An Evaluation of Parent Perception in the Lancaster County FTDC Track
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Introduction:

- Problem-solving courts, such as drug courts, identify underlying social and psychological issues that placed individuals in the courts (Heideman et al., 2016)
- Problem-solving courts promote rehabilitation by catering to each specific situation by:
  - prescribing appropriate services
  - providing support
  - offering encouragement
  - holding parents accountable
- The Family Treatment Drug Court (FTDC) Track is a mandatory problem-solving court established by Judge Heideman in 2014 in Lancaster County, NE
- Families with allegations of child abuse or neglect related to substance use are placed on Judge’s docket.
- FTDC is distinguished from traditional dependency courts by:
  - specialized services
  - monthly team meetings
  - additional supervision
  - higher personal accountability
- FTDC seeks to aid parents involved through therapeutic jurisprudence and reliance on procedural justice principles (Heideman et al., 2016)
- FTDC encourages participation by allowing parents to speak up during team meetings in order to increase fairness (Heideman et al., 2016)
- Parents who report that they feel their voice is heard at team meetings, also report that they are more satisfied with the outcome (Heideman et al., 2016)

RESEARCH QUESTION:
Do parents involved in the FTDC Track feel that the court process is more or less fair than parents in the traditional dependency court?

Method:

Parent Surveys:
- 171 parents completed surveys following team meetings or review hearings:
  - 118 mothers (69.0%), 53 fathers (30.4%)
  - 133 FTDC (77.8%), 38 traditional dependency court (22.2%)
  - 11 items (1 = strongly disagree - 5 = strongly agree) including:
    1. Is the family from the FTDC
    2. Number of days from petition to case closure
    3. Was the child reunified
    4. The process of getting my children back is fair
    5. My voice is heard at family team meetings
    6. The main goal of this process is to get my children returned to me

Case File Reviews:
- 158 case files were content-coded
- 129 FTDC (81.6%), 29 traditional dependency court (18.4%)
- Reviewers coded: relevant dates; case outcomes

Results:

Parent Surveys and Case File Reviews

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<td>4. The process of getting</td>
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<td>5. My voice is heard</td>
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<td>6. The main goal of this</td>
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Process fair: $F(1, 168) = 2.63, MSE = 1.64, p = .12, d = 0.30$
Voice heard: $F(1, 168) = 15.46, MSE = 1.11, p < .001, d = 0.35$
Main goal: $F(1, 168) = 0.29, MSE = 0.78, p = .59, d = 0.10$

Discussion:

- There is no significant difference between FTDC and traditional parents regarding their perceptions of the main goal. Both courts share and promote the same goal of safely returning the children to their parents
- Parents who felt their voice was heard tended to feel that the process is fair
- Parents’ perception of voice and fairness were both negatively associated with the number of days from the petition to case closure. Parents who perceived the process as fair reach case closure more quickly
- FTDC relies on therapeutic jurisprudence and procedural justice:
  - Procedural justice posits that parents who feel the process is fair are more likely to comply and cooperate (Tyler, 1989)
  - FTDC provides voice at family team meetings, which are associated with higher perceptions of fairness
  - Voice and fairness are associated with faster case closure

Limitations & Future Directions:

- Non-experimental program evaluation
- Potential for self-selection bias
- Small sample of traditional dependency court families
- Self report data
- Data collection is ongoing

Acknowledgements:

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