UNLV CENTER FOR CRIME AND JUSTICE POLICY

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RESEARCH IN BRIEF

Nevada's Day Reporting Center: Results from a Randomized Controlled Trial

By Matthew P. West, Linsey A. Belisle, and William H. Sousa

Introduction

Day reporting centers (DRCs) are becoming a popular alternative to incarceration for probationers and parolees but there is limited research and consensus on their effectiveness. The current study evaluated the effectiveness of a DRC in Nevada. Approximately 400 probationers and parolees were randomly assigned to either the DRC or a control group (i.e., traditional parole and probation). The two groups were compared on outcome measures such as recidivism, positive drug tests, education,employment, and residence over a 1-year period. In this *Research in Brief*, we provide a background on DRCs, review prior research evaluating the effectiveness of DRCs, and report the results of arandomized controlled trial (RCT) conducted to assess the effectiveness of a DRC located in Southern Nevada.[1]

Background

The Nevada Division of Parole and Probation (P&P) supervises about 20,000 offenders annually. Although many of these probationers and parolees do not pose a significant risk to the community, some do pose a substantial risk of recidivism. The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) estimates that 68% of parolees in the U.S. are arrested within three years of release, 79% are arrested within six years, and 83% are arrested within nine years (Alper et al., 2018). Moreover, 44% of parolees are arrested within one year of their release (Alper et al., 2018). The recidivism rates for felony probationers are comparable, with some studies finding that over 40% of felony probationers are rearrested within three years of sentencing (Langann & Cunniff, 1992). To increase the chances of success among at-risk parolees and probationers, a variety of initiatives and programs have been developed as alternatives to incarceration.[2]

HIGHLIGHTS

- The Nevada DRC is designed as an alternative to incarceration. Among other goals, the DRC aims to reduce recidivism among at-risk parolees and probationers.
- The current study involved a randomized controlled trial where approximately 400 probationers and parolees from Nevada's Southern Command were randomly assigned to either the DRC or a control group (traditional parole and probation). The two groups were compared on several outcome measures over a 1-year period.
- Results indicate that DRC graduates were significantly more likely to be successfully discharged compared to their control group counterparts. DRC graduates were also significantly less likely to be revoked compared to the control group. Although some in the experimental group did not complete the DRC program, of those that did, only 5 DRC graduates were revoked.
- Compared to the control group, DRC graduates were significantly more likely to be employed and have a stable residence.
- Of those in the DRC group, successful graduates tended to complete more programs and services. About 16% of successful graduates and those remaining in the DRC program at the end of the study period enrolled in 2 or more programs/ services, compared to about 8% of those removed from the program.

One such alternative is a DRC, which generally aims to reduce recidivism among at-risk parolees and probationers and be more cost-effective than incarceration. DRCs first emerged in the U.K. in the 1970s and materialized subsequently in the U.S. Although there is wide variety in programming and structure of DRCs, they typically involve more intensive supervision and case management compared to traditional parole or probation. In practical terms, this involves increased contact with parolees and probationers and additional programs and services (see Parent et al., 1995). The DRC in Southern Nevada provides comprehensive services that target the needs of at-risk parolees and probationers. These services include, for example, substance abuse programming and employment preparation.

Past Evaluations of DRCs

Overall, past evaluations of DRCs have used inconsistent methods and yielded mixed findings. As a result, it is currently unclear whether DRCs effectively achieve their objectives. Some studies have found that DRC participants are less likely to recidivate compared to comparison groups (e.g., Carr et al., 2016; Champion et al., 2011; Craddock, 2000). However, these evaluations often did not employ rigorous, experimental methods such as those that are characteristic of RCTs. When offenders are randomly assigned to a DRC or a control condition (i.e., traditional parole and probation), differences between DRC participants and control group members on outcome measures such as recidivism can be attributed to participation in the DRC. In contrast, without random assignment, we cannot be sure if differences between DRC participants and comparison groups are due to DRC participation or other factors. Unfortunately, very few RCTs have been conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of DRCs. In one of the few DRC evaluations that utilized a RCT design, Boyle and colleagues (2013) found that DRC participants exhibited worse outcomes than control group members on a variety of outcome measures, including recidivism and employment.

The Current Evaluation

The current evaluation overcomes some of the limitations of past studies by employing a RCT design, and expands on past RCTs by evaluating a DRC in a new context and population of offenders.

To get a comprehensive picture of the effectiveness of the DRC, it was important to identify differences between DRC participants and control group members on a variety of outcomes (e.g., attaining/maintaining employment, revocations, positive drug tests), as well as to identify the specific components of the DRC (e.g., program participation/use of services) that predict successful program completion.

Table 1. Sample

Variable	DRC	Control
Under 25 Years Old	28.4%	28.9%
25 – 39 Years Old	52.2%	51.6%
White	45.6%	52.0%
Black	39.5%	31.1%
Hispanic	10.9%	9.2%
Asian/Pacific Islander	4.1%	5.1%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	0.0%	1.5%
Male	71.4%	63.8%
High School / GED / or Above	61.9%	65.3%
Almost Non-Existent Employment	25.4%	24.2%
Inadequate Financial Situation	39.7%	41.2%
Current Offense Level (Felony)	83.8%	86.2%
Average Offense Score (SD)	34.2 (8.4)	35.3 (7.8)
Average Social Score (SD)	27.3 (5.9)	27.1 (5.5)
Average PSP Score (SD)	61.5 (11.4)	62.4 (10.3)
Problematic Alcohol Use	11.2%	7.9%
Serious Drug Abuser/Addict	20.1%	17.9%

The Nevada P&P identified a sample of approximately 400 parolees and probationers eligible for DRC participation. Parolees and probationers were randomly assigned to the experimental group who received the DRC program (n=203) or to the control group who received traditional parole and probation (n=201).[3] Random assignment occurred in the Fall of 2017. Table 1 displays the general characteristics of DRC participants and control group members. Although there are some differences between these two groups, none of these differences are statistically significant. This indicates that the groups were similar in terms of demographic characteristics as well as risk factors.

We compared DRC participants in general, and DRC graduates in particular, with control group members on a variety of outcomes 12 months after the DRC program was implemented. First, we compared the groups on revocations (due to technical violations, new charges, etc.), discharges, and positive drug tests. Second, we compared the groups on whether employment, education, and stable residence were attained/maintained. In addition, we examined DRC participants' use of services.

Revocations and Discharges

We first assessed whether DRC participants in general, and DRC graduates in particular, were more or less likely to be revoked compared to the control group.[4] DRC participants as a whole exhibited a slightly smaller proportion of revocations and a greater proportion of successful discharges compared to the control group. DRC graduates in particular were significantly less likely to be revoked compared to control group members. During the 12-month period, only 5 DRC graduates were revoked. DRC graduates were also significantly more likely to be successfully discharged compared to control group members. Figure 1 displays comparisons between DRC graduates and the control group.

We also compared the reasons for revocation between both groups (see Figure 2). DRC participants were significantly less likely to abscond than control group members. In addition, a smaller proportion of DRC participants had a technical violation or new charges compared to the control group, although these differences were not statistically significant.

Figure 1. DRC Graduates v. Control on Outcome

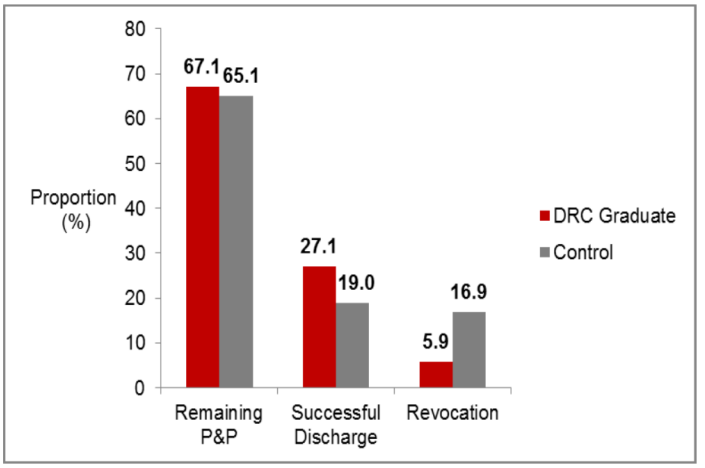


Figure 2. DRC v. Control on Revocation

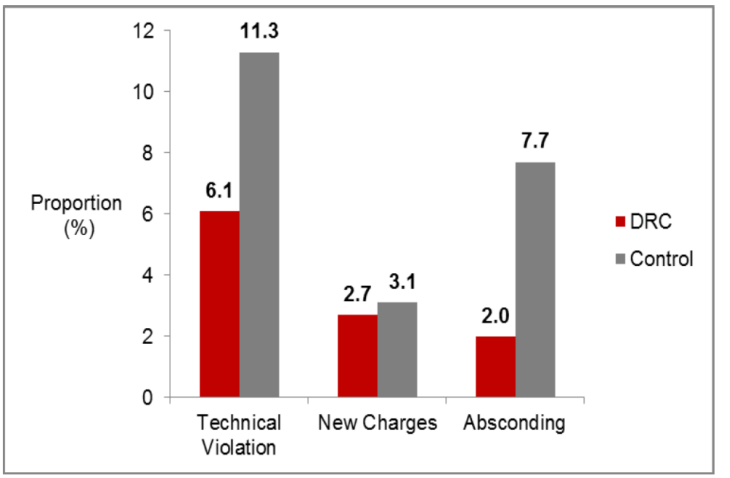
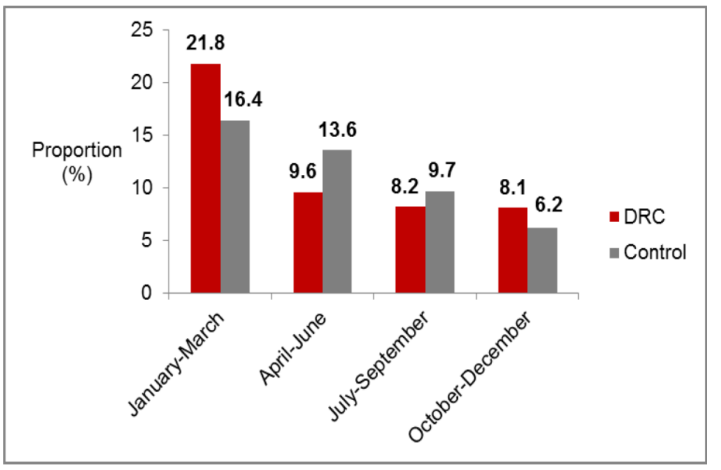


Figure 3. Positive Drug Tests over Time



The next outcome we examined was positive drug tests. The 12-month evaluation was divided into 3- month periods.[5] In the first 3-month period, the DRC group had a greater proportion of positive drug tests compared to the control group. This was an anticipated outcome resulting from the onset of intensive supervision. In the subsequent 3-month periods, the DRC group tended to have a lower proportion of positive drug tests compared to the control group. The proportion of the DRC group who tested positive in a 3-month period exhibited a net decrease of almost 14% over time, whereas this proportion exhibited a net decrease of about 10% over time in the control group (see Figure 3). Furthermore, the DRC group and control group exhibited different patterns of repeat positive drug tests. In the DRC group, repeat positives tended to decrease over time. In the control group, repeat positive drug tests increased over time.

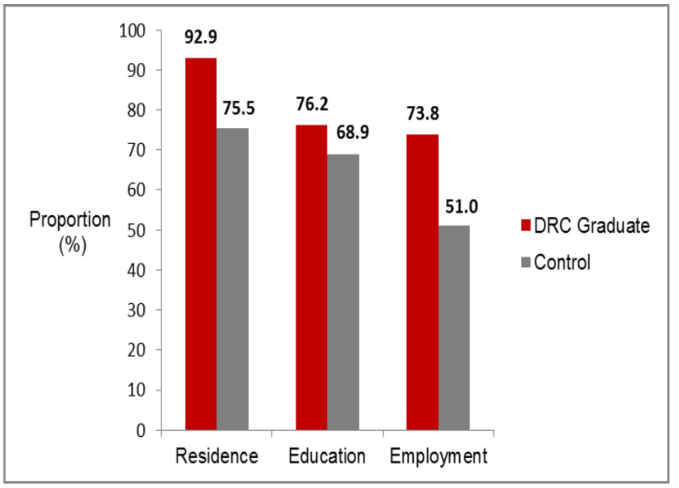
Education, Employment, and Stable Residence

We compared the DRC group and the control group on whether they attained/maintained: 1) education (e.g., GED), 2) employment, and 3) stable residence. A greater proportion of DRC participants attained/maintained employment and stable residence compared to control group members (although the results were not statistically significant). The two groups were similar in terms of education. DRC graduates, specifically, were more likely to attain/maintain employment, education, and stable residence, although only employment and stable residence were statistically significant (see Figure 4).

DRC Participants' Use of Services

Finally, we examined DRC participants' use of services and programming. After 12 months, about 58% of DRC participants had graduated from the program, 35% were removed from the program (e.g., expired, arrested, absconded), and 7% were still participating in the program. DRC participants were in the program for an average of 219 days; successful graduates spent an average of 234 days in the program, whereas participants who were removed spent an average of 183 days in the program. Virtually all of the DRC participants enrolled in the "Moral Reconation Therapy" (MRT) course (93%), which is a cognitive skills-based course (Sentinel, 2019). About 8% received assistance pursuing a GED, 5% used employment preparation services, 3% engaged in substance abuse programming, 3% enrolled in a "Thinking for Good" (TFG) course, 3% enrolled in Anger Management training, 3% enrolled in a parenting course, 1% attended Alcoholics Anonymous, and 1% participated in "Smart Start".

Figure 4. DRC Graduates v. Control on Residence, Education, and Employment



Successful graduates of the DRC were distinct from the other categories of participants primarily in their diverse use of services and programming. Successful graduates enrolled in, and completed, more programs/services than participants who were removed. About 16% of successful graduates and those remaining in the DRC program enrolled in 2 or more programs/services, compared to about 8% of those who were removed from the DRC.

Conclusion

The general goals of a DRC are to reduce recidivism among at-risk parolees and probationers and to serve as an alternative to incarceration. The results of this RCT suggest that DRCs can achieve these objectives. Overall, DRC participants exhibited better outcomes than control group members who participated in traditional probation and parole. DRC participants were significantly less likely to abscond and tended to have lower proportions of new charges and technical violations compared to the control group. DRC graduates, in particular, were significantly more likely to be successfully discharged and less likely to be revoked compared to the control group. In terms of drug tests, although DRC group members had a greater proportion of positive drug tests compared to the control group early in project (likely the result of the onset of more intensive supervision), their repeat positive tests tended to decrease over time whereas repeat positives for the control group tended to increase. In addition, those who graduated from the DRC were more likely to attain and maintain employment as well as a stable residence, both of which are well known factors associated with success post-supervision. The promising results of this evaluation appear to be driven by DRC graduates' long-term and diverse engagement with services and programming in combination with intensive supervision.

Past work suggests DRCs are not effective when they are short-term and do not make program completion a stipulation of graduation (Boyle et al., 2013; Steiner, & Butler, 2013). Participants in the DRC in Southern Nevada were in the program more than 200 days on average, and almost 60% of them successfully completed programming and graduated. Ultimately, behavioral changes among at-risk parolees and probationers take time – as evidenced,

for example, by different patterns in repeat positive drug tests between DRC participants and the control group over the course of the evaluation. In this sense, the results of this study are certainly encouraging regarding the impact of DRCs over a 12-month period. Future research should therefore consider the impact of DRCs over longer follow-up periods (e.g., 24- and 36-month outcomes).

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END NOTES

i. Analytical tests and statistical modeling availble on request.

ii. Nationally, incarceration costs about $80 on average per inmate and per day, whereas supervising probationers costs about $3.50 and supervising parolees costs about $7.50 per client and per day (Pew Center on the States, 2009). Thus, the daily cost of incarceration is over 20 times greater than the daily cost of probation, and about 10 times greater than the daily cost of parole. In Nevada, the cost of incarceration is approximately 8 times greater than community supervision (Mai & Subramanian, 2017; Wood, O'Rourke, & Carpenter, 2017).

iii. Of the initial 203 DRC participants, 147 had begun program participation by January 2018. Of the 201 control group members, data were available for 195 participants. The 147 DRC participants were compared to the 195 control group members on outcomes. DRC participants who began program participation after January 2018, and control group members for whom data were unavailable, were excluded from comparisons.

iv. Pending revocations were included in the analyses.

v. This was restricted to participants who were remaining on parole or probation in the given 3-month period.

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STATE DATA BRIEF SERIES

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CONTACT INFORMATION

Questions of comments about the information contained in this report, data used to generate this report, or about other resources available related to this topic should be addressed to:

Terance D. Miethe, Ph.D.
Research in Brief Project Coordinator
Center for Analysis of Crime Statistics
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
4505 Maryland Parkway - Box 5009
Las Vegas, NV 89154-5009

Phone: 702-895-0236
Fax: 702-895-0252
Email: miethe@unlv.nevada.edu

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Center for the Analysis of Crime Statistics
Department of Criminal Justice
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
4505 S. Maryland Pkwy - Box 5009
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