

Evaluation of the Saskatoon Mental Health Strategy (MHS) Court: Outcome Analysis

The Centre for Forensic Behavioural Science and Justice Studies conducted an outcome analysis of the Saskatoon Mental Health Strategy Court (MHS Court) to determine the effectiveness of the MHS Court and the extent to which it was achieving its intended outcomes. Accordingly, the outcome analysis assessed the Court's success in:

- Diverting clients out of the traditional criminal justice system and reducing further justice involvement.
- Improving clients' mental health.
- Reducing future health services utilization.

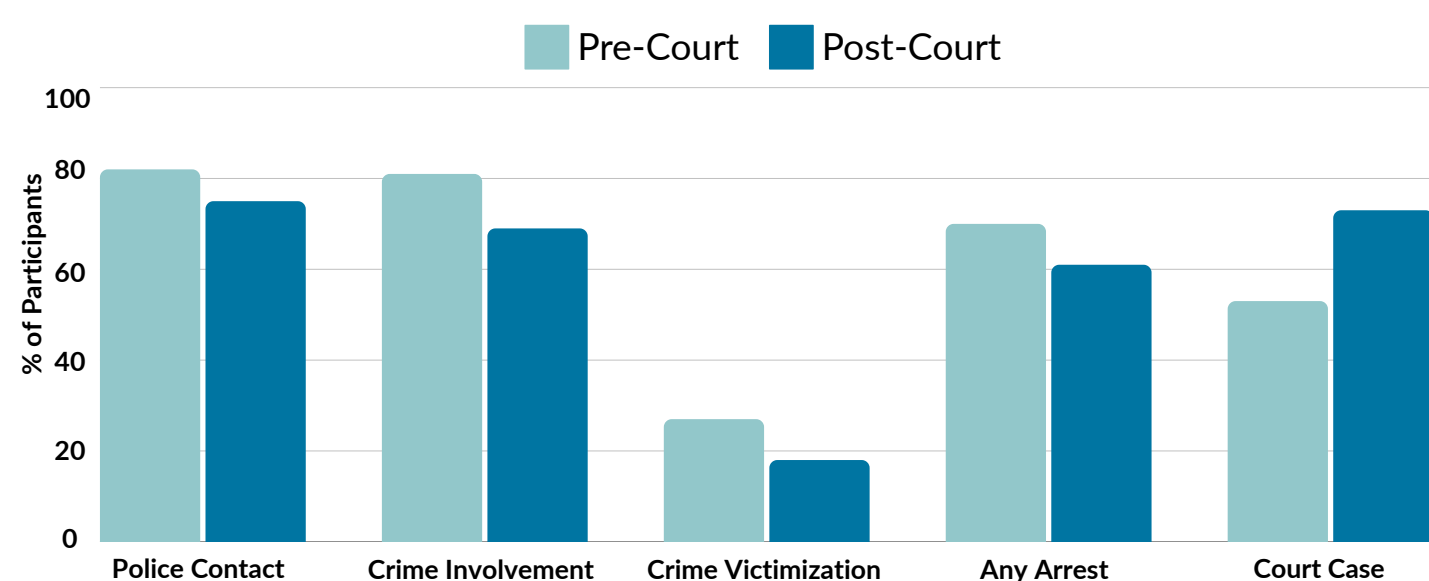


Methods

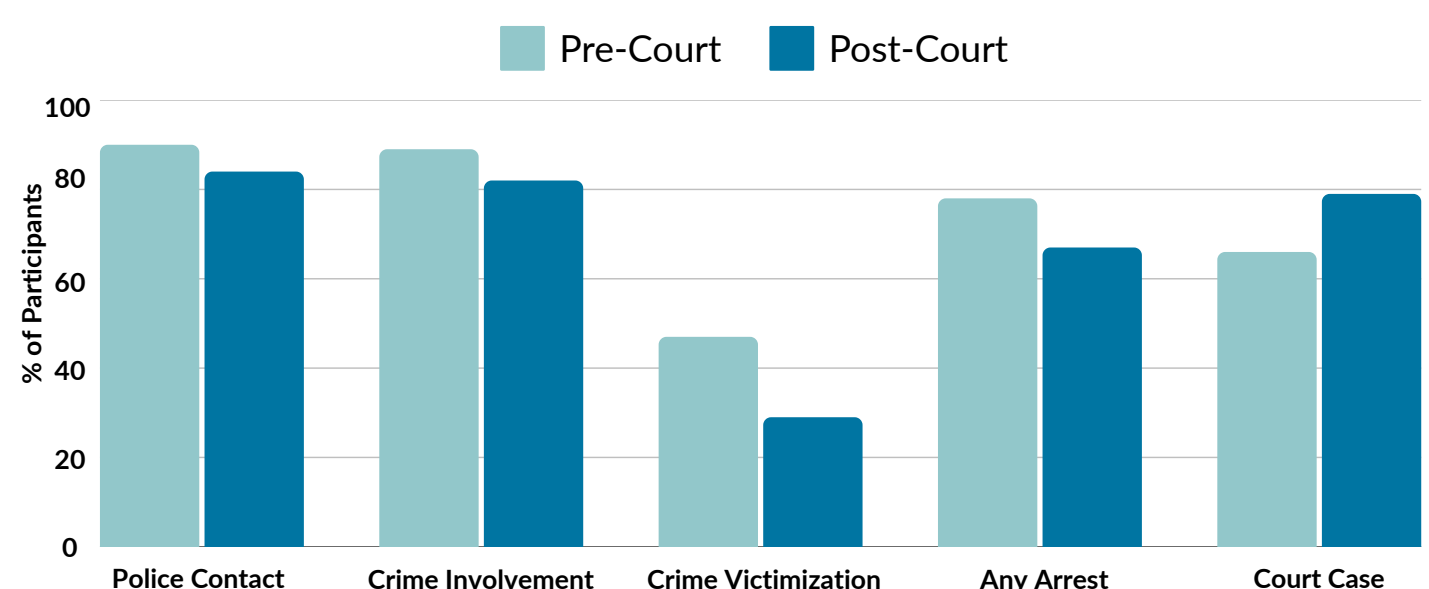
- Data was collected from the Saskatchewan Ministry of Justice on arrests, convictions, court cases/appearances, and sentencing; Saskatoon Police Service on calls for service and police contacts; and the Saskatoon Health Region Authority from the Addictions and Mental Health Services Information System and the National Ambulatory Care Reporting System.
- The outcome analysis examined criminal justice outcomes by comparing clients' involvement with the Courts and police 1 and 2-years pre-post MHS Court entry, while health outcomes and health service utilization were explored 1-year pre-post MHS Court entry.

Results

1 Year Pre-Post MHS Court Entry



2 Year Pre-Post MHS Court Entry



Clients' Criminal Justice Outcomes:

- Arrests were lower for clients after their involvement in the Saskatoon MHS Court although the seriousness of the charges they received tended to increase after entry into the Court.
- Court cases and convictions both increased following participation in the MHS Court with a large proportion of the cases and convictions resulting from system generated or non-compliance issues.
- Evaluation results also suggest that clients have high-risk peer groups that could result in increased risk of involvement with crime or encounters with police.

Clients' Mental Health Outcomes:

- Fewer clients experienced a mental health episode 1-year post-Court entry but these episodes lasted significantly longer following their entry into the Court.
- Slightly more clients accessed mental health services post-Court entry with access to both group and individual counselling and detox increasing.
- Emergency room visits declined significantly at the 1-year pre-post interval suggesting that participation in the Court helped reduce issues that could lead to visits that may put strain on the healthcare system.

Key Takeaways

- Given that arrests declined post-Court entry while convictions and court cases increased, there is evidence of over-supervision and over-punishment by the MHS Court related to the increased detection of non-compliance due to greater supervision by the MHS Court compared to the traditional justice system. This means that accessing the mental health and case management services provided by the Court may come with a possible penalty for clients—namely, increased convictions and additions to their criminal record.
- Overall, the evaluation points to positive gains being made with respect to clients' mental health outcomes and health service utilization, while simultaneously suggesting that the Court should review its practices to ensure clients are not inadvertently being penalized for participating in the Court.



Evaluation of the Saskatoon Mental Health Strategy Court (MHS) Court: Cost Analysis

The Centre for Forensic Behavioural Science and Justice Studies conducted an outcome and cost analysis of the Saskatoon Mental Health Strategy Court (MHS Court) to determine the effectiveness of the MHS Court and the extent to which it was achieving its intended outcomes. Accordingly, the cost analysis assessed the Court's success in reduced criminal justice costs for the clients. The cost analysis compared the criminal justice costs at the 1- and 2-year pre-post court entry intervals focusing on 89 clients included in the outcome analysis and utilized Gabor's 2015 cost estimates related to the costs of crime. Gabor is a criminologist who conducted a literature review of global publications from 1988 to 2014 and computed cost estimates for various types of crimes on August 1, 2014, in Canadian dollars. He computed the societal cost of crime to include criminal justice system costs, victims' tangible and intangible costs, and criminal career costs.

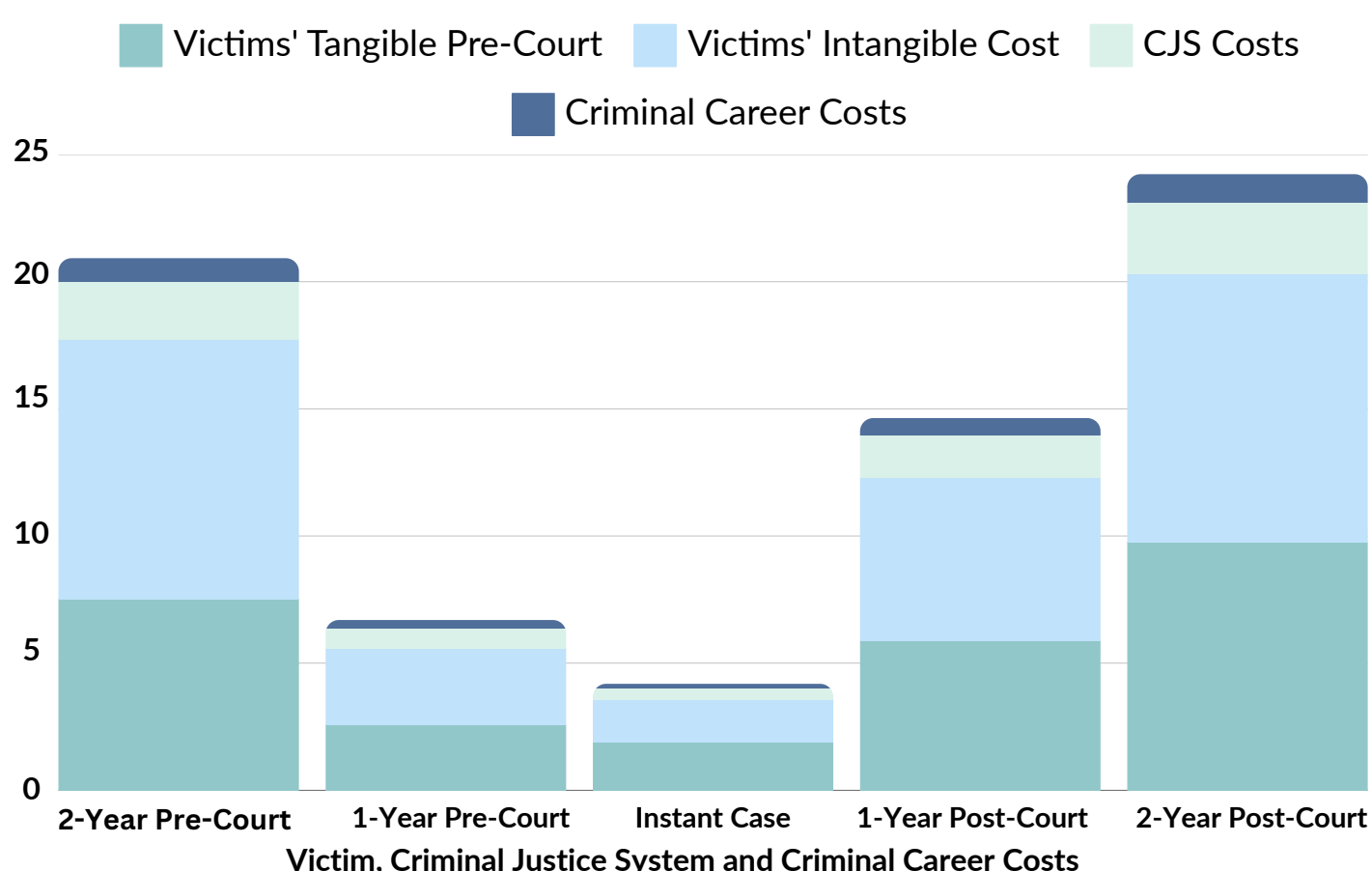


Methods

- Data was collected from the Saskatchewan Ministry of Justice on arrests, convictions, court cases/appearances, and sentencing; Saskatoon Police Service on calls for service and police contacts; and the Saskatoon Health Region Authority from the Addictions and Mental Health Services Information System and the National Ambulatory Care Reporting System.

Results

Total Cost

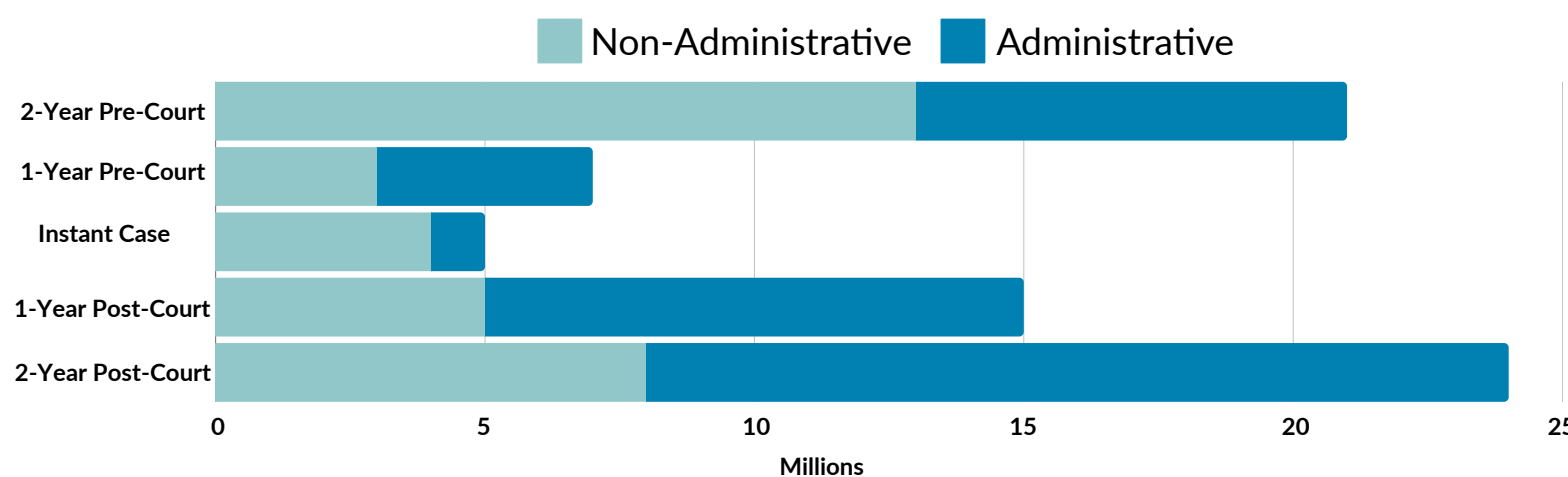


- Findings show that, based on Gabor's estimates, the total cost of the clients' cases that were transferred to the MHS Court was slightly over \$4 million dollars.
- The majority of this expense was attributed to victim tangible and intangible costs, while the criminal justice system cost accounted for about 10% of the total cost.
- Total 1-year recidivism cost was approximately \$14.6 million. This was more than 2 times greater than the 1-year pre-Court cost of \$6.7 million.
- The total 2-year recidivism cost was \$24.2 million and exceeded the total 2-year prior cost which was \$20.9 million with the highest costs again attributed to victim tangible and intangible costs.

Non-Administrative vs Administrative Cost

Cases generated by compliance failure were classified as "administrative" which included breach of probation, failure to appear, and failure to comply with conditions charges. All other cases were considered "non-administrative".

Total Cost: Non-Administrative vs Administrative Cost



- Administrative costs accounted for 54% of the total costs of 1-year pre and 40% of total costs 2-year pre-Court entry.
- In contrast, post-Court entry administrative case costs accounted for about 2/3rds of total recidivism costs.
- These findings suggest an over-supervision effect resulting in increased total and criminal justice-related costs. However, without a matched comparison group to determine whether this increase in administrative costs was due to changes in Saskatoon's charging policies, it is impossible to make any definitive conclusions about an over-supervision effect.

Key Takeaways

- The Court should reconsider the use of administrative charges for clients. Many of the clients had an arrest or conviction for administrative/other charges indicating an issue with compliance. Although compliance is important, as one of the goals of the Court is to divert justice-involved individuals away from the traditional court system and to connect them to services, alternate means of ensuring compliance may be more appropriate for the Court.

