Parent Experience in the Douglas County FIRST Court
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**Introduction**
- People are more willing to comply with decisions they perceive as fair (Tyler, 1989)
- Problem-solving courts adopt processes that focus on rehabilitation to address addiction, family dysfunction, and delinquency (Berman & Feinblatt, 2001) and are being increasingly utilized in abuse and neglect cases (Winick, 2003)
- Problem-solving courts provide for more voice and are therefore perceived as more fair (Gatowski, Dobbins, & Summers, 2013)
- Family Involvement Rehabilitation Services Treatment (FIRST) Court is a problem-solving court in the Douglas County Juvenile Court
- FIRST Court seeks to encourage better communication and cooperation between parties, increase trust and improve relationships, bring families into the court more frequently, and increase parent participation
- FIRST Court holds monthly, informal court team meetings centered around self-assessment and outlining important steps to address needs
- This evaluation seeks to examine (1) whether parents in FIRST Court participate more than parents in the traditional dependency court and (2) whether parents in FIRST Court view the process as more fair than parents in the traditional dependency court.

**Method**
- \( N = 40 \) hearings observed
  - \( n = 13 \) FIRST Court (6 team meetings, 5 dispositions, 2 review hearings)
  - \( n = 27 \) traditional dependency court (15 dispositions, 12 review hearings)
- Observers tracked four types of participation: initiating a new topic; asking a question; responding to a question; making a suggestion
- 15 parents (46.8% of approached) completed a 32-item survey about their perception of the court process. The fairness rating was measured through a mean of 12 items on the Child Welfare and Procedural Justice Scale, with higher scores denoting more fairness.
- Parents responded to items using a 4-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree, 4 = strongly disagree)

**Results**

**Parent Participation During Hearings**

![Graph showing parent participation during hearings](image)

- \( \star p < .05 \)
  - Mom Total: \( t(38) = -2.72, p = 0.01, M_{diff} = 3.57 \)
  - Mom Respond: \( t(38) = -3.13, p = 0.003, M_{diff} = 2.04 \)
  - Mom Suggest: \( t(38) = -2.10, p = 0.04, M_{diff} = 0.75 \)
  - Dad Total: \( t(36) = -2.47, p = 0.02, M_{diff} = 1.30 \)
  - Dad Respond: \( t(37) = -2.03, p = 0.05, M_{diff} = 0.88 \)

**Parent Perceptions of Fairness**

![Bar graph showing parent perceptions of fairness](image)

- \( t(12) = -0.16, p = .88 \)
  - FIRST: \( M = 3.21, SD = 0.32, n = 7 \)
  - Control: \( M = 3.18, SD = 0.50, n = 7 \)

**Discussion**
- Our findings suggest FIRST Court is accomplishing its goal of increasing parent participation: in FIRST Court, total mother participation was three times higher; father participation was lower, but still an improvement from traditional court, where it was almost non-existent
- We did not find a significant difference between FIRST Court and traditional dependency court on perceptions of fairness. Both FIRST Court and traditional track parents perceived the court process as fair – with average responses being fairly positive on the 1-4 scale.
- FIRST Court’s successful expansion of parent involvement may increase parent compliance with the court system; its methods could be used in other tracks struggling to increase engagement
- Despite not finding a difference in perception of fairness, the fact that both tracks trend positively is encouraging that most parents already perceive the court system as more fair than not.

**Limitations & Future Directions**
- These results are based on a small sample of hearings/parents. This evaluation is ongoing and we will collect more data to detect significant differences between FIRST Court and traditional dependency court.
- Future evaluations can focus on finding new ways to get more parent interviews & continuing to gather data on FIRST Court hearings as more cases enter the track.

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