participants appreciate the feedback, regardless of whether it is positive or negative in

content. For example, Harrell, Cavanagh, and Roman (2000) found, through focus groups with participants in court-based drug intervention programs, that knowing penalties ahead of time gave participants a feeling of control and a sense that they were treated fairly when sanctions were imposed.

In consideration of the above findings, it is interesting that 20 percent more of the non-completers wished to have spent more time with the judge than did the graduates. Perhaps clients who were doing favorably in the program did not benefit from repeated meetings with the judge as did those who were having trouble. It is conceivable that clients who were progressing slowly through the program were most in need of the therapeutic role played by the judge and could have profited from more of these types of interactions (see Goldkamp, 2002, for more on participants' perceptions of the judge). Indeed, since these findings indicate that non completers may be poorly invested in society and/or may have little stability in their lives, they may necessitate continued exposure to the judge as an authority figure.

To better understand participants' perceptions of their interactions with the judge and of their overall courtroom experience, drug court researchers may want to explore studies of procedural justice. Procedural justice research indicates that individuals who believe they play an important role in their own courtroom proceedings, and agree that the processes are fair, are more content with the outcomes. Indeed, studies have found that procedural justice has a major influence on a participant's satisfaction and evaluation of courtroom events (Tyler, 1988).

In the present study, clients' perceptions of courtroom experiences, particularly with regard to the judge, appear to coincide with the notions of procedural justice. For example, three times as many of the non-completers thought that the judge was biased against them. In contrast, graduates rather

than non-completers were more likely to indicate that the judge gave them a chance to tell their side of the story before making any decisions in their case. As well, those who completed drug court more often believed the judge to be fair and respectful.

It is evident that the majority of drug court participants in this study were satisfied with what happened to them in treatment and in the courtroom, with the program graduates significantly more satisfied than those who did not complete the program. The authors' data indicate that the majority of participants believed that 1) they were treated fairly and with respect by both treatment staff and the drug court judges, 2) the program helped to improve their lives in terms of family and employment, and 3) as a result of their participation, they will not use drugs or commit crimes in the future. These findings lead the authors to infer that the drug court experience was, overall, a worthwhile endeavor for most of the participants.

Given this assessment, it is surprising that few participants wished they had been in the program sooner. Thus, even though clients were satisfied with the program, this finding suggests that they would not have decided to enter into treatment on their own (e.g., without having been arrested and/or court-ordered). These results support the utility of coercive treatment programs such as drug courts. Indeed, exposure to treatment under any conditions appears to have beneficial consequences, whether the result of drug court or otherwise (Satel, 2000). More specifically, it appears that study participants did not necessarily need to participate willingly in treatment in order for the drug court experience to be satisfying and to produce positive outcomes. At the same time, due to the fact that drug courts are criminal justice-based, not having control over program entry may have resulted in low levels of drug court satisfaction and low levels of motivation to do well for some participants.

As part of the larger project, the authors are collecting

information on the participants' specific incentives for treatment (e.g., personal, legal) which is measured upon drug court treatment program entry. As such, the authors will be better able to gauge how motivation, as well as different life circumstances and levels of readiness for treatment, may influence progress in the drug court program.

The authors are also examining drug court outcomes and their association and interaction with participant characteristics, program experiences, and satisfaction with drug court. Preliminary analyses indicate that education, employment status, and level of drug court satisfaction are statistically related to drug court completion at the bivariate level, while there were no differences by gender, race, or age. More precisely, participants who were employed on a full-time basis, who had more than a high school education, and who were satisfied with the program were more likely to graduate from drug court than were their less educated, less than full-time employed, and dissatisfied counterparts (Butzin, Saum, and Scarpitti, 2002). These data lend support to the present discussion of how level of investment in society may be associated with drug court satisfaction and may influence outcomes while in the program and in the post-drug court period.

The authors are beginning to examine data gathered from study participants one year after discharge from the drug court program. In addition to obtaining information on relapse, recidivism, and several other social and behavioral indicators, the authors' 12-month follow-up interviews continue to measure satisfaction with drug court. Post-program information of this sort allows participants to inform the drug court field of the lasting impact of the drug court experience. The possibility, nonetheless, of a "halo effect," that clients will remember their experiences as being more positive than they were and/or that clients will give socially desirable answers to questions, is a

noted limitation to this type of research.

Just as follow-up interviews of drug court clients will almost certainly become an important research component of all drug court evaluations (Goldkamp, 2002), so too will the need to be aware of the perceptions of its participants (Turner, et al., 1999). Indeed, in order to advance programming in drug courts, criminal justice planners need to have information from the clients themselves about what worked for them and what requires improvement. Knowledge which informs the drug court field of participants' needs is crucial to the success of future drug court programs.

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**Table 1**  
**Drug Court Study Participant Characteristics (N=312) and Program Satisfaction**  
**by Participant Characteristics (Percent Agreeing or Strongly Agreeing)**

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**Demographics**

	<b>Percent<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Percent Satisfied with Drug Court<sup>2</sup></b>
Gender		
Males	73.7	88.1
Females	26.3	88.6
Age (mean)	28	
18-24	51.9	85.2
25-65	48.1	91.4
Race		
White	46.5	90.4
Nonwhite	53.5	86.3

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Employment		
Employed	66.8	87.7
Not Employed	33.2	89.7
Education		
High school diploma or more	59.2	89.6
Less than high school degree	40.8	84.8
Marital Status		
Married	11.9	100*
Single, divorced, separated	88.1	86.53*

**Substance Use/Treatment**

Primary Drug of Choice		
Marijuana	48.2	86.4
Alcohol	20.5	88.3
Cocaine/Crack	17.8	92.0
Heroin	8.3	90.9
Other	5.2	84.6

Drug Use Frequency		
Daily	21.3	78.0*
Weekly	13.1	88.6*
Monthly or less	65.6	91.8*
Self-perceived treatment need at Drug Court entry		
Yes	46.9	89.3
No	46.5	88.3
Don't Know	6.5	88.2
Treatment Experience		
First experience with treatment	62.5	91.1*
One or more previous treatment entries	37.5	81.6*

**Criminal History**

No prior conviction	36.3	91.7
At least one prior conviction	63.7	87.2
Total lifetime convictions (mean)	1.81	
Never incarcerated	68.6	91.0
History of incarceration	31.4	86.3
Months incarcerated in lifetime (mean)	11.3	

**Drug Court Treatment Program**

Graduates	67.3	98.5***
Non graduates	32.7	64.8***
Average length of stay (mean days)	203.6	

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\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

<sup>1</sup> Demographic, Substance Use/Treatment, and Criminal History information was self-reported at program entry. Drug court treatment program data were collected from participants' files at program discharge.

<sup>2</sup> Satisfaction data were collected shortly after program discharge.

**Table 2**  
**Drug Court Participants' Reasons for Drug Court Entry**  
**By Program Completion Status (Percent Agreeing or Strongly Agreeing)**

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	<b>Total Sample: (N = 312)</b>	<b>Completers: (N = 210)</b>	<b>Non-Completers: (N = 102)</b>
<b><u>CSS Questions:</u></b>			
<b>I agreed to enter the Drug Court because it was very important to me to...</b>			
...get them to drop the charges against me.	86.0%	93.1%***	71.1%***
...keep my driver's license.	73.4%	85.1%***	49.5%***
...avoid being sent to prison or jail.	89.1%	93.6%***	79.8%***

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...get treatment for my drug problem.	79.4%	83.1%*	72.2%*
...get back with my family.	61.2%	68.5%***	47.4%***

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\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

**Table 3**  
**Drug Court Participants' Opinions of Treatment Components**  
**By Program Completion Status (Percent Agreeing or Strongly Agreeing)**

	<b>Total Sample</b> (N = 312)	<b>Completers</b> (N = 210)	<b>Non-Completers</b> (N = 102)
<b>CSS Questions:</b>			
<b><u>Location and Time</u></b>			
Transportation to the program was a problem.	27.0%	18%***	45.1%***
Program session times were good for me.	81.2%	89.5%***	64.3%***
Sometimes I did not feel safe at the program.	12.5%	11.8%	14.0%

**Program Staff**

Staff believed that I could grow, change, and recover.	94.9%	97.0%*	90.3%*
Staff knew a lot and did their jobs well.	91.3%	95.4%***	82.4%***
The staff was very supportive.	92.7%	97.6%***	82.3%***
Staff treated women and men with the same respect.	95.9%	97.1%	93.5%
Staff treated people of different races/ethnicities with the same respect.	97.0%	97.1%	96.8%
Staff treated me fairly.	95.7%	97.6%*	91.8%*

**Parts of the Program**

I learned a lot from the drug education.	88.2%	93.5%***	77.3%***
The group sessions were very important.	89.9%	95.3%***	77.3%***
The individual sessions were very important.	86.8%	92.3%***	75.8%***
The urine monitoring was very important.	91.7%	94.4%*	85.9%*

**General Satisfaction**

Overall, I think the program was very good.	89.3%	95.6%***	75.5%***
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If a friend/ family member had a drug problem, I would recommend this agency.

84.9%

92.3%\*\*\*

69.8%\*\*\*

The program was a waste of my time.

16.1%

8.4%\*\*\*

32.6%\*\*\*

I wish I had been in the program sooner.

6.0%

6.3%

5.6%

### **Help From the Program**

The program helped me improve my life.

82.0%

93.5%\*\*\*

58.3%\*\*\*

Because of the program I am I am getting along better with my family.

70.9%

81.0%\*\*\*

50.5%\*\*\*

The program helped me deal better with problems.

77.6%

85.3%\*\*\*

62.6%\*\*\*

Because of the program I am doing better at work.	66.5%	77.0%***	44.9%***
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*\*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001*

**Table 4**  
**Drug Court Participants' Opinions of Courtroom Components**  
**By Program Completion Status (Percent Agreeing or Strongly Agreeing)**

<b>CSS Questions:</b>	<b>Total Sample (N = 312)</b>	<b>Completers (N = 210)</b>	<b>Non-Completers (N = 102)</b>
<b><u>Drug Court Judge</u></b>			
I would have preferred more time with the judge	33.1%	25.2%***	45.9%***
The judge was biased against me.	12.8%	7.4%***	23.9%***

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Praise from the judge for my progress was very helpful to me.	87.7%	95.4%***	70.5%***
A warning from the judge about my progress was very helpful to me.	80.9%	87.2%***	69.5%***
The judge gave me a chance to tell my side of the story before making any decisions in my case.	72.7%	77.3%*	64.6%*
The judge was too hard on me.	14.1%	8%***	26.8%***
The judge tried hard to be fair to me.	90.7%	94.9%***	81.9%***

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The judge treated me with respect.	94.9%	98.5%***	87.8%***
I trusted the judge.	85.0%	90.8%***	72.8%***
Overall, the judge treated me fairly.	92.3%	98%***	80.2%***
The judge was a very important influence on how well I did in the program.	81.9%	91.4%***	62.6%***

**Drug Court Experience**

Sometimes the things that happened to me at Drug Court made no sense to me.	29.6%	17.7%***	50.5%***
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Going through Drug Court made it more likely that I will not commit a crime in the future.	87.6%	92.6%***	77.1%***
Going through Drug Court made it more likely that I will not use drugs in the future.	84.3%	91.1%***	70.8%***
If a friend or relative got sent to Drug Court, I would recommend that they refuse to participate.	16.7%	14.4%	21.7%
Overall, I was satisfied with what happened to me at Drug Court.	88.1%	98.5%***	64.8%***

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\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$