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Two Decades of Specialized Domestic Violence Courts

A Review of the Literature

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Two Decades of Specialized Domestic Violence Courts: A Review of the Literature

INTRODUCTION

Since the late 1970s, the criminal justice system has sought to transform its historically inadequate response to domestic violence. Before that time, the police were reluctant to make domestic violence arrests. Domestic violence was seen by many as a private matter rather than a crime. Even when the police made arrests the cases would often not be prosecuted or would end in dismissal due to a lack of victim cooperation -- very few places had victim service agencies. Courts often lacked effective sentencing options to hold offenders truly accountable, particularly in cases where incarceration was not an appropriate outcome.

In response to activism among the feminist, battered women's and victim's movements of the 1970s (Horowitz 2003; Schechter 1982), an array of new criminal justice initiatives emerged, including pro-arrest policies, evidence-based prosecution, and specialized prosecution units (Rebovich 1996; Sherman 1992). These changes were aided by the passage of the Violence Against Women Act in 1994, which established federal pro-arrest laws and funding mechanisms for victim services and research (Buzawa and Buzawa 1996; Hanna 1996). One result of all of these reforms was a massive influx of domestic violence cases into courts nationwide. For example, Ostrom and Kauder (1999) reported a dramatic 178% increase in criminal domestic violence caseloads nationally from 1989 to 1999, a period that follows the initial policy ferment and caseload expansions of the 1980s.

The rise of new federal and state laws pertaining to domestic violence, coupled with exponentially growing caseloads, provides important context for the rise of specialized domestic violence courts in the 1990s and 2000s. Although these courts vary substantially from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, they typically aggregate all or most of a jurisdiction's domestic violence cases in one or more courtrooms to be heard by one or more specially trained judges. The idea is that these judges will have an opportunity to gain substantive expertise in the unique legal and personal issues presented by domestic violence cases.

Domestic violence courts arose concurrently with several other specialized court models, including drug courts, mental health courts, and community courts (Berman and Feinblatt 2005; Casey and Rottman 2003). The broader "problem-solving court" movement provided legitimacy to the idea of establishing specialized courts. As this movement expanded, it increasingly drew attention to the important substantive goals that might be achieved through specialization (e.g., substance abuse recovery; improved mental health; or reduced recidivism). Over time, such goals increasingly supplanted ones focused primarily on the efficiency advantages of specialization, which tended to predominate early on (McCoy 2003). Much like drug courts, even though domestic violence courts arguably began with the problem of overflowing caseloads, the rationale for creating these courts gradually shifted to the problem of domestic violence itself. Domestic violence courts seek to have a positive impact on the lives of individual victims and on a culture that for too long had tolerated violence between domestic partners.

Approximately two decades after the first several domestic violence courts opened, this paper reflects on where they have come and what the research literature tells us concerning their effects. After summarizing the current state of the field, we examine their major goals and review major research findings.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE COURTS TODAY

There are currently 208 confirmed domestic violence courts in the United States (Labriola et al., 2009), more than 50 in Canada (Quann 2007), and nearly 100 in England (Crown Prosecution Service 2008). The model has spread widely, as 27 states have established at least one domestic violence court; yet, there is also substantial concentration, as five states, New York, Washington, Florida, California, Alabama, account for more than half of all courts.

The total numbers, however, risk obscuring the vast diversity of domestic violence court models, policies, and practices that are now in effect (Keilitz 2001; Labriola et al. 2009; Weber 2000). While most domestic violence courts hear criminal cases only, some also hear civil restraining orders or other types of civil cases. New York, Florida, and several other states have experimented with “integrated” criminal/civil models that hear all cases involving the same defendant and family members (Goldkamp 1996; Sack 2002; Steketee, Levey, and Keilitz 2001). Some domestic violence courts may only hear cases related to intimate partner violence, whereas others may include violence between non-intimate family, or household members. Some courts keep their cases from arraignment to trial, but others may pick up cases only after the initial arraignment, and still others may limit appearances to the pretrial conference only (Helling 2003). Some domestic violence court calendars may be heard full-time, and others may operate a few times per week. Finally, some domestic violence courts have a single specialized judge and calendar, whereas others have multiple calendars.

Unlike drug courts, domestic violence courts lack an agreed upon set of principles that govern court operations and philosophy across sites. Several publications have proposed a set of best or suggested practices for domestic violence courts, such as linkage to victim services, judicial monitoring, and a coordinated community response (Mazur and Aldrich 2002; Sack 2002), but these practices have not been imbedded in statutes or federal grant programs, and it remains unclear how widespread they are. Three published studies sought to quantify the number and percentage of domestic violence courts nationwide that have adopted each policy and practice. The first such report addressed a limited number of case processing features for approximately 42 domestic violence courts that were in existence nine years ago (Keilitz 2001). Tellingly, this study found substantial diversity in goals and practice. A 2000 study of domestic violence case processing in 39 courts operating in California similarly revealed that “this is an emerging field that has yet to produce a particular model of court practice or procedure” (Weber 2000). Finally, a national study of criminal domestic violence courts across the United States reported the results of a survey administered to 284 courts that were believed to have some specialized structures and practices in place to address domestic violence as of the spring of 2008 (Labriola et al. 2009). The 2009 study described domestic violence courts across a variety of content domains, including: the goals of court stakeholders; court strengths and challenges; and structure and policies with respect to eligibility, case processing, sentencing, victim services, assessments, offender programs, and compliance monitoring.

GOALS

Even though it is difficult to identify one uniform procedural model among domestic violence courts nationwide, many share common goals (Keilitz 2001; Labriola et al. 2009; Mazur and Aldrich 2002). They include:

- Efficient case processing: timely and effective management of the domestic violence caseload, including quick review and screening and the expeditious transfer and calendaring of cases to the domestic violence docket;
- Coordinated response: establishment of a collaborative network of courts, criminal justice agencies, local victim service organizations, and social service programs working together to create policies and procedures to increase the safety of victims of domestic violence;
- Informed decision-making: creation of a judiciary knowledgeable in the dynamics of domestic violence and with access to accurate and immediate case information, where appropriate;
- Offender accountability: policies that hold domestic violence perpetrators responsible for their actions through swift responses to noncompliance with court orders;
- Reduced recidivism: a decrease in the amount of future domestic violence incidents and arrests among those processed by the court; and
- Victim safety and services: the provision of frontloaded assistance, including court accompaniment, crisis intervention and shelter referral, to victims (Services are typically provided by an independent victim services agency or a specialized bureau of the prosecutor's office).

To implement these goals the courts frequently employ one or more common tools. They include non-rotating staff, frequent judicial monitoring, offender programs (including batterer programs and substance abuse treatment), intensive probation, and domestic violence training for judges and stakeholders (see Buzawa et al. 1999; Harrell, Newmark and Visher 2007; Keilitz 2001; Labriola et al. 2009; Mazur and Aldrich 2002; Newmark, Rempel, Diffily, and Kane 2001). Have these strategies worked as intended? What follows is a review of the literature on their impact.

EFFICIENT CASE PROCESSING

Comparative analyses of misdemeanor domestic violence courts and non-specialized misdemeanor courts in Milwaukee, Minneapolis, Manhattan, and San Diego indicate that these courts do speed up case processing time (Angene 2000; Davis et al. 2001; Eckberg and Podkpacz 2002; Peterson 2004). For example, in San Diego research documented a 74 percent reduction in the median number of days to disposition in a domestic violence court -- from 57 to 15 days (Angene 2000). Similarly, impact studies of misdemeanor courts in Manhattan and Minneapolis

report significant reductions in domestic violence case processing time in comparison to non-specialized courts (Eckberg and Podkpacz 2002; Peterson 2004). Eckberg and Podkpacz found that in Minneapolis the average length of time from case filing to case resolution was reduced by nearly a week after the inception of the domestic violence court (2002). Peterson reports that only 14% of domestic violence cases were resolved within 5 weeks prior to the implementation of the Manhattan domestic violence court, compared with 24% after the court's inception (2004).

In contrast, an impact study of a felony domestic violence court in Brooklyn found that case processing time increased after the specialized court opened (Newmark et al. 2001). The authors attributed this increase to the greater severity of the indictment charges. In more serious felony cases, specialization may lead to the allocation of greater attention to each case over a longer period, but with only one completed evaluation for a felony program, any attempt at generalization is speculative.

COORDINATED RESPONSE

The literature documents a number of specific strategies that domestic violence courts have used to facilitate collaboration between the court and community stakeholders. Some courts have chosen to include stakeholders in the conception and planning of the domestic violence court (Eckberg and Podkpacz 2002; Steketee et al. 2000). In many courts, what is initially a court planning team morphs into a steering committee that meets on an ongoing basis after the court has opened (e.g., Harrell et al. 2007; Henning and Klesges 1999; Newmark et al. 2001). The community network these meetings create also provides a mechanism by which participants can hold one another accountable for their actions and responses to domestic violence (Newmark et al. 2001).

Research has not determined whether the interagency coordination fostered by domestic violence courts produces a quantifiable positive impact compared to the absence of such coordination. However, several process evaluations have linked collaboration to greater access to services for victims, improved information sharing by probation and community-based programs with judges (see below on informed decision-making), and better development of evidence by prosecution (Gover 2007; Harrell et al. 2007; Henning and Klesges 1999; Newmark et al. 2001; Weber 2000). Additionally, the literature suggests that stakeholder participation in the development of court policies and protocols may promote increased understanding, consensus, and "buy-in," especially among those who may otherwise harbor doubts about the model (Cissner 2005; Steketee et al. 2000). The inclusion of the defense bar in both planning decisions and funding opportunities once the court is open has been a particularly sensitive issue in some jurisdictions. On the one hand, the defense bar often raises fundamental objections to the domestic violence court model, which could delay or derail planning efforts; on the other hand, when the defense has been fully incorporated into the planning process, some examples suggest that buy-in and cooperation has increased (see Cissner 2005; Labriola et al. 2009).

Community-based agencies also engage with the courts by providing training to court staff and other stakeholders on relevant issues, such as the impact of domestic violence on children, teen dating violence, and elder abuse (Harrell et al. 2007; Newmark et al. 2001). This training helps

ensure that the community is educated about the dynamics of domestic violence and the operations of the domestic violence court and is aware of the victim services that are available.

INFORMED DECISION-MAKING

The most recent national survey of domestic violence courts found that 84 percent have one or two dedicated judges (Labriola et al. 2009). Many practitioners believe that dedicating a single judge to a domestic violence court enhances the ability of the court to make informed decisions. Stakeholders interviewed in California consistently expressed that having one judge hear a case from beginning to end enables the judge to become more familiar with the parties and the facts of the case (MacLeod and Weber 2000). Other researchers add that judicial decision-making may benefit from the dedicated judge's intensive training and experience in the unique challenges posed by these cases, such as fearful and reluctant victim witnesses, and perpetrators who minimize their own behavior, blame the victim, and attempt to manipulate the system (e.g., Henning and Klesges 1999; Mazur and Aldrich 2002; Steketee et al. 2000).

Beyond the judge, some domestic violence courts hire special coordinators, whose role may include serving as a liaison between the judge and court partners for the purpose of improving the flow of information (Puffett and Gavin 2004). Other dedicated court partners frequently include personnel from victim advocacy, probation, and prosecution agencies (Puffett and Gavin 2004; Keilitz 2000; Peterson 2004; Sack 2002). These partners can help make possible the timely collection of relevant case information, a task that is more challenging if domestic violence cases are spread across many calendars. Research suggests that 38 percent of domestic violence courts have a project coordinator or administrator, and 45 percent have at least one dedicated resource coordinator, program compliance monitor, or case manager on staff (Labriola et al. 2009). Additionally, 80 percent of responding domestic violence courts reported having at least one dedicated victim advocate (Labriola et al. 2009). A number of descriptive studies speculate that dedicated staff may enhance the knowledge and decision-making not only of the judge, but also of attorneys, probation officers, service providers, and others (see Keilitz 2001; Steketee et al. 2000; MacLeod and Weber 2000). Research to date has not quantified any of these effects.

Other domestic violence court characteristics may enhance decision-making as well. Several authors propose that having a centralized location for hearing cases helps to promote consistency in court procedures, increased access to the court and court-related information for victims, and improved case management for defense counsel and prosecutors (Helling 2003; Mazur and Aldrich 2002). Other domestic violence court innovations designed to increase the quality of decision-making include shared databases that provide stakeholders with information such as recent case actions and service referrals and specialized technology applications (Harrell et al. 2007; Newmark et al. 2001).

OFFENDER ACCOUNTABILITY

Offender accountability can be defined simply as holding perpetrators responsible for their actions. In practice, accountability is a complex concept with many potential implications. It might entail the prosecution of a higher percentage of domestic violence arrests; a higher conviction rate; more severe sentences such as jail, prison, or intensive probation; or the

imposition of swift and certain sanctions for initial noncompliance with court orders (see Frank 2006; Harrell et al. 2007; Labriola et al. 2007).

Beginning with the first possible definition, do domestic violence courts increase convictions? The literature is ambiguous. Three studies link the implementation of specialized domestic violence courts to increased conviction rates (Goldkamp et al. 1996; Davis et al. 2001; Eckberg and Podkopacz 2002). In contrast, three other studies found no significant relationship between domestic violence courts and conviction rates (Angene 2000; Newmark 2001; Peterson 2004).

The impact on sentencing practice is similarly unclear. In jurisdictions that do not have mandatory sentencing laws, different domestic violence courts have been associated with both a greater (Ursel and Brickey 1996, Quann 2007; Visser et al. 2008) and a lesser (Davis et al. 2001; Peterson 2004) use of jail sentences than traditional courts. These apparently conflicting results may be due, in part, to study design. For example, Peterson (2004) employed a pre- vs. post-implementation design in Manhattan, whereas Visser et al. (2008) used comparison groups in two of their three domestic violence court sites and a pre- vs. post-design in the third site. Two studies reported results for Milwaukee (Davis et al. 2001 and Visser et al. 2008), but for different periods and definitions of the intervention, resulting in different findings (respectively a decreased and increased use of jail). The most reasonable conclusion is simply that we lack sufficient evidence to generalize as to the effects of domestic violence courts on sentencing.

In contrast, there is widespread agreement that domestic violence courts are more likely than non-specialized courts to mandate offenders to a wide range of special conditions. These include batterer programs, substance abuse treatment, and other types of programs; special bail conditions; drug testing; intensive probation supervision; and judicial status hearings to verify program compliance (Angene 2000; Gondolf 1998; Harrell et al. 2007; Newmark et al. 2001). Typically held on a consistent day and time, judicial status hearings involve bringing the offender back to court regularly to publicly evaluate how well they are adhering to the terms of their sentence. The utility of this review is based upon ongoing timely, information exchange among the court and probation, mandated programs, victim advocates (with victim consent), police and others. Research on the "Judicial Oversight Demonstration" sites of Ann Arbor Michigan, Dorchester, Massachusetts and Milwaukee, Wisconsin confirmed that increased use of judicial monitoring significantly raises the likelihood of sanctioning for noncompliance and increases the severity of penalties for missing mandated programs and failing to meet with probation officers (Harrell et al. 2006; Harrell et al. 2007). In addition to the "Judicial Oversight Demonstration," studies of the Brooklyn and San Diego domestic violence courts also confirmed that increased judicial monitoring significantly increased the likelihood and severity of penalties for noncompliance (Angene 2000; Harrell et al. 2006; Harrell et al. 2007; Newmark et al. 2001).

Intensive probation monitoring through a special domestic violence unit has sometimes accompanied the development of a domestic violence court, although such units have also been adopted in the absence of a specialized court. The Judicial Oversight Demonstration Project and a study in Rhode Island by Klein and Crowe (2008) both found positive effects in regard to a decreased rate of new offenses, with Harrell et al. (2006) attributing it to incarceration and incapacitation when probation was revoked, and Klein and Crowe attributing it to secondary prevention through frequent contacts with victims and offenders.

Interestingly, the research indicates that domestic violence court staff may be able to anticipate which defendants are more or less likely to maintain compliance with court mandates. A 2006 study of a Brooklyn-based domestic violence court demonstrated that the strongest predictor of program mandate failure is early noncompliance. Defendants who had not enrolled in the program by the time of their first compliance appearance in court were significantly less likely to complete the mandate (Puffett and Cissner 2006). An earlier study also found that defendants with a substance use or abuse problem were especially at risk of not completing their mandate and of subsequent recidivism (Puffett and Gavin 2004).

REDUCED RECIDIVISM

Do domestic violence courts deter domestic violence recidivism? To our knowledge, 10 sites have been evaluated utilizing quasi-experimental methods.¹ Three produced small to significant reductions in re-arrests across most measures analyzed: San Diego (Angene 2000), Lexington County, South Carolina (Gover et al. 2003), and Dorchester, Massachusetts (Harrell et al. 2007). Five sites produced no reductions or increases: Shelby, Tennessee (Henning and Kesges 1999), Brooklyn (Newmark et al. 2001), Manhattan (Peterson 2004), Ann Arbor (Harrell et al. 2007) and Ontario, Canada (Quann 2007). Two separate studies of Milwaukee domestic violence courts yielded mixed results. The first such study yielded positive raw differences in re-arrest rates and victim reports of re-abuse, but the effect sizes were small and not statistically significant (Davis et al. 2001). In the second Milwaukee study, Harrell et al. (2006) found that the domestic violence court reduced the one-year re-arrest rate; but this reduction occurred not because the offenders were less likely to commit new crimes when “at risk” (i.e., living in the community), but because the offenders were more likely to be re-incarcerated on probation revocations. This is essentially a positive impact of the domestic violence court, but simply qualified in that the impact depended solely upon enforcement, not upon behavior change once the offenders were released into the community.

A recidivism reduction may be a consequence of treatment or deterrence mechanisms. In regards to the former, results from four recent randomized trials did not find that mandating offenders to batterer programs produced lower rates of re-offending than did alternative sentences such as community service or probation alone (Davis, Taylor, and Maxwell 2000; Dunford 2000; Feder and Dugan 2002; Labriola, Rempel, and Davis 2005). Furthermore, the research literature has yielded little support for the effectiveness of one over another specific type of batterer program model, including including cognitive-behavioral, couples, psychodynamic, humanist, multicultural, and fatherhood-oriented programs (e.g., Dunford 2000; Edleson and Syers 1990; Gondolf 2005; Hanson and Wallace-Capretta 2000; Safe Horizon 2007; Saunders 1996). The most recent reviews conclude that batterer programs, the primary treatment mechanism used by domestic violence courts, produce no or extremely modest effects (Babcock, Green, and Robie 2004; Bennett and Williams 2004; Feder and Wilson 2005; Peterson 2008).

¹ Two of the 10 sites both involved the Milwaukee domestic violence court, but over different periods during which the nature of the intervention had changed. Davis et al. (2001) analyzed the effect of a specialized court in Milwaukee that was designed primarily to increase case processing speed, whereas Harrell et al. (2006) analyzed the impact of a later, more comprehensive model. For purposes of this brief review, we will treat these studies as involving two different sites since the nature of the intervention differed substantially across the two study periods.

Concerning the ability of domestic violence courts to reduce recidivism through more effective monitoring and accountability mechanisms, the results are inconclusive. Few studies have been conducted regarding the effectiveness of these practices, and barely any utilize an experimental or rigorous quasi-experimental design. A quasi-experimental study of four domestic violence courts in San Diego attributed a 7 percent drop in re-arrest rates to pre-dispositional compliance hearings. However, this study did not account for other court policy changes brought about by the implementation of the domestic violence court (Angene 2000). An analysis of the Pittsburgh domestic violence court linked the imposition of a single mandatory court appearance to an increase in program completion rates but not re-arrest rates (Gondolf 1998). A 2000 study in Brooklyn suggests that assigning batterers to programs reduced recidivism – not due to the batterer classes themselves, but to the continued court control through monitoring (Davis et al. 2000). While these results suggest that court control might have played a role in suppressing recidivism, the Brooklyn study did not test that proposition directly.

A quasi-experiment conducted in the Bronx found no significant difference in re-offending rates between offenders who were and were not mandated to judicial monitoring (Labriola et al. 2005). The authors note that the Bronx did not implement a strong form of monitoring, but scheduled at most monthly court appearances; engaged in neither clear nor probing judicial interactions with the offenders; and did not consistently impose further sanctions in response to violations of the court's orders. They interpret the study findings to indicate that mere monitoring does not appear to reduce recidivism; while allowing for the possibility that a truly rigorous form of "judicial supervision" might produce positive effects.

Although results are mixed concerning whether domestic violence courts reduce recidivism, there is good evidence about predicting recidivism among defendants within these courts. Five domestic violence court studies show a strong correlation between criminal history and re-arrest for domestic violence (Eckberg and Podkpacz 2002; Goldkamp 1996; Gover et al. 2003; Newmark et al. 2001; Peterson 2004; Quann 2007). Two studies also concluded that the probability of re-arrest was significantly higher for younger defendants (Newmark et al. 2001; Quann 2007). Gover linked recidivism in Lexington County, South Carolina to having more charges filed on the current arrest (an additional charge increased the odds of recidivism by 77 percent); and *not* being processed in the domestic violence court (which increased the odds of recidivism by half).

Finally, the research on the impact of case processing time on recidivism is equivocal. Studies have linked reduced recidivism to both an expedited (Wooldredge and Thistlewaite 200, Puffett et al. 2003) and lengthier (Labriola et al. 2005; Peterson 2004) period from arrest to disposition.

VICTIM SAFETY AND SERVICES

In the recent national survey, domestic violence courts were more likely to cite increasing victim safety as an extremely important goal than any other possible goal (Labriola et al. 2009). Stakeholders interviewed as a part of the same study saw protective orders, close offender monitoring, courthouse safety measures, and victim services as the primary means for achieving victim safety.

Many domestic violence courts partner with local victim service agencies to provide victims with immediate access to services and advocacy (Newmark et al. 2001). Typically, victims are linked to advocates who provide support throughout the court proceedings, including assistance with safety planning, linkage to appropriate community resources, the provision of legal information and case updates, as well as court accompaniment (Bell and Goodman 2001; Gover 2007; Mazur and Aldrich 2002). Victim advocates may also act as liaisons with the court and, with victim consent, may inform the court of infractions involving the victim and court orders. Some courts believe that the provision of services will also encourage victim participation in the court process (Smith 2001).

The literature confirms that domestic violence courts are more likely to connect victims to services than non-specialized courts (Harrell et al. 2007; Henning and Klesges 1999; Newmark et al. 2001). In some sites, the impact of the domestic violence court was striking; for instance, the percentage of victims linked to advocates rose from 55% to 100% after the Brooklyn felony domestic violence court opened and from very few to 56% after the Shelby, Tennessee domestic violence court opened.

The literature also indicates that victims have positive perceptions of domestic violence courts (Eckberg and Podkopacz 2002; Gover 2007; Gover et al. 2003; Hotaling and Buzawa 2003; and for the one study not finding such an effect, see Davis et al. 2001). At least four studies found that most victims were more satisfied with the handling of their case in a domestic violence court. Their satisfaction hinged not only on the outcome of the case, but also on perceptions of fair treatment (Eckberg 2002; Harrell et al. 2007; Henning and Klesges 1999), perceptions that the judge cared about and understood their situation (Eckberg 2002; Harrell et al. 2007), satisfaction with victim advocates (Harrell et al. 2007; Hotaling and Buzawa 2003), and personal motivation to end the relationship (Henning and Klesges 1999, Hotaling and Buzawa 2003).

It should be noted that the level of victim satisfaction may be related to the specific type and breadth of services to which they are linked, which can vary greatly from court to court. A recent article detailing an evaluation of domestic violence courts in Michigan, Wisconsin and Massachusetts reports that victims in these courts who received services did not indicate higher levels of perceived safety than comparison groups not receiving these services (Visher et al. 2008). The authors link this result to the unmet need for services such as assistance in finding a job, strengthening social networks and linkage to crisis services. The authors recommend that courts link victims to additional non-governmental service providers, who can provide a wider array of services well after the case has been disposed.

One study, in Quincy, Massachusetts, reported that 40% of victims found the domestic violence court experience “embarrassing” and said they would not return to court if they experienced another incident of domestic violence (Hotaling and Buzawa 2003). Similarly, in focus groups conducted with victims across three domestic violence courts, while expressing a high degree of satisfaction with their treatment by the victim advocates and the judge, victims were highly critical of their treatment by the police and prosecutors (Harrell et al. 2007). Victims described numerous examples in which they felt that these agents failed to treat victims with due respect and dignity. Such findings suggest a need for improved training among all justice agencies that interact with victims, both where there is and is not a specialized domestic violence court.

CONCLUSION

Although there is great diversity in domestic violence court models and practices, many share common goals such as court efficiency, offender accountability, reduced recidivism, and enhanced victim safety. Are domestic violence courts achieving these goals? The research reveals that they are successful in promoting expedited case processing and tend to be associated with increased victim satisfaction and access to services. These courts also appear to increase the use of mechanisms that promote offender accountability such as program mandates, probation monitoring, and judicial monitoring. In fact, research indicates that domestic violence courts are more likely than are non-specialized courts to enforce court orders through the imposition of sanctions for noncompliance, including probation revocation and incarceration. In general, the impacts of the domestic violence court on future recidivism are equivocal. Further investigation is needed to determine how these courts and their partners can effectively deter re-offending.

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