

CATCH Court: Changing Actions to Change Habits Research Findings

This article reports on an independent evaluation of a program for convicted prostitutes who are victims of human trafficking, the Changing Actions to Change Habits (CATCH) specialized docket in Franklin County, Columbus, Ohio. Founded by Judge Paul M. Herbert in 2009, CATCH blends punitive sentences with a 2-year treatment-oriented nonadversarial program for rearrested prostitutes who suffer from posttraumatic stress syndrome, depression, and drug addiction. Based on therapeutic jurisprudence, in its 5 years of existence CATCH has served 130 participants. The success of the CATCH program indicates its use as a model for similar courts in Ohio and nationally.

With funding from the Ohio Consortium of Crime Science, Dr. Karen Miner-Romanoff and Franklin University completed an independent evaluation of the CATCH court in 2014 and 2015.¹

The Mission

This is establishment of an integrated approach to meet the treatment, health, and behavioral medication needs of defendants who have been charged in the Franklin County Municipal Court with prostitution, solicitation, loitering to solicit, or other offenses if the defendant has a history of being a victim of human trafficking. CATCH presents a nonadversarial rather than an exclusively punitive approach; in lieu of jail, referrals to treatments are made. At referral to the program by one of several court professionals, the request for entry is explained by the defense counsel and must be signed by the referring judge and/or administrative judge. The 2-year intensive program emphasizes treatment for drug addiction, depression, and posttraumatic stress disorder by connecting defendants to appropriate substance abuse and mental health facilities and social services resources and by teaching healthy lifestyle choices, including stable housing, supportive interpersonal relationships, and education.

Palatable Change is Taking Place

A remarkable transformation in the judiciary has occurred over the past 20 years with establishment of problem-solving courts, which seek to address the underlying criminogenic risks that may lead to criminal behavior. The courts are an alternative approach to addressing the many and severe societal, psychological, and institutional issues that are not the tradition focus of the criminal justice or judicial system. A number of states have developed community courts as hopefully more effective vehicles than arrest and incarceration to address prostitution and human trafficking

Reduced Costs

In the first years, CATCH was successful in terms of decreased arrests and nights in jail. Arrests for solicitation in Franklin County decreased from 1,745 in 2009 to 1,192 in 2013 since the program began. Now in its 5th year, CATCH program has accepted 105 women with 72% having no new criminal charges. Although in the first 4 years, the graduation rate was only 12%,

¹ K, Miner Romanoff (2015). An Evaluation Study of a Criminal Justice Reform Specialty Court—CATCH Court: Changing Actions to Change Habits.

the percentage rose to 21% by the fifth year, and 90% of the graduates have progressed in their lives (e.g., recidivism rates were significantly lower for graduates than nongraduates). CATCH program costs approximately \$18,000 a year per individual; this is a fraction of estimated cost of \$200,000 for a year in jail.

Need to Educate Criminal Justice Professionals

The majority of those who can refer offenders to CATCH court was defense attorneys (53.33%), and the majority (65.00%) had received no training. Almost one-third received training from Judge Herbert and the CATCH staff, as well as other legal professionals. Approximately three-fourths (73.33%) had referred defendants with, and approximately one-third (38.33%) used their own criteria for referral. The few who did not refer defendants (25.00%) appeared in sympathy with the CATCH Court type of program; their major reasons for nonreferral were lack of certainty about identification of potential participants (10.00%) and other unspecified reasons (15.00). Further, almost three-fourths of the referrers (71.67%) would attend educational classes for better serving the defendant population. Approximately one-fourth (26.67%) responded with additional comments, and these were mixed. Referrers cited the excellence of the program as well as lack of proper training and difficulties of gaining victim-defendants' trust and commitment.

Impact of CATCH on Participants

Most participants had been in the program from 2 to 18 months (approximately 95%), with only 5% having graduated at survey administration. The threat of punishment kept almost three-fourths (71.43%) from reoffending. The program helped increase both mental and physical health a great deal for the majority (47.62%, 61.90%, respectively). In addition, the majority felt safer with the program (85.71%), felt it helped with their families (57.14%), stable housing (71.42%), development of healthier life skills, and increase of healthy behaviors (76.20%, 71.42%, respectively). One participant explained, "CATCH court has saved my life. Without the program, the judge, the staff protecting me from myself, I wouldn't be here."

Nonadversarial Therapeutic Justice

For most participants, the most helpful components of the program were the CATCH staff (81.00%) and the judge (66.67%). Group therapy also helped maintain their probation conditions for the majority (52.39%). The judge was very influential, helping to hold participants accountable for probation conditions, positively impacting participants, and treating them with great compassion (85.71% each). The vast majority of participants also felt they were treated more fairly in CATCH than other programs (85.71%), that the program had positive effects inside the court (95.24%), and that their individual needs were addressed by the program (95.24%). Finally, similar to an early item, the vast majority felt that the CATCH staff and judge had the greatest impact on them (100.00%, 85.71%, respectively).

Reduced Jail Time

The average number of days in jail for the preceding 10 years was compared with participants who were successfully discharged ($N = 22$) from the CATCH Court program and those who were unsuccessfully discharged ($N = 33$) and those neutrally discharged ($N = 51$) with error bar graphs, 95% confidence interval). For those successfully discharged, the average number of jail

days was 300-329, compared to 480-509 for those unsuccessfully discharged and 420-449 days for those neutrally discharged. Further, based on the results, it can be predicted that in a 10-year span, those successfully discharged will spend between 180 and 479 days in jail compared with those unsuccessfully discharged, between 390 and 659 days in jail, and those neutrally discharged, between 360 and 539 days in jail.

Reduced Number of Arrests

Composite arrest numbers were compared over the previous 10 years for participants successfully discharged, unsuccessfully discharged, and neutrally discharged from the CATCH Court program (error bar graphs, 95% confidence interval). The results showed that those successfully discharged had a lower number of arrests, an average 90-119 times, compared to those either unsuccessfully discharged, an average 120-149 times, or neutrally discharged, an average slightly less than 120-149 times.

Reduced Recidivism

Recidivism after program participation over the previous 10 years was measured as number of days in jail (error bar graphs, 95% confidence interval). The results showed that those who successfully completed the program spent an average of 0 to 4 days in jail, compared to those unsuccessfully discharged, 20 to 24 days in jail, or neutrally discharged, 10 to 14 days in jail.

Improvement in Living Conditions

Living conditions of participants who successfully completed the CATCH Program were measured by percentages from 2009 to 2013 who were employed, volunteering, or enrolled in educational programs or vocational training within 1 year of successful discharge. Of the 22 graduates, data were available for 17. Of these, 77.3% were either employed, volunteering, or enrolled in educational programs or vocational training. Of the data not available, it should be noted that total number of graduates included four one honorary graduate in 2009 and four potential graduates in 2013. These circumstances may explain why data on these five participants was not available. With this explanation, the percentage of successfully discharged participants, 17, who were employed, volunteering, or enrolled in educational programs or vocational training becomes 100%.

A Sense of Caring

Qualitative findings concurred generally with the quantitative survey results, in which positive effects of various aspects were cited by approximately 48% to 100% of participants. In the qualitative segment, most participants credited a judge with giving them information about the CATCH Court program, and their assessment of the most important things about the program were a sense of caring, no judgments by others in the program, their growing sense of self-esteem and self-worth, and crediting the program with saving their lives. Participants found that the impact of CATCH Court on their family and relationships was positive, helping them become better parents, healing relationships with their own family members, and creating a sense of sisterhood as a surrogate family. The participants identified the most successful factors of CATCH as understanding, care, and concern by all personnel, beginning with the judge, and recognition by staff of the participants' potential for positive change. All agreed that CATCH had helped them greatly with physical problems and combating their drug addictions.

Expansion of CATCH

Given this initiative and the results of this evaluation study, the CATCH Court program deserves expansion. With studies such as those suggested above and evidence of defendant progress and their successful transition to mainstream society, additional funding could be attracted to enlarge the Franklin County program and serve more defendants. Further, because some judges may indicate opposition to problem-solving and specialty courts based on the evaluation results, a continuing legal education seminar could be developed for judges on criminogenic risks and the benefits to both defendants and court personnel of specialty courts.