



University of New Haven

HENRY C. LEE COLLEGE OF
CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND FORENSIC SCIENCES

DEPARTMENT OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE

An Evaluation of Federal Support Court in Connecticut

David L. Myers, Ph.D.
University of New Haven

New England Association of Drug Court Professionals
November 20, 2019

INTRODUCTION



Federal
Incarcerated and
Probation
Populations



Drug & Alcohol
involved inmates
and probationers



Recidivism of
released and
supervised offenders



Purpose of this
evaluation

LITERATURE REVIEW



Prior Drug Court and
Federal Specialty Court
Research



Prior Probation and Parole
Supervision Research

CURRENT EVALUATION



Federal Support Courts in
Connecticut



Research Questions

Target Population

Stakeholders

Intended Services

Outcomes

RESEARCH DESIGN



Service Record
Data



Observational Data



Survey of
Participants



Survey of
Stakeholders

ANALYSIS & FINDINGS



Is the intended target population being reached?



Are the intended stakeholders/personnel in place and engaged?



Are the intended services being provided?



Are anticipated outcomes being achieved?

ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

▶ Is the intended target population being reached?

- ▶ PACTS Data: Support Court targets individuals at a heightened risk for recidivism and substance use/abuse (i.e., medium and high risk participants).
- ▶ Participants generally present:
 - ▶ long history of substance use
 - ▶ established criminal history (drug-related and felony convictions)
 - ▶ multiple drugs of choice
 - ▶ history of treatment prior to participation in Support Court
- ▶ Average of about 25 Support Court participants per calendar year
- ▶ Approximately 50% success rate (graduation/successful discharge)

ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

- ▶ Are the intended stakeholders/personnel in place and engaged?
 - ▶ Observational & Survey Data from Participants & Treatment Team Members
 - ▶ Consistency in Process and Engagement
 - ▶ Communication and Collaboration
 - ▶ Individualized Treatment Orientation
 - ▶ Procedural Justice and Participant/Stakeholder Satisfaction
 - ▶ Use of Data and Assessment Tools (possible area for improvement)

ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

- ▶ Are the intended services being provided?
 - ▶ Majority of Support Court participants involved in outpatient treatment (61.2%); 10% involved in inpatient treatment and 16% in self-help treatment.
 - ▶ About a quarter (23%) receiving mental health treatment; 11% received therapy within the past year. Half (50%) presented no evidence of a mental health condition; about a quarter (23.9%) had a history of mental health problems, but not active.
 - ▶ Favorable perceptions about drug and alcohol treatment
 - ▶ Participant perceptions on educational, employment, and housing assistance somewhat less favorable

ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

- ▶ Are anticipated outcomes being achieved?
 - ▶ Participant perceptions pertaining to sobriety, remaining drug-free, and social/life skills suggested the program has made a positive impact on these outcomes. Participants also reported positive effect on family views about the criminal justice system.
 - ▶ PACTS data revealed participant housing stability and employment status significantly improved while participants were in the program.
 - ▶ Drug test data indicated participants on average completed 17 drug tests while in Support Court, with an average of 2.5 positive tests.
 - ▶ Low proportion of positive drug tests (14%) both during Support Court and after participating in Support Court (12%).

ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

- ▶ Are anticipated outcomes being achieved?
 - ▶ Pre-trial Support Court participants received significantly shorter sentences of incarceration, as compared to post-conviction participants.
 - ▶ Pre-trial participants received significantly shorter terms of supervised release or probation supervision.
 - ▶ Pre-trial participants exhibited a significantly lower proportion of positive drug tests compared to post-conviction participants.

ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

▶ Comparative Recidivism Analysis

- ▶ Based on 182 Support Court participants and 232 individuals in a comparison group. During post-conviction supervision, Support Court participants:
 - ▶ Were significantly less likely to be arrested (34% versus 45%; $p < .05$)
 - ▶ Were significantly less likely to fail a drug test (41% versus 53%; $p < .05$)
 - ▶ Were significantly more likely to be revoked (19% versus 12%; $p < .05$)
 - ▶ Latter finding due to Support Court participants being significantly more likely to be revoked for technical violations (10% versus 3%; $p < .05$)

ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

▶ Comparative Recidivism Analysis

- ▶ Initial results not take into account pre-existing differences between the groups, aside from Support Court participation. **Based on examination of demographic and legal variables, Support Court participants:**
 - ▶ Were significantly less likely to be male (80% versus 96%; $p < .001$)
 - ▶ Were significantly more likely to be Caucasian Non-Hispanic (30% versus 17%; $p < .01$)
 - ▶ Were significantly less likely to be single (60% versus 70%; $p < .05$)
 - ▶ Were significantly more likely to have experienced prior hard drug use (i.e., something more than alcohol or marijuana use; 82% versus 68%; $p < .001$)
 - ▶ Had a significantly lower average number of prior arrests (5.42 versus 6.66; $p < .01$)
 - ▶ Had a significantly lower average minimum recommended prison sentence based on federal sentencing guidelines (75.75 versus 87.92; $p < .05$)
 - ▶ Had a significantly lower average minimum recommended time on supervised release based on federal sentencing guidelines (35.22 versus 40.89; $p < .05$)
 - ▶ Had a significantly lower average total offense level based on federal sentencing guidelines (20.69 versus 23.30; $p < .001$)
 - ▶ Had a significantly lower average composite score for prior criminal patterns and violence (1.29 versus 2.05; $p < .001$)

ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

▶ Comparative Recidivism Analysis

- ▶ Using a propensity score matching process, 116 Support Court participants were closely matched with 116 comparison group members.
- ▶ Two groups statistically equivalent in their propensity scores (i.e., the probability of being in Support Court), along with the other demographic and legal variables used to predict Support Court group membership.

ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

▶ Comparative Recidivism Analysis

- ▶ Based on the 116 Support Court participants and 116 comparison group members, during the post-conviction supervision period, **the Support Court participants:**
 - ▶ Were insignificantly more likely to be revoked (22% versus 13%; $p = .082$), primarily due to being insignificantly more likely to be revoked on technical violations (13% versus 5%; $p = .109$).
 - ▶ Were significantly less likely to fail a drug test (42% versus 56%; $p < .05$)
 - ▶ Were significantly less likely to be arrested (33% versus 47%; $p < .05$)
 - ▶ Further analyses of arrest data indicated Support Court participants experienced significantly longer times to arrest, as compared to non-participants ($p < .01$).

ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

- ▶ **Comparative Recidivism Analysis**
- ▶ Based on the matched group of 232 individuals:
 - ▶ **Unsuccessful Support Court participants** were significantly more likely to be revoked compared to non-Support Court group members ($p < .01$)
 - ▶ **Successful Support Court participants** were significantly less likely to fail a drug test compared to non-Support Court group members ($p < .01$)
 - ▶ **Successful Support Court participants** were significantly less likely to be arrested compared to non-Support Court group members ($p < .01$)

ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

▶ Comparative Recidivism Analysis

- ▶ Final set of analyses utilized original group of 414 individuals (182 Support Court participants and 232 comparison group members). **While statistically controlling for propensity scores, Support Court participants:**
 - ▶ Were significantly more likely to be revoked ($p < .01$)
 - ▶ Were significantly less likely to fail a drug test ($p < .05$)
 - ▶ Were insignificantly less likely to be arrested ($p = .240$)
 - ▶ Experienced longer times to arrest, as compared to non-participants. This finding approached statistical significance ($p = .07$).

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

- ▶ **Available target population and program size**
- ▶ **Use of data and evidence-based programs and practices**
- ▶ **Participant perceptions of treatment versus perceptions of housing, education, and employment**
- ▶ **Frequency of drug testing and drug test results**
- ▶ **Data and findings on program completion and recidivism**



University of New Haven

HENRY C. LEE COLLEGE OF
CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND FORENSIC SCIENCES

DEPARTMENT OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE

An Evaluation of Federal Support Court in Connecticut

David L. Myers, Ph.D.
University of New Haven

New England Association of Drug Court Professionals
November 20, 2019

INTRODUCTION



Federal
Incarcerated and
Probation
Populations



Drug & Alcohol
involved inmates
and probationers



Recidivism of
released and
supervised offenders



Purpose of this
evaluation

LITERATURE REVIEW



Prior Drug Court and
Federal Specialty Court
Research



Prior Probation and Parole
Supervision Research

CURRENT EVALUATION



Federal Support Courts in
Connecticut



Research Questions

Target Population

Stakeholders

Intended Services

Outcomes

RESEARCH DESIGN



Service Record
Data



Observational Data



Survey of
Participants



Survey of
Stakeholders

ANALYSIS & FINDINGS



Is the intended target population being reached?



Are the intended stakeholders/personnel in place and engaged?



Are the intended services being provided?



Are anticipated outcomes being achieved?

ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

- ▶ Is the intended target population being reached?
 - ▶ PACTS Data: Support Court targets individuals at a heightened risk for recidivism and substance use/abuse (i.e., medium and high risk participants).
 - ▶ Participants generally present:
 - ▶ long history of substance use
 - ▶ established criminal history (drug-related and felony convictions)
 - ▶ multiple drugs of choice
 - ▶ history of treatment prior to participation in Support Court
 - ▶ Average of about 25 Support Court participants per calendar year
 - ▶ Approximately 50% success rate (graduation/successful discharge)

ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

- ▶ Are the intended stakeholders/personnel in place and engaged?
 - ▶ Observational & Survey Data from Participants & Treatment Team Members
 - ▶ Consistency in Process and Engagement
 - ▶ Communication and Collaboration
 - ▶ Individualized Treatment Orientation
 - ▶ Procedural Justice and Participant/Stakeholder Satisfaction
 - ▶ Use of Data and Assessment Tools (possible area for improvement)

ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

- ▶ Are the intended services being provided?
 - ▶ Majority of Support Court participants involved in outpatient treatment (61.2%); 10% involved in inpatient treatment and 16% in self-help treatment.
 - ▶ About a quarter (23%) receiving mental health treatment; 11% received therapy within the past year. Half (50%) presented no evidence of a mental health condition; about a quarter (23.9%) had a history of mental health problems, but not active.
 - ▶ Favorable perceptions about drug and alcohol treatment
 - ▶ Participant perceptions on educational, employment, and housing assistance somewhat less favorable

ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

- ▶ Are anticipated outcomes being achieved?
 - ▶ Participant perceptions pertaining to sobriety, remaining drug-free, and social/life skills suggested the program has made a positive impact on these outcomes. Participants also reported positive effect on family views about the criminal justice system.
 - ▶ PACTS data revealed participant housing stability and employment status significantly improved while participants were in the program.
 - ▶ Drug test data indicated participants on average completed 17 drug tests while in Support Court, with an average of 2.5 positive tests.
 - ▶ Low proportion of positive drug tests (14%) both during Support Court and after participating in Support Court (12%).

ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

- ▶ Are anticipated outcomes being achieved?
 - ▶ Pre-trial Support Court participants received significantly shorter sentences of incarceration, as compared to post-conviction participants.
 - ▶ Pre-trial participants received significantly shorter terms of supervised release or probation supervision.
 - ▶ Pre-trial participants exhibited a significantly lower proportion of positive drug tests compared to post-conviction participants.

ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

▶ Comparative Recidivism Analysis

- ▶ Based on 182 Support Court participants and 232 individuals in a comparison group. During post-conviction supervision, Support Court participants:
 - ▶ Were significantly less likely to be arrested (34% versus 45%; $p < .05$)
 - ▶ Were significantly less likely to fail a drug test (41% versus 53%; $p < .05$)
 - ▶ Were significantly more likely to be revoked (19% versus 12%; $p < .05$)
 - ▶ Latter finding due to Support Court participants being significantly more likely to be revoked for technical violations (10% versus 3%; $p < .05$)

ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

▶ Comparative Recidivism Analysis

- ▶ Initial results not take into account pre-existing differences between the groups, aside from Support Court participation. **Based on examination of demographic and legal variables, Support Court participants:**
 - ▶ Were significantly less likely to be male (80% versus 96%; $p < .001$)
 - ▶ Were significantly more likely to be Caucasian Non-Hispanic (30% versus 17%; $p < .01$)
 - ▶ Were significantly less likely to be single (60% versus 70%; $p < .05$)
 - ▶ Were significantly more likely to have experienced prior hard drug use (i.e., something more than alcohol or marijuana use; 82% versus 68%; $p < .001$)
 - ▶ Had a significantly lower average number of prior arrests (5.42 versus 6.66; $p < .01$)
 - ▶ Had a significantly lower average minimum recommended prison sentence based on federal sentencing guidelines (75.75 versus 87.92; $p < .05$)
 - ▶ Had a significantly lower average minimum recommended time on supervised release based on federal sentencing guidelines (35.22 versus 40.89; $p < .05$)
 - ▶ Had a significantly lower average total offense level based on federal sentencing guidelines (20.69 versus 23.30; $p < .001$)
 - ▶ Had a significantly lower average composite score for prior criminal patterns and violence (1.29 versus 2.05; $p < .001$)

ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

▶ Comparative Recidivism Analysis

- ▶ Using a propensity score matching process, 116 Support Court participants were closely matched with 116 comparison group members.
- ▶ Two groups statistically equivalent in their propensity scores (i.e., the probability of being in Support Court), along with the other demographic and legal variables used to predict Support Court group membership.

ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

▶ Comparative Recidivism Analysis

- ▶ Based on the 116 Support Court participants and 116 comparison group members, during the post-conviction supervision period, **the Support Court participants:**
 - ▶ Were insignificantly more likely to be revoked (22% versus 13%; $p = .082$), primarily due to being insignificantly more likely to be revoked on technical violations (13% versus 5%; $p = .109$).
 - ▶ Were significantly less likely to fail a drug test (42% versus 56%; $p < .05$)
 - ▶ Were significantly less likely to be arrested (33% versus 47%; $p < .05$)
 - ▶ Further analyses of arrest data indicated Support Court participants experienced significantly longer times to arrest, as compared to non-participants ($p < .01$).

ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

- ▶ **Comparative Recidivism Analysis**
- ▶ Based on the matched group of 232 individuals:
 - ▶ **Unsuccessful Support Court participants** were significantly more likely to be revoked compared to non-Support Court group members ($p < .01$)
 - ▶ **Successful Support Court participants** were significantly less likely to fail a drug test compared to non-Support Court group members ($p < .01$)
 - ▶ **Successful Support Court participants** were significantly less likely to be arrested compared to non-Support Court group members ($p < .01$)

ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

▶ Comparative Recidivism Analysis

- ▶ Final set of analyses utilized original group of 414 individuals (182 Support Court participants and 232 comparison group members). **While statistically controlling for propensity scores, Support Court participants:**
 - ▶ Were significantly more likely to be revoked ($p < .01$)
 - ▶ Were significantly less likely to fail a drug test ($p < .05$)
 - ▶ Were insignificantly less likely to be arrested ($p = .240$)
 - ▶ Experienced longer times to arrest, as compared to non-participants. This finding approached statistical significance ($p = .07$).

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

- ▶ **Available target population and program size**
- ▶ **Use of data and evidence-based programs and practices**
- ▶ **Participant perceptions of treatment versus perceptions of housing, education, and employment**
- ▶ **Frequency of drug testing and drug test results**
- ▶ **Data and findings on program completion and recidivism**

**A Recidivism Analysis of Federal Support Court in Connecticut:
Executive Summary**

**David Myers, PhD
Joseph Dule, MA
Jonathan Kringen, PhD**

**University of New Haven
Henry C. Lee College of Criminal Justice and Forensic Sciences
Department of Criminal Justice
September 30, 2019**

Introduction

Substantial portions of federal prison inmates and individuals under federal supervision in the community were convicted of drug-related crimes. Moreover, many other inmates and supervised offenders present a history of drug and alcohol problems, regardless of their official criminal record. Existing research also indicates persistently high recidivism rates among known offenders, with the effects of drug and alcohol use and abuse being likely factors in repeat offending. In modern times, these findings have led to various legislative efforts and programs directed at justice-involved individuals with drug and alcohol problems.

The current study continues an evaluation of one federal initiative to provide support and structure to individuals in the criminal justice system who struggle with drug and alcohol issues. Specifically, this research examines a federal Support Court created by the United States District Court of Connecticut. The specialized drug court originated in 2009 and currently operates in three locations: Bridgeport, Hartford, and New Haven. Initial research centered on conducting a process evaluation of Support Court operations and services, along with an assessment of various participant outcomes. Current analyses were based on comparing the recidivism of Support Court participants with similar federal offenders who did not participate in Support Court.

Support Court Evaluation

Prior research on federal Support Court in Connecticut examined four research questions (Dule, Myers, Earl, Wang, & Daty, 2019a, 2019b):

1. Is Support Court reaching the intended population?
2. Are the intended personnel/stakeholders in place and engaged?
3. Are the intended services being provided?
4. Are the intended outcomes being achieved?

To answer these questions, a mixed methods research design was employed, involving the collection and use of both quantitative and qualitative data. Specifically, during the spring and summer of 2018, data were collected from four sources:

1. Observational data from Support Court team meetings and court proceedings in summer 2018
2. Service record data pertaining to 209 Support Court cases processed from 2009 through 2017 (data were contained in PACTS, the federal Probation and Pretrial Services Automated Tracking System)
3. Survey data from Support Court participants in summer 2018
4. Survey data from Support Court stakeholders/team members in summer 2018

Prior Results

The results of this research indicated the Support Court program appropriately is targeting individuals who are at a heightened risk for continued or renewed substance use or abuse. Support court participants generally demonstrate a long history of substance use, have an

Support Court Recidivism Executive Summary

established criminal history (including drug-related and felony convictions), have multiple drugs of choice, and often present a history of treatment prior to their participation in the Support Court program. It was recommended that consideration be given to the total number of participants served and whether these numbers can be increased, while continuing to target medium and higher risk offenders who may benefit most from the services and treatment provided.

The intended professional stakeholders in Support Court include the U.S. District Judge at each Support Court location, the United States Attorney's Office (USAO), the Federal Defenders Office (FDO), the United States Probation Office (USPO), and treatment providers. On-site observations confirmed that representatives from all intended stakeholders were present for team meetings and Support Court sessions, and each treatment team appeared highly committed to its mission and engaged in its work. Stakeholder survey results confirmed that stakeholders believe the Support Court team works cohesively, members understand each other's perspective, decisions are reached collaboratively, and team members value other team member's input and recognize their contributions to the success of the program.

Support Court participant perspectives about the team members also were highly positive. For example, survey responses of Support Court participants revealed they felt that the Judge, USPO, Treatment Staff, USAO, and FDO were fair, concerned, and respectful of Support Court participants. Further, participant responses about their interactions with the Judge indicated these individuals feel they are being treated in a procedurally just manner, and that the Judge allowed them enough time to tell their side of the story, remembered their name and situation from week to week, and was not intimidating. Scores that appeared more neutral pertaining to the Support Court staff centered on whether or not a USPO, Treatment Staff member, or FDO had too high of expectations for what the participant felt he/she could achieve.

An area in which stakeholders appeared to be less engaged, based on results from the stakeholder survey, concerned the use of data and evidence-based practices. Stakeholder responses that scored somewhat lower pertained to how the program uses data to assess program operations and performance, along with the use of evidence-based assessment tools to guide program decision-making. Additionally, stakeholder survey data revealed less favorable views about public perceptions of the program and if the program has leveraged media to engage the public.

In terms of services being provided, service record data from PACTS revealed that the majority of Support Court participants were involved in outpatient treatment (61.2%), while 10% were involved in inpatient treatment, and 15.8% were involved in self-help treatment. In terms of mental health treatment, about a quarter of participants (23%) were receiving mental health treatment, while 11% reported therapy within the past year. Most participants (50.2%) presented no evidence of a mental health condition, while about a quarter (23.9%) had a history of mental health problems, but no active problems.

Survey data revealed that stakeholders feel participants are receiving the appropriate dosage of treatment, treatments are individualized, needs are being met, the Judge values treatment-providers' recommendations, and the Support Court has a satisfactory network of treatment providers. In line with stakeholder views on treatment, survey data from participants indicated

Support Court Recidivism Executive Summary

that participants feel they are receiving effective drug and alcohol services, and that the services are helpful in reducing their substance use.

In terms of the Support Court program's goal of improving participant access to education and employment, the results from the participant's survey were somewhat less favorable than in the area of treatment. More specifically, participant survey scores pertaining to questions about the program's assistance with education, employment, and housing were comparatively lower than perceptions of treatment scores, indicating less consensus about how successful the program has been in these areas.

Concerning drug testing, stakeholders agreed that drug tests are occurring on a timely basis, results are communicated quickly to the Support Court team, and that sufficient precautions are in place to prevent drug test tampering. Participants also agreed that drug testing was helpful for their sobriety. Analysis of drug testing frequency revealed that participants average .4428 drug tests per week, or about one drug test every two weeks.

Results from this stage of the research also indicated several of the anticipated Support Court outcomes were being achieved. Survey responses of participants pertaining to sobriety and remaining drug-free, being involved in a recovery lifestyle, employment, independence, housing, life skills, mental and physical well-being, coping skills, trust, self-worth, and family relationships suggested that the program has made a positive impact on these outcomes. Participants also generally felt that the program had a positive effect on how their family viewed the criminal justice system.

Analysis of PACTS data revealed that participant housing stability and employment status significantly improved while participants were in the program. In addition, drug test data indicated that participants on average completed 17 drug tests while in Support Court, with an average of 2.5 positive tests. Considering the backgrounds and history of drug use exhibited by drug court participants, the proportion of positive drug tests (.14189, or 14%) while in Support Court seems remarkably low, and the proportion of positive drug tests completed after participating in Support Court was even slightly lower (.11854, or 12%).

A comparison of pre-trial versus post-conviction Support Court participants revealed that pre-trial Support Court participants received significantly shorter sentences of incarceration, as compared to post-conviction participants. This analysis statistically controlled for sentencing guideline scores, demographic characteristics, and court location. To a lesser extent, pre-trial participants also received significantly shorter terms of supervised release or probation supervision. In addition, a separate finding indicated pre-trial participants exhibited a significantly lower proportion of positive drug tests compared to post-conviction participants. Overall, these results suggest the pre-trial component of Support Court has been effective in encouraging treatment and supervision compliance prior to sentencing, and, subsequently, reducing prison sentence lengths and periods of supervision.

In terms of anticipated community outcomes, the second phase of this evaluation incorporated a matched comparison group, through which the effect of Support Court on recidivism can be better estimated. Nevertheless, initial descriptive measures of official recidivism for Support

Support Court Recidivism Executive Summary

Court participants appeared promising. Based on PACTS data and official criminal records data maintained by the State of Connecticut Judicial Branch, 23% of Support Court participants had their supervision revoked after program participation, and 29% had a future conviction in Connecticut on a new offense (with varying amounts of time at risk in the community). Only 10% were convicted on a new felony, and only 8% were convicted on a drug offense. About 22% were sentenced to incarceration on a new offense, but only about 10% were incarcerated for more than 12 months on a new offense.

Finally, about half of all Support Court participants either graduated or otherwise left the program successfully. While this finding is similar to completion rates uncovered in existing drug court research, it also means that about half of the Support Court participants have been terminated or otherwise left the program unsuccessfully. Support Court data indicate the percentage of participants who were terminated formally from the program (23%) was very similar to the percentage of participants who were revoked (23%) or had a future conviction on a new offense in Connecticut (29%). Overall, although the initial recidivism findings were promising, increasing the percentage of graduated/successful program participants also could enhance recidivism outcomes.

Current Analysis

In an effort to provide a further investigation of the effect of Support Court on recidivism, a comparison group of federal offenders from Connecticut was drawn and utilized for statistical analyses. These individuals experienced post-conviction supervision in the United States District Court of Connecticut sometime during the period of 2010 through the first 6 months of 2018, and they had some type of drug and alcohol treatment ordered as part of their supervision conditions. However, they did not experience Support Court during their pre-trial services or post-conviction supervision periods. In general, the 232 individuals in this group were compared to the 182 Support Court participants from 2009 to 2017 who had progressed to post-conviction supervision by the start of 2018 (i.e., recidivism was assessed during the post-conviction supervision period for both groups). Following initial examination of the entire two groups, propensity score analysis was employed to closely match 116 individuals from each group and compare their recidivism outcomes.

Current Findings

For the entire group of 414 individuals in either Support Court or the comparison group, 121 (29%) experienced post-conviction supervision in New Haven, 130 (31%) were supervised in Bridgeport, and 163 (39%) were supervised in Hartford. Of the 182 Support Court members, 50 (28%) participated in New Haven, 64 (35%) participated in Bridgeport, and 68 (37%) participated in Hartford. In addition, 49 of these individuals experienced pre-trial Support Court, while 133 participated in Support Court during their post-conviction supervision.

Three measures of post-conviction recidivism were examined for Support Court participants and the comparison group: arrest, drug test failure, and revocation. Based on data contained in PACTS, for the entire group of 414 individuals, 166 (40%) were arrested during post-conviction supervision, 198 (48%) failed a drug test, and 63 (15%) had their supervision formally revoked.

Support Court Recidivism Executive Summary

Of the 63 revoked individuals, 38 (60%) were revoked due to a new criminal charge, and 25 (40%) were revoked for technical violations.

Initial comparative analyses assessed the recidivism of all Support Court participants versus all individuals in the comparison group. Based on the 182 Support Court participants and 232 individuals in the comparison group, during post-conviction supervision, Support Court participants:

- Were significantly less likely to be arrested (34% versus 45%; $p < .05$)
- Were significantly less likely to fail a drug test (41% versus 53%; $p < .05$)
- Were significantly more likely to be revoked (19% versus 12%; $p < .05$)
- The latter finding was due to Support Court participants being significantly more likely to be revoked for technical violations (10% versus 3%; $p < .05$)

Further basic comparisons considered the recidivism of successful Support Court participants (i.e., those who either formally graduated or otherwise left the program successfully) versus individuals in the comparison group. Here, using measures of arrest and drug test failure during post-conviction supervision, differences between the two groups were pronounced. Based on the 94 successful Support Court participants and the 232 individuals in the comparison group, successful Support Court participants were:

- Significantly less likely to be arrested (26% versus 45%; $p < .01$)
- Significantly less likely to fail a drug test (29% versus 53%; $p < .001$)

It is important to note that the results shown above do not take into account any pre-existing differences between the two groups, aside from Support Court participation. The next set of analyses assessed other possible differences between the two groups. Based on an examination of various demographic and legal variables, the results indicated that Support Court participants:

- Were significantly less likely to be male (80% versus 96%; $p < .001$)
- Were significantly more likely to be Caucasian Non-Hispanic (30% versus 17%; $p < .01$)
- Were significantly less likely to be single (60% versus 70%; $p < .05$)
- Were significantly more likely to have experienced prior hard drug use (i.e., something more than alcohol or marijuana use; 82% versus 68%; $p < .001$)
- Had a significantly lower average number of prior arrests (5.42 versus 6.66; $p < .01$)
- Had a significantly lower average minimum recommended prison sentence based on federal sentencing guidelines (75.75 versus 87.92; $p < .05$)
- Had a significantly lower average minimum recommended time on supervised release based on federal sentencing guidelines (35.22 versus 40.89; $p < .05$)
- Had a significantly lower average total offense level based on federal sentencing guidelines (20.69 versus 23.30; $p < .001$)
- Had a significantly lower average composite score for prior criminal patterns and violence (1.29 versus 2.05; $p < .001$)

Based on these significant differences between the two groups, propensity score analysis was utilized to create two groups that were statistically equivalent on the measured demographic and

Support Court Recidivism Executive Summary

legal variables. The first step in this process was to estimate a logistic regression equation that predicted group membership in Support Court (yes or no). This model contained 22 independent variables, of which 7 were significant predictors ($p < .05$) of Support Court membership: Sex of participant, Number of prior arrests, Total offense level from federal sentencing guidelines, Married or cohabitating, Prior criminal patterns and violence, Age at which drug use began, and Prior hard drug use. Predicted probabilities of Support Court membership (i.e., propensity scores) for each of the individuals in both groups subsequently were utilized to closely match Support Court participants with similar comparison group members.

Using the propensity score matching process, 116 Support Court participants were matched with 116 comparison group members. Overall, these two groups were statistically equivalent in their propensity scores (i.e., the probability of being in Support Court), along with the other demographic and legal variables used to predict Support Court group membership. In other words, for the 232 matched individuals, there were no significant differences between the Support Court participants and comparison group members, in terms of their demographic characteristics and legal variables. In addition, none of these variables continued to be significant predictors of Support Court membership following the matching procedure.

Various measures of recidivism were reassessed following the propensity score matching process. Based on the 116 Support Court participants and 116 comparison group members, during the post-conviction supervision period, the Support Court participants:

- Were insignificantly more likely to be revoked (22% versus 13%; $p = .082$), primarily due to being more likely to be revoked on technical violations (13% versus 5%; $p = .109$).
- Were significantly less likely to fail a drug test (42% versus 56%; $p < .05$)
- Were significantly less likely to be arrested (33% versus 47%; $p < .05$)
- Further analyses of arrest data indicated that Support Court participants experienced significantly longer times to arrest, as compared to non-participants ($p < .01$).

An additional set of analyses considered whether there were differences in recidivism outcomes for successful Support Court participants (i.e., those who formally graduated or otherwise left Support Court successfully) and unsuccessful Support Court participants (i.e., those who were terminated or otherwise left Support Court unsuccessfully), as compared to members of the comparison group. Based on the matched group of 232 individuals:

- Unsuccessful Support Court participants were significantly more likely to be revoked compared to non-Support Court group members ($p < .01$)
- Successful Support Court participants were significantly less likely to fail a drug test compared to non-Support Court group members ($p < .01$)
- Successful Support Court participants were significantly less likely to be arrested compared to non-Support Court group members ($p < .01$)

A final set of analyses utilized the original group of 414 individuals, of which 182 were Support Court participants and 232 were comparison group members. Logistic regression analysis was used to assess the effect of Support Court membership on recidivism, while statistically

Support Court Recidivism Executive Summary

controlling for propensity scores, to account for the pre-existing group differences. In these models, as compared to members of the comparison group, Support Court participants:

- Were significantly more likely to be revoked ($p < .01$)
- Were significantly less likely to fail a drug test ($p < .05$)
- Were insignificantly less likely to be arrested ($p = .240$)
- Further analyses of arrest data indicated that Support Court participants experienced longer times to arrest, as compared to non-participants. This finding approached statistical significance ($p = .07$).

Summary and Conclusions

During the past 2 years, researchers from the University of New Haven collaborated with the United States District Court of Connecticut to evaluate a Support Court operating in three locations. An initial process evaluation revealed that the intended target population of medium and high-risk drug and alcohol-involved offenders was being reached, Support Court participants and professional stakeholders shared positive views about the services and proceedings provided, and participant outcomes in the areas of employment, housing stability, drug use, and recidivism were positive. The data also suggested that consideration be given to the optimal size of Support Court, in terms of the number of participants served, as well as greater use of data and evidence-based programs and practices.

The current impact evaluation sought to assess the effect of Support Court on recidivism, by utilizing a comparison group of federal offenders from Connecticut who had experienced post-conviction supervision in the United States District Court of Connecticut during the same time period that Support Court was being offered. These individuals had some type of drug and alcohol treatment ordered as part of their post-conviction supervision conditions, but they did not experience Support Court during their pre-trial services or post-conviction supervision periods. The 232 individuals in this group were compared to the 182 Support Court participants from 2009 to 2017 who had progressed to post-conviction supervision by the start of 2018. Following an initial examination of the entire two groups, propensity score analysis was employed to closely match 116 individuals from each group and compare their recidivism outcomes.

Overall, the results were favorable for Support Court participants. Based on the entire group of 414 Support Court participants and comparison group members, during post-conviction supervision, Support Court participants were significantly less likely to be arrested and less likely to fail a drug test. Following the use of propensity score matching, these findings held for 116 Support Court participants closely matched with 116 comparison group members. In addition, the matched individuals from Support Court experienced significantly longer times to arrest, as compared to the non-Support Court members. Moreover, the favorable recidivism findings were strengthened when successful Support Court participants were separated from unsuccessful Support Court participants.

Although the findings were supportive of Support Court based on measures of arrest and drug test failure, based on measures of revocation they were not. Using the entire group of 414 individuals, Support Court participants were significantly more likely to be revoked during post-

Support Court Recidivism Executive Summary

conviction supervision. This primarily was due to Support Court participants being significantly more likely to be revoked on technical violations. This pattern also was revealed after propensity score matching was utilized, although the differences between the Support Court participants and comparison group members were not statistically significant.

In sum, following process evaluation and impact assessment, it appears Support Court is operating as intended and is producing positive behavioral outcomes. It is recommended that Support Court personnel continue to review and utilize the past and current research findings for assessing the Support Court target population and ideal program size, enhancing use of data and evidence-based approaches, and identifying ways to increase Support Court completion rates. Strategies focused on these areas also are likely to improve recidivism outcomes, which already are favorable and indicate a measurable degree of Support Court effectiveness.

References

Dule, J., Myers, D., Earl, K., Wang, M., & Dady, T. (2019a). *An evaluation of federal Support Court in Connecticut*. Department of Criminal Justice, University of New Haven.

Dule, J., Myers, D., Earl, K., Wang, M., & Dady, T. (November, 2019b). *An evaluation of federal Support Court in Connecticut*. Presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Society of Criminology, Atlanta, GA.