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SCOPING REVIEW OF THE BEST PRACTICES IN DRUG COURTS IN THE UNITED  
STATES

By

Elise Crumrine and Camille Culp

A thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.

Oxford

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## ABSTRACT

**PURPOSE:** Drug courts are reform programs that are utilized in America to reduce the amount of incarcerations due to non violent drug charges. A successful drug court has a high number of graduates and low recidivism rates. To accomplish this, a variety of methods are utilized such as medication assisted therapy (MAT), random and mandatory drug testing, positive reinforcement in the form of words or tangible items, etc. The purpose of our study was to identify the best practices of drug courts, as defined as increased graduation rates and decreased recidivism, so that the findings may be applied in the future towards improving success rates.

**METHODS:** A scoping review was conducted to evaluate the best practices for success in drug courts. A literature search was conducted to find articles that outlined best practices. The measures of success utilized were improved graduation rates and reduced recidivism rates. Data was extracted from the previous research, summarized, and presented in this scoping review.

**RESULTS:** The practice that was found to be the most effective, as mentioned by the greatest amount of articles, in improving graduation rates and decreasing recidivism was education and employment status, defined as increasing literacy rate, obtaining high school diploma, GED, or associate's degree or as receiving a part or full time job, as a best practice.<sup>1-7</sup>

**CONCLUSION:** While all of the practices mentioned are important factors of drug courts, the most influential for increasing graduation rates and decreasing graduation rates are education and employment status,<sup>1-7</sup> individual and group counseling and therapy,<sup>3,5,7-10</sup> medication assisted therapy (MAT),<sup>3,5,8-10,21</sup> and increased supervision and contact with the judge or court.<sup>2,11-14</sup>

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## BACKGROUND

In 1991, there were approximately 12.6 million people consistently using illicit drugs, with 37.1% of the total population having taken illicit drugs at least once.<sup>15</sup> In 2020, 91,799 deaths due to drug overdose were recorded by the CDC.<sup>16</sup> Across both local and federal law enforcement, 1,358,933 individuals were arrested for drug related crimes in 2012.<sup>17</sup> In addition to the overwhelming amount of usage, “Individual beliefs and attitudes, bureaucratic procedures and requirements, and the lack of treatment capacity” were all listed as obstacles to receiving addiction treatment assistance in 30.7% of respondents in a 2006 survey.<sup>18</sup>

Drug courts in America were first established in 1989. The purpose of these courts is to take people with felony convictions for nonviolent drug charges and enroll them in programs that includes, but is not limited to, random drug testing, visits with a court judge, therapy, employment, education, and medication assisted therapy (MAT) to reduce relapsing as well as recidivism.<sup>19</sup> The incentive for participation and graduation in drug courts is the dismissal of charges.<sup>19</sup> One study found that drug courts reduce recidivism by almost 26%,<sup>11</sup> while another court recorded graduation rates of 81% and recidivism rates of 23%.<sup>20</sup> Multiple courts have found that participants are significantly more likely to graduate and less likely to recidivate if they are employed or currently in some form of education program.<sup>1-6</sup>

One Southern California court gave educational assistance by helping participants finish their GED and by enrolling those with a GED in a local community college. This same court provided vocational training for those unsure of a career path and connected participants to local employment agencies. Of those with educational gains, such as receiving a high school diploma, GED, or associate's degree, 55.6% graduated vs. graduation rates of 40.3% for those with no

educational gains, and of those with employment gains, such as receiving a part or full time job, 56.8% graduated vs. graduation rates of 20.3% among those without employment gains.<sup>3</sup>

Having meaningful therapy available and or making therapy mandatory to participants has also proven to be a major benefit.<sup>4,6,8-10</sup> Courts in Virginia use Moral Reconciliation Therapy (MRT) which uses a combination of group and solo work to address and change criminal thinking, showed a reduction in recidivism by 36%.<sup>10</sup> Medication assisted treatment (MAT) is another option that, while not all courts offer, is extremely useful for those who have opioid use disorder.<sup>6,8,9,21</sup> The Opioid Intervention court found that opioid users were three times more likely to graduate if they received MAT.<sup>21</sup> Evidence also shows that increasing the time spent with the judge or court officials and the use of frequent drug testing increases the participants compliance.<sup>2,12-14</sup> These two methods are some of the most commonly used, with 79% of participants in a midwestern court testifying that they were some of the most influential methods in their success.<sup>13</sup>

Yet no one Drug Court is like another. While there are many differences that exist across states, many also differ within states. For example, all drug courts in Virginia are required to use MRT,<sup>10</sup> while the courts in New York are not held to this same standard. Furthermore, not all courts in New York are the same: the court in Syracuse, NY requires that participants be completely drug free for a consecutive year to be eligible to graduate, while a court in Queens, NY will make graduation determinations on a case-to-case basis and dismiss certain early positive drug test infractions without increasing time needed for graduation.<sup>5</sup>

The purpose of this scoping review is to dive into the literature surrounding Drug Courts, and the different methods used between each, to determine which combination of interventions may have the best chances for ensuring the success of participants.

## **METHODS**

### **STUDY DESIGN**

A scoping review was conducted to determine the best practices for the success of drug court participants. A scoping review is a technique that aims to summarize existing literature and point out key concepts. The goal is to gather all existing literature surrounding one broad question and provide a foundation for informing practice or making policy recommendations.<sup>22</sup> We sought to obtain all previous research surrounding the best practices of drug courts in the United States. In completing our scoping review, we adhered to the following six steps: identify an appropriate research question, develop a search strategy and perform the search, select studies based on predetermined inclusion criteria, extract relevant data, analyze the data and present findings, and summarize the findings to present implications and recommendations for policy change.<sup>22</sup>

### **SEARCH STRATEGY**

We conducted a literature search in the Google Scholar database from January 2000 to December 2022 for articles that examined best practices for drug court success in the United States. These dates were selected to account for the changing culture and increasing rate of drug use in the United States over the past twenty years. Articles were identified by combining the following search terms: drug court success, drug court education, drug court efficacy, drug court graduation, and drug court recidivism. These terms were searched individually using quotation marks around each. Then, the term “drug court success” was combined with the remaining terms using the boolean term “and.” The articles chosen for this study from the results of the search were selected using the following criteria.



## **STUDY SELECTION**

The goal of the scoping review was to determine the best practices to ensure the success of drug court participants. Articles included in the review outlined the best practices of drug courts. In particular, studies with a high or improved rate of graduation, reduced recidivism rates, and a clear definition of efficacy were targeted. Studies that outlined how they measured the success of their practices were considered to have a clear definition of efficacy. Studies conducted outside of the United States were excluded, and only peer-reviewed articles were considered for inclusion.

## **DATA EXTRACTION AND ANALYSIS**

The Data extracted from each article included: the location, the metric definition of efficacy used, the practices of the court, the barriers faced, and the statistics of graduation and recidivism. The practices found were examined to determine which were seen more frequently across courts in various locations. While searching for information, we chose articles based on if the study explicitly stated that a practice had a positive impact on graduation and recidivism rates, whether it was statistical or surveyed from participants. Graduation rates were considered high if they were 50% or greater, meaning that at least 50% of enrolled participants completed the program. Any improvement shown in graduation rates was considered relevant for inclusion. If the rate of recidivism reported in the study was reduced by any margin after the implementation of their practices, the studies were included. A practice that was frequently associated with higher rates of graduation and lower rates of recidivism were deemed best practices.

## RESULTS

Ultimately, 77 studies were reviewed, 23 underwent data extrapolation, and 19 are being presented in this study due to 4 being removed because they did not meet inclusion criteria. The oldest piece of literature used was published in 2003, while the newest was published in 2021. The location of these courts were evenly distributed throughout the United States. There were 45 total courts examined between the 19 studies: 8 courts located in the northeast, 8 were located in the south, 6 were located in the west, 5 were located in the midwest, and 18 were not specified. For additional study level details see Table 1.

The majority of studies, 15, were primary literature containing direct examinations of drug court's practices. The remaining 4 students were secondary literature, including meta-analysis and scoping reviews. Of these studies, 7 utilized methods such as interviews and surveys to gather data directly from the participants of the courts, wherein they would recount their experiences in the program and the progress they had made. A total of 8 studies compared graduation and recidivism rates across courts utilizing different methods. The remaining 4 studies evaluated specific interventions, detailed drug court assessment tools, and compared drug court participation to traditional criminalization of drug use. Table 1 below discusses the articles that were found during our research on evidence of best practices of drug courts and separates them out to show their year of publication, state or location of court, objective of the study, and the statistical results (if disclosed) of best practices.

TABLE 1.

Article Title	Author	Year of Publication	State/Location	Objective of Study	Results/Evidence of Best Practices
An examination of the impact of drug court clients' perceptions of procedural justice on graduation rates and recidivism <sup>20</sup>	Atkin-Plunk	2016	large metropolitan area, Southern state	“Using a convenience sample of participants involved in one drug court, this study adds to the limited body of research on procedural justice and drug courts by examining whether variation in drug court clients' perceptions of procedural justice is related to their likelihood of graduation from drug court and recidivism.”	81% graduated and only 23% recidivated during the 2 year follow up.
Combating Methamphetamine Use in the Community: The Efficacy of the Drug Court Model <sup>1</sup>	Listwan	2009	Northwestern state, relatively rural	“This study explores whether community-based drug courts are a reasonable option for treating this population[methamphetamine users].”	Education and employment status were statistically significant in predicting graduation.
Drug court handbooks suitability for programme participants with low literacy <sup>7</sup>	Gill	2018	7 separate urban courts; Handbooks 1 and 2 were from the	“The objective of this study was to describe the suitability of adult drug court handbooks for participants with	Having handbooks written at lower literacy levels may improve graduation rates.

			northeastern region, Handbook 3 was from the midwest, and handbooks 4-7 were from the southern region	low literacy.”	
Evaluating the Effectiveness of a Juvenile Drug Court: Comparisons to Traditional Probation <sup>12</sup>	Gummelt	2016	Jefferson County Juvenile Drug Court in Southeast Texas	“Using data collected from a Juvenile Drug Court (JDC) in Southeast Texas, this project sought to determine if the JDC intervention reduced recidivism compared to a comparison sample of juvenile offenders.”	Recidivism was decreased with an increase in supervision and time in contact.
Factors of Success: Drug Court Graduate Exit Interviews <sup>2</sup>	Contrino	2016	Western New York	“A study of 600 graduates from drug court details self-report data of motivations and perceptions offenders shared about their experience in drug court.”	84% of participants reported positive improvements in family, relationship, vocational, and educational situations as important factors in their drug court completion.
Improving graduation rates in drug court: A qualitative	Gallagher	2017	Midwestern state	“This qualitative study adds to the literature by asking drug court participants (N =	A survey stated that 79% found urine testing and frequent contact with the judge to

study of participants' lived experiences <sup>13</sup>				42) their views on the most helpful aspects of the program that support them in graduating and how the program could be more helpful to support them in graduating.”	be the most important factor.
Measuring Drug Court Adherence to the What Works Literature: The Creation of the Evidence-Based Correctional Program Checklist–Drug Court <sup>23</sup>	Blair	2016	18 drug courts throughout the country have been assessed, including both adult and juvenile drug courts	“In this article, we chronicle the development of a tool designed to evaluate juvenile and adult drug courts, the Evidence-Based Correctional Program Checklist–Drug Court (CPC-DC).”	The following factors were found to increase graduation: random and mandatory drug testing and treatment styles should be matched on a per-patient basis.
The impact of drug court participation on mortality: 15-year outcomes from a randomized controlled trial <sup>8</sup>	Kearley	2019	Baltimore City	“To test the effects of drug court participation on long-term mortality risk.”	MAT and reducing the use of stigmatizing language are methods that should be implemented to improve Drug Court outcomes.
Treating Opioid Use Disorders in Drug Court: Participants' Views on Using Medication-Assisted Treatments	Gallagher	2019	Midwest	“This is the first known qualitative study to ask drug court participants (n = 38) who have opioid use disorders questions related to their lived experiences in	The use of MATs in combination with psychosocial therapies attributed to the best outcomes.

(MATs) to Support Recovery <sup>9</sup>				drug court, as well as direct questions related to the use of medication-assisted treatments (MATs) in drug court.”	
“The Emergency Room” in the Drug Court System: Evaluating the Opioid Intervention Court <sup>21</sup>	Kahn	2021	Buffalo, NY	“We evaluated the OIC focusing on four major aims: (1) To describe OIC participant demographic characteristics, completion, and court engagement, from court administrative data; (2) To examine OIC completion by demographics and court engagement characteristics; (3) To describe participants’ OIC experiences from survey data; (4) To explore court team members’ perceptions and experiences based on interviews.”	Those who received MAT had more than 3-fold greater odds of completing OIC compared to those who did not receive MAT. Participants who received MAT within the first 7 days of OIC were nearly 4 times as likely to complete OIC than those who did not receive MAT within the first 7 days of OIC.
A Review of the Use of Positive Reinforcement in Drug Courts <sup>24</sup>	Bascom	2019	Dade County, Florida	“This survey-based, mixed methods study assessed (1) the frequency of the use of positive reinforcement, currently or in the past, (2) stakeholders’	Participants reported that positive reinforcement was “very important” to their drug court success.

				beliefs about the use of positive reinforcement in their programs, (3) the forms of positive reinforcement currently being used, and (4) the ways in which they implement positive reinforcement into their programs.”	
A systematic review of drug court effects on recidivism <sup>11</sup>	Wilson	2006	Florida	“Using meta-analytic methods, we systematically reviewed the extant evidence on the effectiveness of drug courts in reducing future criminal offending.”	Methods such as increased contact with the court and early engagement of participants were found to increase positive outcomes.
Enhancing Drug Court Success <sup>3</sup>	Deschenes	2009	5 regions of Orange County California	“This study evaluates the impact of enhanced drug court services in a large county in Southern California.”	Improving the RT, specialty programs, and educational/vocational therapy increased graduation from 20% to 30%
Comparing and contrasting White and African American participants' lived experiences in drug court <sup>25</sup>	Gallagher	2016	Midwest	“This qualitative study interviewed 38 participants from a midwestern drug court to compare and contrast Whites’ (n D 22) and African Americans’ (n D	Specialized treatment, especially in regards to cultural differences, and a supportive environment were viewed by participants as major factors to

				16) lived experiences in the program in order to learn about the factors that may contribute to racial disparities in outcomes.”	their success.
Drug Court Effectiveness and Efficiency: Findings for Virginia <sup>10</sup>	Cheesman	2016	Virginia	“In 2011, the Office of the Executive Secretary of the Supreme Court of Virginia contracted with the National Center for State Courts to conduct a comprehensive, statewide evaluation of adult drug courts.”	Programs that utilized Moral Reconciliation Therapy (MRT) had lower probabilities of in-program recidivism (OR= 0.35, 95% CI:0.13, 0.95). Programs with written sanction guidelines had higher probability of drug court graduation for participants with no prior felonies (OR= 4.35, 95% CI: 1.08, 17.49).
Race, Neighborhood, and Drug Court Graduation <sup>4</sup>	Howard	2016	Delaware	“This research examines the possibility that racial disparities in drug court graduation are attributable to individual-level employment or education or to neighborhood-level disadvantage.”	Client employment and education are important individual level predictors of drug court graduation.
Assessing the effectiveness of drug courts	Mitchell	2012	used 154 eligible and	“The objective of this research was to systematically	The average effect of participation is



on recidivism: A meta-analytic review of traditional and non-traditional drug courts <sup>14</sup>			independent studies	review quasi-experimental and experimental evaluations of the effectiveness of drug courts in reducing offending.”	analogous to a drop in recidivism from 50% to 38%.
The New York State Adult Drug Court Evaluation: Policies, Participants and Impacts: (640692007-001) <sup>5</sup>	Rempel	2003	New York	“Among other analyses, this report evaluates the impact of six drug courts on recidivism and identifies the participant characteristics and programmatic features that increase the likelihood of successful drug court outcomes.”	One-year post-program recidivism reductions range from 19% to 52% across the six sites.
Improving graduation rates in drug court through employment and schooling opportunities and Medicated assisted treatment (MAT) <sup>6</sup>	Gallagher	2018	Indiana	“This study contributes to the existing body of research by identifying which participants (n = 248) were most likely to graduate from a drug court in Indiana (United States).”	Participants who were employed or were students at the time of admission were nearly 2.5 times more likely to graduate than participants who were not.

Table 2 groups the studies according to what each determined to be a best practice (see table for complete results). These groupings are listed in order from greatest to fewest articles corresponding. There were 7 studies that cited education and employment status, defined as increasing literacy rate, obtaining high school diploma, GED, or associate's degree or as

receiving a part or full time job, as a best practice.<sup>1-7</sup> Another 6 studies reported counseling and therapy, either at individual or group level, as beneficial in increasing graduation and decreasing recidivism rates.<sup>3,5,7-10</sup> Medication assisted therapy (MAT), a prescription drug that curbs opiate cravings, was advantageous in 6 studies.<sup>3,5,8-10,21</sup> A total of 5 studies cited increased supervision and time spent in contact with the judge or court employees as a useful method.<sup>2,11-14</sup> Early engagement of tasks and responsibilities within the court was cited by 4 studies as a best practice.<sup>5,6,11,21</sup> Just 3 studies mentioned that a supportive environment with court or family in the form of continuous words of affirmation and encouragement had a positive impact.<sup>2,13,20</sup> Another 3 studies reported that mandatory and random drug testing had a positive effect.<sup>12,13,23</sup>

TABLE 2.

Grouping	Article Title
Education and employment status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Combating Methamphetamine Use in the Community: The Efficacy of the Drug Court Model<sup>1</sup></li> <li>● Factors of Success: Drug Court Graduate Exit Interviews<sup>2</sup></li> <li>● Enhancing Drug Court Success<sup>3</sup></li> <li>● Race, Neighborhood, and Drug Court Graduation<sup>4</sup></li> <li>● The New York State Adult Drug Court Evaluation: Policies, Participants and Impacts: (640692007-001)<sup>5</sup></li> <li>● Improving graduation rates in drug court through employment and schooling opportunities and Medicated assisted treatment (MAT)<sup>6</sup></li> <li>● Drug court handbooks suitability for programme participants with low literacy<sup>7</sup></li> </ul>

<p>Individual and group counseling and therapy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The impact of drug court participation on mortality: 15-year outcomes from a randomized controlled trial<sup>8</sup></li> <li>● Treating Opioid Use Disorders in Drug Court: Participants' Views on Using Medication-Assisted Treatments (MATs) to Support Recovery<sup>9</sup></li> <li>● Enhancing Drug Court Success<sup>3</sup></li> <li>● Drug Court Effectiveness and Efficiency: Findings for Virginia<sup>10</sup></li> <li>● The New York State Adult Drug Court Evaluation: Policies, Participants and Impacts: (640692007-001)<sup>5</sup></li> <li>● Drug court handbooks suitability for programme participants with low literacy<sup>7</sup></li> </ul>
<p>Medication assisted therapy (MAT)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The impact of drug court participation on mortality: 15-year outcomes from a randomized controlled trial<sup>8</sup></li> <li>● Treating Opioid Use Disorders in Drug Court: Participants' Views on Using Medication-Assisted Treatments (MATs) to Support Recovery<sup>9</sup></li> <li>● Enhancing Drug Court Success<sup>3</sup></li> <li>● Drug Court Effectiveness and Efficiency: Findings for Virginia<sup>10</sup></li> <li>● The New York State Adult Drug Court Evaluation: Policies, Participants and Impacts: (640692007-001)<sup>5</sup></li> <li>● “The Emergency Room” in the Drug Court System: Evaluating the Opioid Intervention Court<sup>21</sup></li> </ul>
<p>Increased supervision and contact with judge or court</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Evaluating the Effectiveness of a Juvenile Drug Court: Comparisons to Traditional Probation<sup>12</sup></li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Factors of Success: Drug Court Graduate Exit Interviews<sup>2</sup></li> <li>● Improving graduation rates in drug court: A qualitative study of participants' lived experiences<sup>13</sup></li> <li>● Assessing the effectiveness of drug courts on recidivism: A meta-analytic review of traditional and non-traditional drug courts<sup>14</sup></li> <li>● A systematic review of drug court effects on recidivism<sup>11</sup></li> </ul>
Early engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The New York State Adult Drug Court Evaluation: Policies, Participants and Impacts: (640692007-001)<sup>5</sup></li> <li>● “The Emergency Room” in the Drug Court System: Evaluating the Opioid Intervention Court<sup>21</sup></li> <li>● Improving graduation rates in drug court through employment and schooling opportunities and Medicated assisted treatment (MAT)<sup>6</sup></li> <li>● A systematic review of drug court effects on recidivism<sup>11</sup></li> </ul>
A supportive environment with court or family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● An examination of the impact of drug court clients' perceptions of procedural justice on graduation rates and recidivism<sup>20</sup></li> <li>● Factors of Success: Drug Court Graduate Exit Interviews<sup>2</sup></li> <li>● Improving graduation rates in drug court: A qualitative study of participants' lived experiences<sup>13</sup></li> </ul>
Mandatory drug testing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Evaluating the Effectiveness of a Juvenile Drug Court: Comparisons to Traditional Probation</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Improving graduation rates in drug court: A qualitative study of participants' lived experiences</li> <li>● Measuring Drug Court Adherence to the What Works Literature: The Creation of the Evidence-Based Correctional Program Checklist–Drug Court<sup>23</sup></li> </ul>
Strict court guidelines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Drug Court Effectiveness and Efficiency: Findings for Virginia<sup>10</sup></li> <li>● Assessing the effectiveness of drug courts on recidivism: A meta-analytic review of traditional and non-traditional drug courts<sup>14</sup></li> </ul>
Positive reinforcement (words, vouchers, or tangible items)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● A Review of the Use of Positive Reinforcement in Drug Courts<sup>24</sup></li> <li>● Comparing and contrasting White and African American participants' lived experiences in drug court<sup>25</sup></li> </ul>
Specialized treatment per person	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Measuring Drug Court Adherence to the What Works Literature: The Creation of the Evidence-Based Correctional Program Checklist–Drug Court<sup>23</sup></li> <li>● Comparing and contrasting White and African American participants' lived experiences in drug court<sup>25</sup></li> </ul>

**DISCUSSION**

The objective of this study was to determine what methods employed by drug courts were most highly associated with success as measured by increasing graduation rates and reducing recidivism. The most commonly cited best practices were education and employment,<sup>1-7</sup> which included things like increasing literacy rate or obtaining high school diploma, counseling and therapy,<sup>3,5,7-10</sup> medication assisted therapy, ,<sup>3,5,8-10,21</sup> and increasing

supervision and contact with the judge or court.<sup>2,11-14</sup> The problem of illicit drug use in the United States continues to rise. The increasing rates of drug use prompts the need for research into drug courts and how to make their participants successful. Previous literature focused primarily on comparing recidivism rates of drug court participants to those of nonparticipants to evaluate the effectiveness of the courts.<sup>11,20</sup> This research has shown a positive connection between drug courts and reducing recidivism.<sup>11,20</sup> Other previous works have outlined the effectiveness of one practice but failed to mention the contribution of other methods that may improve success.<sup>1-6</sup>

The National Association of Drug Court Professionals (NADCP) has previously researched this topic of the best drug court practices with the most recent update being in 2018.<sup>26,27</sup> The best practice standards include 10 categories: target population, equity and inclusion, roles and responsibilities of the judge, incentives, sanctions, and therapeutic adjustments, substance use disorder treatment, complementary treatment and social services, drug and alcohol testing, multidisciplinary team, census and caseloads, and monitoring and evaluating.<sup>26,27</sup> Target population includes assessing potential participants that are categorized as high risk.<sup>26</sup> Equity and inclusion focuses on making an equal opportunity for all participants despite race, gender, or ethnicity.<sup>26</sup> Roles and responsibilities of the judge includes having a judge that is approachable and understanding.<sup>26</sup> Incentives, sanctions, and therapeutic adjustments are used to incentivise participants to stay clean.<sup>26</sup> Substance use disorder treatment provides medication assisted treatment to participants.<sup>26</sup> Complementary treatment and social services includes counseling for mental health as well as offers vocational and educational services.<sup>27</sup> Drug and alcohol testing is random and frequent to assess progress.<sup>27</sup> Multidisciplinary teams are a combination of many law enforcement officers, drug court employees, and healthcare professionals.<sup>27</sup> Census and caseloads review the timeline and

requirements of the courts.<sup>27</sup> Finally, monitoring and evaluation of adherence to best practices is the overall determinant of efficacy.<sup>27</sup> Table 3. shows the best practices and their inclusion in our study compared with inclusion in the NADCP.

TABLE 3.

Best Practice	Our study	NADCP
Education and employment status	X	X
Individual and group counseling and therapy	X	X
Medication assisted therapy (MAT)	X	X
Increased supervision and contact with judge or court	X	X
Early engagement	X	
A supportive environment with court or family	X	
Mandatory drug testing	X	X
Strict court guidelines	X	X
Positive reinforcement (words, vouchers, or tangible items)	X	X
Specialized treatment per person	X	X
Target population		X
Equity and inclusion		X
Incentives, sanctions, and therapeutic adjustments		X
Multidisciplinary team		X
Census and caseloads		X
Monitoring and evaluation		X

There are a few limitations to this study that must be considered. First, this study does not account for barriers in the implementation of any of the best practices noted, but reports solely

on the practices found to lead to the most successful graduation rates and lowest rates of recidivism. This study is limited due to the fact that certain practices are not as prevalent. In this scoping review, a practice found in 2 studies is not as prevalent as a practice found in 7 studies; however, they may be equally as effective. Further research should be conducted to statistically evaluate the effectiveness of each practice using a meta analysis by ranking the best practices statistically. Another step would be to compare the barriers of these drug courts and what utilized methods participants feel are harmful or hinder them from graduation or increase recidivism. By having a complete list of benefits and harms, drug courts can use these future reviews to determine which methods they can choose to implement and discontinue to serve their population best and manage resources to their maximum benefit in an attempt to increase graduation rates and decrease recidivism. One final limitation may be using Google Scholar as our sole search engine, rather than a scholarly database.

## **CONCLUSION**

The objective of this study was to perform a scoping review of previous literature to determine what practices used in drug courts are most beneficial in increasing graduation rates and decreasing recidivism rates. Educational and employment gains were found to be most influential in all of the studies reviewed.<sup>1-7</sup> Counseling and therapy, as an individual or within a group, were the next most influential in participant success.<sup>3,5,7-10</sup> This was followed by giving participants who struggled with opioid addiction access to medication assisted therapy<sup>3,5,8-10,21</sup> and an increase in time spent with the judge or court employees.<sup>2,11-14</sup> All of the methods mentioned in this study, even those not concluded here as a major finding, have the potential to positively affect drug court operations and should be considered for implementation. Future



research should focus on statistically comparing these methods employed by drug courts to determine which has the greatest influence on increase in graduation rates and decrease on recidivism rates.

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