Introduction

- Parent substance use is the second-leading cause for children's removal from the home in Nebraska (Voices for Children, 2018) with 10-30% being removed again later on (Wulczyn et al., 2007).
- The theory of Therapeutic Jurisprudence suggests using a treatment-oriented approach to reduce recidivism and mitigate the negative psychological effects that the legal system may have on offenders (Fessinger et al., 2018).
- The Judge acts as a team leader for caseworkers and attorneys who use a collaborative approach in the Family Treatment Drug Court (FTDC).
- Team meetings between parents and court professionals include discussion about parents’ progress to help ensure a rehabilitative environment.
- Social exchange theory says that interpersonal relationships form with the exchange of emotional resources (Rupp & Cropanzano, 2002).
- Preliminary findings suggest that FTDC participants who receive support in high quality relationships may have a faster time to case closure (Fessinger et al., 2018).
- Research question: Do the high quality relationships between adjudicated parents and court professionals explain faster time to case closure in FTDC?

Method

Participants
- N = 227
  - FTDC: n = 231 (81.6%)
  - Control: n = 46 (16.3%)
  - Surveyed participants: n = 183
    - Father: n = 60 (21.2%)
    - Mother: n = 122 (43.1%)

Materials
- Parents’ experience survey: 11-items, 5-point agreement Likert-type scale
- Caseworker relationships (2-item, α = 0.93)
- Judge relationship (1-item)
- Content coding legal files in JUSTICE
- Number of days between petition and case closure date (Time to Close)

Results

- FTDC Time to Close
  - 523.55 days (24% fewer)
- Control Time to Close
  - 686.97 days

Figure 1. Mean relationship scores (5-point scale)
- * Indicates significant difference
- Caseworker: \( t(5.7) = -2.408, p = .018, \text{Mdiff} = -.604 \)
- Judge: \( t(7.5) = -3.945, p = .007, \text{Mdiff} = -.826 \)

Figure 2. Mean Time to Case Closure.
- \( n(208) = 3.73, p < .001, \text{Mdiff} = 163.43 \)

Figure 3. Regressions predicting time to case closure with FTDC through caseworker and judge relationship.

Discussion

- FTDC participants had significantly shorter time to case closure.
  - FTDC participants tended to have more positive relationships with the judge and caseworker.
  - More positive relationships were associated with shorter time to case closure.
- This aligns with Social Exchange Theory which says that the formation of high quality relationships with superiors may lead to more success (Rupp & Cropanzano, 2002).
- This means that through adjusting the dynamic between the adjudicated and court professionals, those involved can foster relationships that appear to enhance a rehabilitative process.

Limitations & Future Direction

Limitations
- Self-report data has variability that can cause concern.
  - FTDC participants tended to have more positive relationships with the judge and caseworker.
- No random assignment.

Future Direction
- Examine the role of service participation in explaining time to case closure.
- How do relationships affect participation in services?

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