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Drug Court Versus Incarceration: Which Is More Effective?

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Abstract

Aim: This study explores the effectiveness of drug court treatment programs in maintaining sobriety and employment status compared to incarceration. The participants will be chosen by a random sampling of 100 residents of the Hampton Roads area of Virginia—50 who have graduated drug court and 50 who were incarcerated for drug-related offenses. Each participant must be a legal resident of Virginia for at least 3 years and have successfully completed the drug court course.

Methods: A descriptive correlational design will be used for this research study to determine the participants' life one year after graduating from a drug court program or one year after incarceration for a drug-related offense, possible drug and alcohol relapse, and questions on their demographics.

Analysis: An analysis will be conducted using descriptive and inferential statistics. A demographic profile will be constructed for each group. The data will be organized using frequency distribution to compare employment status and sobriety with small sample size.

Expected findings: It is expected that findings will show participation in drug court reduces the rate of recidivism and increases the rate of sobriety maintenance more than incarceration in drug-addicted individuals.

Limitations: This study is limited due to the self-reporting nature of questionnaires and small sample size.

Background

Drug addiction affects millions of Americans nationwide. Among Americans aged 12 or older, the use of illicit drugs has increased over the last decade. Drugs have a detrimental effect on society, leading to high rates of recidivism. Drug courts are a different approach to treating drug addiction compared to incarceration. The treatment is a multifaceted, collaborative, and an individualized process, employing a multidisciplinary drug-court team (judge, treatment professionals, probation officers) to meet the drug offender's psychosocial, financial, physical, spiritual needs to correct behaviour.

DTCs vigilantly monitor the offender's progress via drug testing (urinalysis) and immediate penalties are given as necessary for non-compliance or relapse. Prison seems to be the most used intervention to “motivate” recovery in individuals found guilty of a crime due to substance use. The problem is that there are so many different disorders also have co-occurring mental illness disorders. Many individuals that have substance use related disorders also have co-occurring mental illness disorders.

Procedure: 18-question survey

Analysis

A demographic profile will be produced to illustrate the breakdowns of gender, age, ethnicity, level of education, and marital status. A comparison will be made between the two populations. The data will be organized using frequency distribution to compare employment status and sobriety of each group. The participants' employment status and sobriety will be ratio measurement. A dependent t-test will be used to verify the means of each group are statistically different.

Conclusion

Drug treatment courts (DTCs) are an alternative to traditional courts for drug abusers. The treatment is a multifaceted, collaborative, and an individualized process, employing a multidisciplinary drug-court team (judge, treatment professionals, probation officers) to meet the drug offender’s psychosocial, financial, physical, spiritual needs to correct behaviour. DTCs vigilantly monitor the offender’s progress via drug testing (urinalysis) and immediate penalties are given as necessary for non-compliance or relapse. Findings in this study will indicate that DTCs are the more effective intervention of choice compared to its counterpart. Moreover, it is found that the rate of sobriety is increased, while reducing the rate of recidivism.

Interprofessional

Many individuals that have substance use related disorders also have co-occurring mental illness disorders. Prison seems to be the most used intervention to “motivate” recovery in individuals found guilty of a crime due to substance use. The problem is that there are so many different reasons for why a person chooses to use substances. Drug court utilizes an integrated team of professionals from different fields to address the multiple factors for the substance use of an individual.

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