

## **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE - LEXINGTON COUNTY DOMESTIC VIOLENCE COURT**

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Overall, there have been few rigorous evaluations of domestic violence courts, but what has been done is encouraging. The presentation now focuses on one such study provided by Gover, MacDonald, and Alpert in 2003 entitled "Combating Domestic Violence in Rural America: Findings from an Evaluation of a Local Domestic Violence Court."

In order to provide some background information on the Lexington County Criminal Domestic Violence Court, the typical cases of domestic violence were handled in one of eight magistrate courts in Lexington County, South Carolina. The county did not have adequate resources to give domestic violence cases the attention they did need. As such, to address this concern Lexington County established a Criminal Domestic Violence Court, or also referred to as a CDV court.

The approach in the Lexington County Domestic Violence Court focuses around an active approach that emphasizes victim safety, offender accountability, and batterer treatment. This court involves a collaborative relationship with the police, victim services, and mental health officials. The staff in this Criminal Domestic Violence Court involves two dedicated judges, two full-time criminal domestic violence investigators, one full-time domestic violence prosecutor, one court administrator, one mental health official, one victim advocate, and one shelter representative.

The researchers in this study posed the following two research questions-- one, did defenders who were processed in the specialized domestic violence court have lower re-arrest rates compared to offenders process in traditional courts? And two, did the arrest rates for domestic violence increase or decrease after the court was implemented? In an effort to evaluate these two research questions and their related outcomes the researchers used two different analyses.

The first analysis was a time-series analysis, also called a before-after study where they examine the impact of the court on arrests for domestic violence. And a second type of analysis is generally referred to as a recidivism analysis. And this is where they examine the impact of the Domestic Violence Court on re-arrests for domestic violence offenders.

Once again, the time-series analysis examined the court's general impact on arrests for domestic violence in Lexington County using a before-after comparison of the domestic violence arrests. In the sense, they examined if the numbers of arrests were higher or lower prior to the Domestic Violence Court establishment, compared to the numbers of arrests after the Domestic Violence Court was established. Specifically, the researchers used an ARIMA time-series model to examine statistically significant changes in the arrests.

This figure presents the monthly arrest totals for the 56-month period time frame. As can be seen, the criminal domestic violence arrests are in red, simple assault arrests are in black, and aggravated assault arrests are in green. The vertical line that splits the figure at 36 months refers to when the Criminal Domestic Violence Court was established.

As can be seen, graphically it appears that there wasn't much change in the number of arrests. However, further analysis was necessary. Here you have a before-after comparison. The 34 months in the pre-Criminal Domestic Violence Court establishment there were an average of 55.35 domestic violence arrests, compared to the post-Criminal Domestic Violence Court establishment. 26, specifically, months of follow up where the average number of arrests were 60.92.

Comparatively for simple assaults, the arrests were 21.58 pre-Domestic Violence Court, and 21.84 post-Domestic Violence Court. Also, aggravated assault-- 14.14 arrests pre-Domestic Violence Court, and 11.76 arrests post-Domestic Violence Court. The results of several T-tests indicated that the only difference in the number of arrests were observed for the domestic violence arrests. In the sense, domestic violence arrests increased after the establishment of the Criminal Domestic Violence Court.

With regard to the recidivism analysis, the researchers created a historical control group of 200 cases that were processed prior to the Criminal Domestic Violence Court's implementation-- 1997 to 1999-- compared to the treatment group which was made up of 200 cases processed in the Criminal Domestic Violence Court during the years of 1999 and 2000. Both of these samples were randomly selected from arrest data. And the offenders were followed for 1 and 1/2 years post-arrest in order to gauge recidivism.

Here a series of comparisons between the control group and the treatment group. Remember, the control group are domestic violence offenders that were not processed through the new court, and the treatment group were the domestic violence offenders that were processed through the new Criminal Domestic Violence Court. As you can see, there were no significant differences with regard to race, female defendant, the age of the offender, whether or not the offender was employed, whether or not pre-trial diversion was used, the average number of charges, or the average number of prior domestic violence offenses.

The only significant difference was found for the mean number of days in jail pre-trial. Those in the control group spent an average of one additional day in jail pre-trial. Not much interesting findings there. However, with regard to the recidivism findings, which is the main point of the study, the recidivism of the control group was 19% compared to the recidivism of the treated group which was 11.6%.

This indicates that the domestic violence offenders that were processed through the new Criminal Domestic Violence Court had significantly lower recidivism rates compared to those that were not processed through this new Criminal Domestic Violence Court. Once again, in order to recap, the results showed lower recidivism rates suggesting that the specialized Domestic Violence Court was working. So process evaluation findings were also examined in order to understand the reduction in recidivism.