

**Methodological review:
outcome studies of diversion and
aftercare programs for drug-
involved offenders**

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Overview

- Purpose of the review
- Brief methodology and major outcomes
- Good practice in evaluating diversion and aftercare programs
- Best evidence elements of diversion and aftercare programs
- Specific recommendations for designing and evaluating an aftercare component of MERIT

Purpose of the review

- Describe the methodological adequacy of outcome studies on efficacy of diversion and aftercare programs
- Identify likely value of an aftercare component to MERIT
- Identify best practice elements of diversion and aftercare

Methodology

- Electronic and manual search = 713 studies of diversion
- Relevant to review = 124
- Outcome evaluations = 28 (23%) with comparison group
- Diversion=19; aftercare=9

Major outcomes

- Diversion only (aftercare=1)

- Methodological problems:
 - Poor descriptions (eligibility criteria, data sources, client characteristics, time-frames, etc). Eg. 27% did not specify intervention
 - 16% random allocation
 - Of non-randomised, 47% used incomparable comparison groups
 - 85% reported one outcome only, 52% no drug use measure
 - 63% did not report retention rates at time of evaluation

Major outcomes

■ Methodological strengths:

- 85% prospective evaluation designs
- Objective, repeated outcomes available (eg. crime recidivism rates)
- Reasonable retention rates (approximately 60%)
- 74% reported reduced recidivism, 66% reduced drug use, effect size small

■ Conclusions and opportunities:

- Strong conclusions on efficacy of diversion and aftercare inappropriate (weak evaluations and heterogenous studies), but tentative support
- Clear scope for methodologically rigorous evaluation, especially of aftercare

Good practice in evaluations

- Clear & detailed descriptions of aims, methods, process & outcomes
- Prospective, randomised evaluation designs
- Adequate sample size
- Sophisticated statistical analyses (eg. clustering)
- Objective, or reliable and valid self-report, measures
- Repeated measures (process, outcome and cost)
- Strategies to maximise retention
- Adequate follow-up periods
- Affordable budget

Evaluation recommendations

- Interrupted time series evaluation design (multiple baseline):
 - Prospective
 - Comparable comparison group
 - Random selection and allocation
 - Affordable
 - Court/location is unit of randomisation, not individuals
- Structured but flexible programs (client choice?)
- Feedback
- Tailored

Evaluation recommendations

Design: repeated measure, multiple baseline, staggered intervention

Court 1	•	•	0	#	#	#	#	#	#	#	#	#	#	#	#
Court 2	•	•	•	•	•	0	#	#	#	#	#	#	#	#	#
Court 3	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	0	#	#	#	#	#	#
Court 4	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	0	#	#	#
Court 5	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•

Key

• = baseline data (6 monthly); 0 = diversion + aftercare; # = post-test data (6 monthly)