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Butts, J., & Roman, J. (Eds.). *Juvenile Drug Courts and Teen Substance Abuse*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.

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This collection of essays provides a comprehensive policy overview of juvenile drug courts. The essays are based on findings from the National Evaluation of Juvenile Drug Courts, a National Institute of Justice (NIJ)–funded evaluation of juvenile drug courts in six states conducted by the Urban Institute.

The book states that it does not presume to evaluate the efficacy of juvenile drug courts but rather observes juvenile drug courts to develop a conceptual framework upon which to do future policy evaluations. It contains several chapters to set up and outline that framework. The first chapter outlines the rapid expansion of juvenile drug courts in the United States, suggesting some critical questions that any juvenile drug court should consider such as “Why juvenile drug courts?” and “What is a ‘drug involved’ offender?” The second chapter discusses the evolution of such courts from their adult drug court predecessors and within the context of a U.S. drug policy that conceptualizes drug use as a medical and legal problem and links drug treatment programs increasingly to the justice system. Chapter 3 compares six juvenile drug courts’ policies and procedures to a generalized model of juvenile drug courts, noting several areas of difference in how they screen, assess, and work with the youth participants. Chapter 4 takes stock of current evaluations of adult and juvenile drug courts, highlighting key findings to date and methodological weaknesses in several studies limited by inadequate funding and imprecise measures. Chapters 5 and 6 take different approaches to answer the same question: How do juvenile drug courts and treatment practitioners distinguish between and work with youths who may or may not actually have significant drug problems? Chapter 7 takes a look to the future, presenting “a new conceptual framework” for future evaluations of juvenile drug courts. Chapter 8 concludes with an assessment of the current policy scene, suggesting the need to devote the scarce resources to fewer, higher quality evaluations, versus spreading them out over several studies. The book ends with an extensive appendix summarizing the drug court literature from 1993 to 2004.

The book addresses many important issues that policy makers and practitioners should definitely consider if they are thinking of starting a juvenile drug court or if they currently operate one. Despite its breadth, there are a couple areas of untapped potential to the book. Chapters 1 and 2 provocatively discuss theoretical issues about juvenile drug courts, in terms of how their popularity is linked to the ambiguity of U.S. drug policy and the historical context for such a phenomenon. If, as Butts and Roman write in chapter 1, the U.S.

drug laws are “an imperfect mixture of fear, anger, and moral judgment” (p. 14), and juvenile drug courts appear to be a natural evolution of the drug policy premised upon such laws, perhaps we should reevaluate the overall missions of drug courts, if only to have clearer and more realistic goals. That is, do we really need juvenile drug courts if we cannot truly discern who has serious drug problems and youth whose problems mainly stem from poverty, troubled home environments, misdiagnosed mental health issues, underfunded schools, or violent communities? Would it not be better to simply advocate having the juvenile courts go back to their originally stated premise of *parens patrie* and rehabilitation? Can we even apply an accountability-based model such as the drug court to adolescents who, by definition, are not independent, autonomous individuals like their adult counterparts in adult drug courts?

Similarly, Chapter 7 mentions several challenges to working with an adolescent population who aims to resist adult authority, may not be drug addicted, and have an “invincibility” complex (p. 237). Yet the chapter goes on to outline several conceptual frameworks that, although interesting and thought provoking, do not discuss how drug courts address any of those operational challenges in the box of the “drug court activities.” Chapter 7 also emphasizes a shift from asking *if* juvenile drug courts work to asking *how* they work. A natural extension to that analytical shift would be to consider *how* the practical operations of juvenile drug courts affect any type of outcome measure. For example, if court staff measures drug use or defines compliance differently (as shown in chapter 3 with the various drug courts), would that not presumably complicate how we assess the “drug court activities” box of the “conceptual framework” listed in chapter 7? Should we not better identify the processes by which drug court practitioners enact and operationalize the various “drug court activities” before considering the intermediate and end outcomes?

Despite these questions, the book remains an essential read for policy evaluators and practitioners. Before any jurisdiction jumps on the drug court bandwagon, its officials should read this book to ask the critical questions peppered throughout the book, namely, if their juvenile justice population actually has a significant drug use problem and if their local justice and drug treatment systems have the structural capacity to devote the needed resources to run a juvenile drug court. If the answers to both questions are “yes,” the next step would be to establish clearly articulated goals while designing their juvenile drug courts that are realistic, attainable, and truly geared to help the youths that it is intended to serve.

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