

AN ANALYSIS OF FACTORS RELATED TO DRUG COURT TREATMENT-  
PROGRAM COMPLETION RATES

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of  
Texas State University-San Marcos  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of SCIENCE

by

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May, 2011

AN ANALYSIS OF FACTORS RELATED TO DRUG COURT TREATMENT-  
PROGRAM COMPLETION RATES

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This incredible journey from the initial concept to the defense of my thesis could not have been successfully completed without the support of several individuals. I would like to first thank my thesis chair, Dr. Joycelyn M. Pollock, for providing an ever present level of direction and guidance on this project. I would also like to thank Dr. Pablo Martinez and Dr. Bett A. Sanders for their insight and suggestions to improve draft after draft of this thesis.

Dedication to improving the lives of those individuals struggling with addiction is exemplified by the inspiring work and efforts of the Honorable Judge Ernie Glenn and the drug court team. Without their help, this project would not have been completed. I would like to express my gratitude to my family who continue to inspire and encourage me to reach my full potential. Thank you to Cristian Dobre for being supportive and editing the many drafts— I'm sure you learned more about drug courts than you ever thought possible.

This manuscript was submitted on March 9, 2011.

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **AN ANALYSIS OF FACTORS RELATED TO DRUG COURT TREATMENT- PROGRAM COMPLETION RATES**

by

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May 2011

**SUPERVISING PROFESSOR: JOYCELYN POLLOCK**

Over the past twenty years, drug courts were developed with goals to rehabilitate offenders in terms of criminality and drug dependency. In sending criminal defendants to treatment programs rather than to prison, these courts promise to meet the needs of defendants while reducing recidivism rates and costs. This study evaluates 290 Felony Drug Court participants in a large city in Texas to determine factors that are related to drug court completion. This study examines the drug court program through the lens of strain theory in order to understand its effectiveness as a rehabilitative effort for the substance-abusing participant. The data are analyzed using bivariate analysis and descriptive analysis. Results from the present study indicate that the variables that predict success include employment and marital status. Participants who were employed and married are more likely to complete the program. Limitations of this study and recommendations for future research are discussed.

## CHAPTER ONE: LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Introduction**

The growth of drug-related criminal caseloads in the 1980's in many jurisdictions across the United States has been well documented (Goerdts, Lomvadias, Galas, & Mahoney, 1989; Goerdts & Martin, 1989; Heck & Rousell, 2007). Drug courts were proposed as a solution to the increasing numbers of drug involved offenders entering the criminal justice system. Drug courts have become widespread since their introduction in 1989 in Miami-Dade County, Florida (Wilson, Mitchell, & Mackenzie, 2006; Heck & Rousell, 2007). According to the Office of Justice Programs Drug Court Clearinghouse and Technical Assistance Project (2007), drug courts were present in all 50 states with over 2,000 adult drug courts in operation in 2007.

Drug courts use a courtroom dynamic that is based on teamwork among defense, prosecution, treatment, and other court-related agencies (Goldkamp, 1994). Their focus is on helping participants stop drug abuse as well as related criminal activity (Drug Strategies, 1999). The drug court is a judge-supervised treatment program based on outpatient treatment in the community (Goldkamp, 1994). It cost approximately \$30,000 to keep one offender in county jail for a year versus \$700 for each participant in the drug

court treatment program (Drug Strategies, 1999). In addition to cost savings, drug court programs are enabling the justice system to allocate resources more efficiently. By taking a drug caseload, the drug court judges have freed up docket time for other criminal matters as well as civil cases. In some jurisdictions where jail space has been freed up, this space is now being used to house more serious offenders (Drug Court Clearinghouse Technical Assistance Project, 1998).

While drug court programs seem to be beneficial, research exploring the demographic profile of offenders, criminal history, and program completion rates for those who participate in a treatment-oriented drug court program continues. The purpose of this study is to determine the factors related to completion in one drug court treatment-program. This thesis will provide demographic data, criminal history and program completion rates for those who participated in a treatment-oriented drug court. The sample consists of adults who participated in the "Hill County" felony drug court in 2006. The study begins by first discussing the literature on five issues concerning drug courts including: drug court components, drug court costs and benefits, drug court participants, gender differences of participants, and evaluations of felony drug court programs. The second section of the literature review includes a review of Agnew's general strain theory (GST) and a summary of the most relevant empirical studies. Strain theory is utilized to explain why some drug court participants fail and others succeed.

### **Drug Court Components**

The National Association of Drug Court Professionals' Standards Committee identified ten key elements of successful drug courts which are as follows: (1) drug courts integrate alcohol and other drug treatment services with the justice system case

processing; (2) drug courts use a non-adversarial approach in which prosecution and defense counsel promote public safety while protecting participants' due process rights; (3) eligible participants are identified and placed in the drug court program; (4) drug courts provide access to a continuum of treatment and rehabilitation services; (5) abstinence is frequently monitored by drug testing; (6) sanctions and incentives that participants receive from the court and the treatment programs are organized as personalized contingency contracts; (7) drug court participants have an ongoing judicial interaction; (8) program effectiveness and goals are monitored and evaluated; (9) continuing interdisciplinary education of the drug court team promotes effective drug court planning; and (10) drug court effectiveness partnerships among drug courts, public agencies and community based organizations are established (National Association of Drug Court Professionals, 1997).

Participants after successfully completing drug court, the original charge may be dismissed or reduced, the sentence may be set aside, or the judge may reduce the penalty (Drug Strategies, 1999). The participant has control over their own success in drug court and their performance is based on measurable goals (Drug Strategies, 1999). If participants fail to complete treatment, then prosecution and sentencing might proceed immediately (Drug Strategies, 1999). Drug courts either target first offenders or habitual drug criminals. Many drug court participants end their criminal activity leading to a much lower cost to the taxpayer than incarceration (Drug Strategies, 1999). The Drug Court model uses various tools such as sanctions and incentives implemented in the regular judicial hearings. These tools help diagnose addiction severity, find the participant appropriate treatment services, hold offenders accountable, and help manage their

behavior within and outside the treatment setting (Heck & Roussell, 2007). These tools make the drug court model a collaborative approach that provides a complete assessment. The drug court team matches locally available resources with the needs of the participant (Heck & Roussell, 2007).

Drug courts require treatment services which usually include individual or group counseling, relapse counseling, relapse prevention, medical care, and general detoxification (NADCP, 1997). The treatment provider gives a report to the drug court team about the participant's progress so that sanctions and incentives can be provided by the court (Drug Strategies, 1999). Drug courts generally require participants to take additional steps such as obtain a high school or GED certificate, maintain employment, have all aspects of their financial situation under control, have a sponsor in the community, and perform community service hours (DCCTAP, 1998). Most drug courts also offer referrals to family counseling and parenting services. Some drug courts provide aid with housing, food, and clothing. Some even provide child care services for parents attending drug court treatment sessions and hearings (DCCTAP, 1998).

Alonso (2009:61) comments "drug courts are perceived to be soft on crime, but on the contrary when looking at the proven facts according to the data on program requirements, intensity of supervision, program effectiveness, and long-term change in substance abuse, it shows the opposite." Drug court programs have the most intensely supervised probationers in the criminal justice system. The programs include weekly drug testing, treatment, frequent court reviews, intensive supervision, and home visits by probation officers. Treatment inside the drug court usually include the participant as well as his or her family (Alonso, 2009).

### **Drug Court Costs and Benefits**

Studies have demonstrated that drug courts can be a cost-effective use of criminal justice system and taxpayer resources. Carey and Finigan (2004) evaluated the Multnomah County Drug Court in order to assess the costs of drug court in relation to benefits. The study used a transactional cost economic model which allowed the examination of multiple agency contributions to costs. The data was collected in order to assess overall and agency-by-agency costs and benefits. Many policy makers believe that drug courts are an expensive investment compared to traditional case processing. This study found that cost advantages in the drug court occurred immediately (Carey & Finigan, 2004).

Carey and Finigan (2004) also found, however, that these savings are not spread equally among agencies. Some agencies, such as the public defender, law enforcement, and the probation department, all invest far less in the drug court than the district attorney, the court, and treatment agencies. The results indicated that the combined investment cost of all the agencies in the drug court was \$1,441.52. An average savings of \$3,520.85 was realized for every drug court participant. This measurement included individuals who graduated and those who were terminated less than a week after starting the program. When victimization costs were added, the total saving averaged \$4,788 per participant, showed that close to half a million dollars was saved for every 100 participants who entered this drug court (Carey & Finigan, 2004).

### **Drug Court Participants**

With a growing number of adolescents entering the juvenile system due to crimes related to drugs, juvenile drug courts were implemented in the mid-1990s (Belenko &

Dembo, 2003). As with adult drug courts, juvenile drug courts also use judicial supervision, treatment and community resources. In addition, juvenile drug courts shape the program's treatment and rehabilitation services to focus on the juvenile's developmental needs, family situation, and the juvenile environment (DCCTAP, 1998). By 2001, juvenile drug courts made up 26 percent of all drug courts (American University, 2001). By the year 2002, there were more than 200 juvenile drug courts in 46 states plus the District of Colombia (Belenko & Dembo, 2003).

In juvenile drug courts, judges, prosecutors, defense attorneys, probation officers, and treatment providers work as a team to monitor each participant's progress and tailor an effective treatment for each individual. The judge plays a more specific role in the recovery process than in standard juvenile court dockets (Belenko & Dembo, 2003). The two main components of juvenile drug courts are drug testing and family involvement. Juvenile drug court programs may use home visits or family therapy, or require adult family members to stop their own drug abuse. In some states, the parents can lose visitation rights or custody of their children if they do not comply with the requirements of the drug court. Intensive monitoring and treatment have the potential to reduce drug abuse and criminal activity among the juvenile population in the drug court. Treatment may also impact participants' school attendance, achievement and behavior (Drug Strategies, 1999).

The length of juvenile drug court program usually ranges from 12 to 15 months. Treatment also varies from program to program, but usually consists of drug testing, a 12 step program, group therapy, individual therapy, family therapy, as well as educational and vocational assistance. One of the most important aspects of the juvenile drug court

treatment model is family therapy (Belenko & Dembo, 2003). Youths are rewarded for treatment compliance by promoting them into progressive phases with fewer restrictions and less intensive treatment requirements. On the other hand, not meeting the requirements of the treatment can result in sanctions, such as such as additional days in treatment, fines, community service, or usually as a last resort, incarceration (Cooper, 2002).

### **Gender**

There are many differences between men and women when it comes to substance abuse. It appears that women may be more likely to use alcohol or drugs out of a desire to self medicate (Newcomb, Chou, Bentler, & Huba, 1988; Toray, Coughlin, Vuchinich, & Patricelli, 1991). On the other hand, men are more likely to abuse drugs for social and recreational purposes (Newcomb et al., 1988; Novacek, Ranskin, & Hogan, 1991). There have been a few studies that explore the impact of gender on drug court success (Shaffer et al., 2009). Studies suggest men have higher re-arrest rates than women. (O'Connell, Nestlerode, & Miller, 1999; Spohn, Piper, Martin, & Frenzel, 2001; Truitt, Rhodes, Hoffman, Seeherman, Jalbert, Kane, Bcani, Carrigan, & Finn, 2002; Wolfe, Guydish, & Termond, 2002).

Gray and Saum's (2005) comparison of male and female drug court participants found that women were significantly more likely to self-report depression and the use of medications for mental health issues. Also, this study found that women were more likely to successfully complete the program when compared to men (Gray & Saum, 2005). Peters and Murrin (2000) found the opposite, specifically, that females actually had an increased likelihood of re-arrest. On the other hand, Daly's (1992) research provides a framework



for considering the needs of female drug offenders. In this study, it was found that drug addicted women are more likely to be victims of sexual and physical abuse and their drug use may be tied to negative experiences associated with living on the streets (Daly, 1992). Holtfreter and Morash's (2003) analysis of female offenders found that women with the highest risk of recidivism were drug addicted, had mental health issues, child issues, employment difficulties, and educational deficits (Holtfreter & Morash, 2003).

Beckerman and Fontana (2001) evaluated drug court services for female participants in Florida. The services consisted of women-only group sessions, assessment, and intensive case management services. The study found that women receiving enhanced services remained in the program for longer periods of time; on average 13 months versus 5.5 months for those not receiving these services. Women who received enhanced services also had significantly more negative drug tests, specifically 85 percent versus 33 percent (Beckerman, & Fontana, 2001).

The Office of Justice Programs Drug Court Clearinghouse and Technical Assistance in 1995 conducted a study of drug court participants in 23 different states. The study results indicated that significantly more men than women were enrolling in drug court programs. The study also found that in some drug courts, women who participated in the program were more heavily involved with drugs by the time they become involved in the criminal court process than their male peers. In addition, the study found that in the drug courts that offered special services such as day care, females graduated at a higher rate than their male counterparts (OJPDCC, 1997).

## **Evaluations of Adult Drug Courts**

Previous literature has found that drug courts reduce recidivism among participants when compared to non-participants across a number of jurisdictions (Brewster, 2001; Gottfredson, Najaka, & Kearley, 2003; Hartman, Listman, & Shaffer, 2007; Jensen & Mosher, 2006; Peters & Murrin, 2000; Shaffer, Listwan, Latessa, & Lowenkamp, 2008). Graduates of drug courts are less likely to be arrested or convicted when compared to non-participants (Dynea & Sung, 2000; Peters, Haas, & Murrin, 1999; Vito & Tewksbury, 1998). Studies have failed to show evidence of a reduction in criminal behavior (Belenko, Fagan, & Dumanovsky, 1994; Deschenes & Greenwood, 1994; Grandfiled, Eby, & Brewster, 1998; Miethe, Lu, & Resse, 2000). Overall, reviews have concluded that drug courts are effective in reducing drug use and rearrest (Lowenkamp, Holsinger, & Latessa, 2005; Wilson, Mitchell, & Mackenzie, 2006). Shaffer et al, (2009) compare outcomes between a sample of 95 moderate to high-risk drug court female participants and 80 female probationers. The study found that female drug court participants had significantly lower rates of recidivism than their probation counterparts (Shaffer et al., 2009).

Alonso (2009) analyzed 100 individuals who participated in a Drug Treatment Court and 100 who were sentenced in Bexar County Court Number One. Drug court participants were less likely to recidivate when compared to participants with no exposure to the drug court. The study confirmed that non-drug court participants are more than three times as likely to recidivate and pick up multiple cases than drug court participants. Alonso's (2009) research demonstrated that non-drug court offenders are more likely to have their probation revoked than those offenders participating in drug court. Of the 100

persons on probation and not involved in drug courts, 30 percent were terminated from probation, 56 percent had their probation revoked, and 14 percent had their cases dismissed. Of the same group, 35 percent were re-arrested after being terminated, revoked, or dismissed from probation (Alonso, 2009). The recidivism rates among non-drug court participants showed that 17 percent picked up a second case. On the other hand, 57 percent of the Drug Court Program participants successfully graduated. The sample of the Drug Court participants yielded an 11 percent recidivism rate. This showed that participants with any exposure to Drug Court were less likely to recidivate when compared to participants with no exposure to Drug Court (Alonso, 2009).

Banks and Gottfredson's (2004) study used an experimental design to assess the impact of a drug treatment court on nonviolent felony offenders. The study showed that that drug court clients were significantly more likely to avoid rearrest than the comparison sample, and also had significantly fewer arrests during the follow-up period of two years. Half of the control sample had failed five months into the follow-up period, while half of the drug court sample did not fail until six months later. This analysis suggested that once a drug court sample member made it to a certain point in the recovery stage he or she was likely to continue to avoid rearrest. The control sample, on the hand, continued to be a risk for failure for two years. The study demonstrated that the first four months has the highest risk for failure in both samples (Banks & Gottfredson, 2004).

Wilson et al. (2006) combined 50 studies representing 55 evaluations to review the evidence on the effectiveness of drug courts in reducing future criminal offending using meta-analytics. The findings of the research suggest that drug offenders

participating in a drug court are less likely to reoffend than similar offenders sentenced to traditional correctional options (Wilson et al., 2006).

### **Agnew's General Strain Theory Literature Review**

It would be helpful to identify who is more likely to succeed in any drug court program. Strain theory, developed by Robert Agnew, may provide some of the answers. Traditional strain theory focused on youths that are motivated to commit delinquent acts because they have failed to achieve desired goals, such as middle class status (Cohen, 1955) or economic success (Merton, 1938; Cloward & Ohlin, 1960). This type of strain has been measured by most researchers in terms of conventional aspirations, conventional expectations, or as a discrepancy between the two (Elliot & Voss, 1974; Gold, 1963; Hirschi, 1969; Johnson, 1979; Liska, 1971; Quicker, 1974). In 1992, Robert Agnew introduced a revised General Strain Theory (GST) (Agnew, 1992). GST allows for an individualized conceptualization of strain. The theory incorporates gender, race/ethnicity, class, and other personal differences in both the conceptualization of goals and strains. Also, GST explains why only some individuals who experience strain turn to delinquency (Agnew, 1992).

Agnew's (1992) GST addresses strains other than those generated by a separation between goals and means. Agnew identified three major sources of strain: (1) elements that prevent or threaten to prevent the individual from achieving positively valued goals, (2) elements related to the removal or potential of removing positively valued stimuli, and (3) a relationship that presents negatively valued stimuli (Agnew, 1992). Agnew (1992) states that strain not only results when others prevent you from achieving your goals but also when others present you with negatively valued stimuli such as verbal and

physical abuse or the removal of positively valued stimuli, such as taking your possessions.

According to GST, negative emotions arise as a result of strain and lead the individual to either conventionally cope or illegitimately cope. A form of illegitimate coping is drug or alcohol abuse (Agnew, 1992; Brezina, 1996). Agnew (1992) stated that anger is a key reason for deviant behavior in reaction to strain. On the other hand, other negative feelings can also play an important role in explaining the effect of strain on criminal behavior. While anger is strongly related to violent crime, feelings of depression and anxiety might lead to drug use (Agnew, 2006). Agnew's (1992) general strain theory recognizes that there are a wide range of adaptations to strain, some cognitive, behavioral, and emotional, and some of these adaptations involve crime and some do not.

### **Empirical Studies of Strain Theory**

The research done in order to test general strain theory seems to support the theory. Most of this research tests the relationships between delinquency and the various types of strain identified in the theory (Agnew & White, 1992; Hoffman & Su, 1997; Mazerolle, 1998; Paternoster & Mazerolle, 1994).

Agnew and White (1992) analyzed data based on the first wave of the Rutgers Health and Human Development Project (HHDP) which is a prospective longitudinal study focusing on alcohol and drug use. The data included 1,380 New Jersey adolescents interviewed between 1979 and 1981. The data provided support for the GST. The study demonstrated that stress from a negative life event, negative relations with adults, parental fighting, and neighborhood problems has as much predictive power as social

control and social learning variables for explaining delinquency and adolescent drug use (Agnew & White, 1992).

Agnew and White (1992) also found that stress as a correlate of delinquency and drug use is strongest for adolescents with a greater number of delinquent peers. They also found that strain's effect on delinquency increases when self-efficacy is low. The data in the study suggested that strain interacts with certain variables in its effect on delinquency and drug use. The study examined interactions with delinquent friends and self-efficacy and found that adolescents with delinquent friends are much more likely to respond to strain by engaging in delinquency and drug use. Agnew and White (1992) mention that future research should determine if there are any subgroup differences such as age, sex, class, and race in the impact of strain.

Another study of Agnew's theory is presented by Paternoster and Mazerolle (1994). It showed two extensions of Agnew and White's study and provided a longitudinal examination of the effects of stress on delinquency over a one year time period. They measure interactions between stress and moral beliefs, delinquent dispositions, and social support. Their results showed that only one out of five interactions examined was significant, and it suggests a relationship that is counter to that proposed by Agnew's model. Specifically, their results demonstrated that stress leads to delinquency when one's sense of control is high (Paternoster & Mazerolle, 1994).

Aseltine, Gore, and Gordon (2000) examined the central hypotheses of GST using data from a three-wave panel study of 939 high school youths in the Boston metropolitan area. Data for this analysis came from a prospective study of stress, mental health, and social adaptation during the adolescent and young adult years. The researchers focused

on three core issues: 1) the relationship between multiple measures of life stresses, relationship difficulties and measures of delinquency; 2) the role of anger and anxiety in mediating the relationship between strain and deviant behavior; and, 3) the impact of personal and social resources on deviant behavior (Aseltine, Gore, & Gordon, 2000).

The study provided limited support for GST. The results showed that strain in the form of negative life events and conflict with family members is, indeed, significantly and positively related to the adolescent's deviance. The results of the study showed that strain would be related to delinquency through anger and anxiety. Structure models reveal that anger and hostility in response to negative life events do play a causal role in fostering more aggressive forms of delinquency, but are not significantly related to either nonaggressive delinquency or marijuana use. A limitation of this study is that it does not contain many youths from severely disadvantaged circumstances. Also, another limitation is that the sample is restricted to a narrow range of ages within middle to late adolescence (Aseltine, Gore, & Gordon, 2000).

Hoffman and Su (1997) study GST model by assessing the sex-specific effects of stressful life events on delinquency and drug use. This study used two waves of data of 803 adolescents. Hoffman and Su (1992) used a longitudinal study designed to assess how parental risk factors including substance abuse disorder affect adolescent substance use, deviant behavior, and mental health. Hoffman and Su's (1997) study indicated that stressful life events have a similar, short-term impact on delinquency and drug use among young men and women. They also found that changes in life events are associated with greater delinquency and drug use (Hoffman & Su, 1997).

While some studies have mixed findings, the studies do seem to support GST. Strain has also been measured by assessing the sex-specific effects of stressful life events on delinquency and drug use. In this study, we will test to see whether strain theory can help us understand who succeeds and who fails in drug court. Unfortunately, we will only be able to approximate strain measures from the data available.

After reviewing the drug court literature, it is apparent that a large gap in drug court literature exists. There are studies that show drug court to be a successful program by showing lower recidivism rates compared to control groups, but more research is needed. If we can better understand who benefits from drug court experience, then resources could be prioritized to be targeted more effectively on those likely to benefit (Goldkamp, 1994). This study aims and intends to fill a gap in research by exploring the factors associated with drug court completion in a felony drug court program. Chapter II illustrates the research questions and hypothesis of the study. Chapter III presents the research design and methodology used to complete the study.



## CHAPTER II. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

The present study focuses on determining whether characteristics of drug court participants are directly related to their success or failure in completing the drug court program. Three major areas of the participant background were examined: demographic information, prior history of drug use, and prior criminal history. Success is measured by graduation, using the original drug court program outcome records from drug court staff.

We will also explore whether strain theory can help predict success. The variables of history of mental health, history of abuse and employment will be used for this study as measures of strain. This analysis excludes those offenders who are still active in the program. The sample includes the entire population of drug court participants from the years 2006 to 2010 that entered the program. The following hypotheses will be addressed:

Hypothesis #1: Successful drug court completion will be more likely associated with women than with men.

Hypothesis #2 Successful drug court completion will more likely be associated with white than with non-white drug court participants.

Hypothesis #3: Successful drug court completion will more likely be associated with married than with single or divorced drug court participants.

Hypothesis #4: Successful drug court completion will more likely be associated with older than with younger drug court participants.

Hypothesis #5: Successful drug court completion will more likely be associated with drug court participants with a higher education than with drug court participants with lower education.

Hypothesis #6: Successful drug court completion will more likely be associated with drug court participants with fewer pre-drug court arrests than with drug court participants with a greater number of pre-drug court arrests.

Hypothesis #7: Successful drug court completion will more like be associated with non-crack/cocaine using drug court participants than with crack using drug court participants.

Hypothesis #8: Successful drug court completion will more likely be associated with employed drug court participants than with not employed drug court participants.

Hypothesis #9: Successful drug court completion will more likely be associated with drug court participants that have not been sexually abused than with drug court participants that have an abuse history.

Hypothesis #10: Successful drug court completion will more likely be associated with drug court participants that do not have a history of mental health than with drug court participants that have a history of mental health.

## CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

The remaining chapters in this thesis describe the study in more detail, report the findings, and discuss the results. In this chapter, the first section provides the statistical procedure that reveals the core structure of the study, and the second section defines the demographics of the program participants. The third section provides an in-depth review of the variables and describes the measures used.

### **Data**

This study examines participants who entered the Felony Drug Court program of a large city in Texas. The study was quantitative in design. The analysis examined the factors related to successful drug court completion. The participants' demographics, drug history, and criminal history are examined in relation to drug court completion.

Established in 2006, the "Hill County" Felony Adult Drug Court<sup>1</sup> is based on the Ten Key Components articulated by the National Association of Drug Court Professionals and the Bureau of Justice Assistance. The Drug Court is a post-adjudication program and utilizes a team approach in which the judge, prosecution, defense counsel, treatment providers, probation officers, and other stakeholders advocate on behalf of the

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<sup>1</sup> The name of the Drug Court program will be confidential

participants and oversee community-based treatment. The Drug Court Program requires random drug testing, case management services, judicial monitoring, and drug treatment.

When participants start the drug court program, it is very structured; however, as participants progress through the program phases, they slowly obtain more privileges (Spohn, Piper, & Davis-Frenzel, 2001). The Drug Court Program has four phases which consist of twelve weeks each. Altogether, the program's four phases require a minimum of twelve months, the average length to completion is eighteen months, given that some offenders experience relapses and/or need continued judicial supervision (Alonzo, 2009).

The population from which this sample was drawn consists of adults who voluntarily chose to participate in the Felony Drug Court program from January 2006 to September 2010. The data for this study were collected from the Felony Drug Court for the first four years of the existence of the program. Upon admission to the drug court program, a form is completed by each participant. The intake form provides demographics, first, second and third drugs-of-choice, marital status, employment status within the last 24 months, a list of various criminal offenses, number of times arrested for each of those offenses, age at the time of first use, and previous treatment exposures. The study will also include whether the participants successfully completed the program or were the subject of a motion to revoke (MTR). This will be used as a measure of failure. The data received from the court did not contain the participant identifiers, thus an exempt form from the university IRB was requested and received. The total sample of the participants who completed the program or received a Motion to Revoke (MTR) during the program was 290 participants.

Success, for the purpose of this study, will be defined as when a participant graduates from the drug court program. Graduating from the program comes after completing the four phases. The other requirements to graduate from the drug court program are: passing the GRE exam, six months of drug free tests, and having a stable job.

### **Sample Characteristics**

Table 1 provides a description of the entire drug court sample. Characteristics of those who succeed are then compared to those who failed to graduate from the program.

### **Demographics**

The sample of (n=290) was predominately Hispanic men and woman. Men accounted for 51% (n=147) of the sample, while 49% (n=143) were women. Participants included: Caucasians 26.9% (n=78), African-Americans 17.9% (n=52), Hispanics 50.0% (n=145), and “Other” 5.2% (n=15). The intake form divided participants into single, married/living together, widowed, and divorced. For the analysis, the groups were then collapsed to include four categories: (1) single, (2) married, (3) divorced and (4) widowed. Only 20 cases were missing these data. Most participants 56.7% (n= 153) were single. Remaining categories included: Divorced 21.2% (n= 57), Married 20.4% (n= 55), and widow(er) 1.9% (n=5).

The intake form noted the highest education grade completed for each participant. For the analysis, education was classified into four groups: “some college,” “completed high school,” “completed grade from 9 to 11” and “less than grade 9.” There were 59 cases missing this variable. The table illustrates that 6.5% (n=15) participants noted that their highest education was less than grade 9, 30.7% (n=71) noted that their highest

education was grade 9 to 11, 28.1% (n=65) noted that high school was their highest education and 34.6% (n=80) indicated some college as their highest education grade completed.

The intake form asked when entering the drug court program whether or not the participant was employed. Responses indicated 65.5% (n=190) of the participants were not employed when entering the program compared to 34.5% (n=100) participants who were employed when entering the drug court program. The age of participants ranged between 17 to 57 years. The mean age of the sample was 32.3. The mean age of the first arrest for the sample was 16.7. Additional demographic data from this sample are presented in Table 1 below.

**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Sample**  
Drug Court Participants

Characteristics		n = 290	%
<b>GENDER</b>	Male	147	50.70%
	Female	143	49.30%
<b>RACE</b>	Hispanic	145	50.00%
	White	78	26.90%
	Black	52	17.90%
	Other	15	5.20%
<b>MARITAL STATUS<sup>a</sup></b>	Divorce	57	21.20%
	Married	55	20.40%
	Single	153	56.70%
	Widow(er)	5	1.90%
<b>EDUCATION<sup>b</sup></b>	Less than grade 9	15	6.50%
	Grade 9-11	71	30.70%
	High School	65	28.10%
	Some College	80	34.60%
<b>EMPLOYED</b>	Yes	100	34.50%
	No	190	65.50%

<sup>a</sup>Missing 20 cases

<sup>b</sup>Missing 59 cases

## **Analysis**

The data analysis for this thesis examines the factors which predict drug court program completion. The data analysis focused on one basic question: What were the similarities and differences between the participants who graduated from the drug court programs and the participants who were terminated from the drug court program?

The sample included 290 cases. Frequencies and T-Test analyses were used to compare the characteristics of the participants. Chi-square tests of association for categorical measures and t-tests for differences between means were used to compare the groups. Specifically, chi-square tests of association were used to test the relationship between successful and unsuccessful participants by gender, presence of dependents, ethnicity, education, drug of choice, frequency of drug use, employment history, marital status, and abuse history. Differences between successful and unsuccessful participants with regard to age, and number of prior arrests were examined using t-tests for differences in means. The same independent variables were tested to determine differences within the terminated group based on the time of termination. Results determined the unique contribution of each of the independent variables and the predictive value each had to completing the drug court program successfully.

## **Independent Variables**

In order to test the hypotheses regarding differences between graduates and those terminated from the drug court program, a number of independent variables were analyzed including gender, race/ethnicity, marital status, age, education, employment history, prior drug use, number of prior arrests, age of first arrest, and history of abuse.

**Dependent Variables**

The dependent variable is successful completion of the program. The sample consisted of 155 participants that graduated and 135 who failed. Participants could voluntarily leave the program, or be removed by the drug court team.



## CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

The sample consisted of 155 drug court participants that graduated the program and 135 drug court participants who were removed from the program. First the study looked at age, gender, race, and marital status, to see if these variables determined differences in those who succeeded and those who failed the drug court program.

The mean age for those who failed was 31.7 compare to 33.1 for those who succeeded in completing the drug court program. The mean age for the failed group was younger than the mean age of the successful group. Further Chi-square analyses tested whether there was a significant difference between groups based on the demographic variables of gender and race.

These analyses revealed no statistical significance between gender and drug court completion,  $\chi^2(1, n = 290) = 2.293, p = .130$ . Table 2 shows that 51% of women failed the drug court program and 49% graduated the program, 42% of the men failed and 57.8% graduate.

**Table 2. Gender and Drug Court Completion**

		Gender		
		FEMALE	MALE	TOTAL
<b>FAIL</b>	Number	73	62	135
	Percent	51.00	42.20	46.60
<b>GRADUATE</b>	Number	70	85	155
	Percent	49.00	57.80	53.40
<b>TOTAL</b>	Number	143	147	290
	Percent	100.00	100.00	100.00

Chi Square = 2.29, df = 1, p = n.s.

There was also no significant correlation between race/ethnicity and drug court completion,  $\chi^2$  (3, n = 290) = .344, p = .952. Of the 135 participants that did not graduate, 26 were African-American, 35 were Caucasian, 67 were Hispanic, and 7 were labeled as other. Of the 155 participants that graduated the drug court program from the year 2006 to 2010; 26 were African-American, 43 were Caucasian, 78 were Hispanic, 8 were labeled as other.

**Table 3. Race and Drug Court Completion**

		Race				
		African American	Caucasian	Hispanic	Other	Total
<b>FAIL</b>	Number	26	35	67	7	135
	Percent	50.00	44.9	46.2	46.7	46.6
<b>GRADUATE</b>	Number	26	43	78	8	155
	Percent	50.00	55.1	53.8	53.3	53.4
<b>TOTAL</b>	Number	52	78	145	15	290
	Percent	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Chi Square = .344, df = 3, p = n.s.

Previous research indicates a correlation between marital status and an individual's ability to complete a treatment program. Those terminated from treatment

are more likely to be divorced than those completing the program (Cummings, 1977). The Chi-square analysis,  $\chi^2 (3, n = 270) = 7.928, p < .05$ , demonstrated that drug court participants that were married when entering the drug court program were more likely to graduate than drug court participants that were single and/or divorced. The analysis showed that 30.9% of the participants that failed the program were married compare to 69.1% who graduated the program.

**Table 4. Marital Status and Drug Completion**

		Marital Status				
		Divorce	Married	Single	Widower	Total
<b>FAIL</b>	Number	28	17	74	4	123
	Percent	49.10	30.90	48.40	80.00	45.60
<b>GRADUATE</b>	Number	29	38	79	1	147
	Percent	50.90	69.10	51.60	20.00	54.40
<b>TOTAL</b>	Number	57	55	153	5	270
	Percent	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

missing 20 participants

Chi Square = 7.928, df = 3, p < .05

Table 5 illustrates an independent sample t-test which was conducted to analyze differences between age of first arrest of those that failed versus those participants that did not ( $t = 1.245, df = 287, p = n.s$ ). A t-test analysis demonstrated no significant difference when comparing the age of participants when they first got arrested and drug court completion.

However, the results showed that the mean of the drug court participants that failed was 15.6 years of age when they first got arrested compared to 17.9 years of age for participants that successfully graduated the drug court program. The analysis on Table

5 shows that individuals who got arrested at a younger age were more likely to not complete the drug court program; however the difference was not significant.

A second independent sample t-test was performed to further examine if significant correlations existed when comparing the education of drug court participants and their graduation rates. The T-test analysis revealed no statistical significance  $t = -1.058$ ,  $df = 229$ ,  $p = n.s.$  It appears that education was not related to drug court completion; however, this variable had 55 missing cases, so it is possible that the lack of significance was due to the large number of missing cases.

Further T-test analyses were used to determine whether there was a correlation between the number of drug arrests 24 months prior to entering the drug court program and drug court completion. The t-test analysis, ( $t = .253$ ,  $df = 252$ ,  $p = n.s.$ ) revealed no statistical significance between drug arrests 24 months prior to entering the drug court program and drug court completion.

**Table 5. Arrest, Age and Education**

	T-test		
	T	df	P
<b>DRUG ARREST PRIOR 24 MONTHS</b>	0.253	252	n.s.
<b>AGE FIRST ARREST</b>	1.245	287	n.s.
<b>EDUCATION</b>	1.058	229	n.s.

Further Chi-square tests were performed to further examine if significant differences existed when comparing the primary drug type selected by the drug court participants when entering the program and drug court completion rates. The drug use variables are primary drug-of-choice and secondary drug-of-choice. For the primary drug

variable, data were recorded for four drug types or categories. The primary substances of abuse were alcohol, cocaine/crack, THC, methamphetamine and heroin.

The Chi-square analysis,  $\chi^2(4, n = 244) = 11.550, p = .021$ , demonstrated no statistical difference between primary drug and drug court completion. Even though the analysis showed no statistical significance, we can still identify the primary drug that was most chosen by the participants. Table 6 illustrates that 39.7% of participants that failed the program chose alcohol as the primary drug, and 60.3% of participants that graduated from the drug court program chose alcohol as their primary drug.

Table 6 demonstrates that 44.60% (n=29) participants that failed the program chose crack/cocaine as their primary drug. On the other hand, more participants 55.40% (n=36) who chose crack/cocaine as their primary drug graduated the program. These findings suggest that a larger percentage of crack/cocaine users are more likely to graduate. The participants that graduated the program most often chose alcohol as their primary drug. The table also demonstrates that 10 participants that failed chose heroin as their primary drug compared to one participant that graduated the drug court program.

**Table 6. Primary drug and Drug Court Completion**

		Primary Drug					
		Alcohol	Cocaine/ crack	Heroin	Meth	Thc	Total
<b>FAIL</b>	Number	27	29	10	28	24	118
	Percent	39.70	44.60	90.90	56.00	48.00	48.40
<b>GRADUATE</b>	Number	41	36	1	22	26	126
	Percent	60.30	55.40	9.10	44.00	52.00	51.60
<b>TOTAL</b>	Number	68	65	11	50	50	244
	Percent	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

missing 46 participants

Chi Square = 11.550, df = 4, p= n.s.

A secondary drug-of-choice was self-reported by 201 participants or 69.3% of the total sample used in this study. Table 7 presents those 63.6% (n = 42) participants that failed chose meth as their secondary drug versus 36.4% (n = 24) participants that graduated. It also shows that 54 participants that graduated chose cocaine as their secondary drug versus 26 that failed the program.

**Table 7. Secondary Drug and Drug Court Completion**

		Secondary Drug					
		ALCOHOL	COCAINE/CRACK	HEROIN	METH	THC	TOTAL
<b>FAIL</b>	Number	1	26	1	42	29	99
	Percent	20.0	32.5	10.0	63.6	59.2	49.3
<b>GRADUATE</b>	Number	4	54	0	24	20	102
	Percent	80.0	67.5	.0	36.4	40.8	50.7
<b>TOTAL</b>	Number	5	80	1	66	49	201
	Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Missing 89 cases

This research reveals that employment is a factor that is related to drug court completion. A Chi-square analysis,  $\chi^2(1, n = 290) = 8.186, p < .01$ , demonstrated that participants that were employed when entering the drug court program had a higher completion rate than those that were unemployed.

Table 8 illustrates 35.0% of the participants that failed were employed compared to 65.0% of participants that graduated from the drug court program. On the other hand, 52.6% of the participants that failed were unemployed compared to 47.4% of the participants that graduated the program. The findings demonstrate that employed

participants (when entering the program) were more likely to graduate than participants that were unemployed.

**Table 8. Employment and Drug Court Completion**

		Employed		
		NO	YES	Total
<b>FAIL</b>	Number	100	35	135
	Percent	52.60	35.00	46.60
<b>GRADUATE</b>	Number	90	65	155
	Percent	47.40	65.00	53.40
<b>TOTAL</b>	Number	190	100	290
	Percent	100.00	100.00	100.00

Chi Square = 8.186, df = 1, p < .01

Table 9 was constructed to show the relationship between drug court completion and a history of abuse. These analyses revealed no statistical significance between having a history of sexual abuse and drug court completion,  $\chi^2(1, n = 290) = .830, p = .362$ . The analysis revealed that 50.6% of the participants that failed the drug court program reported an abuse history compare to 49.4% of the participants that graduated the program.

**Table 9. Abuse History and Drug Court Completion**

		Abuse History		Total
		No Abuse	Sexual, Physical and Mental Abuse	
<b>FAIL</b>	Number	90	45	135
	Percent	44.80	50.60	46.60
<b>GRADUATE</b>	Number	111	44	155
	Percent	55.20	49.40	53.40
<b>TOTAL</b>	Number	201	89	290
	Percent	100.00	100.00	100.00

Chi Square = .830, df = 1, p = n.s.

Table 10 was conducted to determine the relationship between drug court completion and a mental health history. These analyses revealed no statistical significance of mental health and drug court completion,  $\chi^2(3, n = 290) = .582, p = 3.915$ . Table 10 illustrates the incidence of mental health history among participants. The analysis revealed that 72.7% (n = 8) of the participants that failed had been diagnosed with ADHD, compared to 27.3% (n = 3) of the participants that graduated the drug court program.

The analysis also revealed that 41.4% (n = 12) of participants that failed reported being diagnosed as Bipolar compared to 58.6% (n = 17) of participants that graduated the program. The analysis illustrated that 48.3% (n = 14) of participants that failed were diagnosed with depression compare to 51.7% (n = 15) of participants that graduated the program.

**Table 10. Mental History and Drug Court Completion**

		Mental Health History				
		None	Adhd	Bipolar	Depression	Total
<b>FAIL</b>	Number	77	8	12	14	111
	Percent	43.3	72.7	41.4	48.3	44.9
<b>GRADUATE</b>	Number	101	3	17	15	136
	Percent	56.7	27.3	58.6	51.7	55.1
<b>TOTAL</b>	Number	178	11	29	29	247
	Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Missing = 43 cases

Chi Square =3.915, df = 3, p = n.s.



## CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this project was to conduct an analysis which described the characteristics of participants who may be more likely to succeed in a felony drug court program. This study examined the characteristics of 290 participants and explored relevant variables in order to see if it might help predict who would succeed. On the basis of these comparisons, the following conclusions can be drawn. Employment and marital status are the only two variables which were significantly associated with success.

Based on previous studies, it was hypothesized (hypothesis number 1) that female participants are more likely to graduate than males. These analyses revealed no statistical significance between gender and drug court completion. It was also hypothesized (hypothesis number 2) that successful drug court completion will more likely be associated with white than with non-white drug court participants.

There was also no significant correlation between race/ethnicity and drug court completion. It was hypothesized (hypothesis number 3) that successful drug court completion will more likely be associated with married than with single or divorced drug court participants. These analyses demonstrated that drug court participants that were married when entering the drug court program were more likely to graduate than drug court participants that were single and/or divorced, thus supporting the hypothesis.

It was hypothesized (hypothesis number 4) that successful drug court completion will more likely be associated with older than with younger drug court participants. The analysis on Table 5 shows that individuals who got arrested at a younger age were more likely to not complete the drug court program, just not significantly. It was hypothesized (hypothesis number 5) that successful drug court completion will more likely be associated with drug court participants with a higher education than with drug court participants with lower education. This T-test analysis revealed no statistical significance when comparing education and drug court completion. These analyses show that education is not related to drug court completion.

It was hypothesized (hypothesis number 6) that successful drug court completion will more likely be associated with drug court participants with fewer pre-drug court arrests than with drug court participants with a greater number of pre-drug court arrests. The t-test analysis revealed no statistical significance between drug arrests 24 months prior to entering the drug court program and drug court completion. It was hypothesized (hypothesis number 7) that successful drug court completion will more like be associated with non-crack/cocaine using drug court participants than with crack/cocaine using drug court participants. These findings do not support the hypothesis and suggest that a larger percentage of crack/cocaine users are more likely to graduate.

After reviewing the literature on strain theory, three variables were created in order to examine the assumption of strain theory. The three variables created in the study were employment, history of mental health and history of abuse. It was hypothesized (hypothesis number 8) based on GST that successful drug court completion will more likely be associated with employed drug court participants than with not employed drug

court participants. It was hypothesized (hypothesis number 9) based on GST that successful drug court completion will more likely be associated with drug court participants that have not been sexually abused than with drug court participants that have an abuse history. It was hypothesized (hypothesis number 9) based on GST that successful drug court completion will more likely be associated with drug court participants that have a history of mental health than with drug court participants that have a history of mental health problem. The study results demonstrate that mental health history and abuse victimization history are not predictors of failure for drug court participants. Employment did predict success and, thus, was consistent with Agnew's suggestion that individuals who experience strain turn to delinquency (in this case recidivism).

According to strain theory, negative emotions arise as a result of strain and lead the individual to either conventionally cope or illegitimately cope. A form of illegitimate coping is drug or alcohol abuse (Agnew, 1992; Brezina, 1996). The study makes an important contribution to the literature highlighting unemployment as a stress factor for the drug court participants in this specific program. Employment may be considered a strain because participants with a job want to graduate the drug court program in order to continue their job. The results have implications for theory and future research on drug court programs.

### **Limitations**

The results of the research can aid in developing specific programs for specific groups of drug court participants such as participants without a job. However, the study had some limitations. One limitation of this project was that the data gathered from the

Felony Drug court database was entered by someone other than the researcher, and therefore the researcher had no control over the accuracy of the assessment provided.

Also, the data were not collected for the purpose of this study. As a result, some variables, such as those related to treatment, were not able to be included in the analyses. There continues to be a lack of research that studies the drug court process. For example, differences in treatment programs, such as program intensity in regards to addressing drug use, may affect recidivism rates. The availability and accessibility of services for drug court participants were not assessed.

The major advantage of using agency data is that it is readily available with only minor potential ethical problems and harm to human subjects. Although there are clear advantages in using agency data, there are also some disadvantages that created limitations in this study. Although efforts were made to obtain a complete data set, there was a moderate amount of missing information for a number of the test variables, one of them being education. Missing data are an expected aspect of secondary and agency data; however, incomplete data can affect data reliability.

Another limitation is that the data was drawn from a single database and for this reason the results may only be relevant to adults in drug court programs with similar demographics. The findings may not be generalized to other geographic areas. Also, the participants in this study entered the program when the drug court program started. At these early stages of implementation, there are often procedural and substantive changes which occur. Also, modifications continue to occur over the course of any program including treatment services availability, personnel changes and changes in supervision approaches, which can all affect drug court outcomes.

Any application of a statistical technique requires that certain assumptions be made about the data. When conducting hypothesis tests, it must be assumed that the sample has been randomly selected. The major problem with this study was the fact that subject selection was not random. Randomness allows inferences about population characteristics based on sample characteristics. Without random selection, it is difficult to generalize any of the study's findings. For this reason, the results of the statistical analysis should be viewed with caution. On the other hand, the study includes all participants in the drug court that either failed or graduated.

The study group only contained participants who either graduated from the drug court program or were terminated from the drug court program. The study did not employ the use of a true experimental design because there was no control or comparison group. Thus, it is not possible to determine whether the results are attributable to participant characteristics, rather than some other variable. The limitations of this study are important and should be addressed; however, these limitations are relatively minor. While the findings should be viewed with some caution, a number of interesting and potentially useful differences were found among those who graduated and those who were terminated.

### **Policy Implications**

While this study identified two correlates of success it appears that success in the drug court program is largely dependent on the individual participant. This is consistent with current policy in determining if a participant should be allowed to participate in the drug court program. As long as a defendant attempts to comply with drug court, usually he or she is permitted to continue the drug court program. Clearly, stable employment

appears to correlate to success. It may be in the policy makers' best interest to develop additional program components within the drug court program that promote career growth. This will not only help those who enter drug court without outside commitments, but it will also strengthen family and career associations for those who are already married, have children, or are steadily employed.

The findings of this study will be reported to the felony drug court. This information can be useful for planning purposes in terms of better selection of drug court participants, could benefit criminal justice and treatment providers, and improve the types of programming made available in drug courts. This research could help planners better develop or redesign the drug court program to match the needs of their participants. By assessing the types of offenders who are successful in drug court as well as those who fail, we can begin to uncover how the problem-solving approach of therapeutic jurisprudence can be applied to specific offenders with specific needs.

### **Future Research**

Future research should utilize a qualitative method which may lead to better understanding the findings of this study. Also, other significant influences on offender's drug court outcomes could be examined in future drug court studies. Furthermore, future studies should examine more closely the relationship of the participants with the treatment provider and probation officer. The relationship of the participants and treatment providers are important and influence the client's overall drug court experience. The same is true for the quality of the offender's relationship with the judge.

Drug court programs can benefit from more research concerning effective sanctions, treatment, and effective case management. Very little research had examined

the long-term effectiveness of drug court programs; therefore, future research is clearly necessary in order to expand the study of drug courts. Future research can provide further evidence to guide the creation of new programs and the enhancement of current drug court programs. By improving drug court programs across the nation, more participants can experience positive change in their lives, fewer citizens can experience victimization, and taxpayers will not be required to pay for offenders who cycle in and out of the system (Belenko, 2001).

The success of these programs is not only dependent on how many defendants complete drug court, but perhaps more importantly on how many defendants continue a drug free lifestyle. Thus, there is an urgency to examine the long term effects of drug courts in an effort to determine whether drug courts are helping drug users become and remain drug free. In the present study, it was not feasible to perform long term follow up on participants. Therefore, it is not known whether individuals who completed this specific drug court program had better long term outcomes than those who did not complete the drug court program. Future research should focus on long term outcomes with follow up focusing primarily on recidivism. In addition, studies of drug court programs should employ the use of true experimental design when possible. The importance of control or comparison groups is important in determining whether a study's findings are actually attributable to the drug court itself, rather than some other variable. This means that drug courts should be compared to other drug treatment programs, both coercive and voluntary.

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