

The long-term effect of the NSW Drug Court on recidivism

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SUMMARY

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BACKGROUND

The Drug Court has been in operation in New South Wales since 1999. It is reserved for drug dependant individuals residing in Western or South Western Sydney who have (or intend to) plead guilty to a non-violent summary offence and are likely to receive a prison sentence. Participation in the Drug Court involves intensive supervision and monitoring by the court, frequent drug testing, sanctioning for non-compliance and treatment for drug dependency.

The current study extends an earlier evaluation of the NSW Drug Court undertaken by Weatherburn et al. (2008). It aims to assess whether the Drug Court has any long-term positive effect on re-offending. Specifically, it compares individuals accepted into the Drug Court with individuals referred to but not accepted onto the program across five outcomes:

1. Time to first new offence of any type;
2. Time to first new person offence;
3. Time to first new property offence;
4. Time to first new drug offence;
5. Total number of reconvictions after referral to the Drug Court.

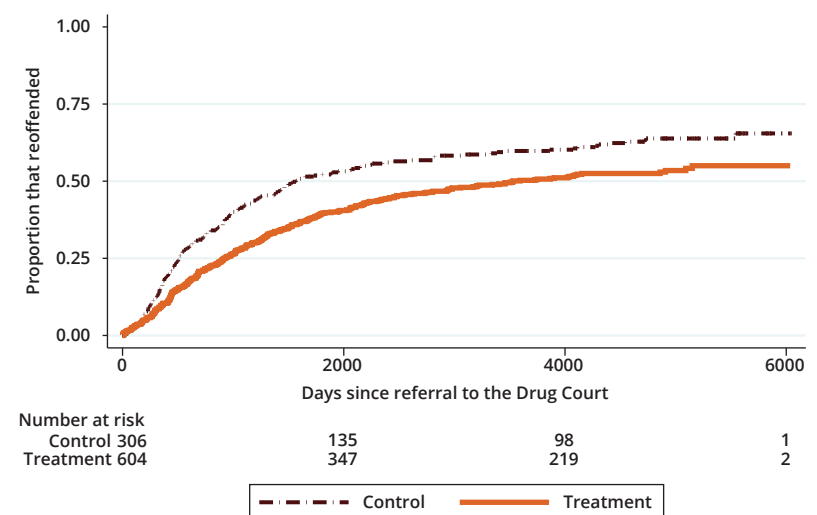
KEYWORDS

Drug Court recidivism

survival analysis

KEY FINDINGS

Cumulative proportion re-offending for person offences, by treatment status



After controlling for a variety of defendant and case characteristics, Drug Court participants were found to take 22 per cent longer to commit a person offence and recorded a 17 per cent lower reconviction rate compared with the control group. No statistically (or practically) significant differences between groups were found for any other outcomes examined.

CONCLUSION

The Drug Court appears to have long-term beneficial effects on the total number of reconvictions and the risk of another offence against the person. Given that the Drug Court is an expensive intervention, further research comparing the relative cost-effectiveness of the Drug Court with other drug treatment programs (e.g. MERIT) is justified.