

Drug court reduces risk of reconviction in the long term, new research finds

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The study's results indicate that participation in the Drug Court program has a positive long-term effect on the overall frequency of offending. Credit: Unsplash

Treating drug-related offenders is far more effective than sending them to prison, according to new research conducted jointly by the National Drug and Alcohol Research Center (NDARC) at UNSW Sydney and the

NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR).

The researchers compared re-offending rates among Drug Court participants with offenders who had been deemed eligible for the Drug Court but not placed on it. Offenders were followed up over an average period of 13.5 years.

The report authors say that Drug Courts emerged in the United States in the 1980s in response to the twin problems of [court](#) and prison congestion and drug-related crime.

"Participants in Drug Court programs are typically subject to close monitoring, including frequent meetings with the Drug Court team and frequent testing for [drug](#) use. Progress toward abstinence is also usually rewarded in some way, while relapse or non-compliance with [program](#) conditions typically attracts a sanction," the authors write.

The study's results indicate that participation in the Drug Court program has a positive long-term effect on the overall frequency of offending: Drug Court participants were found to have a 17 percent lower reoffending rate than those not placed in the program. Participants in the Drug Court program also took 22 percent longer to commit an offense against the person. The positive results are consistent with the findings of earlier Drug Court studies both here and overseas.

Commenting on the findings, NDARC Professor Don Weatherburn, who led the study, said they were remarkable given the profile of those dealt with by the NSW Drug Court and the length of time that had passed since treatment.

"It is important to remember that the Drug Court is not dealing with people who have simply dipped their toe in the water of crime. A substantial proportion have committed serious offenses and have long

criminal records," said Professor Weatherburn.

"Almost one in 20 of the treatment group had accumulated 15 or more convictions. Our findings therefore show that participation in the Drug Court program can have lasting positive effects on the lives of recidivist offenders and are a credit to all those involved in the Drug Court program."

The authors said the positive and the null results should both be treated with some degree of caution.

"It remains possible some unobserved difference between treatment and control groups is responsible for the results. The only way to be completely sure about the positive results would be to conduct a further randomized trial," the researchers said.

More information: The long-term effect of the NSW Drug Court on recidivism. [www.bocsar.nsw.gov.au/Pages/bo ... t-on-recidivism.aspx](http://www.bocsar.nsw.gov.au/Pages/bo...t-on-recidivism.aspx)

Provided by University of New South Wales

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