

Why and How a Swift, Certain, and Fair Sanctions Pilot Program Involving High/Risk Needs Probationers Needs to Be Assessed

CACJ's 6th Annual Training Conference

Presented by:

William J. Sabol, GSU

John P. Prevost, GSU

Miranda L. Baumann, GSU

September 29, 2021

Overview

- Three presentations covering GSU's plans and efforts to evaluate the Safe, Certain, and Fair (SCF) Pilot Program involving the Department of Community Supervision and four pilot Accountability Courts.
 - 1. Evaluation design;
 - 2. Early observations on the pilot;
 - 3. Prior research and implications for the pilot.

SCF Program

- Bureau of Justice Assistance- (BJA-) funded effort (FY2019 solicitation).
- BJA's aim for the SCF is to reduce recidivism and thereby crime, as part of a comprehensive violent crime reduction strategy.
- Focus on probationers:
 - 4.5MN persons; ~2MN exit and about half are not successful exits.
 - Use the swift, certain, and fair principles.

SCF Program

- SCF principles:
- **Swiftness**—respond to behavior promptly so that offenders connect the response to their behaviors.
- **Certainty**—ensure that sanctions are applied with consistency and predictability.
- **Fairness**—make sanctions proportionate to negative behavior.

SCF Program

- SCF literature provides support for the SCF principles, <https://scfcenter.org/bja/annotated-scf-literature-review/>
- Hawaii's "HOPE" Project: SCF participants were 2.5 times as likely to succeed and 3.7 times as likely to receive early termination.
- HOPE II: SCF participants had 57% fewer new drug charges and were 52% less likely to be returned to prison.
- But: HOPE replicates in four mainland counties showed no differences.

SCF Program

- Criminal Justice Coordinating Council of GA led the proposal effort with the Council of Accountability Court Judges, the Department of Community Supervision, and Georgia State University.
- CJCC awarded funds for a four-year SCF pilot project.
- Pilot designed to test SCF interventions in four GA judicial circuits.
 - Aims to establish strong collaboration and partnerships between DCS and ACs;
 - Expand AC capacities to accept probationers;
 - Refer probationers as alternative to custodial treatment.

SCF Pilot: Organization

- Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (CJCC): Administrative entity.
- Department of Community Services (DCS): Referral entity; supervision services.
- Council of Accountability Court Judges (CACJ): Subject matter specialists; liaison with pilot courts.
- Pilot Accountability Court Circuits (ACs): Review, accept, and deliver AC services.
- Georgia State University (GSU): Local evaluator.

SCF-AC Circuits & Courts

Dougherty (1)

Dougherty MH/SA

Northeastern (4)

Dawson Co. HELP (MH) /
Dawson Co. Tx Court (Drug/ DUI)

Hall Co. Drug Court /
Hall Co. HELP Court w/ Veterans' Track

Lookout Mountain (2)

Drug Court /
MH Court

Eastern (2)

Chatham Co. Drug Court w/ Veterans Division
Chatham Co. MH Court

SCF-AC Courts: Selection Criteria

- Quantitative:
 - Number of probationers with SA/MH needs who were at least moderate risk.
 - Number revoked as a secondary consideration.
- Qualitative considerations:
 - Courts' adherence to CACJ principles and practices and willingness to participate as pilot courts.

SCF-Target population

- Probationers with substance use or mental health disorders, whose
- Dynamic risk levels (DCS) have increased during the past six months, or
- Who are at risk of having probation revoked and being sanctioned to a custodial treatment option—e.g., RSAT, jail/prison.

SCF-Target population: Triggering events

- New arrest;
- Failure on a prior placement in a Day Reporting Center (DRC);
- Successive failures on DCS-administered drug test screens;
- Outcome of a judicial hearing.

SCF-Target population: Enrollment goals

- 270 total new entrants from DCS referrals; about 30 per year per circuit, or about 7-8 per quarter per circuit.
- Original plan:

Table 1. Probationer enrollment and reporting plan by enrollment quarter

Target number of enrollments per quarter per AC pilot site; expected duration of AC program is 18 months.

	Year 1				Year 2				Year 3				Year 4				
YR/QTR:	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Totals
Cohort:	y1c1	y1c2	y1c3	y1c4	y2c1	y2c2	y2c3	y2c4	y3c1	y3c2	y3c3	y3c4					
AC1				7.5	7.5	7.5	7.5	7.5	7.5	7.5	7.5	7.5					67.5
AC2				7.5	7.5	7.5	7.5	7.5	7.5	7.5	7.5	7.5					67.5
AC3				7.5	7.5	7.5	7.5	7.5	7.5	7.5	7.5	7.5					67.5
AC4				7.5	7.5	7.5	7.5	7.5	7.5	7.5	7.5	7.5					67.5
Total enrolled per quarter				30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30					270
Cumulative total				30	60	90	120	150	180	180	180	180	150	120	90	60	

SCF Pilot-Evaluation Components

- Process: What was planned and what was implemented?
- Outcome: What progress are pilot participants making in their assigned ACs?
- Impact: Did AC participation improve outcomes compared to “business as usual”?
 - Effects
 - Costs and benefits (effects)
- Sustainability: Can and should the SCF be expanded, and if so, what would be required?

SCF Pilot-Evaluation Research Questions

- Process evaluation: Core question →
 - To what extent was the pilot implemented as designed?
 - Referral and acceptance practices; services delivered; timeliness and appropriateness of sanctions and rewards.
- Implemented as designed:
 - Does not mean “no modifications” but that modifications are consistent with SCF goals and objectives.
 - Means that the intervention needs to “stable” for a period of time to measure what is delivered.
 - Leads to the question: What were the processes leading to a stable SCF intervention?
 - Allows for variation across circuits in SCF practices.

SCF Pilot-Evaluation Research Questions

- Outcome evaluation: Core question →
 - What short-term, intermediate- and longer-run outcomes were achieved?
 - Several outcomes to be measured, including measures of progress through AC phases, sanctionable behaviors and sanctions, perceived fairness, successes and failures.
- Process & Outcome Evaluations: Primarily descriptive studies that will not make inferences about the impacts of the SCF.

SCF Pilot-Evaluation Research Questions

- Impact evaluation: Core questions →
 - Did the SCF “cause” or lead to improved outcomes? And
 - Was the SCF cost-beneficial?
 - Primary outcome to be measured is recidivism.
 - Recidivism measures: violations, re-arrest, revocations; by severity (e.g., type of behavior, offense); by duration (time to event); by frequency or number of events within a specified period.
 - Other outcomes (depending upon data) may include employment, continued treatment.

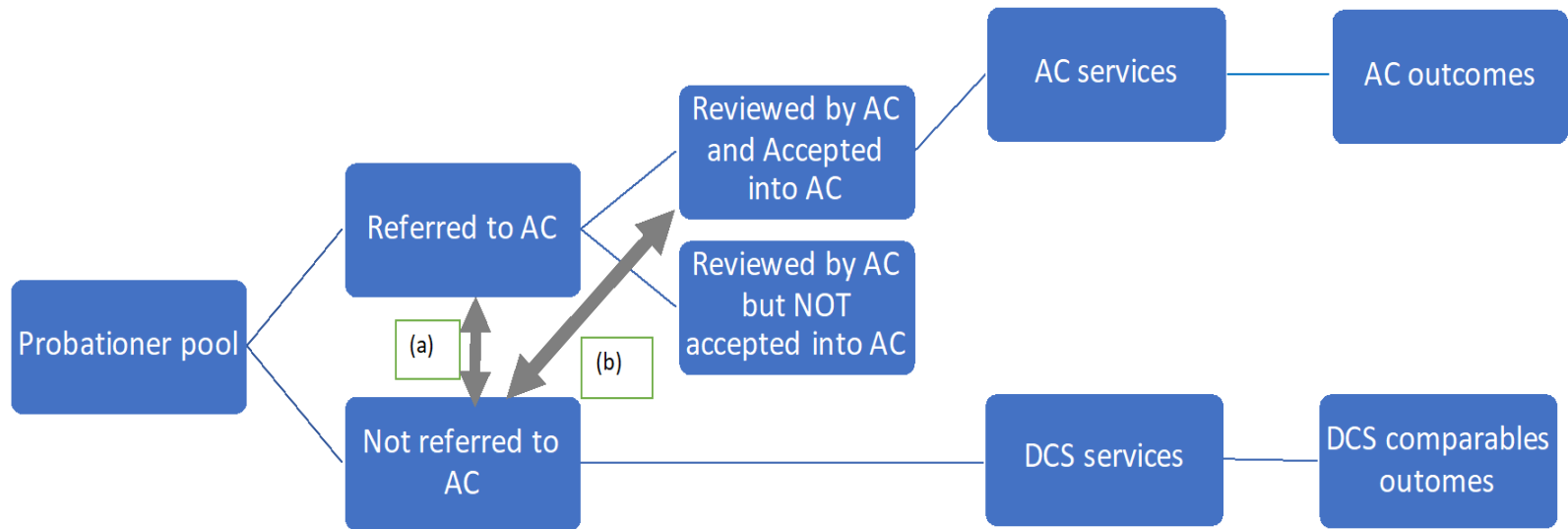
SCF Pilot-Impact Evaluation Design

- Quasi-experimental design: Random assignment not preferred.
- Comparison groups:
 - Best group: The above AC thresholds (~7-8 per quarter) group: Probationers who meet criteria but quarterly (or other period) goal was met and they are not referred.
 - Acceptable alternatives:
 - High need/risk probationers within pilot circuits who have similar characteristics as referred probationers.
 - Comparable risk AC participants who entered the AC via the standard method.

SCF Pilot-Impact Evaluation Design

- Unacceptable comparison groups:
 - Referred but not accepted. (Pre-selection effects.)
 - Unmatched all participants.

SCF Pilot-Impact Evaluation Design



- (a) "Threshold" probationers matched with referrals on observable attributes;
(b) "Threshold" probationers matched with accepted probationers on observable attributes.

SCF Pilot-Evaluation Research Questions

- Sustainability assessment: Core question →
- Given SCF impacts what would be involved in expansion or "going to scale"?
 - Presumes that the SCF generated cost-beneficial impacts.
- Use model or "modal" practices for implementing an SCF program.
- Develop expansion plan (largely CJCC and CACJ).
- Seek and obtain funding for expansion.
- Longer-run objective.

SCF Pilot-Process Evaluation Data

- Quarterly PMT reporting (DCS and CACJ data)
- Two-wave interviews with AC officials (e.g., judges, ADAs, defenders, site coordinators, case managers)
 - Wave one: Baseline or “pre-pilot” practices.
 - Wave two: Two-plus years into the pilot.
- Two-wave survey of probationers about fairness, swiftness, and certainty.
 - Wave one: Baseline
 - Wave two: End of AC participation.
- AC data on processes and outcomes (MOU tbd.)

SCF Pilot-Process Evaluation Data

- Quarterly PMT reporting (DCS and CACJ data)
 - PMT reports to BJA on 60-plus process and outcome performance items including:
 - Size of probation population pool from which referrals are drawn;
 - Number entering and leaving the SCF, with reasons for leaving;
 - Risk levels of participants;
 - Drug screens ordered and results;
 - Violations and sanctions imposed;
 - New arrests (recidivism);
 - Treatments ordered.

SCF Pilot-AC Interview Guides

- Purpose: Understand AC operations with ACs and capture variation across ACs. Compare with wave 2 interviews to identify change associated with SCF.
- Contents include:
 - Role on the AC team and experience with ACs.
 - Eligibility and enrollment processes:
 - Capacity of AC prior to SCF and expansion under SCF;
 - Preparation for and experience with SCF (early months):
 - To be modified in wave 2 to capture SCF-related changes.

SCF Pilot-Probationer Surveys Content

- Background questions
- Rewards and sanctions:
 - Select one of each and rate them on fairness, certainty, and swiftness items, e.g.,
 - The reward/incentive was fair, worth the effort, an important milestone; helped me finish supervision, etc.
- Quality of services received.
- Wave 1 focuses on probation experiences, while wave 2 will focus on AC experiences.

SCF Pilot

Illustrative SCF flow data

Approx. size of probationer pool (moderate/high risk with SA/MH needs) in pilot circuits ~4,200

SCF flows, through June 30*:

Number referred	74
Number accepted	30
Number denied	38
Number pending	6

Enrollments on target in two circuits and below planned levels in two circuits

*These numbers are illustrative; actual referrals and acceptances change daily.

SCF Pilot-Other Evaluation Issues

- COVID-19 and the Pandemic—Further changes in pilots expected; need to determine when interventions stabilize.
- Monitoring enrollments—Currently low overall; circuits differ on enrollments, but these are related to the first point.
- Measure of risk differs between DCS and ACs.
- Other data to obtain:
 - AC specific data—to obtain better measures of processes.
 - GCIC data—post-program arrests and convictions (impacts on recidivism).

SCF Pilot

- John Prevost will now discuss some of our early observations about the pilot.