

Youth Treatment Court Outcome Evaluation: Preliminary Analysis of Eligibility Data 2006

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Executive Summary

Purpose:

- To determine percentage of youth referrals found eligible to participate in a Youth Treatment Court (YTC).
- To describe reasons for non-eligibility.
- To compare demographics of eligible and non-eligible youth.
- To determine percentage of eligible, randomized youth who actually enrolled in a YTC.
- To compare the demographics and other available characteristics of youth assigned to treatment (YTC) with those assigned to the control group.

Background:

- The eligibility data used for these analyses were entered by North Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (DJJDP) personnel at the time of youth referral to a YTC. Most DJJDP staff members began using the eligibility program in August 2005; however, Forsyth and Rowan counties have not yet begun using the program. As a result, eligibility data are only available for Mecklenburg, Durham, and Wake counties.

Method:

- The data used in this evaluation were drawn from the iRT Youth Treatment Court Outcome Study eligibility software program. These data contain information entered by DJJDP personnel. These data include the youth NCJOIN number, birthdate, race, ethnicity, county of adjudication, and answers to eligibility questions as well as a question about whether the youth has a prosocial adult who is active in his or her life.
- Univariate statistics and frequencies were conducted to describe the three study groups: eligible and assigned to treatment, eligible and assigned to control, and not eligible.
- Chi-square and ANOVA statistics were used, as appropriate, to describe between-court (Mecklenburg vs. Durham vs. Wake) and between-group (treatment vs. control) differences in demographics and other available, relevant variables.

Key Findings:

- Fifty-six (38%) of the youth entered into the YTC eligibility program were eligible to participate in the YTC Outcome Study (YTC-OS), but this percentage varied significantly by court. Wake County had the most referrals ($n = 68$) with the smallest percentage of eligible youth (22%), and Mecklenburg County had the fewest referrals ($n = 28$) but the greatest percentage of eligible youth (75%).

- For those 93 youth who were not eligible, the most common reasons for ineligibility were not meeting substance abuse or dependence criteria (81%) and not being on Level II disposition or post-release supervision (38%).
- The eligible youth did not differ significantly from the ineligible youth on recorded race, ethnicity, gender, or prosocial adult influences; however, the groups did differ by age. On average, the eligible youth were one-half year older than the ineligible youth (15.4 vs. 14.9 years old).
- Of the 56 eligible youth, 28 were randomly assigned to the control group and the other 28 were randomly assigned to the treatment group. These groups did not differ in their demographic characteristics. Both groups were primarily male, Black, non-Hispanic, and averaged 15 ½ years old. Most youth had a prosocial adult involved in their lives. For the control group, 96% of the youth had such an adult active in their lives, and for the treatment group, 93% had a prosocial adult influence.
- Information collected by the North Carolina Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) from the YTC sites indicated that Mecklenburg did not accept seven of the eligible youth assigned to treatment there. The Durham YTC reported that one youth who was randomized to treatment was not accepted in the YTC because of not being truly eligible. Conversely, one control-group youth is currently being served by the Durham YTC because that youth was court-ordered to it. The Wake County YTC reported that all youth assigned to treatment there had, in fact, enrolled. By report of the drug court administrator, the Wake YTC has not accepted any control-assigned youth into its YTC treatment program.

Summary:

Based on these preliminary analyses, the random assignment seems to have resulted in comparable study groups. However, this comparability may be compromised as a result of the treatment-assigned youths not actually enrolling in the YTCs and by control-assigned youths being court-ordered to YTC treatment. The comparability of the control and treatment groups will be reassessed for the final report. At that time, more information should be available for the analyses.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Report

This report constitutes the second in a series of quantitative evaluations of the Youth Treatment Courts (YTCs) of North Carolina. This report presents findings from the YTC eligibility data program that documents youths referred to the YTCs, their eligibility outcomes, and their assignment to study conditions if eligible. The data included in this report span the period from August 9, 2005, to January 4, 2006.

The overarching goal of this preliminary analysis of the eligibility data is to insure that the eligible youth assigned to YTC treatment do not differ significantly from those assigned to the control group. This report will present these findings and also present the findings related to ineligibility. This report will describe the reasons for ineligibility and will compare the demographics of youth who are eligible versus those who are not eligible to participate in the YTC outcome study. In preparing this report, iRT will assess what percentage of those youth randomized to treatment actually enrolled in a YTC and also what percentage of those randomized to control joined a YTC program. In addition, analyses will determine what, if any, differences exist between the treatment group and control group youth on available, relevant variables.

Background

The eligibility data used for these analyses were entered by DJJDP personnel at the time of youth referral to a YTC. Most DJJDP staff members began using the eligibility program in August 2005; however, Forsyth and Rowan counties have not yet begun using the program. Eligibility data are only available for Mecklenburg, Durham, and Wake counties.

Methods and Procedures Used

Description of the Data

The YTC eligibility data set contains youth identifiers (NCJOIN and J-Number ids), demographic characteristics (birthdate, ethnicity, race and gender), answers to the eligibility questions, information about the presence of a prosocial adult who is active in the youth's life, data entry information, and group assignment, if relevant. In order to be eligible for participation in the YTC Outcome study, the answer to each of the following four questions must be "yes".

1. From today, is this child eligible for at least one year of probation or post-release supervision?

2. Does this child have a nonviolent history? (Nonviolent history means that he or she has never been adjudicated for a Level A through E felony)
3. Are any of the following true?
 - a. the child has a DSM-IV substance abuse or dependence diagnosis from a mental health or substance abuse professional
 - b. a professional has recommended substance abuse treatment within the past 12 months
 - c. more than one instance of excessive substance use has occurred in the past 12 months
4. Is this child currently on a Level II disposition or post-release supervision?¹

The eligibility program asks one extra question: “does this child have a close, supportive, potentially long-lasting relationship with one prosocial adult”? YTC staff hypothesized that the presence of a positive adult role model might influence the success of the youth in overcoming alcohol and drug use; therefore this information was gathered at the time of the eligibility screening. Although included as a question in the program, a negative answer to the question did not affect whether the youth was eligible to participate in the study or a YTC program.

Overview of the Analyses

Frequencies are conducted to determine the percentage of referred youth who are eligible to participate in the YTC Outcome study. Frequency analyses are also used to examine the most common reasons for ineligibility.

Between-group differences are evaluated with chi-square and ANOVA statistics, depending on the dependent variable type. Ineligible and eligible youth are compared on demographic factors: age, race, ethnicity, and gender. The control and treatment groups are compared on these variables as well.

In order to determine the percentage of treatment-assigned youth who actually enrolled in a YTC, the YTC staff were contacted and the MIS system used. In addition to determining the treatment-assigned youth who enrolled in a YTC, the percentage of control-assigned youth who enrolled in treatment were also evaluated. YTC staff and the MIS system were also used to determine this information.

The merging of eligibility and NCJOIN data was not completed at the writing of this report, so comparing treatment and control youth on variables other than demographics was not possible. This analysis will be completed as part of Report #4.

¹ Required for Mecklenburg, Durham, and Wake County YTCs.

Results

Referrals and Eligibility

As of January 4, 2006, 149 youth were referred to one of three YTC programs. Fifty-six (38%) met eligibility criteria to participate in the Youth Treatment Court Outcome Study. Half of these youth were assigned to treatment in a YTC, and the other 28 were assigned to the control group.

The percentage of referred youth who were eligible to participate in a YTC differed significantly by county ($p < .0001$, see Table 1 below). Mecklenburg County logged the smallest number of referrals (N=28) to its YTC program, but it demonstrated the largest percentage of eligible youth (75%). In contrast, Wake had the greatest number of entered referrals (N=68) and the lowest eligibility rate (22%). Durham entered 53 referrals into the YTC eligibility program, and it produced an eligibility rate of 38%.

Table 1: Number and Percent of YTC-Eligible Youth by County as of January 4, 2006

County*	Number Eligible
Durham	20 (38%)
Mecklenburg	21 (75%)
Wake	15 (22%)

* $p < .0001$

Table 2 below presents the frequencies for each reason youth were not eligible to participate in the study. Of the 93 youth found ineligible to participate in the Youth Treatment Courts Outcome Study (YTC-OS), the most common reason for ineligibility was lack of a clear substance abuse problem (81%). The next most common reason was not being on Level II disposition or post-release supervision (38%). Other reasons for being ineligible were having a history of violence (17%) and not being eligible for one year of probation or post-release supervision (16%). Youth may have had more than one reason for being ineligible to participate.

Table 2: Reasons Cited for Youth Being Ineligible to Participate in Study (N=93)

Reason for Ineligibility	Number	Percentage
Child not eligible for one year of probation or post-release supervision?	15	16%
Child has history of violence (Level A through E felony)	16	17%
Child's behavior not consistent with substance abuse or dependence	75	81%
Child not on Level II Disposition or post-release supervision	35	38%
TOTAL	141	100%

* Youth can be ineligible for more than one reason

Eligible Youth Characteristics

There was only one statistically significant difference found between the youth who were eligible to participate and those who were not eligible. This difference was in age; the eligible youth were older than the ineligible youth by an average of one-half year (15.4 vs. 14.9 years old). Otherwise, there were no significant differences between these groups. As a result, Table 3 presents the characteristics of only the eligible youth.

Of the 56 youth who were eligible to participate, most were male (88%), black (73%), and non-hispanic (98%). In addition, most (95%) had a relationship with an adult considered prosocial; this was also true for those who were ineligible, with 92% of the ineligible youth having a relationship with a prosocial adult.

Table 3: Characteristics of Youth Eligible for YTC Outcome Study (N=56)

Youth Characteristic	Mean	Range
Age^b	15.4	13-17
Gender	Number	Percentage
Male	49	88%
Female	7	13%
Race		
Black	41	73%
Latino	1	2%
Multi-racial	3	5%
White	11	20%
Ethnicity		
Not Hispanic	55	98%
Hispanic	1	2%
Prosocial Adult		
No	3	5%
Yes	53	95%

^a $p < .05$, ^b $p < .01$, ^c $p < .001$

Random Assignment: Treatment vs. Control

Variables from the YTC eligibility software program were used to test for initial sample differences between those youth randomized to the control group (N=28) and those randomized to treatment in the YTC (N=28). If the randomization process was successful, there should be no initial differences between these two groups. Assignment to a particular group does not guarantee that a youth will remain in that group, i.e. continue in treatment when assigned there or remain in the control group if a judge court-orders YTC treatment; however, it is important to evaluate the effectiveness of the randomization procedure in producing comparable groups. The analyses for report #3 will evaluate whether attrition affects the group composition.

No significant differences were found between the treatment and control groups. The youth in both groups were approximately the same age—15 years old—and were primarily male, Black, and non-hispanic. See Table 4 for details. In addition, similar proportions of the control-assigned youth and the treatment-assigned youth had a prosocial adult influence (96% vs. 93%).

Table 4: Characteristics of Youth in the Study Control (N=28) and Treatment Groups (N=28)

Youth Characteristic	Control - Mean	Treatment - Mean
Age	15.6	15.3
	Control – Number (%)	Treatment – Number (%)
Gender		
Male	25 (89%)	24 (86%)
Female	3 (11%)	4 (14%)
Race		
Black	22 (79%)	19 (68%)
Latino	0	1 (4%)
Multi-racial	2 (7%)	1 (4%)
White	4 (14%)	7 (25%)
Ethnicity		
Not Hispanic	28 (100%)	27 (97%)
Hispanic	0	1 (4%)
Prosocial Adult		
No	1 (4%)	2 (7%)
Yes	27 (96%)	26 (93%)

^a $p < .05$, ^b $p < .01$, ^c $p < .001$

Youth Enrollment in YTC: Control and Treatment

Although eligible youth were randomly assigned to either the control or treatment groups, for various reasons these assignments may have been “violated”. In other words, some of the treatment-assigned youth may never have enrolled in YTC treatment, and some of the control-assigned youth may have chosen to seek out YTC treatment.

An Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) staff member contacted the YTC programs and inquired whether any of the treatment-assigned youth had failed to enroll and whether any of the control-assigned youth had been accepted for YTC treatment. All of the YTCs provided this information.

To date, the Mecklenburg YTC has not admitted seven of the treatment-assigned clients². The reasons for these youth not being served include youth and/or parent refusal to participate, and team and/or DA concerns about the suitability of YTC treatment for the particular youth's problems. The Mecklenburg YTC reported that no youth have been admitted to treatment from the control group².

The Durham County YTC reported that it did not enroll one of the youth assigned to treatment because this youth was, in fact, not eligible based on the probation criteria³. In addition, the Durham County YTC coordinator reported at the YTC-AOC meeting in Greensboro on 2/27/06 that it is currently serving a control-assigned youth because the judge court-ordered this treatment.

The Wake County YTC representative reported that all of the county's treatment-assigned youth have been accepted into the program, and no control-assigned youth have been accepted.⁴ So 100% of treatment-assigned youth enrolled in the Wake YTC, and zero percent of the control-assigned youth enrolled in a YTC.

Conclusions

Summary of Findings and Recommendations

Slightly less than 40% of the youth referrals who were entered into the YTC eligibility program were eligible to participate in the YTC Outcome Study. The main reasons for lack of eligibility were failure to meet the substance abuse/dependence criteria and/or not being on Level II disposition or post-release supervision. Given the wide discrepancies across counties in the percent of youth who are eligible to participate, it may be useful to examine the reasons for ineligibility by county when the sample is larger.

The randomization procedure seems to have produced comparable groups; however, the failure of some of these assignments may lead to initial between-group differences that ultimately influence the outcomes of those groups. Testing for initial between-group differences will be reassessed at the time of the final outcome analyses.

² This information was reported to Ryan Ramey in an email dated February 3, 2006.

³ This information was reported by Ryan Ramey in an email dated February 13, 2006.

⁴ This information was provided by Ryan Ramey in an email dated February 9, 2006.