**RELINQUISHING VS. TERMINATING PARENTAL RIGHTS: THE ROLE OF PROCEDURAL JUSTICE IN A PROBLEM-SOLVING COURT**

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**Introduction**

- Therapeutic jurisprudence acknowledges the impact of the law on the psychological well-being of those involved in the court process (Winick, 2003)
- Problem-solving courts use tools of therapeutic jurisprudence to address the causes of law violations (Winick, 2003)
- Procedural justice, the evaluation of decision-making procedures as fair, is one tool used (Heideman et al., 2016)
- People who perceive legal decisions as fair are more likely to cooperate with those decisions (Thibaut & Walker, 1978)
- Individuals who are given a voice but feel their opinion was not considered experience the frustration effect (de Vries et al., 2012)
- The frustration effect results in less satisfaction and cooperation with the decision than those who aren’t given a voice (Margalit, Suleiman, & Samid, 2014)
- The Family Treatment Drug Court (FTDC Track) is a mandatory problem-solving court in Lancaster County, Nebraska for families with allegations of child abuse or neglect related to substance use
- Child abuse and neglect cases can end in reunification of the family, the voluntary relinquishment of parental rights, or the termination of parental rights by the State
- This evaluation seeks to examine:
  1. whether parents on the FTDC Track perceive the court process as more fair than parents in the traditional dependency court and
  2. whether parents who perceive higher levels of fairness are more likely to voluntarily relinquish their parental rights than parents who experience lower levels of procedural justice

**Methods**

- **N = 48 parents with a Motion to Terminate Parental Rights (MTPR)**
  - n = 33 mothers, n = 15 fathers
  - n = 40 FTDC, n = 8 traditional dependency court
- **Case File Reviews:**
  - Reviewers coded parents’ cases for important dates, case outcomes
- **Parent Surveys:**
  - After team meetings or review hearings
  - 11 items participants rated using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree)
  - Examples include “My voice is heard at family team meetings” and “The process of getting my children back is fair”
  - Mean procedural justice score for most recent
    - M = 4.00, SD = .80, N = 48

**Results**

**Procedural Justice Perceptions in Parents with an MTPR**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Procedures</th>
<th>FTDC Track</th>
<th>Control</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean Justice Score</td>
<td>4.31</td>
<td>3.84</td>
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<tbody>
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**Limitations & Future Directions**

- Quasi-experimental design
- Did not directly test for the frustration effect
- Small sample sizes
- Future evaluations should isolate the factors that lead to the termination of parental rights

**Acknowledgements**

Thank you to the University of Nebraska – Lincoln UCARE program for funding this research, the Lancaster County Family Treatment Drug Court for allowing this project, and to the team at the Nebraska Resource Project for Vulnerable Young Children, including Katherine Hazen, Melanie Fessinger, Jamie Bahn, Jennie Cole-Mossman, and Kelli Hauptman for their support and guidance.