Abstract

Doing Justice While Doing Therapy: Theory and Practice in a Co-Occurring Disorders Court

By

Myesa Knox Mahoney

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Professor William C. Thompson, Chair

Although a large number of offenders with substance abuse disorders also suffer from co-morbid mental health disorders, few programs exist to identify and treat these offenders. Using a single court case study approach, this study examines perceptions and experiences of probationers and court team members involved in the Co-Occurring Disorders Court (CODC) in Orange County, CA. Research questions focused on perceptions of probationers, impact(s) of therapeutic interventions and the evolution of legal roles within the court. Data include courtroom observations, qualitative interviews and survey measures of perceived coercion, perceived procedural justice and the quality of the judge-defendant relationship. The findings suggest that perceived coercion is low among probationers and perceived procedural justice is moderately high. The Judge-Defendant relationship is overwhelmingly positive and probationers perceive this relationship as extremely important, along with social support and 12-step programming, in the CODC program. Implications for policy and avenues for further exploration are discussed.