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Tolerance of Minor Setbacks in a Challenging Reentry Experience:
An Evaluation of a Federal Reentry Court

Considering that 70,000 individuals are released from federal prisons annually and many repeatedly cycle in and out prison, there is an undeniable need for a comprehensive strategy to improve ex-offender reintegration into the community (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2008). Recognizing the need for such a strategy, the Federal Probation Office and the Board of Judges for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania initiated a pilot program entitled the Supervision to Aid Reentry (STAR) program in 2007. STAR program participants appear in court for a special biweekly Reentry Court session and have access to a variety of services intended to support their successful reintegration into the community.

The following outcome evaluation offers preliminary evidence of the program's success by comparing the first 60 program participants to a matched comparison group of 60 individuals under the regular terms of supervision for the 18 months following their release from federal prison. Some background information about the STAR program, including a summary of a process evaluation previously completed on the program, will first be provided followed by a review of previous research on other reentry courts. The research methodology used for the outcome evaluation and the results of the evaluation will then be detailed. A discussion of the implications of these findings will conclude the article.

The STAR Program[1] and Supervised Release

In 2006, several criminal justice practitioners developed a pilot Reentry Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania named the Supervision to Aid Reentry (STAR) program.

Following the collaboration of a district judge, a magistrate judge, and representatives from the Federal Defender's Office, the U.S. Attorney's Office and the U.S. Probation Office, the first Reentry Court sessions began in September 2007 with twelve participants. By February 2011, there were 125 current or former STAR program participants split between two Reentry Courts with two Reentry Court judges in Philadelphia.

Those eligible for participation in the STAR program have served time in federal prison, scored between five and seven on a risk prediction index indicating a medium to high risk level and been recently released on "supervised release" to Philadelphia.[2] Individuals returning from federal prison to the Philadelphia on supervised release are presented with the opportunity to voluntarily participate in the Reentry Court.

In addition to meeting the regular requirements of supervision, STAR program participants must also appear for Reentry Court sessions that are scheduled, on average, once every two weeks. Participants are assigned to one of two courts. There is one probation officer for each court and his or her caseload consists solely of the probationers in that court. Reentry Court session attendees include all program participants assigned to a particular court day and the Reentry Court workgroup, which includes the probation officer for that group, an administrative assistant for both probation officers, a reentry coordinator, a representative from the Federal Public Defender's Office and an Assistant U.S. Attorney. A reentry coordinator is responsible for partnering with various community organizations and businesses in order to provide services to all STAR program participants and overcome obstacles to successful reentry.

During Reentry Court sessions, the judge individually calls each participant up to the front of the court and asks him or her to discuss both successes and challenges in regards to their reentry back into the community. The judge praises participants for achievements and

encourages them to continue with their reintegration efforts. When an individual reports a certain obstacle to their reentry, the judge may refer the individual to a particular social service provider or he may invite the reentry coordinator to suggest possible strategies. If a participant does not feel comfortable discussing an issue in open court, the Reentry Court workgroup may meet privately with someone who is experiencing depression or who has shown signs of illiteracy so that they do not need to disclose such experiences in front of all other participants and courtroom observers.

Some participants may be hesitant to report any ongoing problems to the judge. In these circumstances, as a result of a pre-court workgroup meeting, the judge has often already been informed of any significant problems and can ask the individual about the issue. In the hour prior to each Reentry Court session, the judge meets with the workgroup to review the progress of each participant and decide collaboratively on the most appropriate response to a particular obstacle or success.

In addition to gaining access to a valuable array of services, there is another incentive for STAR program participation. Following the completion of 52 successful weeks in the program, the Reentry Court judge will recommend to the original sentencing judge that the total term of the participant's supervised release be reduced by up to 12 months. Similar to the drug court model in its tolerance of potential setbacks, these 52 weeks do not need to be consecutive. A "successful" week is earned if the participant appears in court (or notifies the court ahead of time of a valid reason for being absent) and continues to successfully follow the terms of his or her supervision.

As of February 2011, 48 Reentry Court participants have successfully completed twelve months and "graduated" from the STAR program. During the graduation ceremony, motions to

reduce the length of supervision are presented to the original sentencing judges. If the original sentencing judge is not available to attend court, another federal judge will receive the motion. All STAR graduates have had their motions signed by a judge and have received a reduced supervision sentence.

Considering that the comparison group in this outcome evaluation was composed of individuals under the regular terms of supervised release, it is important to also describe these requirements. The standard conditions of supervision in the Eastern District of Pennsylvania require individuals to maintain regular contact with their probation officer and permit the officer to visit their home or workplace at any time. Excessive alcohol use, the use of illegal substances and/or possession of a firearm are strictly forbidden. Individuals on supervised release are also required to maintain regular employment, unless excused for school or vocational training. In addition to these standard conditions, special conditions may also be imposed, which include required drug testing, substance abuse treatment, mental health counseling or community service.

Existing Research on Reentry Courts

Some research has begun to investigate the effectiveness of reentry courts in terms of reducing recidivism and increasing access to services. The Office of Justice Programs (OJP) launched one of the first large-scale reentry court projects in early 2000. Titled the Reentry Court Initiative (RCI), OJP provided assistance to nine sites interested in creating a reentry court. These sites included cities and counties in California, Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Iowa, Kentucky, New York, Ohio and West Virginia. Although there were significant program differences between sites, the RCI identified six core elements for all reentry courts to follow. These components included assessment and planning, active oversight, management of support

services, accountability to community, graduated and parsimonious sanctions and rewards for success (Lindquist, Hardison & Lattimore, 2003).

Most of the RCI sites have only undergone process evaluations that utilized stakeholders' perceptions to measure program effectiveness. Lindquist, Hardison & Lattimore (2003) surveyed reentry court participants, judges, case managers, treatment providers and supervision officers in order to document their views on RCI's effectiveness in aiding reentry. While specific perceptions of program effectiveness varied among RCI sites, key stakeholders generally reported that participation in reentry court positively influenced reentry as a result of increasing supervision, reconnecting ex-offenders with family members and providing access to a variety of social services.

A few RCI sites have conducted their own outcome evaluations with promising preliminary results. Spelman (2003) investigated the Richland County Reentry Court in Ohio and found that the rearrest rate for reentry court participants was only 6% during the first year. Considering nationwide data indicating that nearly 50% of released offenders are rearrested within the first year, Spelman described the Richland court as "remarkable" (76). Despite this impressively low recidivism rate, this study simply examined rearrest rates for a fairly small sample of reentry court participants (n=66) and was further limited by the lack of a comparison group.

Investigations of the Harlem Parole Reentry Court have perhaps contributed most to the research literature on reentry courts. Farole (2003) compared the first 45 reentry court participants to a closely matched comparison group of 90 parolees. Using bivariate and multivariate analyses, the evaluation failed to find any significant differences in the likelihood of reincarceration between the reentry court group and the comparison group in the first year

following release. Although not a statistically significant difference, a higher percentage of reentry court participants were incarcerated in the one year following release. Twenty-two percent of reentry court participants were reincarcerated and 14% of the comparison group were reincarcerated within one year.

While Farole was only able to follow a small sample of participants for the first year following release, Hamilton (2010) investigated outcomes for over 300 Harlem Parole Reentry Court participants and a matched comparison group of over 600 parolees for up to three years following release. Reentry court participants were found to have higher rates of parole revocation, likely due to the "supervision effect" (closer supervision meant a higher number of technical violations were detected). However, this study revealed that reentry court participants were less likely to be reconvicted of a new offense. Forty three percent of reentry court participants and 53% of the comparison group had been reconvicted at three years following release. Further analysis revealed that those who completed the reentry court program were even less likely to be rearrested or reconvicted.

Perhaps central to understanding the different results, several changes were made to the Harlem Parole Reentry Court with the intention of improving outcomes following Farole's initial investigation of the program. Hamilton's study then confirmed that these improvements were associated with a decline in recidivism. As the most thoroughly evaluated reentry court, the Harlem Parole Reentry Court offers an important lesson in allowing programs to evolve and develop over time. Although the initial evaluation revealed disappointing results, the program was not abandoned; rather, applicable program improvements were implemented and a future evaluation highlighted more desirable results.

The reentry court movement has also been growing in the federal system. A large-scale experimental study of many of these programs is currently underway. A federal reentry court in the District of Oregon underwent a fairly small-scale evaluation that compared all court participants to graduates, those who were terminated from the court, and a comparison group of individuals under regular supervision (Close, Aubin & Alltucker, 2008). Bivariate analyses revealed significant differences between the groups in terms of the total sanctions received, the total number of support services used and employment status. Program terminators received, on average, the greatest number of sanctions, followed by graduates, current court participants and the comparison group with the least number of sanctions. On average, graduates and reentry court participants used the greatest number of services, followed by program terminators and the comparison group with the least number of services used. Individuals in the comparison group were most likely to be employed, followed by court graduates, current court participants and lastly individuals who were terminated from the program.

There were several notable limitations of the Oregon court study. In addition to using a fairly small sample size (n=114), these groups were not comparable on several key predictors of success on supervision, including gender and employment status. There was also no control for time. Comparing the use of services between program graduates who may have spent two years in the program to terminators who may have only been in the program for two months is misleading.

Even though reentry courts are a relatively new approach, little research has sought to assess their effectiveness in reducing recidivism. Considering the relative lack of research on reentry courts and the mixed results found in the existing research, an investigation of the STAR program is certainly warranted.

Key Components of the STAR Program

In May 2010, a process evaluation of the STAR program was released (Taylor, 2010). The process evaluation was designed to identify the program's key components. While the RCI-funded programs were guided by a list of "core components" (see Lindquist, Hardison & Lattimore, 2004, 2003), reentry court programs have generally not yet been subject to definitive program standards to the same extent as drug courts (see National Association of Drug Court Professionals, 1997/2004) or DWI courts (see National Center for DWI Courts). The STAR program process evaluation thus contributed to the developing understanding of reentry courts' key components.

In addition, it was crucial that such an investigation preceded an outcome evaluation. If the outcome evaluation found that the STAR program participants were less likely to reoffend compared to similar individuals under the regular terms of supervision, it would be critical to know the policies and procedures yielding such results. Perhaps even more importantly, if the outcome evaluation found that STAR program participants are not significantly less likely to recidivate, an in-depth record of program components could be used to guide program improvements.

Data were collected for the process evaluation using a variety of research tools. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight STAR participants and the Reentry Court workgroup, including both probation officers, both Reentry Court judges, the reentry coordinator, an Assistant U.S. Attorney and a representative from the Federal Public Defender's Office. Interviewees were asked to identify the components of the program that were believed to be associated with the program's success and any ongoing issues that inhibited program success. Based on observations of pre-court workgroup meetings, regular court proceedings and

graduation ceremonies, detailed field notes were also collected. In addition, a documentary analysis was conducted on planning documents provided to the researcher. These documents included a general overview of the program, the proposal for the pilot program and a criminal conduct protocol that details which agencies can impose sanctions and under what circumstances.

All data were entered into the qualitative data analysis software, Atlas.ti version 5.0, which assisted in the discovery and analysis of themes in the data. The study revealed four particularly important components of the Reentry Court process: the unique role of the judge, the use of sanctions and rewards, access to social services and efforts to strengthen social networks and develop social capital. The following sections will briefly summarize the findings of the process evaluation and relate these findings to prior research on reentry and correctional supervision.

The Unique Role of the Judge

Past research has found that the judge plays a particularly key role in specialized courts. First, supportive, positive dialogue with a judge can improve a participant's chances of program completion (Senjo & Leip, 2001) and reduce a participant's likelihood of recidivism (Miethe, Lu & Reese, 2000). Second, simply appearing before a judge in a structured, supervised environment can improve a participant's likelihood of success (Marlowe, Festinger & Lee, 2004; Marlowe et al., 2003; Festinger et al., 2002). Third, specialized court participants seem to value their relationships with judges and form strong opinions based on these relationships (Porter, 2001; Goldkamp, White & Robinson, 2002).

The process evaluation confirmed that the Reentry Court judges play an important role in the STAR program. The judges seem to balance two somewhat conflicting roles. While they often engage in very informal, friendly interactions with STAR participants, the judges are also required to balance these amicable relationships with more firm, authoritative, disciplinarian interactions with participants. These dual roles appear to influence several court processes related to the provision of social support and the imposition of intermediate sanctions. The adaptation of traditional judicial roles may also explain the range of participants' perspectives about the judges. While some participants doubt the sincerity of the judges' interest in their overall well-being, others have begun to develop a new, more positive outlook on the entire criminal justice system as a result of their interactions with the Reentry Court judge.

The Use of Sanctions & Rewards

The use of graduated rewards and sanctions is a defining feature of the specialized court movement (National Association of Drug Court Professionals, 1997; Lindquist, Hardison & Lattimore, 2003; Marlowe & Kirby, 1999). Graduated sanctions have been found to reduce the likelihood of rearrest for drug court participants (Harrell, Cavanaugh & Roman, 1998; Goldkamp, White & Robinson, 2002).

The process evaluation revealed that sanctions and rewards play a key role in the STAR program. Some workgroup members and court participants emphasized the importance of the visibility of sanctions (sanctions are imposed in front of all participants) and the subsequent fear of being sanctioned. Others emphasized the importance of the immediacy of sanctions following a violation and the shame of being sanctioned in front of other participants. While most workgroup members believed that sanctions were a tool to help guide participants back on track

after a violation, a few workgroup members questioned whether sanctions have any influence on participant behavior. Inconsistencies in the delivery of sanctions for different individuals indicates that the Reentry Court does not use a strict graduated sanctioning model. In recognition of the flexibility in sanctioning, the workgroup values their ability to impose sanctions with a consideration for the individual participant's circumstances. In terms of rewards, some participants appear to be motivated by the ultimate reward of a reduced supervision sentence following program completion, but there appears to be little evidence that intermediate rewards are being used to encourage compliance throughout participation in the program.

Access to Social Services

Prior research has documented that ex-offenders are in need of a variety of social services, including housing assistance (Ditton, 1999; McKean & Raphael, 2002), education (Harlow, 2003; Visher & Lattimore, 2007), employment assistance (Yahner, Visher & Solomon, 2008; Visher & Lattimore, 2007), substance abuse treatment (ADAM, 2003; Belenko & Peugh, 2005; La Vigne, Shollenburger & Debus, 2009), and mental and physical healthcare (Mallik-Kane & Visher, 2008; Visher & Lattimore, 2007). A relatively small body of research has explored the relationship between the availability of social services and recidivism among ex-offenders. Seiter & Kadela's (2003) meta-analysis confirmed that the availability of vocational training programs and drug treatment programs are associated with a reduction in recidivism. More recent research from the Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative (SVORI) revealed that individuals enrolled in reentry programs were more likely to access a variety of social services, but the subsequent effects on recidivism were minimal (Lattimore & Visher, 2009).

The research literature also definitively states that social services are most effective when offenders begin receiving services during incarceration and continue to receive these services throughout their transition into the community (McCollister et al., 2003; Taxman, 1998; Altschuler and Armstrong, 1994). Successful service delivery further depends on a structured intake assessment of individuals' risks, needs and strengths (Taxman, Young & Byrne, 2004).

The STAR program process evaluation found that workgroup members generally agreed that social services were an integral component of the Reentry Court program. Unfortunately, workgroup members confirmed that participants rarely began receiving services while incarcerated that could be continued throughout the reentry process. According to interviews and observations, the most common services to which Reentry Court participants were directed included substance abuse treatment, transportation assistance, mentoring, education, employment assistance and legal assistance. As opposed to an intake assessment, services are most commonly delivered through three possible mechanisms: (1) participation in a particular type of program (such as substance abuse treatment or mental health counseling) is a condition of an individual's supervised release, (2) the participant expresses the desire to receive a particular resource or (3) the judge (sometimes repeatedly and sometimes strongly) suggests that a participant take advantage of a particular resource after the workgroup has informally recognized a particular need. Reentry Court participants generally agreed that the social service resources are helpful for their successful reintegration.

Strengthening Social Networks & Building Social Capital

There continues to be a growing body of research demonstrating the importance of social capital and social networks for individual reentry success (Clear, 2007; Farrall, 2004).

Oftentimes, ex-offenders' ability to successfully reintegrate is dependent upon their ability to tap into social networks that can provide them with job opportunities, emotional guidance and support, and other important resources. Research on other reentry court programs has documented the role that family members and other ex-offenders can play in helping court participants gain access to resources, such as employment and social support (Lindquist, Hardison & Lattimore, 2003; Close, Aubin & Alltucker, 2008).

The process evaluation found that the Reentry Court helps ex-offenders build social capital by encouraging family involvement and relationships among program participants. Having such individuals in their social networks allowed participants to benefit from the social and emotional support of family members and other participants while also accessing employment opportunities through these personal connections. Family members and other ex-offenders also appeared to be valuable assets in securing gainful employment for Reentry Court participants.

The process evaluation thus confirmed that many of the key components of the STAR program were consistent with practices identified as effective in the research literature. An impact evaluation was completed in order to explore whether or not STAR program participation was actually associated with improved reentry outcomes.

Evaluation Research Methods

Sample Construction

The STAR program outcome evaluation employed a quasi-experimental research design that compared the first 60 STAR participants to a matched sample of individuals under the regular terms of supervised release. The analysis was limited to the first 60 participants to allow

for a sufficient length of time for post-release observations. Descriptive information was first

collected on each of the 60 STAR participants including their gender, date of birth, date of

release and risk prediction index (RPI) score.[3] This set of four characteristics was used to select

a similarly situated comparison group.

Considering that there is a relatively small pool of probationers who return to

Philadelphia from federal prison, it was not possible to match STAR participants to comparison

group individuals using a more detailed set of characteristics.[4] Additionally, due to a limited

number of probationers eligible for the comparison group, it was necessary to construct ranges

for both age and date of release. For age at time of release, the following categories were

constructed: under 25 years old, 25 to 34 years, 35 to 44 years and 45 years and over. The

ranges for date of release were designed to at least partially account for seasonal variations in the

likelihood of offending and thus included April to September 2007, October 2007 to March

2008, April to September 2008, October 2008 to March 2009, and April to September 2009.

Sets of characteristics were then compiled for each participant. For example, one

participant had the following set of characteristics: male, aged 25 to 34 at time of release, and

released between April and September 2007 with an RPI of six. This set of characteristics was

assigned matching group number one. Any other participant with that same set of characteristics

was then also assigned matching group number one. In total, for the 60 participants, 40 different

sets of characteristics were identified. A list was sent to the Probation Office with the forty

matching group numbers and the corresponding sets of characteristics. The Probation Office

generated a list of all probationers currently under federal supervision in Philadelphia who met

each of the sets of characteristics (a total of 40 lists were generated).

Not counting the STAR participant(s) on each list, the remaining individuals' names were numbered starting with one. A random number generator was used to select a comparison group individual from that list. For characteristics lists with more than two STAR participants, two random numbers were generated in order to select two comparison group individuals. In some circumstances, there was only one eligible comparison group individual on the list so that individual was automatically selected.

Efforts were made to exclude any individuals from the comparison group who had been offered participation in the program, but declined to participate. Twenty of the sixty individuals in the final comparison group were program decliners. These individuals were only included when there were no other eligible comparison group individuals who matched the criteria. A discussion of the potential bias related to including these individuals is included in the limitations section.

Unfortunately, there were also five cases in which no eligible comparison group individuals were on a list (the list only included the STAR participant's name). In these cases, the release date parameters were extended until an eligible comparison group member could be identified. In one of these cases, the release date was extended only one month and in another case the release date was extended four months. In the other three cases, expanding the release date up to six months still did not identify an eligible comparison group individual. For these three cases, the age range was extended up to three years to identify eligible comparison group members.

Data Collection

The Probation Office provided the researcher with access to case files for STAR participants and the comparison group. Relevant sections of the case files included presentencing reports, arrest reports, administrative memorandums, and chronological reports compiled by each research subject's probation officer. Procedures for updating case files are standardized within the Probation Office. Chronological reports, which detail all officer contacts with probationers, are statutorily required to be updated every three days in the event of non-compliance or every five days if the probationer is successfully following the terms of supervision. The researcher developed a data collection instrument to be filled out using the records kept in each subject's case file.

For each subject, data were collected for a set period of time. The study period included the time between the subject's release and the 18 months following their release. This study period was consistent regardless of whether someone graduated from the STAR program, withdrew from the STAR program or was returned to prison due to a new arrest or supervision revocation.

Dependent Variables

For the purposes of this evaluation, several dependent variables were used including employment status at the end of the 18 month follow up period, service receipt, sanction imposition, and several measures of recidivism. Measures of recidivism included any new arrest charges, any new violent arrest charges, and supervision revocation. Probation case files for STAR participants and comparison group members were used to obtain these measures.

Independent Variables

Independent variables of interest included the subject's age, RPI score, original offense type (coded as violent, drug, white collar and other), whether any sanctions were received, whether any services were received, and whether the individual participated in the STAR program (STAR participation coded as 1). A list of all items included on the data collection instrument can be found in Appendix A. These measures were all obtained from probation case files.

Evaluation Findings

Sample Characteristics

An initial analysis was conducted to determine the extent to which the STAR group matched the comparison group on key characteristics related to the likelihood of recidivism. As shown in Table I, the comparison group closely matched the STAR group in terms of age, RPI, and gender. Although it would have been ideal to select comparison group members that also matched STAR participants in terms of the type of offense for which they were originally sentenced and the length of incarceration sentence they most recently served, the relatively small pool of eligible comparison group members prevented such matching. It is clear that the STAR group was composed of somewhat more violent offenders while the comparison group was composed of more drug and white-collar offenders. While there was a great deal of variability in sentence length in both the STAR and comparison groups, Table I shows that on average, STAR participants' most recent incarceration terms were over a year longer than the incarceration terms of the comparison group. Differences between the comparison group and STAR participants in

terms of offense type and length of incarceration are a notable limitation of this study; however, multivariate analyses were able to account for some of these differences.

[INSERT TABLE I. HERE]

Bivariate Analyses

Bivariate analyses investigated differences in service receipt, sanction imposition, supervision revocation, future employment and recidivism between STAR participants and the comparison group in the 18 month study period.

As shown in Table II, both the STAR participants and the comparison group received a variety of social services, including employment assistance, housing assistance, substance abuse treatment, education, mental healthcare, physical healthcare, mentoring, legal services, and parenting services. An impressive 95% of STAR participants and 87% of the comparison group received at least one service during the study period.

[INSERT TABLE II. HERE]

Chi-square tests of significance were used to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference in the percentages of individuals in each group who received services and sanctions. Table II indicates that STAR program participants were significantly more likely to receive education, mentoring and legal services than the comparison group. Individuals in the comparison group were significantly more likely to receive substance abuse treatment and mental health services than STAR participants.

Table II also denotes that STAR participants and the comparison group received a variety of sanctions including verbal reprimands, warning letters, increased drug testing, curfews, home detention, community service, administrative hearings, restricted travel, increased reporting, and

confinement.[5] In both groups, a majority of individuals received at least one type of sanction during the study period. Analyses indicated that STAR program participants were significantly more likely to be asked to participate in community service and members of the comparison group were significantly more likely to receive a verbal reprimand.

Table III highlights differences between STAR participants and the comparison group for several outcomes of interest, including supervision revocation, new arrests and employment status at the end of the 18 month follow-up period. While nearly one quarter of the comparison group had their supervision revoked during the 18 month study period, fewer than 10% of STAR program participants had their supervision revoked. Nearly one-third of both STAR participants and comparison group individuals were arrested for a new offense during the study period. Eight percent of STAR participants and 6% of the comparison group were arrested for a new violent offense. Results revealed a statistically significant difference for employment status at the end of the follow up period, with over 40% of the comparison group unemployed and only 22% of STAR participants unemployed at the end of the follow-up period.

[INSERT TABLE III. HERE]

Chi-square tests of significance were also used to explore a potential relationship between graduation from the STAR program and the likelihood of a new arrest among STAR participants. As shown in Table IV, among the 60 STAR participants, twenty nine graduated from the program within the 18 month study period. Among the nineteen STAR participants who were arrested during the study period, only three had graduated from the program compared to sixteen who had not graduated. Participants who were successful in the STAR program and graduated were statistically less likely to commit a new offense compared to participants who did not graduate.

[INSERT TABLE IV. HERE]

In sum, STAR program participants were statistically more likely to receive education, mentoring and legal services as well as participate in community service activities. Although no differences were found for new arrests, STAR participants were significantly less likely to have their supervision revoked or be unemployed at the end of the 18 month study period. Additionally, STAR graduates were less likely than non-graduates to commit a new offense.

Multivariate Analyses

Logistic regression was used to isolate the unique effect of STAR participation on recidivism and supervision revocation after controlling for other variables associated with the likelihood of recidivism and supervision revocation. While several key control variables were included, the small sample size prohibited the inclusion of a more extensive set of control variables. Table V summarizes the results of the logistic regression analysis.

As illustrated in Table V, STAR participation did not significantly predict the likelihood of any new arrest or a new arrest for a violent offense, after controlling for age, RPI score and original offense type. However, Table VI shows that STAR participation was significantly associated with a 81% reduction in the likelihood of supervision revocation, even after controlling for a new arrest, age, RPI score and original offense type.

[INSERT TABLE V. AND VI. HERE]

Discussion

A more complete interpretation of these results can be achieved by considering the insights gained during the process evaluation. Although STAR participation was not associated

with a reduction in the likelihood of reoffending, participation was associated with a reduction in the likelihood of supervision revocation. Considering findings from the process evaluation on the Reentry Court's use of intermediary sanctions to guide troubled participants away from further non-compliance, the findings from the outcome evaluation may not be surprising. As opposed to instantly revoking a participant's supervision immediately following a new offense, intermediary sanctions are imposed with the intention of directing the participant into compliant behavior. In other words, supervision is not instantly revoked following non-compliance; intermediary sanctions are used to give participants another chance. While the data used for this outcome evaluation cannot confirm the temporal ordering of non-compliance, the imposition of intermediate sanctions, and then compliance, the available data do yield findings that are consistent with the process evaluation findings. Such processes are also particularly notable as a marked contrast to the Harlem Parole Reentry Court, which appeared to detect technical violations and subsequently revoke parole at a greater rate than parolees not in the reentry court (Hamilton, 2010).

Taking into account the Reentry Court's tolerance for minor setbacks and use of intermediary sanctions to discourage participants from future problems, documenting the beneficial effects of the STAR program in terms of reducing future reoffending may require a follow-up period longer than the 18 months used in the current study. Some preliminary evidence for the program's ability to guide individuals back on track is offered by the bivariate analyses that revealed the success of program graduates. Participants who stay in the program long enough to graduate may be less likely to reoffend in the future.

The ability of any program to prevent participants, especially high risk offenders, from reoffending during a short amount of time is influenced by the vast number of challenges

formerly incarcerated individuals must overcome. The evaluation of the Harlem Parole Reentry Court offers a relevant example of how program effectiveness may not be detectable in short study periods. An initial evaluation of the reentry court failed to identify any significant differences in recidivism between program participants and a comparison group (Farole, 2003). However, a later evaluation was able to identify long-term positive impacts of program participation on reoffending (Hamilton, 2010).

The Harlem Parole Reentry Court also provides an example of a program that has continued to evolve and improve throughout its existence, which may also account for the more positive results in the later evaluation. The STAR program has also recognized the importance of ongoing program adaptation. Following many of the recommendations made in the process evaluation (Taylor, 2010), the STAR program has worked to implement a variety of evidence-based practices to improve the program. The probation officers dedicated to the STAR program now use a new validated risk assessment instrument, called the Post Conviction Risk Assessment (PCRA), which features new additions for measures of criminal thinking. The STAR program is also working to develop cognitive behavioral therapy courses. Based on the PCRA assessment, STAR participants will soon be directed to cognitive behavioral therapy courses run by probation officers certified to deliver cognitive behavioral therapy.

Limitations

Several limitations of this study should be noted. A fairly short follow-up period of only 18 months and a relatively small sample size of 120 probationers was used. For the multivariate analyses, the small sample size limited the number of independent variables that could be included in the model. Complex human behaviors, including reoffending or decisions to revoke

supervision, are influenced by a wide variety of factors that could not be included as control variables. However, as the number of STAR program participants continues to grow and the length of time since release increases for the first set of participants, future research endeavors will be able to investigate the effectiveness of the STAR program over longer periods of time and with a larger sample size. Additionally, the statistical power of the analyses that focused on graduates is fairly low; as the number of graduates increases over time, future analyses will be able to better account for the impact of program graduation.

The construction of an appropriate comparison group was limited by the relatively small number of individuals returning to Philadelphia on supervised release. As shown above, the comparison group included more white collar and drug offenders and the STAR group included more violent offenders. Additionally, one-third of the comparison group were individuals who had been offered participation in the STAR program, but declined to participate. Although one-third is a small portion of the comparison group, it is possible that individuals who agreed to participate in the STAR program were more motivated to change. Thus, differences in individuals' readiness to change may have accounted for some of the findings. While it would have been ideal to match STAR participants and comparison group individuals on additional characteristics, such as offense type and readiness to change, the small pool of eligible comparison group individuals prohibited the inclusion of such criteria. Priority was given to matching the groups on age, gender, date of release, and risk prediction index score.

Implications

Despite these limitations, the current study has made a valuable contribution to the extremely limited research literature on the effectiveness of reentry courts. Considering the

growing popularity of reentry courts, it is important to continue to develop an empirical basis for the effectiveness of such courts.

Although potential impacts on reoffending are yet to be seen, the STAR program's reduction in the likelihood of probation revocation is beneficial to the criminal justice system and general society. Considering the high costs of incarceration, preventing individuals under supervision from returning to prison is associated with substantial cost savings to the justice system and taxpayers. According to a report released by the U.S. Courts, it cost $24,992 per year to incarcerate one person in a federal prison in 2007 and only $3,622 per year for a person to be supervised by federal probation in the community (United States Courts, 2008).

Additionally, a variety of research indicates that high rates of incarceration have damaging effects on families and communities, especially in already disadvantaged communities like Philadelphia. The repeated removal and return of neighborhood residents via incarceration is associated with family and community instability and subsequently increased crime rates (Auerhahn and McGuire, 2010; Clear, 2007; Clear, Rose and Ryder, 2001; Edin, 2000; Rose and Clear, 1998; Clear, Rose, Waring and Scully, 2003). Reducing the incidence of probation revocation and the return of individuals to correctional facilities may have a positive impact on their families and communities.

Formulating and implementing effective strategies for reducing ex-offender recidivism is an extremely complex process that requires addressing a wide array of challenges that formerly incarcerated individuals encounter. Recognizing these challenges, the STAR program appears to tolerate minor setbacks in hopes of keeping participants out of prison and maintaining the opportunity to guide them in their reintegration process. The STAR program has shown that

they are dedicated to improving the lives of the individuals in their program as they embrace

innovative strategies to reintegrate high risk offenders back into the community.

Notes

1. A thorough description of the STAR program can also be found in a recent publication by Ware (2011).

2.   Reentry Court participants were given split sentences, meaning that at the time of adjudication for their offense, their original sentencing judge sentenced them to a certain number of years in prison and a certain number of years on supervised release following their release from prison.

3. The RPI takes into account a variety of factors including the offenders' age at the beginning of supervision, the number of prior arrests, employment status, history of illegal drug use or alcohol abuse, prior history of absconding from supervision, whether the probationer has a college degree and whether the probationer was living with a spouse and/or children at the start of supervision.

4. A variety of options were explored for potentially expanding the pool of eligible comparison group individuals, such as including probationers from nearby urban counties. However, this option was ruled out following discussions with key decision makers in various probation offices that revealed substantial variation in revocation practices and rates of reoffending in communities outside of Philadelphia. The researcher compared revocation rates between 2007 and 2009 in Philadelphia and two other urban areas in Southeastern Pennsylvania and found that Philadelphia had significantly higher rates of revocations than the other areas. The consideration of other research on the strong influence of social ecology on the likelihood of reoffending (see Mears, Wang, Hay & Bales, 2008) also contributed to the decision to not expand the eligible pool of comparison group individuals to other locations.

5. Although it is included in Table II for ease of reporting results, the STAR workgroup does not view community service as a sanction or a punishment. Rather, requiring community service is used when participants are struggling to find employment. Community service is believed to occupy participants' discretionary time and encourage them to value hard work and generosity.

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Table I. Characteristics of STAR Participants & the Comparison Group

Characteristics	STAR	Comparison Group
Age (*M*, *SD*)	32.9 (6.6)	32.5 (7.2)
Risk Prediction Index (*M*, *SD*)	5.4 (1.3)	5.3 (1.2)
Male (%)	96.7	96.7
Sentence length (*M*, *SD* months)	65 (39)	49 (39)
Offense Type (%)		
Violent	63.3	41.7
Drug	26.7	36.7
White Collar	8.3	16.7
Other	1.7	5

Table II. Comparison of STAR Participants and Comparison Group:

Services and Sanctions Received

	STAR (N = 60)	Comparison Group (N = 60)
Services		
Employment assistance	72%	67%
Housing	2%	2%
Substance abuse treatment **	23%	42%
Education ***	32%	8%
Mental healthcare **	8%	22%
Healthcare	8%	5%
Mentoring *	8%	2%
Legal services ***	17%	2%
Parenting	2%	3%
At least one service received	95%	87%
Sanctions		
Verbal reprimand *	45%	62%
Warning letter	2%	3%
Increased drug testing	8%	10%
Curfew	3%	0%
Home detention	8%	7%
Community service ***	23%	2%
Administrative hearing	7%	10%
Restricted travel	0%	3%
Increased reporting	3%	2%
Confinement	30%	20%
At least one sanction imposed	62%	67%

* p<.10, ** p<.05, *** p<.01

Table III. Comparison of STAR Participants and Comparison Group:

Supervision Revocation, Recidivism and Employment

Outcome	STAR	Comparison Group
Supervision revocation during 18 months **	8%	23%
New arrest during 18 months	32%	32%
New violent arrest during 18 months	8%	6%
Unemployed at end of 18 months ***	22%	42%

* p<.10, ** p<.05, *** p<.01

Table IV. Comparison of STAR Graduates and Non-Graduates: Recidivism

	Graduated	Did Not Graduate
No new arrest during 18 months	90% (26)	48% (15)
New arrest during 18 months	10% (3)	52% (16)

Table V. Logistic Regression Model Predicting Recidivism

	New Arrest			New Violent Arrest		
	B	*SE*	Exp (*B*)	*B*	*SE*	Exp (*B*)
Age	-0.097*	0.037	0.908	-0.116*	0.058	0.891
RPI score	0.474*	0.192	1.606	0.442	0.274	1.556
Original offense	-0.011	0.260	0.989	-0.208	0.401	0.812
STAR participation	0.036	0.426	1.037	0.382	0.607	1.466
Constant	-0.276*	1.48	0.759	-0.773	2.132	0.462
Nagelkerke's R^2		0.159			0.125	
Model χ^2		14.45*			7.939*	

*p<.05

Table VI. Logistic Regression Model Predicting Supervision Revocation

	Supervision Revocation		
	B	*SE*	Exp (*B*)
Age	-0.046	0.058	0.955
RPI score	1.220*	0.374	3.387
Original offense	0.172	0.159	1.188
STAR participation	-1.673*	0.697	0.188
New arrest	1.510*	0.647	4.526
Constant	-7.848*	2.485	.000
Nagelkerke's R^2		0.452	
Model χ^2		36.637*	

*p<.05

Appendix A. Items on Data Collection Instrument

Date of birth

Gender

Risk prediction index (RPI) score

Number of previous felony arrests

Original offense(s)

Dates incarcerated for the original offense(s)

Date probation term began

End of follow-up date (18 months after the probation receive date)

Date started in the STAR program

Dates spent in a halfway house post-release

Dates in Judge Rice's court (if any)

Dates in Judge Restrepo's court (if any)

Graduation date (if applicable)

Supervision revocation date (if applicable)

Date for program withdrawal (if applicable)

Employment status at end of 18 month follow up date

Dates the following services were offered and/or received: job training, job placement, housing, drug or alcohol treatment, education, mental health services, healthcare, mentoring, legal assistance, SEPTA tokens, parenting support, or other services

Dates the following sanctions were imposed and the dates the related violations were detected: verbal reprimand, warning letter / written reprimand, increased drug testing, curfew, home detention, community service, administrative hearing, restricted travel, increased reporting, confinement

New arrest charges and the date of arrest (if any)