Law&
Social
Inquiry

Many Shades of Success: Bottom-up Indicators of Individual Success in Community Courts

Hadar Dancig-Rosenberg and Tali Gal

This study challenges the conventional approach to the appropriate indicators of individual success in community courts (CCs) by exploring the different meanings that CC professionals ascribe to the term "success." CCs conduct a non-adversarial process in which team members collaborate to provide a comprehensive rehabilitative intervention for recidivist participants. We conducted fifty-three in-depth interviews with CC personnel between 2016 and 2020. According to the interviewees, standard evaluation measures such as program completion, reduced recidivism, and systemic reduction of incarceration are necessary for evaluating these courts. Yet individual success is relative, subjective, multidimensional, and must be understood as a continuum. Therefore, it should also be measured by looking at significant processes of change that participants have undergone in various aspects of their lives. Study findings can be translated into measurable well-being indicators, moving the "what works" discourse forward to include more nuanced and diverse manifestations of success in studies evaluating specialized courts.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, various types of problem-solving courts have emerged, which have renounced the traditional adversarial model in favor of a collaborative, future-oriented rehabilitative process. These courts offer comprehensive interventions to address the root problems that cause people to engage in criminal behavior, including mental health problems, addictions, post-trauma, and family crises (Berman and Feinblatt 2001). Prosecutors, defense attorneys, court coordinators, social workers, and other relevant professionals use a collaborative teamwork approach to construct an individual rehabilitation program for each defendant jointly. They conduct ongoing monitoring,

with judges serving as team leaders. The dynamics in specialized courts differ from those that characterize mainstream courts (Gal and Dancig-Rosenberg 2020). Judges regularly engage in direct dialogue with defendants. Professionals use a distinct vocabulary (for example, defendants are called "participants"). Therapeutic techniques to motivate normative behavior are common. Examples of specialized courts include drug courts, mental health courts, family violence courts, and veteran courts. There are more than four thousand problem-solving courts across the United States as well as in the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and elsewhere (Alkon 2019).

Problem-solving courts strive to address the root causes that lead to recidivism, but only a few studies have examined the degree to which these courts succeed in their endeavors. Most evaluation studies focus on their end goal, which is to reduce reoffending. At the individual level, this is typically achieved by measuring reductions in the frequency and severity of crimes committed by graduates of the problem-solving courts and the time that elapsed to the first repeated offense. In addition to measuring the decrease in recidivism rates of graduates of problem-solving courts, evaluation studies also examine completion rates and the overall reduction in incarceration (Gottfredson et al. 2006; Moore and Hiday 2006; McNiel and Binder 2007; Hakuta, Soroushian, and Kralstein 2008). Occasionally, studies have explored defendants' experiences of procedural justice, their overall satisfaction with the process (Custer, Cissner, and Finkelstein 2008; Lee et al. 2013), and their trust in law enforcement (Berman and Fox 2005).

Sally Merry's (2011) seminal work on measurement and quantification has demonstrated the power of metrics and indicators to influence how social justice problems are seen and understood (see also Davis, Kingsbury, and Merry 2012). Policy makers need indicators to measure performance, structure incentives, determine the allocation of resources, and translate values into bureaucratic operating procedures (Kleinfeld and Dancig-Rosenberg 2022). Indicators are the tools that simplify complex social reality and translate it into measurable categories that are legible from a bureaucratic point of view (Scott 2008; Merry 2011). They also "submerge local particularities and idiosyncrasies into universal categories, thus generating knowledge that is standardized and comparable" (Merry 2011, 84). The labels assigned to indicators—what they represent and who decides their function—are "fundamental to the way an indicator produces knowledge" (84).

In gauging the success of criminal justice interventions or of those who participate in them, scholars have argued that, however popular, recidivism alone is a poor metric (Weisberg 2014; Klingele 2019). Recidivism is a binary measure, whereas change in criminal behavior is a process. Therefore, scholars have enjoined policy makers to use more nuanced indicators. The present study joins these calls by challenging the conventional approach toward the appropriate indicators of success in one variant of specialized courts: community courts (CCs). Guided by a phenomenological approach and based on in-depth interviews with Israeli CC personnel, the study seeks to uncover the various meanings that interviewees ascribed to the term "success" in individual cases, which go beyond the formal, top-down indicators of recidivism and program completion.

Many research topics lend themselves to top-down measurement, but omitting the perspectives of those most familiar with the field, who know it from the inside, is

particularly problematic in the case of criminal justice interventions aimed at solving problems. Such programs require a broad exploration of the effects these interventions have on various aspects of the participants' everyday lives. This research is part of a large-scale evaluation study of CCs in Israel. The evaluation study involves a comparison between reoffending rates of CC graduates and those of defendants of mainstream criminal courts who share comparable characteristics. In this study, we did not attempt to ascertain whether CC professionals ascribed success or effectiveness to the program as a whole; instead, we focused on their opinions regarding what the indicators of individual success should be.

COMMUNITY COURTS

CCs are similar to other problem-solving courts in that they are based on collaborative teamwork between mental health and legal actors with the shared goal of rehabilitating offenders. Like in other problem-solving courts, progress is achieved by routine judicial monitoring and frequent interactions between CC professionals. Successful program completion exempts participants from the punishment of incarceration; failure to meet program requirements leads to reassignment to the mainstream court, with the possibility of a punitive sentence. In addition to the goal shared by all problem-solving courts of addressing the root causes of crime in order to reduce reoffending, an additional goal of CCs is to improve the quality of life of the communities and the citizens' sense of safety and to enhance public trust in state authorities. To meet these goals, CCs are designed to serve the local community in accordance with its concrete needs and interests. The community is perceived as an active participant in the design and operation of these courts (Fagan and Malkin 2002). CCs involve the community in offender rehabilitation, and some also offer "walk-in" mental health and welfare services to non-offending residents.

Typically, CCs deal with low-level offenses such as shoplifting, disturbing public order, and other non-violent crimes (Connor 2021). Some CCs, however, address more serious crimes such as assault, vehicle theft, and drug-related property offenses. Some CCs have also assumed the role of local dispute-resolution hubs for non-criminal cases, particularly in small and rural communities (Lang 2011).

Theoretical Underpinnings of Community Courts

Therapeutic jurisprudence (TJ) considers the law a powerful social agent with positive and negative implications for individuals' well-being (Winick 1997). According to TJ, the courts affect people's well-being not only through their decisions but also, no less important, through the behaviors of those involved in court proceedings (Winick and Wexler 2003). TJ scholars promote the adoption of TJ practices by regular courts (mainstreaming TJ) (Spencer 2014; Wexler 2014), but, in practice, specialized courts, including CCs, are the central arena where TJ principles are implemented daily (Casey and Rottman 2000). TJ scholarship examines how judges can treat offenders "therapeutically" (Jones 2011; Kawalek 2020). For example, judges are urged to speak with defendants respectfully, engage in a

direct dialogue with defendants and encourage them, focusing on their strengths rather than failures. Judges in CCs have adopted these insights from TJ scholarship and implemented them in their courtrooms, contributing their understanding of TJ in practice to a growing knowledge base (King 2006; Jones 2011; Gal and Dancig-Rosenberg 2020).

Procedural justice (PJ) is another theoretical approach that stresses the importance of how defendants experience the justice process for their motivation to comply with court decisions and, more broadly, with the law (Tyler 1990). According to PJ, when defendants feel that their voice has been heard and that they have been treated respectfully by neutral and professional agents in a clear and transparent process, they perceive those agents as more legitimate and are more likely to comply with the outcomes (Tyler 2003). Both TJ and PJ assume that a positive experience in the criminal justice system (whether a fair process, according to PJ, or empathic treatment, according to TJ) may have a far-reaching influence on the defendants' motivation to rehabilitate (King 2009).

Another perspective that significantly influenced the development of CCs is community justice, which points to the fact that justice systems have ignored their central clients—the citizens and neighborhoods that bear the consequences of crime (Fagan and Malkin 2002). Community justice promotes partnerships between local communities and justice institutions, and CCs are a central arena where these partnerships flourish. In CCs, community representatives participate in planning and designing the justice process; they contribute to the set of rehabilitative services provided for court participants and take part in monitoring participants' behavior (Berman and Fox 2005).

Another theory that has developed outside the domain of specialized courts but that we find relevant to their vision and goal is the desistance theory. The study of desistance has focused on the individual circumstances that lead people to desist from crime (Farrington and Hawkins 1991; Shover 1996; Maruna 2001). Desistance is understood as a process rather than merely an outcome (Bushway, Thornberry, and Krohn 2003). Some scholars have distinguished between primary desistance, described as a break or hiatus in offending behavior, and secondary desistance, which is long-term non-offending accompanied by changes in the offender's identity (Maruna, Immarigeon, and LeBel 2004).

The empirical desistance literature draws on three general methodologies: criminal careers research, recidivism studies, and qualitative studies of those who lead a life of criminal activities and those who leave it. The examinations share the same retroactive perspective: they focus on those desisted from crime and inquire into the circumstances that led to their desistance. For example, researchers found associations between desistance and parenthood (Zoutewelle-Terovan et al. 2014), marriage (Doherty and Bersani 2016), stable and meaningful interpersonal relationships (Barr and Simons 2015), employment (Cauffman et al. 2017; Skardhamar and Savolainen 2014), aging (Sampson and Laub 2003), maturation (Rocque and Welsh 2014), and military service, with additional influences of race and gender (Abeling-Judge 2017). Yet evaluation studies of specialized courts have not used desistance theory, although a few scholars have suggested that such integration is desirable (Maruna 2001; Wexler 2002). Desistance theory is relevant to understanding success in CCs because, like CCs, it focuses on individuals' circumstances and well-being and regards them as conditions for desisting from crime.

Community Courts around the World

Approximately sixty CCs operate in the United States, and a few dozen in other countries, including Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, Israel, and New Zealand. As the following examples demonstrate, cultural, social, legal, and political differences between the CCs have led to variations in their focus of attention (Miller, Block, and DeVault 2020). The Red Hook Community Justice Center (RHCJC), established in 2000 in a vacant schoolhouse in Brooklyn, was designed architecturally to offer a comfortable and non-threatening environment (Berman and Adler 2018; Connor 2021). The RHCJC was the first multi-jurisdictional community court. It handles civil, family, and criminal cases by a single judge. Programs such as a youth-led teen court, a volunteer-based peacemaking program, and a housing resource center extend the courtroom, enabling the RHCJC to significantly increase the use of alternative sanctions and decrease the use of jail sentences (Lee et al. 2013; Berman and Adler 2018).

The Neighbourhood Justice Centre (NJC) in the city of Yarra (downtown Melbourne), Australia, was established in 2007 to provide innovative ways of dealing with crime and other social disorders (Ross 2015). The NJC offers a range of justice and social services and operates as part of the Magistrates' Court of Victoria, with jurisdiction to hear most criminal offenses, family violence, and other safety matters. It is also a venue for a civil and administrative tribunal dealing with residential tenancy and other civil matters (Ross 2015). The NJC has a client services team that provides treatment and referral services to persons referred through the justice processes of the center, and other social service agencies have staff located at the center (Ross 2015).

The Vancouver Downtown Community Court (DCC) was launched in 2008. Over fourteen agencies collaborate in the DCC, representing health, justice, and social services (Somers et al. 2014). The DCC hears most of the severe offenses committed within its geographic jurisdiction. Offenders are not required to plead guilty to enter the program. The DCC integrates sanctions, services, and interventions to reduce the risk of reconviction. A triage team and health, justice, and social welfare agency representatives are dedicated to working with DCC participants. Most offenders are sentenced to sanctions and supervised in the community by a probation officer. Offenders with more complex needs are assigned to a case management team (CMT). The team supports offenders who require a high level of assistance to manage significant changes related to their offense risk (Somers et al. 2014).

Community Courts in Israel

In 2014–15, the first two CCs were established in Israel. Two cities—Be'er-Sheva and Ramle—were selected to serve as sites for the pilot stage of the project because of their highly heterogeneous populations, with multiple social problems, and the openness to address these problems using innovative justice interventions (Gal and Dancig-Rosenberg 2017). In 2016, the Israeli government decided to establish CCs in each judicial district in the country. Four more CCs began operation in Tel-Aviv,

Nazareth, Haifa, and Jerusalem. In 2022, the establishment of the CCs was enshrined in law. The Israeli CC pilot project was initiated by Ashalim, a department of the Jewish Distribution Committee (a philanthropic organization founded during the First World War) in partnership with the government. It was inspired by the RHCJC in Brooklyn, New York. The Israeli pilot made some adaptations to the RHCJC model to meet the particular needs of the population. Among other differences, the Israeli model accepts defendants with more severe criminal behavior and complex needs.

The CCs were established within the local magistrates' courts. In each court, a designated multiagency team was created, consisting of a community court judge, a coordinator, a community social worker, a public prosecutor, a police prosecutor, a public defender, and a probation officer.[1] According to the new law, eligible defendants are adults who, based on their underlying problems, are likely to commit additional offenses and would face incarceration if convicted in a mainstream criminal court in the case at hand. According to the CC dataset, most CC clientele suffer from at least one chronic problem, such as addiction, mental health issues, extreme poverty, or lack of normative routine. Referrals are made only for represented defendants who were informed about the CC program, understand its terms, have agreed to join it, and are willing to plead guilty. The willingness of the prosecution to waive incarceration should the defendant complete the program successfully reflects a prioritization of the rehabilitation goal over retribution and deterrence. The underlying principle is that retribution and deterrence are secondary and that the key public interest is to reduce the defendants' dangerousness through extensive rehabilitation.

The CC process consists of an intense intervention package that takes approximately thirteen months and comprises five stages, allowing participants to achieve various milestones gradually. The first stage involves mutual acquaintance and the design of the treatment plan. The second stage focuses on establishing stability and collaboration with multiple services. In the third stage, participants begin to achieve the goals set out in the treatment plan. During the fourth stage, participants gradually learn to maintain stability independently and continue working on their treatment plan. Participants prepare for independent life in the fifth stage and eventually graduate from the program. During the process, five areas of rehabilitation are addressed for each participant: health, welfare, employment, support networks, and adjusting to a law-abiding way of life (Gal and Dancig-Rosenberg 2017). Each CC handles approximately 100 to 150 cases annually. The program's completion rate is approximately 50 percent (Gal, Dancig-Rosenberg, and Mentovich 2023).

Evaluating the Effectiveness of Community Courts

The success of CCs is typically conceptualized as their ability to reduce crime and crime-related costs and to enhance trust and a sense of PJ in participants. Therefore, studies evaluating specialized court programs have focused on these areas. Regarding

---

1. Typically, the police are authorized to press charges concerning crimes that carry a penalty of up to seven years, whereas the state public prosecution indicts for all other offenses.

crime reduction, studies have indicated that problem-solving courts can effectively reduce recidivism rates (Lowenkamp, Holsinger, and Latessa 2005; Huddleston, Marlowe, and Casebolt 2008). But empirical findings about the effectiveness of these courts are often subject to sharp criticism because of methodological flaws that undermine their reliability. Notwithstanding this reservation, most evaluation studies of CCs focusing on recidivism rates indicate a significant effect (Hornick, Kluz, and Bertrand 2011; Kilmer and Sussell 2014). For example, an evaluation of the RHCJC in Brooklyn found that the chances of being rearrested two years after being processed were 10 percent lower for CC graduates (20 percent for juveniles) than for defendants indicted for similar offenses who had been processed in other Brooklyn courts (Lee et al. 2013). Another study examined the effect of the Vancouver DCC, focusing on the high-risk subset of the population referred to it. Compared to matched offenders who received traditional court outcomes, those assigned to CMT showed a significantly greater reduction in offending (a mean reduction of 2.27 versus 1.34 offenses per person), primarily in property crimes (1.35 versus 0.55) (Somers et al. 2014).

A comparison between the Yarra NJC and a mainstream court found a similar effect of a 10 percent reduction in repeat conviction rates (Ross 2015). An evaluation study of the East of the River CC program in Washington State found a 42 percent reduced risk of program graduates being reconvicted (Westat 2012). By contrast, some studies have found no significant effect (Sviridoff et al. 2002; Jolliffe and Farrington 2009; Booth et al. 2012; Grommon, Hipple, and Ray 2017). Focusing on cost-efficiency, the RHCJC evaluation study estimated that, based on reduced victimization costs owing to reductions in recidivism, the benefits of processing cases in the RHCJC's CC outweighed its total cost by nearly two to one (Lee et al. 2013). Similar conclusions were reached for the NJC in Yarra (Morgan and Brown 2015).

Other studies examined court participants' perspectives of the procedures' fairness compared to those in mainstream courts, based on the assumption that PJ is likely to increase people's trust in the justice system. CCs were perceived as reflecting higher PJ than mainstream criminal courts and led to higher satisfaction rates among defendants (Frazer 2006; Halsey and de Vel-Palumb 2018). A qualitative study by Tyrell Connor (2019) illustrated how CC judges and personnel implement PJ principles and identified potentially problematic practices in these courts. For example, some defendants lacked opportunities to have their voices heard; some court officers demonstrated impatience, negative attitudes, and aggressive tones toward defendants; some judges paid more attention to defendants who were college students than to those who were not and were partial to the former during rulings; and, at times, some substitute judges did not uphold the principles of PJ and changed the culture of the courtroom.

Specialized courts, CCs among them, have faced criticism from various directions, including concerns about defendants' due process rights (Lane 2002; Meekins 2007; Miller 2009), net-widening (Hoffman 1999), cherry-picking defendants (Collins 2020), and overusing scarce treatment resources (Seltzer 2005). Critics have also argued that, despite the encouraging results, these courts failed to make a sea change in the carceral state. Overall, Anglo-American legal systems have continued to prioritize punitive measures over rehabilitative and reparative ones, despite the systemic use of specialized courts (Alkon 2019). Referring to attempts to go beyond the measurement of the

criminogenic effects of specialized courts, some critics pointed out the inadequacy of the police and justice system for resolving social problems such as mental health, poverty, and addictions (Akbar 2020; Simonson 2020). These critics pointed out the risks of using punitive measures to remedy welfare problems.

METHODOLOGY

The present research was based on a single case study—that of the Israeli CC program. The research question was conceptual and focused on the meaning of success rather than on whether CCs, in general, were effective. A case study approach is appropriate for addressing this type of research question. The choice to interview CC team members was based on the understanding that professionals who regularly work with participants in these courts and have worked in mainstream courts are highly suitable to offer firsthand insights about practice-based indicators of individual success. These insights have the potential to enrich future evaluation studies by pointing out the need to expand the formal, traditional indicators currently used for evaluation.

Acknowledging that the views of participants in the program and other community members about the meaning of success are also relevant, we conducted in-depth interviews with thirty-four court participants—completers and non-completers, men, and women—as well as nineteen participants' female spouses, as part of the larger evaluation study spanning the last four years. Although these views are not the focus of the present article, we mention some of them in the findings to provide a broader context. Because of space limitations, we report them generally without citing them. A comprehensive report of the views expressed by participants and their partners will be the focus of a separate article (Dancig-Rosenberg and Gal, forthcoming, 2024).

Data were collected in two waves. The first wave was part of a formative study conducted during 2016 and 2017, which examined the establishment of the CC model in Israel and its first years of operation (hereinafter, the formative study). The second wave was carried out in 2018–21 as part of an evaluation study of the Israeli CCs, which ended in 2022 (hereinafter, the evaluation study). The evaluation study includes a comparative analysis of post-sentencing recidivism rates of graduates of CCs and defendants who have had similar chances to be referred to the program but were not referred and instead were sentenced in mainstream courts, showing reduced recidivism rates of the former (Gal, Dancig-Rosenberg, and Mentovich 2023).

The qualitative component of the evaluation study included in-depth interviews with CC personnel, participants, and family members and was designed to capture their subjective perspectives and experiences. The present study focused on one of the topics discussed with CC personnel: their perception of the meaning of individual success. We conducted fifty-three in-depth interviews with forty-eight CC personnel. Some belonged to the national steering committee (consisting of representatives of the

relevant government authorities and organizations), and most were involved in the operation of the various CCs. The five interviewees who were interviewed twice (during both waves of data collection) were central actors involved in the program from its first day (two were members of the steering committee, and three were involved in the operation of these courts). During the first wave of data collection, two courts were operative: Be'er Sheva and Ramle. The second wave included data from two additional CCs: Tel-Aviv and Nazareth.[2] Overall, we were able to interview the majority of the professional staff of all four CCs operating at the time of data collection and produce a robust picture of the kaleidoscope of views voiced by Israeli professionals involved with the specialized courts regarding the meaning of success.

To obtain multiple perspectives, we interviewed various professionals involved in the operation of the CCs: court coordinators (five), defense attorneys (eight), community probation officers (eleven), prosecutors (nine), community social workers (five), and members of the national steering committee of the project (ten). Interviewees roughly reflect the diversity of CC personnel: thirteen men and thirty-five women; forty-five who were Jewish and three who were Arab; the average age was 41.5. Table 1 summarizes the roles and experiences of the various research participants, reflecting their different perspectives.

The semi-structured, in-depth interviews were based on an interview guide that included several topics: the goals of the CCs, the roles of the various stakeholders and the forms of collaboration between them, the nature of the interactions between professionals and participants in the project, the uniqueness of the model within the mainstream justice system, and current and future challenges. Special attention was paid to the question of the meaning of individual success, which is the focus of this article. Most interviews were held at the interviewees' offices; a few were conducted online by Zoom because of COVID-19 restrictions. All interviewees signed a consent form. The interviews took approximately sixty to ninety minutes each. Each interview was recorded and transcribed verbatim to maintain the authentic expressions of the interviewees. We analyzed the data based on the principles of grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin 1990). Each author read through all of the interviews and independently conducted an initial open-coding analysis. Next, the authors conducted a joint analysis of each interview and identified recurrent ideas in the interviews by iterative discussion, which led to axial codes (Creswell and Poth 1998). Further discussions and conceptual analysis led to several central themes, described below. The interviews were conducted in Hebrew, and we translated into English only the excerpts quoted in this article. We strove to make the quotes as close as possible to the original wording to reflect the authentic voices of the interviewees but maintained the interviewees' anonymity. The study was approved by the University of Haifa Institutional Review Board, and additional approvals were obtained from the relevant authorities of the interviewees' organizations.

---

2. In 2019 and 2020, two additional CCs were established—in Haifa and in Jerusalem. The six CCs currently operating represent the six judicial districts in Israel. The sample excluded the professionals involved in the operation of these two courts because they were in the early stages of operation.

TABLE 1.
Roles and experience of interviewees

	Name	Function in the program	Seniority at time of the interview	Professional experience
1	Ada	STM	From day 1 of program establishment	Head of the Counseling and Legislation Department at the Ministry of Justice
2	Dana*	Project leader and STM	From day 1	Former attorney
3	Sean*	Project leader and STM	From day 1	Head of the youth area at JDC-Ashalim
4	Ron	Chief executive officer of JDC-Ashalim	11 years in this role	Chief executive officer of DC-Ashalim
5	Hanna	STM	From day 1	Senior public defender
6	Hugh	STM	From day 1	Senior attorney, with 15 years of experience
7	Lila	STM	From day 1	District probation officer with 5 years of experience
8	Rebecca	STM	From day 1	Senior national district probation officer with 38 years of experience
9	Maya	STM	From day 1	Attorney in the Counseling and Legislation Department, with 6 years of experience
10	Tammy	In charge of rehabilitation in the CC; Joint-Ashalim	3 years	Social worker with 15 years of experience
11	Zoe	Nazareth CCC	Since the CC opened	Attorney with 13 years of experience, former defense attorney
12	Amy*	Beer-Sheva CCC	Since the CC opened	Attorney with 7 years of experience in social lawyering
13	Mike	Ramla CCC	Since the CC opened	Attorney
14	Sharon*	Tel Aviv CCC	Since the CC opened	Attorney with 16 years of experience, former prosecutor
15	Tania	Nazareth CCP	Since the CC opened	Prosecutor with 21 years of experience
16	Rachel	Beer-Sheva CCP	Since the CC opened	Prosecutor and lawyer with 16 years of experience
17	Naomi	Ramla senior CCP + Rehovot magistrate court	Since the CC opened	Prosecutor with 15 years of experience
18	Susan	Tel Aviv senior CCP + senior prosecutor in Tel Aviv criminal court	Since the CC opened	Senior prosecutor with 23 years of experience
19	Aharon	Nazareth CCP + detention hearings referee at criminal trials	Since the CC opened	Prosecutor with 7 years of experience
20	Cynthia	Tel Aviv CCP	Since the CC opened	Prosecutor and lawyer with 10 years of experience

TABLE 1. *Continued*

	Name	Function in the program	Seniority at time of the interview	Professional experience
21	Heidi	Beer-Sheva CCP	1 year	Police prosecutor with 9 years of experience
22	Zara	Ramla CCP + criminal court prosecutor	Since the CC opened	Police prosecutor and lawyer with 9.5 years of experience
23	Eric	Nazareth CCPP	1 year	Prosecutor with 7 years of experience
24	Julie	Nazareth CCDA	Since the CC opened	Defense attorney and lawyer with 15 years of experience
25	Noah*	Ramla senior CCDA	Since the CC opened	Defense attorney with 21 years of experience
26	Adam	Beer-Sheva CCDA	Since the CC opened	Attorney and lawyer with 6 years of experience
27	Emma	Beer-Sheva senior CCDA	Since the CC opened	Defense attorney with 12 years of experience
28	Mona	Beer-Sheva CCDA	5 months	Defense attorney with 10 years of experience in the youth department
29	Helen	Nazareth CCDA	Since the CC opened	Defense attorney with 13 years of experience
30	Mary-Ann	Nazareth CCDA	Since the CC opened	Defense attorney with over 20 years of experience
31	Antony	Nazareth CCDA	Since the CC opened	Defense attorney with 18 years of experience
32	Chris	Tel Aviv CCPO	4 months	Probation officer with 1 year of experience
33	Jacob	Tel Aviv CCPO	2 years	Probation officer with 3.5 years of experience
34	Judith	Ramla CCPO	13 months	Probation officer with 5 years of experience
35	Heather	Beer-Sheva CCPO	Since the CC opened	Probation officer with 11 years of experience
36	Jasmin	Tel Aviv CCPO	Since the CC opened	Probation officer with 5.5 years of experience
37	Debby	Ramla senior CCPO	Since the CC opened	Probation officer with 10 years of experience (replaced Iris)
38	Iris	Ramla senior CCPO	Since the CC opened	Probation officer with 8.5 years of experience
39	Nadia	Nazareth senior CCPO	Since the CC opened	Probation officer with 14 years of experience
40	Gavin	Tel Aviv CCPO	Since the CC opened	Probation officer with 11 years of experience
41	Nelly	Tel Aviv CCPO	1 year	Completed internship
42	Nevra	Tel Aviv CCPO	13 months	Probation officer with 4 years of experience
43	Kevin	Nazareth CCPO	Since the CC opened	Probation officer with 17 years of experience

TABLE 1. *Continued*

	Name	Function in the program	Seniority at time of the interview	Professional experience
44	Olivia	CCSW supervisor	2 years	Community social worker with 15 years of experience
45	Ian	Nazareth CCSW	Since the CC opened	Social worker with 1.5 years of experience
46	Fiona	Ramla CCSW	6 months	Community social worker with 20 years of experience
47	Gale	Ramla CCSW	18 months	Social worker with 6 years of experience
48	Naomi	Tel Aviv CCSW	3 years	Joined the CC right after graduation

Notes:
*More than one interview; STM = Steering Committee member; CCC = Community Court coordinator; CCP = Community Court prosecutor; CCPP = Community Court police prosecutor; CCDA = Community Court defense attorney; CCSW = Community Court social worker; CCPO = Community Court probation officer.

FINDINGS

Below we describe the subjective meaning assigned by interviewees to the term "success" in relation to individual participants of the Israeli CCs, what they considered to be a successful process, and satisfying outcome for an individual CC participant.[3] An overarching finding to be mentioned at the outset of this section is that we identified no patterns associating interviewees' institutional affiliation or job positions with particular views of success. According to all the interviewees, standard measures were needed to evaluate the level of success of the project as a whole, such as program completion and reduced recidivism. However, participant's success must be understood as a continuum consisting of many degrees rather than a binary concept. Each personal story of a CC client can be positioned along an axis of success. According to CC professionals, individual success is relative, multidimensional, and subjective. It is relative to the individual's starting point so that a significant change can indicate success. It is multidimensional in that it manifests in various domains of well-being, such as employment, mental health, family relations, a stable routine, and a support network. It is also subjective because different achievements are considered significant for various participants according to specific needs, circumstances, and life stories. Additionally, interviewees demonstrated that, even in cases that were formally declared unsuccessful because of program incompletion or reoffending, there were often glimmers of success along the way: positive experiences that participants cherished and learned from. Such glimmers of success may be seen as harbingers of future desistance, even when an individual participant still failed to achieve success in its formal meaning.

---

3. Interviewees expressed various perceptions about the desirable measures for evaluating the success of an entire program. These will be described in a separate publication. The present study focused only on the interviewees' understandings of the meaning of success of individual participants of the CCs.

Understanding Success on a Continuum

The picture emerging from the interviews is one of success as a continuum, ranging from non-success at one end to complete success at the other. Between the two poles are varying degrees of success, what we term the many shades of success. Focusing on the negative end of the continuum, we asked our interviewees about their understanding of the meaning of failure. Interviewees listed various indicators of failure: continued addiction, continued law breaking, aggressiveness, police contact while still in the program, lack of signs of reduced dangerousness, failure to change behavior patterns, denial of responsibility, and blaming others for the participants' situation. Julie, a defense attorney, described failure in formal terms: "Quitting the program is a failure. As long as we stay in the program, we are on a success track." Sharon, a coordinator, said: "The most difficult moment is when I realize that I want more that the defendant succeeds than he does, when it just doesn't feel good to him to tell me that he's tired of it." Five interviewees pointed out the difficulty in clearly defining failure because the result is not only completion or non-completion of the program but also a change that did or did not occur in the participant's life. Amy, a coordinator, said: "Failure is a problematic word." Noah, a defense attorney, explained: "Even the 'failing,' it depends on how they failed. There are those who didn't manage to achieve anything, there are defendants whom we didn't influence at all, usually those who withdrew after a very short time." Jasmin, a probation officer, talked about a participant who formally completed the program, but at a post-completion meeting with her, he expressed a deep sense of distrust toward the program personnel. Jasmin said: "In my view, this is problematic because something deep in his perspective didn't change . . . if someone completes the program and still comes and says something like that—I wonder whether the process is indeed a success." In other cases, signals from participants that they have not accomplished a significant inner change have led to expelling them from the program even if they did not commit further crimes. A participant who was already at the fourth stage of the program behaved aggressively and intimidatingly at a therapeutic group meeting, which led to the termination of his participation in the program because it reflected his failure to internalize behavioral norms that were expected of him at that stage.

Thirteen interviewees explicitly noted that even partial success was a success. Mona, a defense attorney, explained: "[P]eople who had a change of circumstances in their lives and were not able to take care of themselves, but who didn't have new criminal cases opened and who are still functioning." Three interviewees mentioned participants who did not complete the program but experienced some change or became less suspicious of the system. Amy, a coordinator, noted: "It's true that formally only the certificate signifies success, but there are successes among those who have reached stage 3, for example, if their degree of dangerousness has decreased." This notion also appeared in the interviews with participants who failed to complete the program and were required to leave before reaching its final stage. Some stated that they nevertheless experienced a significant change in their attitudes toward law enforcement. The positive experiences with the CC staff increased their trust in state authorities and people in general. Some even stated that, although they could not complete the

program at that point in their lives, the skills they had acquired through their participation were likely to help them in the future.

Nelly, a probation officer, talked about the need to lower expectations about the long-term prospects of the participants and interpret the term "success" given the complexities of their daily lives: "Anything long-term with our participants? No. But I say, if I choose to look at a half-full glass, did we help the guy take care of different areas? For a certain period in life … he *did* manage to stay clean, he *did* manage to be non-violent, he *did* find a job, he *has* experienced success, maybe it's good enough." Jacob, another probation officer, noted: "We try to be modest in our goals, not to change their entire lives. They have very complex lives. Small steps. Changing the world in one year is impossible, but something can be done." Six interviewees made a distinction between great and small successes. Ian, a community social worker, explained that only a few achieve a profound internal change and that the majority hold up for the duration of the program but then return to substance use: "Small success is those who have lasted for two years. Great success is those who have made a real inner change."

Success as a Relative Concept

How is it possible to determine whether a case can be declared successful when only a few fall under "complete success" or "complete failure"? Eighteen interviewees considered the answer to be individual, depending on each defendant's starting point and personal circumstances. Helen, a defense attorney, explained: "I have learned that success is a relative concept … not everyone succeeds equally." Thus, success is present when a meaningful process of change has occurred. As Mary-Ann, a defense attorney, shared, "[s]uccess is such an individual concept, it really depends on the participant and his or her needs." Nelly, a probation officer, explained that there is no expectation for the process to be perfect: "We, in the probation service, are not romantic. … I think we're in a place where we understand that there will be ups and downs … and that there can be setbacks after the end of the program." Heather, another probation officer, said: "Our clients are not perfect. They won't become an exemplar of the law-abiding citizen overnight, but I want to see that something in their perception has changed."

Four professionals described life stories of end-to-end change, participants who made a "180-degree change in all aspects of life" (Iris, a community social worker). Tania, a prosecutor, described how the change could be detected even through differences in participants' speech: "At first he would say 'they got me coming and going,' and later 'how happy I am to get up and go to work.'" But relative success does not necessarily require an end-to-end change. Referring to change in the relationship with a spouse, Emma, a defense attorney, explained that the threshold for success should be realistic. What matters is the achieved transformation: "I do not expect that a person will now have a relationship like in the movies … But once life with the man in the house becomes tolerable, the children are at home, and there is no atmosphere of violence … for me, it's a tremendous achievement. I don't think we're magicians." Interviews with participants' spouses reflected a similar sentiment. Participants' wives talked about the relief they felt having their partner present at home and participating in childcare. Many did not ask for much more and were content with this change.

One of the most common background problems of CC participants is addiction, which is extremely difficult to eradicate, as described by Aaron, a prosecutor: "We had someone successful here in the CC, and after two months of being clean, he reported falling off the wagon and using drugs once. As far as I'm concerned … he's still quite successful in that he came and reported it." Nelly, a defense attorney, argued that setting complete rehabilitation as the central and top goal of the project reflects a wrong and one-dimensional perception: "This project needs a different definition of success. Someone who's been addicted for many, many years and suddenly goes into therapy and is stabilized—this is a huge success."

Thirteen interviewees described the change in participants' relationships with family members and relatives as one of the important changes that mark the success of the process. Amy, a coordinator, explained: "We have family members who come to say thank you, we got back mom, grandpa, grandma, brother." Rachel, a prosecutor, also shared: "Suddenly you see new friendships, contacts with family members reestablished, circles that open up, eyes suddenly light up." Susan, a prosecutor, described encounters of one of the participants with his grandson, who before the program, did not know of his grandfather's existence. Debby, a probation officer, talked about a female defendant who committed violent offenses against her daughter, a ten-year-old girl: "At the graduation ceremony, the girl asked to read a letter: 'Thank you for returning my mother to me. My mother was always irritated and angry, and after she came to you, and she came here, I got my mother back, and I thank you.' It was so wonderful, and in this sense, yes, you can see the change." Four interviewees specifically described a change in relationships with spouses. Noah, a defense attorney, talked about a female participant whose spouse initially objected to her process in the CC. In time, he relented and began to show interest and involvement. At one point, he brought his mother's ring and presented it to his wife in the courtroom as a symbol of their "renewal of vows."

Sharon, a coordinator, talked about a participant who developed a deep friendship with a volunteer, a former director of the criminal department in court: "The two meet once a week, and the participant, who initially said he had no one in the world, now says he feels people care about him."

Success as a Subjective Concept

Sixteen interviewees perceived success as a personal, subjective concept that depends on the participant's life story, priorities, and needs. Therefore, each success story is different and should not be defined by an absolute achievement. For one participant, a particular achievement may be considered an individual success, whereas, for another, the same achievement might not qualify as such: "There can be many, many, shades of success" (Naomi, a community social worker). Nelly, a probation officer, pointed out that success occurs "when we see change in the areas that we defined as the central challenges for the individual." Parenting skills, for example, were particularly important for female participants in the program interviewed as part of the broader evaluation study and were mentioned as central achievements during their participation in the program.

According to Maria, a defense attorney, there is a risk in the *a priori* definition of absolute and rigid measures of success and failure because "it's very personal and can change over time." Nelly, a probation officer, suggested examining what the participants themselves defined as success for them. She mentioned a participant with multiple problems who, in her view, had not undergone a sufficient change. When she conveyed her dissatisfaction to him, he replied: "Maybe for you, what I do doesn't seem like much, but you should know that for me, what I'm going through in the program is a very significant change." The probation officer said: "It was enlightening. Being in treatment and being stabilized was a huge success for him."

Success as a Multidimensional Concept

Nineteen interviewees described success as a profound change in various areas of life. In cases of significant success, such a change included abandoning criminal life, integrating into society and the job market, and maintaining a stable and normative everyday routine. Amy, a coordinator, said: "You see that a person has something daily, a kind of daily routine that is relatively healthy, something he feels good about." Other types of significant change have also been described as a success, such as improving participants' functional abilities, acquiring life skills, and gaining tools for dealing with a variety of personal problems. Kevin, a probation officer, explained: "Someone who has never worked in his life and I see him working today—this is a success. Someone who went in and out of rehab remains sober today and shows clean tests—I can say this is a success. Someone who used to break the law daily and today has no contact with the police—it's surely a success." Eric, a prosecutor, stated: "He may trip up at one point or another ... but he'll have the tools to deal with his problems." Other indicators of success that interviewees mentioned include health and mental health treatment, acquiring education and language skills, finding housing, engaging in normative leisure activities, settling debts, changing thinking and behavior patterns, and learning to utilize public services. Chris, a probation officer, said: "The main thing is hope. This is the main thing the program gives. The program reveals their possibilities, opportunities, and talents."

The changes that participants undergo are symbolically reflected in external appearance and behavior, such as body language and manners, as described by eight interviewees. Heidi, a prosecutor, explained: "You see the defendant who shows up at first in dirty and smelly clothes. And later you see the physical change in the person." Rachel, a prosecutor, said: "First of all, you see the man, he looks different. Clean, tidy, organized, dressed respectably, speaks more clearly and pleasantly, in a comfortable and relaxed manner. ... You seem that they perceive themselves differently."

Glimmers of Success

Even in the case of participants who formally may have failed by the clearly stated indicators of the program—completing its five stages and desisting from crime—there may be partial successes along the way. Iris, a prosecutor, described a case of a repeat

offender, a drug user for many years, who was facing a high likelihood of being sentenced to prison again. According to her, even if this happened in the end, he may still have experienced significant successes in the process itself: "He experienced being valued, being told 'good job,' having been able to get out of rehab, having started working … even if he goes to jail eventually, maybe the entire year of program participation was a success in his experience." The non-completing interviewees in the evaluation study voiced these exact opinions. Many had recollections of positive and even warm encounters with the court staff, which lingered long after they dropped out of the program.

The positive experience deriving from the participants' sense of being seen, cared for, and belonging was mentioned by nine interviewees as a valuable achievement in itself, regardless of any outcome, because these experiences encouraged the participants to meet the goals set for them. Iris noted: "A defendant told me: 'I don't like to do stupid things because everyone here supports me so much…. I don't want to disappoint.'" The transformation from being invisible into being noticed by others is seen as a success in itself, irrespective of formal indicators. Mike, a coordinator, explained: "I don't see a person leaving here by slamming the door, even those who have been expelled." Zoe, a coordinator, shared: "The feeling that at some point someone believed in them will remain even if they stumble." Chris, a probation officer, stated: "Suddenly, the judge asks how are you? What do you want to say? The defendant is in shock. He sees that law enforcement and the justice system care about him. That it's not the same system they've known before, that wanted to throw them in jail and failed to see them." The sense of surprise at the willingness of state officials to help them was articulated by the participants themselves. Those interviewed in the evaluation study described how they entered the program with feelings of alienation, distrust, and suspicion toward all state authorities. They gradually discovered that in this particular program, state officials treated them with genuine care and support. Expressions such as "like a family," "parental attitude," and "like a mother (or a father) to me" were used repeatedly.

DISCUSSION: TRANSLATING MANY SHADES OF SUCCESS INTO BOTTOM-UP INDICATORS

The key finding of this research suggests that, when we think about how to measure individual success in CCs, it is worth considering not only the use of formal, top-down standardized yardsticks that are in universal use, such as reduced recidivism and the completion of the CC program. The interviewees noted that, alongside these relevant measures, others provide more nuanced indications of participants' success. Interviewees repeatedly mentioned many manifestations of success for individual participants. According to almost all the interviewees, "success" is a relative, multidimensional, and sometimes subjective term that should be assessed based on the individuals' progress from their starting point to the endpoint. These concepts seemed to overlap at times, reflecting the interconnectedness of the identified themes. Success is relative in that it should be measured in relation to the individual's starting point. But it is also subjective in that each individual assigns different importance to certain changes. Often the subjective experience of significant success overlaps with an

objective assessment of relative success, and, at other times, these views fail to align. But subjective success is important in itself because a personal success narrative can become an objective success story in the future.

The interviewees expressed doubts about how appropriate, accurate, and sufficient ethnocentric, top-down standardized measures were. These measures reflect the viewpoints of researchers and policy makers and ignore the daily realities of marginalized people who struggle with the challenges of waking up, eating a decent meal, staying sober, staying safe, and being heard. The many-sided manifestations of success described by the interviewees reflect the practice-based understanding of the meaning of success in participants' everyday life and echo the various elements that have been linked with desistance from crime (Maruna 2001; McNeill et al. 2012). The interviewees' non-adversarial and collaborative approach may explain why many of them expressed similar perceptions, irrespective of their job positions or institutional affiliations. The unique teamwork of CC professionals probably closes the gap that we expect to see between professionals who represent distinct institutions and ethos.

A notable insight of the interviewees was that, for program participants, successful program completion was only part of the overall picture. The interviewees reported that almost all participants experienced glimmers of success along the way, which presumably had a long-term influence on them, even if they failed to complete the program or completed it but recidivated later. Examples of such glimmers of success were being seen and heard by state officials or experiencing sincere care and empathy from the judge. These examples echo theories that point out the importance that individuals assign to experiencing a positive process rather than focusing only on the legal outcomes. As noted, PJ emphasizes the importance of a fair process for one's willingness to accept its outcomes and one's attitude toward decision makers (Tyler 1990). TJ stresses the importance of respectful and compassionate interactions with judges, lawyers, and police for people's overall sense of well-being, irrespective of the legal outcome (Winick and Wexler 2003; King 2006). Other glimmers of success that interviewees mentioned reach beyond the legal process per se. Examples of such glimmers of success were having a successful job interview; having a sense of belonging following active participation in a local event; or participating in vocational training for the first time. These findings suggest that any positive experience in the course of the clients' participation in the program (in or outside the courtroom) may significantly affect the participants for extended periods. The CC professionals reported that, for non-completers, the glimmers of success along the way represented better encounters with the justice system than they have ever had and a satisfying and realistic outcome. From a public policy perspective, they provided a potential for future improvement in their social functioning (Tyler 1990).

The finding about the importance of glimmers of success is helpful in considering the criticism that problem-solving courts cherry-pick defendants most likely to rehabilitate, because it suggests that there are benefits in expanding the eligibility criteria. The Israeli model is inclusive and accepts those who, in many other jurisdictions, would not be admitted to a specialized program: people with complex life circumstances and often a significant criminal record. Not surprisingly, approximately half of them complete the program, a rate that our interviewees accepted as expected and reasonable. The fact that the other half—the non-completers—had meaningful

positive experiences that are likely to improve their future social behavior might convince other problem-solving courts to reconsider their tight eligibility criteria and be willing to accept a higher rate of non-completers.

According to our interviewees, success should not be measured only in absolute terms reflecting mainstream evaluation approaches. Although the ideal outcome for the CC is to achieve as many stories of full success as possible, manifested in program completion and desistance from crime, forms of partial success, which are more realistic goals for participants, are nevertheless important in evaluating individual success in the program. Governments and policy makers have the authority and responsibility to set the threshold for defining what a successful program is. In some countries like England, Scotland, Ireland, Canada, and Australia, the threshold for success in drug courts is defined based on "harm reduction" or "harm minimization" rather than the American requirement that tilts toward total abstinence. Some jurisdictions are willing to accept ongoing, albeit reduced, criminality as long as court participants use drugs less or engage in safer drug-use behaviors (Nolan 2009, 2010). The present study reflects professional views that are somewhat closer to the "harm reduction" philosophy typical of common law jurisdictions outside the United States but offers further suggestions about the desired improvements in the daily functioning of participants. Based on the insights of our interviewees, we argue that displays of relative, subjective, and multidimensional success should be counted in evaluating the program, even when reduced criminality is only moderately achieved. This insight may apply beyond the domain of CCs to other specialized courts that share a similar ethos of providing holistic intervention programs to address the root causes of recidivism. Evaluation studies in CCs and other specialized courts should include multiple well-being indicators beyond recidivism and program completion.

The contribution of this study is twofold. First, an in-depth understanding of the various manifestations of success in problem-solving courts goes beyond the "what works" discourse to include more nuanced evaluation studies. Inspired by calls to develop indicators that capture more than recidivism, this study takes recent recommendations by scholars one step forward. Cecelia Klingele (2019, 817) suggested adopting "markers of desistance" that follow patterns of escalation or reduction of offending behavior that individuals display over time but added that these markers "will still fail to capture many of the more holistic ways in which the pro-social progress of those entangled in the criminal justice system might be measured." Our suggestion fills this gap. Based on our interviewees' firsthand insights, we recommend developing well-being indicators for specialized courts that capture significant processes of change not manifested in the transformation of criminal behavior patterns. Such well-being indicators can be based, for example, on reports on substance use, employment, professional training, medical needs, childcare difficulties, and social welfare assistance. Some of these indicators are already being used but have so far not been connected with evaluating criminal justice interventions. Using these indicators to measure the success of problem-solving courts may help answer the criticism that these courts use (or spend) scarce treatment resources, which could be allocated to those in need who did not break the law. The CC model assumes that only with the threat of a criminal penalty can program clientele embrace the help they receive. Such indicators may help prove or

refute this allegation by comparing similar indicators regarding clients of non-criminal treatment programs struggling with similar problems.

We do not argue that outcomes related to personal well-being should replace the criminological measures of recidivism and imprisonment. Rather, we suggest taking into account the unified position emerging from a significant portion of professionals playing various roles in the operation of the Israeli CCs. According to this practice-based position, even if specialized courts can only show minor achievements in reduced recidivism, improved well-being may be crucial in evaluating such programs. Without looking at the broader picture of the court clientele's overall well-being, the raison d'être of these courts, which is to address the root causes of crime, cannot be effectively evaluated.[4] This article suggests that well-being indicators must not be overlooked when conducting the cost-benefit analysis of these courts and evaluating the criticism leveled against them regarding their contributions. With the problem of net-widening collateral damages, one must also consider the broader social, behavioral, and psychological benefits that these programs offer to the participants and their family members.

The second contribution of the study derives from its conceptual dialog with desistance theory. The indicators of success identified by the study interviewees are similar to those named in the desistance literature as empirically based predictors of desistance, such as stable relationships with family members and employment. The present study uncovers the connections between the dynamics occurring in justice responses to crime (in this case, CCs) and desistance. But whereas desistance scholarship considers desistance as its starting point for theoretical and empirical analysis, this study points out various milestones in progress toward desistance (a destination that some CC participants may never reach) as important when evaluating the program. Study interviewees also revealed other measures of success that have received little attention in the desistance literature, such as positive experiences that offenders accumulate with justice professionals (Maruna 2001), which may act as additional catalysts or cornerstones for a process of desistance (Wexler 2002).

Study Limitations

One limitation of the study is that it focuses mainly on professionals' perspectives and thus is vulnerable to criticism about reflecting the biased views of those managing the program. Admittedly, exploring the opinions held by adversarial legal actors about the activity of CCs could provide instructive insights into how a non-adversarial program is accepted within the mainstream adversarial criminal justice system. Further examinations exploring the perceptions of policy makers, law enforcement agents, and the public about CCs are needed. Based on phenomenological epistemology, this study had a different goal: to capture the subjective views of those involved in the operation of CCs about the meaning of individual success in the program. The interviewees, who had close familiarity with the program (and many were equally familiar with the mainstream criminal justice

---

4. The authors are currently involved in a large evaluation study of the Israeli CCs, which includes the key element of comparing recidivism rates of community court participants with an equivalent control group of defendants processed through the mainstream courts. Surveys and in-depth interviews with program participants and their family members as well as archival data from their case files provide additional information about their overall well-being in the areas discussed in this study. This will be reported in a separate article.

system), were strategically situated to provide detailed accounts of the researched phenomenon. We did not seek their opinions about whether the CCs were successful as a whole, a question that requires a robust and unbiased examination.

The fact that professionals representing various and sometimes conflicting organizational cultures expressed similar views about the meaning of individual success validates and strengthens our findings. Generally, the dominant message of the vast majority of interviewees concerned the need to expand the checklists for evaluating success. Even prosecutors, who typically represent notions of public safety, retribution, and deterrence, shared the sentiment expressed by defense attorneys and other professionals that success should not be measured only through the lens of recidivism and formal completion. The research adopted a bottom-up approach and sought to capture the subjective views of those familiar with the program. We enriched the data by making short references to general opinions voiced by the participants themselves and their female spouses. To capture the phenomenon in its entirety, it is necessary to fully account for the participants and family members who have firsthand experience with the program and the meaning of individual success. This article provides a separate perspective of professionals based on multiple and varied cases, some more positive than others.

The study falls short of providing a broad perspective of other community members with a stake in the program, such as volunteers, employers, crime victims, and neighbors. The very logic of CCs is that they function in collaboration with the communities in which they are located. A true participatory model requires a decision-making process in which "goals and/or strategies are decided together through a deliberative process between different groups" (Malkin 2009, 145). How these stakeholders understand the meaning of individual success is relevant to guiding policy makers in assessing these courts (Fagan and Malkin 2002). Future studies focusing on the views of community members about the basic principles underlying the problem-solving courts operating in their midst are highly desirable (Dancig-Rosenberg and Dixon, forthcoming, 2025).

Another possible concern relates to the degree of transferability of the study, which examined Israeli CCs. The Israeli criminal justice system is similar to most Anglo-American ones in that it is adversarial, managerial, and overburdened (Friedmann 1975). Like some Western countries and unlike the United States, Israeli citizens enjoy comprehensive public health and social welfare systems, which provide subsidized social, mental, and physical health services to all. The CC program utilized these services and helped make them particularly accessible to its participants. In this sense, the Israeli case study provides a unique example of a program that, on the one hand, grew out of an American model (the RHCJC in Brooklyn, New York) but, on the other hand, shares some characteristics with problem-solving courts in other jurisdictions that adopted the harm reduction philosophy (Nolan 2009, 2010). The views of program professionals about the meaning of individual success can therefore be relevant to problem-solving court programs in the United States and elsewhere.

We recognize, and, to some extent, even justify, criticism arguing that law enforcement systems have assumed roles that comprehensive public welfare and health systems should play. This criticism has recently received increased public attention, as reflected by some abolitionists (Simonson 2020). Notwithstanding the dispute about the desired level of government responsibility for citizens' well-being, our findings

suggest that, as long as specialized courts strive to improve the overall well-being of their participants—if not as an independent goal, at least as a secondary goal to achieve the primary one of reducing recidivism—evaluation studies might benefit from measuring indicators that correspond to the goal of enhancing well-being. Moreover, as known, desistance could be, and often is, a long process that does not happen overnight. Therefore, even if desistence is not yet achieved, enhancing participants' well-being might accelerate processes of desistence and increase their probability down the road, thus potentially contributing to recidivism reduction in the longer run. Utilizing measurable well-being indicators in evaluation studies can help track such changes.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study have practical implications for how specialized courts should be evaluated. Our findings suggest that, in addition to measuring programs' completion rates and participants' recidivism (such as number of subsequent offenses, offense severity, and time to first offense), evaluation studies should use other well-being indicators to assess the individual impact of the program on all participants, completers as well as non-completers. These include family and social connections, positive encounters with government agencies, employment status, mental health, active community involvement, addictions, and a stable daily routine. To measure the changes in these aspects, there is a need to develop research instruments that directly examine the level of their attainment.

By making the connection between community court evaluation and desistance theory, we pointed out that scholarship relating to problem-solving courts should take into account the desistance framework. Problem-solving courts aim to address the root causes of crime and seek to accelerate processes that contribute to desistance. The present study considered the steps along the way to desistance and raised the possibility of even designating processes that do not deliver desistance at the end of the legal process as successful. The study does not suggest that common measures of recidivism and completion rates are redundant or unimportant. On the contrary, these are crucial standards for evaluating the effectiveness of various programs in reducing crime and enhancing public safety, which is the distinct goal of criminal law. At the same time, the study stressed the importance of the additional outcomes identified as complementary measures of the success of specialized courts. Using a detailed and diverse set of indicators may help identify programs where the criminogenic outcomes (measured by recidivism and imprisonment) dramatically differ from well-being outcomes (measured based on the indicators identified here). For example, there may be programs demonstrating only little measurable reduced recidivism but where participants report positive experiences and significant changes. Other programs may lead to reduced recidivism, but personal indicators of well-being have not changed. In both cases, the multilayered understanding of success is an instrument to detect anomalies and reach informed decisions about the efficiency of certain programs and the justification for their various components. Without developing new indicators and implementing them as part of the evaluation of criminal justice interventions, valuable information remains in the dark and ignored by decision makers.

REFERENCES

Abeling-Judge, David. 2017. "Examining the Impact and Changing Nature of Social Influences of Desistance from Crime and General Offending." PhD diss., Northwestern University. https://doi.org/10.17760/d20202299.

Akbar, Amna. A. 2020. "An Abolitionist Horizon for (Police) Reform." *California Law Review* 108: 1781–1846. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3670952.

Alkon, Cynthia. 2019. "Have Problem-Solving Courts Changed the Practice of Law?" *Cardozo Journal of Conflict Resolution* 21: 597–624.

Barr, Ashley Brooke, and Ronald R. Simons. 2015. "Different Dimensions, Different Mechanisms? Distinguishing Relationship Status and Quality Effects on Desistance." *Journal of Family Psychology* 29, no. 3: 360–70. https://doi.org/10.1037/fam0000079.

Berman, Greg, and Julian Adler. 2018. "Toward Misdemeanor Justice: Lessons from New York City." *Boston University Law Review* 98, no. 3: 981–98.

Berman, Greg, and John Feinblatt. 2001. "Problem-solving Courts: A Brief Primer." *Law & Policy* 23, no. 2: 125–40. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9930.00107.

Berman, Greg, and Aubrey Fox. 2005. "Justice in Red Hook." *Justice System Journal* 26, no. 1: 77–90. https://doi.org/10.1080/0098261X.2005.10767739.

Booth, Lucy, Adam Altoft, Rachel Dubourg, Miguel Gonçalves, and Catriona Mirrlees-Black. 2012. *North Liverpool Community Justice Centre: Analysis of Re-Offending Rates and Efficiency of Court Processes.* https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/217393/liverpool-community-centre.pdf.

Bushway, Shawn D., Terence P. Thornberry, and Marvin D. Krohn. 2003. "Desistance as a Developmental Process: A Comparison of Static and Dynamic Approaches." *Journal of Quantitative Criminology* 19, no. 2: 129–53. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315089256-18.

Casey, Pamela, and David B. Rottman. 2000. "Therapeutic Jurisprudence in the Courts." *Behavioral Sciences & the Law* 18, no. 4: 445–57. https://doi.org/10.1002/1099-0798(2000)18:4<445::aid-bsl371>3.0.co;2-j.

Cauffman, Elizabeth, Adam Fine, April G. Thomas, and Kathryn C. Monahan. 2017. "Trajectories of Violent Behavior among Female and Males." *Child Development* 88, no. 1: 41–54. https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12678.

Collins, Erin R. 2020. "The Problem of Problem-solving Courts." *University of California Davis Law Review* 54: 1573–1630.

Connor, Tyrell A. 2019. "Legitimation in Action: An Examination of Community Courts and Procedural Justice." *Journal of Crime and Justice* 42, no. 2: 161–83. https://doi.org/10.1080/0735648x.2018.1506708.

—— 2021. "Community Courts: Restoring the Community One Case at a Time." In *Taking Problem-solving Courts to Scale: Diverse Applications of the Specialty Court Model*, edited by Eileen M. Ahlin and Anne S. Douds, 141–62. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

Creswell, John W., and Cheryl N. Poth. 1998. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Designs.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Custer, Sarah., Amanda B. Cissner, and Rachel Finkelstein. 2008. "Public Perceptions of Neighbourhood Quality of Life and Safety in Five New York City Communities: Results from Operation Data, 2004–2005." *Center for Court Innovation.* https://www.courtinnovation.org/sites/default/files/op_data_report1_08_08%5B1%5D.pdf.

Dancig-Rosenberg, Hadar, and Peter Dixon. Forthcoming, 2025. "'Justice of Our Own': Holistic Indicators of Success in the Red Hook Community Justice Center in NYC." Vanderbilt Law Review.

Dancig-Rosenberg, Hadar, and Tali Gal. Forthcoming, 2024. "Success Stories in community courts: listening to paticipants' voices." Cardozo Journal of Conflict Resolution.

Davis, Kevin E., Benedict Kingsbury, and Sally Engle Merry. 2012. "Indicators as a Technology of Global Governance." *Law & Society Review* 46, no. 1: 71–104.

Doherty, Elaine Eggleston, and Bianca E. Bersani. 2016. "Understanding the Mechanisms of Desistance at the Intersection of Race, Gender, and Neighborhood Context." *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 53, no. 5: 681–710. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022427816632573.

Fagan, Jeffrey, and Victoria Malkin. 2002. "Theorizing Community Justice through Community Courts." *Fordham Urban Law Review* 30, no. 3: 897–954.

Farrington, David P., and J. David Hawkins. 1991. "Predicting Participation, Early Onset and Later Persistence in Officially Recorded Offending." *Criminal Behavior and Mental Health* 1, no. 1: 1–33. https://doi.org/10.1002/cbm.1991.1.1.1.

Frazer, M. Somjen. 2006. "The Impact of the Community Court Model on Defendant Perceptions of Fairness." *Center for Court Innovation*. www.courtinnovation.org/sites/default/files/Procedural_Fairness.pdf.

Friedmann, Daniel. 1975. "Infusion of the Common Law into the Legal System of Israel." *Israel Law Review* 10, no. 3: 324–77. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0021223700005306.

Gal, Tali, and Hadar Dancig-Rosenberg. 2017. "Characterizing Community Courts." *Behavioral Science and the Law* 35, nos. 5–6: 523–39. https://doi.org/10.1002/bsl.2310.

——. 2020. "I Am Starting to Believe in the Word 'Justice'": Lessons from an Ethnographic Study on Community Courts." *American Journal of Comparative Law* 68, no. 2: 376–411.

Gal, Tali, Hadar Dancig-Rosenberg, and Tali Mentovich. 2023. "An Evaluation Study of Community Courts in Israel: A Final Report" (in Hebrew).

Gottfredson, Denise C., Stacy S. Najaka, Brooke W. Kearley, and Carlos M. Rocha. 2006. "Long-term Effects of Participation in the Baltimore City Drug Treatment Court: Results from an Experimental Study." *Journal of Experimental Criminology* 2, no. 1: 67–98. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11292-005-5128-8.

Grommon, Eric, Natalie Kroovand Hipple, and Bradley Ray. 2017. "An Outcome Evaluation of the Indianapolis Community Court." *Criminal Justice Policy Review* 28, no. 3: 220–37. https://doi.org/10.1177/0887403415573774.

Hakuta, Justin, Vishtasp Soroushian, and Dana Kralstein. 2008. "Testing the Impact of the Midtown Community Court: Updating Outcomes a Decade Later." *Center for Court Innovation*. https://www.courtinnovation.org/sites/default/files/Midtown_Downtown.pdf.

Halsey, Mark, and Melissa de Vel-Palumbo. 2018. "Courts as Empathic Spaces: Reflections on the Melbourne Neighbourhood Justice Centre." *Griffith Law Review* 27, no. 2: 182–201. https://doi.org/10.1080/10383441.2018.1500081.

Hoffman, Morris B. 1999. "Drug Court Scandal." *North Carolina Law Review* 78: 1437–1534.

Hornick, Joseph P., Karolina Kluz, and Lorne D. Bertrand. 2011. "An Evaluation of Yukon's Community Wellness Court". https://prism.ucalgary.ca/handle/1880/107424.

Huddleston, C. West, Douglas B. Marlowe, and Rachel Casebolt. 2008. "Painting the Current Picture: A National Report Card on Drug Courts and Other Problem-Solving Court Programs in the United States." *National Drug Court Institute*. https://www.ndci.org/sites/default/files/nadcp/PCP%20Report%20FINAL.PDF.

Jolliffe, Darrick, and David P. Farrington. 2009. "Initial Evaluation of Reconviction Rates in Community Justice Initiatives." Research Summary no. 9. *Ministry of Justice*. http://mws73973.mws3.csx.cam.ac.uk/people/academic_research/david_farrington/commjmoj.pdf.

Jones, Michael D. 2011. "Mainstreaming Therapeutic Jurisprudence into the Traditional Courts: Suggestions for Jdges and Practitioners." *Phoenix Law Review* 5: 753–76.

Kawalek, Anna. 2020. "A Tool for Measuring Therapeutic Jurisprudence Values during Empirical Research." *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry* 71: 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijlp.2020.101581.

Kilmer, Beau, and Jesse Sussell. 2014. *Does San Francisco's Community Justice Center Reduce Criminal Recidivism?* San Francisco: Rand Corporation. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR735.html.

King, Michael S. 2006. "The Therapeutic Dimension of Judging: The Example of Sentencing." *Journal of Judicial Administration* 16, no. 2: 92–105.

—— 2009. *Solution-Focused Judging Bench Book*. Melbourne:Australasian Institute of Judicial Administration. https://aija.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2007/07/SFJ%20BB.pdf.

Kleinfeld, Joshua, and Hadar Dancig-Rosenberg. 2022. "Social Trust in Criminal Justice: A Metric." *Notre Dame Law Review* 98: 815–84. https://scholarship.law.nd.edu/ndlr/vol98/iss2/6/.

Klingele, Cecelia. 2019. "Measuring Change." *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* 109, no. 4: 769–817.

Lane, Eric. 2002. "Due Process and Problem-solving Courts." *Fordham Urban Law Journal* 30: 955–1026. https://ir.lawnet.fordham.edu/ulj/vol30/iss3/2.

Lang, Julius. 2011. "What Is a Community Court?: How the Model Is Being Adapted across the United States." *Center for Court Innovation.* https://perma.cc/MG6D-XH8B.

Lee, Cynthia G., Fred L. Cheesman, David B. Rottman, Rachel Swaner, Suvi Lambson, Mike Rempel, and Ric Curtis. 2013. A Community Court Grows in Brooklyn: A Comprehensive Evaluation of the Red Hook: Community Justice Center Final Report. *National Center for State Courts.* https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/community-court-grows-brooklyn-comprehensive-evaluation-red-hook.

Lowenkamp, Christopher T., Alexander M. Holsinger, and Edward J. Latessa. 2005. "Are Drug Courts Effective: A Meta-analytic Review." *Journal of Community Corrections* 15, no. 1: 5–11.

Malkin, Victoria. 2009. "Problem-Solving in Community Courts: Who Decides the Problem?" In *Problem-Solving Courts: Justice for the Twenty-First Century?*, edited by Paul Higgins and Mitchell B. Mackinem, 139–59. Westport, CT: Praeger.

Maruna, Shadd. 2001. "Making Good: How Ex-Offenders Reform and Reclaim Their Lives." *American Psychological Association.* https://doi.org/10.1037/10430-000.

Maruna, Shadd, Russ Immarigeon, and Thomas P. LeBel. 2004. "Ex-offender Reintegration: Theory and Practice." *After Crime and Punishment: Pathways to Offender Reintegration*, edited by Shadd Maruna and Russ Immarigeon, 21–44. London: Willan. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781843924203.

McNeill, Fergus, Stephen Farrall, Claire Lightowler, and Shadd Maruna. 2012. "How and Why People Stop Offending: Discovering Desistance." *Insights Evidence Summary to Support Social Services in Scotland.* https://eprints.gla.ac.uk/79860/1/79860.pdf.

McNeil, Dale E., and Renee L. Binder. 2007. "Effectiveness of a Mental Health Court in Reducing Criminal Recidivism and Violence." *American Journal of Psychiatry* 164, no. 9: 1395–1403. https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ajp.2007.06101664.

Meekins, Tamar M. 2007. "Risky Business: Criminal Specialty Courts and the Ethical Obligations of the Zealous Criminal Defender." *Berkeley Journal of Criminal Law* 12: 75–126.

Merry, Sally. 2011. "Measuring the World: Indicators, Human Rights, and Global Governance." *Current Anthropology* 52: 83–95.

Miller, Eric J. 2009. "Drugs, Courts, and the New Penology." *Stanford Law & Policy Review* 20, no. 2: 417–62.

Miller, Monica K., Lauren M. Block, and Alicia DeVault. 2020. "Problem-solving Courts in the United States and around the World: History, Evaluation, and Recommendations." *Advances in Psychology and Law* 5: 301–71. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-54678-6_9.

Moore, Marlee E., and Virginia Aldige Hiday. 2006. "Mental Health Court Outcomes: A Comparison of Re-Arrest and Re-Arrest Severity between Mental Health Court and Traditional Court Participants." *Law and Human Behavior* 30, no. 6: 659–74. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10979-006-9061-9.

Morgan, Anthony, and Rick Brown. 2015. "Estimating the Costs Associated with Community Justice." *Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice* 507: 1–12. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology.

Nolan, James. 2009. *Legal Accents, Legal Borrowing: The International Problem-Solving Court Movement.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

——. 2010. "Harm Reduction and the American Difference: Drug Treatment and Problem-Solving Courts in Comparative Perspective." *Journal of Health Care Law and Policy* 13: 31–48.

Rocque, Michael, and Brandin C. Welsh. 2014. "Offender Rehabilitation from a Maturation/Biosocial Perspective." In *The Routledge International Handbook of Biosocial Criminology*, edited by DeLisi Matt and Michaek G. Vaughn, 501–15. London: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315858449-34.

Ross, Stuart. 2015. "Evaluating Neighbourhood Justice: Measuring and Attributing Outcomes for a Community Justice Program." *Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice* 499: 1–8. https://search.informit.org/doi/10.3316/informit.337689468528090.

Sampson, Robert J., and John H. Laub. 2003. "Life-course Desisters? Trajectories of Crime among Delinquent Boys Followed to Age 70." *Criminology* 41, no. 3: 555–92. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-9125.2003.tb00997.x.

Scott, James C. 2008. *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Seltzer, Tammy. 2005. "Mental Health Courts: A Misguided Attempt to Address the Criminal Justice System's Unfair Treatment of People with Mental Illnesses." *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law* 11, no. 4: 570–86.

Shover, Neal. 1996. *Great Pretenders: Pursuits and Careers of Persistent Thieves.* New York: Westview Press.

Simonson, Jocelyn. 2020. "Police Reform through a Power Lens." *Yale Law Journal* 130: 778–860. https://brooklynworks.brooklaw.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2253&context=faculty.

Skardhamar, Torbjorn, and Jukka Savolainen. 2014. "Changes in Criminal Offending around the Time of Job Entry: A Study of Employment and Desistance." *Criminology* 52: 263–91. https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-9125.12037.

Somers, Julian M., Akm Moniruzzaman, Stefanie N. Rezansoff, and Michelle Patterson. 2014. "Examining the Impact of Case Management in Vancouver's Downtown Community Court: A Quasi-Experimental Design." *PloS one* 9, no. 3: e90708. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0090708.

Spencer, Pauline. 2014. "From Alternative to the New Normal: Therapeutic Jurisprudence in the Mainstream." *Alternative Law Journal* 39, no. 4: 222–26. https://doi.org/10.1177/1037969X1403900404.

Strauss Anselm L., and Juliet Corbin. 1990. *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Sviridoff, Michele, David B. Rottman, Rob Weidner, Fred Cheesman, Richard Curtis, Randall Hansen, and Brian J. Ostrom. 2002. "Dispensing Justice Locally: The Impacts, Costs and Benefits of the Midtown Community Court." *Center for Court Innovation.* https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/196397.pdf.

Tyler, Tom R. 1990. *Why People Obey the Law.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

—— 2003. "Procedural Justice, Legitimacy, and the Effective Rule of Law." *Crime and Justice* 30: 283–357. https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/10.1086/652233.

Weisberg, Robert. 2014. "Meanings and Measures of Recidivism." *Southern California Law Review* 87: 785–804.

Westat. 2012. "East of the River Community Court (ERCC) Evaluation." *DC Courts.* https://www.dccourts.gov/sites/default/files/matters-docs/ERCC-Evaluation-Report.pdf.

Wexler, David B. 2002. "Robes and Rehabilitation: How Judges Can Help Offenders 'Make Good'." *Victorian Bar News* 123: 27–31.

—— 2014. "New Wine on New Bottles: The Need to Sketch Therapeutic Jurisprudence Code of Proposed Criminal Processes and Practices." *Arizona Summit Law Review* 7: 463–80.

Winick, Bruce J. 1997. "The Jurisprudence of Therapeutic Jurisprudence." *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law* 3, no. 1: 184–206. https://doi.org/10.1037/1076-8971.3.1.184.

Winick, Bruce J., and David B. Wexler. 2003. *Judging in a Therapeutic Key: Therapeutic Jurisprudence and the Courts.* Durham, NC: Caroline Academic Press.

Zoutewelle-Tevoran, Mioara, Victor van der Geest, Aart Liefbroer, and Catrien Bijleveld. 2014. "Criminality and Family Formation: Effects of Marriage and Parenthood on Criminal Behavior for Men and Women." *Crime and Delinquency* 60: 1209–34. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011128712441745.