



Parents' Perceptions of the Lancaster Family Treatment Drug Court

Nebraska Resource Project for Vulnerable Young Children
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Introduction

- Juvenile dependency courts deal with cases that have allegations of child abuse or neglect by a parent or guardian.
- Problem-solving courts are being increasingly used in abuse and neglect cases (Winick, 2003). They aim to mitigate the issues that bring families in front of the court (such as addiction or family dysfunction).
- Problem-solving courts also aim to provide participants more voice in the process and, consequently, increase perceptions of fairness (Gatowski, Dobbin, & Summers, 2013) which is important because when people perceive a process as more fair, they are more likely to comply (Tyler, 1989).
- Judge Heideman's Lancaster Family Treatment Drug Court (FTDC) is a problem-solving court that deals with cases of child abuse or neglect related to substance abuse.
- Parents on FTDC receive monthly team meetings (attended by the Judge), specialized services targeting substance use and trauma, 90-day review hearings, and corrective measures.
- This ongoing evaluation is designed to measure outcomes and provide insight to assist the FTDC in improving its work, and therefore, assist the parents and children.

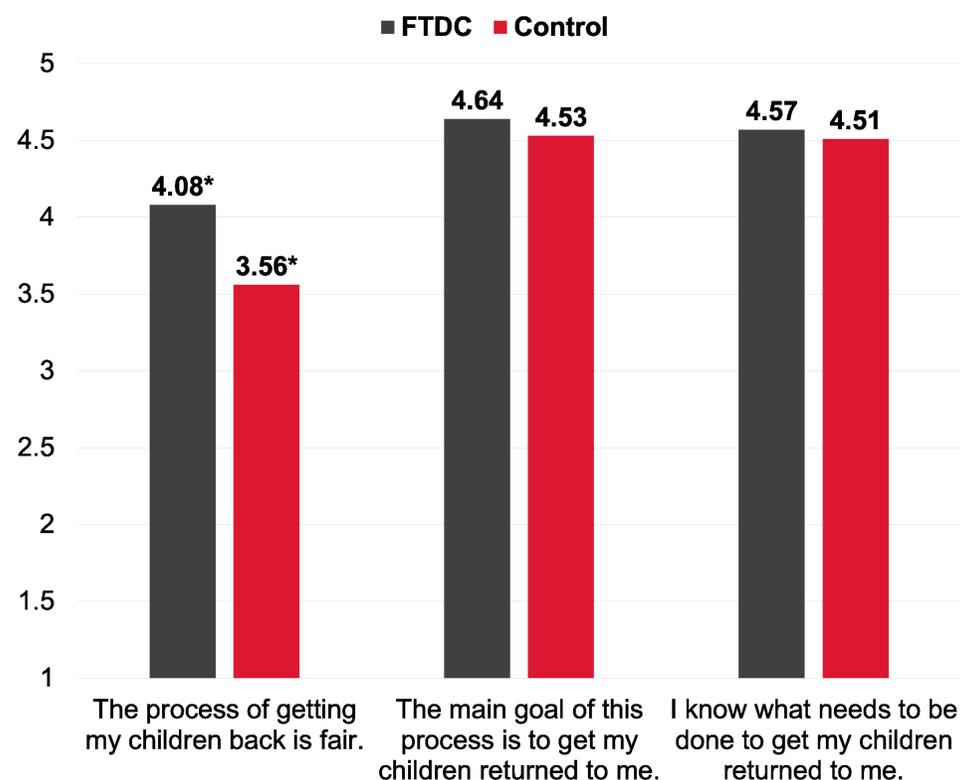
Research Question

Do parents on the Family Treatment Drug Court perceive the court process more positively than parents who are not on the track (control)?

Method

- **144 parents (109 FTDC; 35 Control)** completed an 11 item survey following their court hearings
- Parents responded to items using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 3 = neutral, 5 = strongly agree)

Results



“The process of getting my children back is fair.”

FTDC parents ($M = 4.08$, $SD = 1.18$) agreed that the process is fair significantly more than control parents ($M = 3.56$, $SD = 1.44$), $F(1, 141) = 4.59$, $p = .03$, $\eta^2 = .031$.

“The main goal of this process is to get my children returned to me.”

FTDC parents ($M = 4.64$, $SD = 0.80$) and control parents ($M = 4.53$, $SD = 1.05$) equally agreed that getting their children back was the main goal of this process $F(1, 141) = .44$, $p = .51$, $\eta^2 = .003$.

“I know what needs to be done to get my children returned to me.”

FTDC parents ($M = 4.57$, $SD = .85$) and control parents ($M = 4.51$, $SD = 0.82$) equally agreed that they knew what needed to be done to get their children returned to them $F(1, 141) = .11$, $p = .74$, $\eta^2 = .001$.

Conclusion and Discussion

- Overall, both FTDC and control parents expressed very positive perceptions of the court process on the three items examined.
- FTDC and control parents equally agreed two of the three statements, these being: “The main goal of the process is to get my children returned to me,” and “I know what needs to be done to get my children returned to me.”
- However, there was a significant difference in parents who thought the process of getting their children back was fair, with FTDC parents believing this process to be more fair.
 - This is important because people who perceive decision-making processes as fair are more likely to comply with the decision and cooperate with the decision-maker in the future (Tyler, 1989).
- Parents' perceptions of the court are important; positive perceptions may lead to more involvement and faster case closure (Heideman, Cole-Mossman, Hoetger, & Hazen, 2016).

Limitations and Future Directions

- This evaluation is limited by its reliance of self-report data; parents' responses on the survey may not truly represent how they perceive the court. Additionally, we only gathered data from parents who were willing to fill out the survey, which may be skewed in the direction of parents with positive perceptions of the court.
- In the future, it will be important to examine process outcomes, such as how long it takes for cases to close and how that may relate to these perceptions.
- This evaluation is ongoing and we will continue to collect data to further develop the FTDC.

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