

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE - LEXINGTON COUNTY DOMESTIC VIOLENCE COURT

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The presentation now focuses on the process evaluation that can be found in Gover, Brank, and John MacDonald's article entitled "A Specialized . Domestic Violence Court in South Carolina: An Example of Procedural Justice for Victims and Defendants."

Research indicates that perceptions of treatment influences future behavior. Specifically, victims who have a positive experience with the system may be more likely to contact law enforcement in the future. Also, defendants who perceive their experiences with the system as fair may be more likely to abide by court sanctions.

In this study, qualitative methodologies were used to examine procedural justice practices. The researchers used courtroom observations, interviews with court staff, and interviews with victims and defendants in order to assess the procedural justice practices.

With regard to the courtroom observations, the courtroom observations consisted of 30 court sessions that were observed over a 12-month period. The observation instrument measured the degree of the collaborative process, the level of problem solving and commonsensical decision making. The general observation suggested that a collaborative courtroom workgroup was, in fact, being implemented.

Now we'll review the results from the interviews with the court staff. So the judges were asked, can you explain how the criminal domestic violence court acts differently than traditional magistrates court?

Here are some example responses. Judge number one: First off, we have a prosecutor in place, which is very helpful because you don't always have a cooperative victim. Compared to judge number two, who reported, eh, it's really no different.

The judges were also asked questions like, do you think that this court process for criminal domestic violence court is more effective in preventing future acts of domestic violence compared to traditional magistrates court?

Here's an example of two judges' responses. Judge number one: Yeah, I do, or I wouldn't be here. Judge number two indicated, I haven't got any proof to show me that it has, so I really don't have an answer for that one because I haven't seen the stats on it.

Concerning the interviews with the prosecutor, the prosecutors were asked, do you think the criminal domestic violence court provides a more user-friendly system for victims of domestic violence? Their response was, yes, we do everything for them. They don't have to prosecute. We'll take care of it. They don't have to testify. They don't have to go anywhere to get services because they're all right here.

The investigators were asked, how do you view your role as domestic violence investigator different from the role you would have if you were investigating other types of crimes? The investigators responded, well, I view it as being able to hopefully touch somebody's life and make a change in it.

The domestic violence investigators were also asked, are domestic violence cases treated differently than other types of criminal cases? If yes, how so? The investigators responded with, we treat them differently because they should be treated differently. If they're not, then you're not working them appropriately.

Now we review the results from the victim and defendant interviews. Overall, a total of 50 victims and 50 defendants were interviewed. A convenient sample of defendants and victims after cases were heard was used with a response rate of 96%. Only four of these individuals refused to be interviewed.

Both the victims and the defendants were asked general questions on satisfaction with process and procedural justice. Here is a figure indicating overall, both the victims and defendants had generally positive impressions of the court process. Specifically, 54% of the victims reported they felt process was good, and 20% thought the process was excellent. Comparatively, 26% of the defendants thought the process was good, and 20% of the defendants also agreed the process was excellent.

The results also overwhelmingly indicated that the victims and the defendants had positive perceptions of respect, fairness, and justice. Specifically, with regard to respect, 88% of the victims and 86% of the defendants thought they were treated with respect. As far as with regard to fairness and justice, 77% of the victims and 68% of defendants thought that the process resulted in fair and just outcomes.

The evidence was also supportive regarding the overall quality and professionalism of the court. 34% of the victims thought that the quality and professionalism of the court was good, and 40% thought the quality and professionalism of the court was excellent.

Comparatively, for the defendants, 40% thought the quality and professionalism of the court was good, and 22% thought the quality and professionalism of the court was excellent.

The victims and the defendants were asked, what could improve the criminal domestic violence court experience? Their responses were, the victims indicated the most frequent recommendations involved better communication. The most common suggestion among the defendants, comparatively, involved changing the criminal domestic violence law or making bond restrictions more lenient.