

The Effectiveness of Day Reporting Centers

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Abstract

A Day Reporting Center is a community-based, highly structured, non-residential alternative to incarceration. Day Reporting Centers (DRCs) are programs that have been utilized for a variety of offender populations (e.g., pre-trial released offenders, probationers, and parolees). Most of the studies on DRCs suffer from a number of methodological deficiencies; the most prominent flaw being the lack of the use of quasi-experimental design. The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of DRCs on the criminal recidivism of adult offenders by conducting a meta-analysis of DRC studies that used a quasi-experimental design. The findings show that, overall, DRCs do not differ from traditional supervision options in terms of recidivism outcomes. One the major challenges in conducting evaluative research on DRCS is that the programs themselves differ from state to state and even from county to county. Inconsistencies in program characteristics and different types of clients the program serves (e.g. probationers or parolees) limit the ability to make recommendations for best practices.

Key Words: Day Reporting Centers, Alternative to Incarceration, Community Corrections,

Introduction

A Day Reporting Center is a community-based, highly structured, non-residential alternative to incarceration. Day Reporting Centers (DRCs) are programs that have been utilized for a variety of offender populations (e.g., pre-trial released offenders, probationers, and parolees). Offenders assigned to DRCs generally report to the facility during the daytime hours and return home at night allowing state run corrections systems the opportunity to monitor and supervise offenders while they remain living in the community. Day Reporting Centers provide offenders substance abuse counseling and programming, frequent drug testing, and cognitive restructuring. For those who need it, adult literacy and GED preparation are also provided. A large component of the DRC program is learning basic life skills and incorporating the participant's family into the program. The program goals are to protect the public through intensive supervision and behavioral interventions, divert offenders from local jails, prisons, or other residential facilities, and to replace criminal behaviors and attitudes with pro-social alternatives that reduce recidivism.

The Day Reporting Center program is ideally six to nine months for Phases I and II, followed by another six months for Phase III (aftercare). However, there is a variance in the type of DRC programs throughout the United States, and there is no single definition of what constitutes a DRC. Furthermore, DRCs are known by a variety of names, including community resource centers, day treatment centers, day incarceration centers, and restorative justice centers (Craddock, 2004). Differences in eligibility factors also vary widely from program to program. Many program reject violent offenders, others place eligibility criteria on such variables as the offender's gender, legal status, treatment needs, prior record, and residential stability. Most DRC's offer a minimum of drug counseling, psychological counseling, and education; many DRCs offer additional programs, such as on-site recreational activities, transitional housing, and work-release programs (Diggs & Pieper, 1994).

Review of the Literature

Most studies on DRCs have focused upon program completion or the cost savings of DRC programs, rather than utilizing recidivism as a dependent variable to assess the effectiveness of a program. Within this literature, the results of these studies have been mixed. Many studies show positive outcomes of DRC programs, including high completion rates among participants, high employment attainment rates, and the cost savings of

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DRC use (e.g., Craddock & Graham, 2001; Craddock, 2004; Diggs & Pieper, 1994; Martin et al., 2003; McBride & VanderWaal, 1997). Other studies have found high failure rates among DRC participants (Brunet, 2002; Marciniak, 1999; Roy & Grimes, 2002) as well as a lack of evidence of a reduction in criminal justice costs (Marciniak, 1999; 2000).

All of these studies, however, suffer from a number of methodological deficiencies. As mentioned previously, most studies have focused upon program completion or termination rather than recidivism as the primary dependent variable. The second most prominent flaw is the lack of the use of quasi-experimental design without the use of a control (comparison) group that is matched with a similar experimental group. As such, any conclusions drawn about DRC program effectiveness for probationers or parolees are potentially biased.

There are only a small number of studies on DRCs that have used an experimental research design in which subjects in a DRC were compared with subjects in a non-DRC comparison group. In 2004, Ostermann (2009) conducted a study of 714 parolees in New Jersey in four different groups: (1) individuals who maxed-out of their prison sentences and were released to the community without any form of supervision, (2) individuals who were paroled but were not involved in any type of community program, (3) individuals who were paroled to a Halfway Back (HWB) program, and (4) those individuals that were paroled to a Day Reporting Center (DRC). HWB programs are residential facilities that serve as an alternative sanction to parole revocation or as a special condition of parole upon release. Parolees do not stay longer in a HWB longer than 180 days and a review panel is used to assess the resident's needs in the program (Ostermann, 2009). In this study, the max-out group served as the comparison group for all analyses.

Data for this study consisted of all individuals who were released from the New Jersey Department of Corrections (NJDOC) custody in calendar year 2004. Of the 714 parolees released in 2004, 200 were in the maxed-out group, 198 were on parole and did not participate in any program, 181 cases were in the HWB group, and 135 were participants of a DRC. The majority of the participants in this study were African American (67%) males (93%). All of the participants in the study were followed for three years, after being released from prison in 2004. The dependent variable, re-arrest, was measured by whether or not an individual was arrested for a new crime after their 2004 release.

In general, the majority of individuals (65%) in this study were rearrested after three years. Sixty-two percent of the parolees who did not go graduate from a DRC or HWB were rearrested. Parolees with either DRC or HWB status fared better, albeit negligibly, with a respective 58% and 59% experiencing a re-arrest. Ostermann (2009) used logistic regression to control for a number of variables including age, gender, race, number of arrests, and the type of crime for which an individual was incarcerated for prior to their 2004 release. The results of the logistic regression showed that those who maxed-out of prison were significantly more likely to be rearrested than any of the other four groups after controlling for demographics and criminal history. An analysis of the odds ratios revealed that those parolees who participated in a DRC are roughly 68% less likely than max-outs to be rearrested after controlling for the demographic and criminal history variables. Those paroled to a HWB program are 64% less likely than max-outs to be rearrested after the control variables were accounted for. The results of these analyses showed that not only were those who maxed-out of prison more likely to be rearrested after release, they were more likely to have a greater volume of arrests, and were more likely to be rearrested faster than any of the four groups.

There were two weaknesses of this study. First, the design of this study utilized a random selection process, and hence did not employ a true experimental design. Participants were not randomly assigned to max-out of prison or randomly selected to participate in either a DRC or HWB program. Experimental designs that utilize sampling techniques that match the various characteristics of the control group with those of the experimental groups are the gold standard for most evaluative studies, however, group assignment is not a realistic option for this type of research because it may jeopardize public safety. Parole decisions are serious decisions based upon an individual's likelihood of reoffending, and placing individuals in programs that are not designed for serious criminal (e.g. violent criminals) may be unethical. A second weakness of this research is that the study only used five control variables, the majority of which were demographic variables. In-prison variables that may have had an effect upon the dependent variable of recidivism were not controlled for within this study. Such variables may include offender behavior while in prison, participation in prison programs, such as drug treatment, and connections with family and friends outside of prison.

Jengeleski and Gordon (2010) conducted a study that examined the recidivism rates of 362 offenders who were referred to a Day Reporting Center from 2006 to 2009 in Franklin County, PA. A comparative group was comprised of 2299 standard probationers (SP) who were released from jail during the 2004 calendar year. Recidivism was determined by whether or not a probationer was arrested after one year of being released from a

DRC or after one year on standard probation. Results of the study showed that standard probation (SP) clients were over three times more likely than DRC clients to recidivate after being discharged from jail or prison. Thirty-four percent of those in a standard probation program were arrested compared to 9.6 percent of clients who graduated from a DRC.

There were two major problems with this study. First, the study utilized a convenience sample, therefore, generalization of the data is limited. Furthermore, the characteristics of the clients in the standard probation court did not match the characteristics of the probation clients enrolled in a day reporting centers. The day reporting sample was comprised of more females (24% versus 14%), had served less time in jail, and committed less severe crimes than those subjects in the standard probation group.

A second weakness of this study was did not involve any type of sophisticated statistical analyses that controlled for such variables as age, race, gender, type of offense, and criminal history. The authors of the study only used frequency tables and percentages, and could have done a better statistical analysis by using logistic regression to control for several important independent variables. The authors of the study also mention a need for the inclusion of more psycho-social variables in the assessment of client success in a day reporting center.

Champion, Harvey, & Schanz (2011) conducted a study that contained two groups; one containing offenders who participated in a DRC, and a control group of county offenders who committed similar offenses but received other facets of intermediate punishment (i.e., electronic monitoring, house arrest, probation) or incarceration. The major strength of this study was that the DRC group and the control group were very comparable in several variables, including size the groups (N = 64 for both groups), sex (40 percent were male), race (over 90 percent were white, age (mean age for both groups was 35 years), and offense type. Both groups were comprise of Level 3 and Level 4 offenders. Level 3 offenders are considered "serious" offenders with multiple previous convictions and Level 4 offenders are those who are considered to be "very serious," with multiple prior convictions that necessitate between 12 and 30 months of incarceration, with options for intermediate punishment. Over 84 percent of the subjects in both the experimental and control groups were in some type of alcohol and/or drug treatment program.

The dependent variable, recidivism, for this study was measure by whether or not participants in the study were rearrested after three years from being release from prison or jail. All of the participants in both groups who were rearrested were arrest for property (nonviolent) crimes. After three years, a comparison of DRC group and the control group showed that only 4.8% of the DRC group had been rearrested, while 20.6% of those in the control group had been rearrested. While the difference between these two groups was significant at the .002 level, the sample size for both groups was very small (n = 63). The DRC program also saved the county a total of \$973,960 and 18,730 incarceration days. This number was calculated based upon the savings incurred through alternative programming for offenders who would otherwise have been incarcerated over the 3-year span.

Again, this study is limited because of its sample sizes in both the experimental and control groups (N = 64). Because of the small sample size it would not have been possible for the authors to determine which control variables are most significant in predicting a favorable outcome through the use of a more advanced statistical analysis, such as logistic regression. Including more variables, such as psychological variables and/or family support families, would have also added to this analysis and enhanced the body of knowledge about day reporting centers.

All three of the previous studies found that offenders who participated in DRC had lower recidivism rates compared to offenders who did not participate in a DRC program. Three more recent studies, however, contradict the assumption that DRC programs reduce recidivism.

One of largest and longest experimental studies conducted on DRCs was six year study conducted by the University of Cincinnati (Van Voorhis, Groot & Ritchie, 2010) that examined five DRCs operating under the Georgia Department of Corrections. The study had a total of 2,543 matched subjects, 1,271 in a DRC group and another 1,271 in a comparison group. Recidivism rates for the subjects in this study were examined at 6, 12, 18, 30, and 36 month follow-up time frames. Differences were significant ($p < .001$) only for the 6 and 12 month time periods. As time went by, however, recidivism rates for DRC participants were higher in all of the follow-up periods than those for the comparison groups. In fact recidivism rates for the 30 and 36 month periods were significantly higher ($p < .05$) for the DRC participants than the members of the comparison group. The authors of the study claim that the higher recidivism among DRC participates are likely due to the dramatic changes in sample size as case were dropped from the study due to releases from probation, incarcerations, and other forms of censoring (missing data). However, they fail to support this claim with little or any statistical evidence.

A more recent study by Boyle, Ragusa-Salerno, Lanterman, and Marcus (2013) also contradict the current beliefs that DRCs are effective correctional programs. In this study, the authors conducted a randomized controlled experiment in which seven DRCs in New Jersey were compared to parolees. The evaluators randomly assigned parolees into two groups, each with about 200 people with similar criminal backgrounds. Participants were randomly assigned to either the day reporting center program or the traditional parole program. Data were collected for 18 months after the 90-day study period. Overall, DRC participants were more likely to be arrested for a new offense than parolees, were more likely to be re-convicted of a new offense, and were more likely to produce a positive drug test. Data from this study also showed that parolees can be supervised at a lower cost using traditional parole than the day reporting center model. The average supervision costs for traditional parole ranged from \$7 to \$13.67 per day per parolee, whereas average programming costs at the day reporting centers averaged \$57 daily. The policy implication of this study are pretty clear; medium-and high-risk parolees can be managed just as effectively in traditional parole programs as they can in DRCs.

One of the latest quasi-experimental evaluations of day reporting centers was done by Hyatt and Ostermann (2019) whose study included 2,789 participants of day reporting centers (DRC) in New Jersey who were released from prison or jail in 2008, 2009, and 2010. These DRC participants were matched with 6,500 parolees who did not participate in day reporting center programming. The authors of this study did an excellent job of matching the experimental group with the control groups on a variety of different variables, including criminal history, correctional experience, age at the time of release, gender, race, a measure of the relative deprivation in the county to which the parolee returned, mental health status, instant offense type, a count of prior arrests, and a pre-release risk score. All of the participants were followed for three years and the dependent variable, post-release recidivism, was measured by several measures, including new arrests, technical violations, and convictions with the three year period.

The results of the study show that during all periods (1 year, 2 years, and 3 years) day reporting center participants were arrested and had more parolee revocations at significantly higher rates than those parolees who did not participate in a day report center. The authors of the study believe that the higher rates of violations among DRC participants may be due to the fact that the members of this group were under more intense and/or consistent supervision. Parolees in the DRC group were required to report to the DRC on a daily basis and spend several hours under the supervision of correctional offices. This likely increased the likelihood of any misconduct being detected. Setting aside these effects for parole violations, it is worth noting that this study found that the re-arrest rate among DRC participants was quite high, with 41 percent of parolees being arrested during the first year after release. As such, the results of this study do not provide a strong empirical foundation for the use of DRCs, in fact, as was the case for intensive parole and boot camp prisons, there seems to be a “backfiring” effect because of the strict rules of DRCs.

The only major weaknesses of this study was that the researchers were not able to examine the effects of any type of treatment programs, such as drug and alcohol treatment or counseling and it is possible that more time in treatment programs may have shown to have a positive effect. The findings of this study, therefore, reflect only an analysis of DRC versus standard parolee, not the effect that the treatment provided at DRCs may have had for specific groups of offenders, including those that completed the full program relative to failures or specific demographic or other subgroups within the parole population.

In summary there are no consistent findings that demonstrate that DRC programs reduce recidivism. One of the major challenges in conducting evaluative research on DRCs is that the programs themselves differ from state to state and even from county to county. Some programs serve offenders on probation, others serve offenders who are parole, while others are applied to offenders in lieu of prison or jail. All DRC programs require offenders to report daily, but differ in the quality and types of services offered. Some programs offer intensive drug treatment and counseling programs, while other programs simply supervise and monitor participants. Roy (2002), for example found that the graduation rates of DRCs vary from 13.5% to 84% depending on jurisdiction and graduation rates are influenced by a number of various factors, including program goals, target selection (i.e. chronic offenders), the location of the program (urban versus rural), program quality, and staff turnover. Our point is that there are simply too many differences among DRC programs to make generalized conclusions about their effectiveness. Future studies need to consider all the different characteristics among DRCs to help us better understand why some programs work and others do not. Until such evaluations are conducted, policy makers should be cautious about beginning new DRC programs in their jurisdictions.

And even though there is limited evidence that supports the success of day reporting centers, several states, including Georgia and Alabama have recently offered a new “condensed versions of DRCs, known as Day Reporting Center Lites in order to provide services to more rural areas of their states. A Day Reporting Center Lite serves 25 to 30 clients, while a full DRC can serve up to 150. DRC Lites typically are housed within probation or parole field offices that are staffed with 1 supervising officer and 1 or 2 counselors. With smaller staffs, DRC Lites often have to rely on external community resources to assist with offender education and employment opportunities. For the most part, DRC Lites function very similar to DRCs and offer similar programming but are limited to focusing on cognitive behavioral treatment, substance dependence assistance and educational/job training. (Alabama Department of Pardons and Paroles, n.d.; Georgia Department of Corrections, n.d.). To this date, there has yet to be a study with analysis the effectiveness between DRC Lites and/or compares the recidivism rates of DRC Lites to normal DRCs. Further research is needed to assess the implementation and success of DRC Lites and DRCs in general.

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