

Mental Health Programs: What Judges Need to Know about Program Evaluations

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My Background

- Case Manager at a Prison Psychiatric Hospital
- Criminal Justice Professor for 22 years
- Program Evaluations of Specialty Courts for 12 years

Evaluation Research in Criminal Justice

- Evaluation- effectiveness of an intervention
- Differences from other research (Weiss, 1998)
 - Decision-making
 - Program-derived research questions
 - Judgmental quality
 - Role conflicts
 - Publication
- Systematic Review & Meta-Analysis (Welch & Farrington, 2001)
- The Maryland Report & What Works (Sherman et al., 1998)

Types of Evaluations

- Needs Assessment
 - What are the needs of the treatment subjects?
 - Often not fully known until after the program begins
 - Types of treatment, transportation, employment
- Theory-Driven
 - There should be a logical explanation for why a program should work
 - Often it is not made explicit and evaluators have to make inferences
- Process
 - Is the program delivering services as planned?
- Outcome
 - Is the program achieving its goals?
 - A focus on recidivism over other types of outcomes
- Cost-Efficiency (Cost-Benefit Analysis)
 - What are the financial costs of the program versus potential cost savings?

Program Goals & Objectives

- Goal Statements

- Specific
- Measurable
- Attainable
- Relevant
- Time-Bound



- (Locke & Latham, 2013)

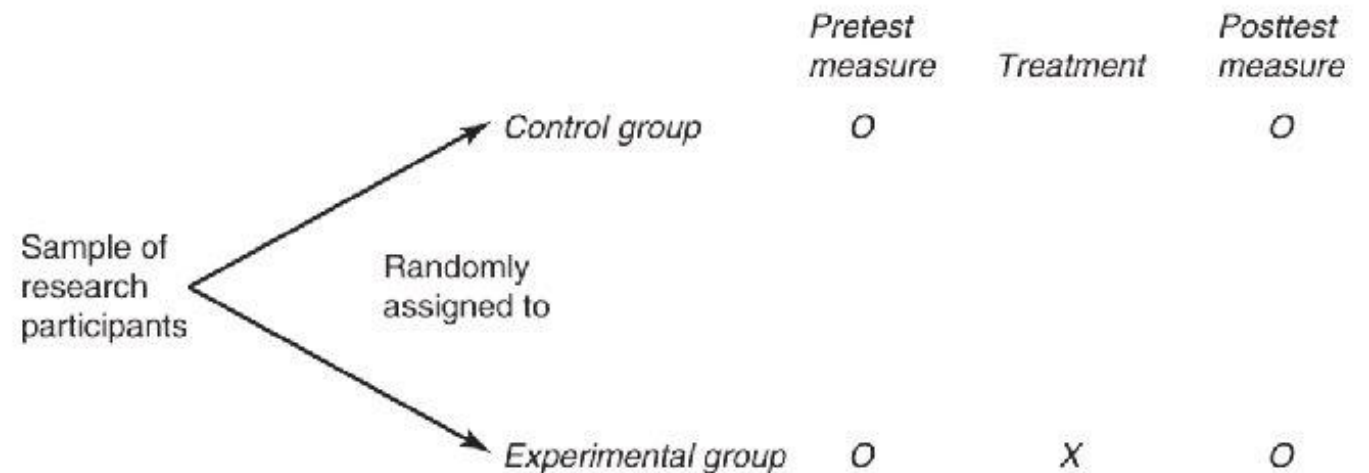
Issues in Evaluations

- Trapped vs. Experimental Program Administrators (Campbell, 1969)
 - Trapped administrators
 - Feel threatened by evaluation findings
 - Do an evaluation because it's a grant requirement
 - Less likely to use findings to make changes in the process
 - Experimental Administrators
 - Are there breakdowns in the process?
 - How will I know why a program is working or not?
 - What needs to be done to improve performance?
 - How do I promote the results to stakeholders?

Issues in Evaluations

- Importance of a Classical Experimental Design
 - Eliminates many potential sources of biases or errors
 - Motivated versus unmotivated participants
 - Stronger the research design, the more likely to find a positive treatment effect
 - Motivated versus unmotivated participants
 - Very few CJ evaluations use the classic design
 - (Weisburd, Lum, Petrosino, 2001)

Classical Experimental Design



A blurred background image of a city street with several multi-story buildings. The buildings have various architectural styles, including brick and modern glass facades. The street is paved and has some greenery visible in the distance. The overall scene is out of focus, emphasizing the text overlay.

Mental Health Court Evaluation Findings

Needs Assessment

- Housing
 - 82% experienced unstable housing
 - On average 3.6 times
- Trauma
 - All participants experienced or witnesses a traumatic event
 - 73% stated the trauma interfered with their daily functioning
 - 55% stated they almost always experience symptoms from trauma
- Criminal thinking
 - The vast majority scored low in criminal thinking (attitudes that support criminal behavior)
- Employment opportunities

Process Findings

- Capacity of the court
- Net widening
- Reducing time between jail and treatment
- Treatment resources in the community
- Conflict resolution among team members
- Interaction with the judge
- Sustainability

The background image is a blurred photograph of a city street. On the left, there is a large, multi-story building with a prominent arched entrance and a glass facade. In the center, a fountain with several water jets is visible. To the right, there are more buildings, including a tall, modern skyscraper. The overall scene is bright and sunny, with a clear blue sky. The word "Outcomes" is overlaid on the left side of the image in a large, black, sans-serif font.

Outcomes

Criminal Recidivism

- Defined as new misdemeanor or felony charge (non-traffic offenses)
- Significantly fewer new charges at 12-month, 18-month, and 24th month intervals as compared to those eligible but did not participate
- Recidivism rates lower among discharged clients as compared to eligible but did not participate
- Recidivism was much lower among program graduates
- Program completion was strongest predictor of recidivism (age, gender, prior offenses, age at first arrest)

Quality of Life

- California Quality of Life Scale
- Domains include Living Situation, Daily Functioning, Family, Social Relations, Finances, Safety, Health, and Life in General
- Significant improvements in all domains at program completion
 - Finances saw the greatest improvement
 - Living Situation, Daily Functioning, and Health also saw big improvements

Client Perspective

- Overwhelmingly positive
- Most recognized they needed help
- Cite the structure of the program and monitoring as key to their success
- Incentives provided were motivating
- Many claim the experience was life-changing

Final Suggestions

If you create any type of mental health intervention evaluate its effectiveness.

The best quality evaluation study whose report never leaves the shelf, that is, is never utilized, may as well never been undertaken- Douglas Lipton

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