



**MINNESOTA
JUDICIAL BRANCH**

FOURTH JUDICIAL DISTRICT

***Probate/Mental Health Court
Fairness Study***

**Prepared by:
Fourth Judicial District Research Division**

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Probate/Mental Health Court Fairness Study

Acknowledgements

This study would not have been accomplished without the help of a number of people. First and foremost, we would like to thank the Probate/Mental Health Court judge, referees, and probate registrars for cooperating with the survey process so that we could provide them with feedback to further improve the already high level of customer service they provide.

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Third, when we began examining fairness in the courts, we were very fortunate to have a Chief Judge who not only supported the research we did, but actively pursued a research agenda. In this case, it was Judge Kevin Burke's idea to begin to study fairness in our courts. Luckily, his successor is equally passionate about being accountable to our court users. We would like to thank Chief Judge Lucy Wieland for her support on this series of studies.

Finally, we would like to thank Scott Vrieze for his assistance with analyzing the qualitative data.

***Hennepin County District Court
Fourth Judicial District Court of Minnesota***

Probate/Mental Health Court Fairness Report: Executive Summary

Background

- Prior research tells us that satisfaction with the court process has more to do with fair treatment than with favorable case outcomes. In addition, prior research tells us that litigant satisfaction leads to viewing court authority as legitimate, which in turn leads to increased compliance with court orders.

Research Design

- Visitors to the Probate/Mental Health Court completed a survey after their hearings. Visitors to the Probate Registrar's Office also completed a survey after their visit.
- Six hundred ninety-six surveys were completed by visitors to the Probate/Mental Health Court. The people surveyed included petitioners, respondents, family members, and court professionals (e.g., psychologists, social workers, attorneys).

Results of Quantitative Analysis

- Overall, all visitors were satisfied with how they were treated by the Probate/Mental Health Court judicial officers, the probate registrar, and the staff at the check-in counter.
- Survey participants who had completed college were more likely than those who did not complete college to indicate that they understood what occurred during the hearings.
- Individuals who felt that they waited too long for their hearings were less likely to indicate that their cases were handled in a timely manner and they rated the check-in counter staff less favorably. The number of people who felt they waited too long was a quite a bit smaller than we have seen in other courts (6% vs. 30-44%).
- Petitioners and attorneys were more likely than social workers and professional guardians to feel they were treated fairly and that their cases were handled in a timely manner. Petitioners and attorneys also rated the check-in counter staff more favorably than did social workers and family members.

Results of Qualitative Analysis

- When asked to tell us about their experience in Probate/Mental Health Court, a majority of individuals indicated that they felt the judicial officers or the probate registrars had treated them fairly and that their experiences with this court had been positive.
- When participants were asked to tell us how we could improve Probate/Mental Health Court a large number of participants indicated no improvements were needed. Those who did offer

suggestions for improving Probate/Mental Health Court, indicated that they would have liked more information about the process or would have liked the process to be more efficient.

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Introduction to the Study of Fairness

In March 2003, the Fourth Judicial District embarked upon a study of fairness in the courts. The study was largely based on nationally recognized research by three social psychologists – Larry Heuer (Barnard College, Columbia University), Tom Tyler (New York University), and Steven Penrod (John Jay College of Criminal Justice) – who have spent many years studying the relationship between individuals’ perceptions of fairness and satisfaction, as well as subsequent compliance with the orders of those in authority.

Prior Research

The results of prior studies have shown that while the actual outcome of a case can explain 30-40% of the variance in litigants’ level of satisfaction with the court, perceptions of whether or not litigants feel they have been treated fairly by the court (specifically the judicial officer) can explain 60-70% of the variance. (Tyler, 1984; 1989). In other words, perceptions of fairness are approximately twice as important as case dispositions when it comes to measuring litigant satisfaction with the court. This finding has been labeled “one of the most robust findings in the justice literature” (Brockner et al., 2000). Furthermore, increased justice (procedural fairness) has been shown to be related to increased compliance with court orders, ultimately reducing the rate of “repeat business” for the court and its justice partners (Tyler, 1990).

A number of more recent studies have corroborated the findings of Tyler and his colleagues. Many have found that individuals are satisfied with authority figures if they feel the procedures followed by the authorities have been fair, even if the outcome adversely affects the individual (see Tyler and Smith, 1998, for a review). Another way of saying this is that people are prone to say that even unfavorable outcomes are fair if they have been treated with respect (Skitka and Crosby, 2003). More recent studies, however, are exploring whether procedural justice matters more in some situations than in others (Skitka and Crosby, 2003). It may in fact be, for example, that for certain types of courtroom experiences the procedural fairness piece is less relevant because contact with the judicial officer is minimal. Procedural fairness may also matter more to some types of individuals than others, depending on what groups the individuals identify themselves with (Tyler and Blader, 2003). Regardless, issues of procedural justice and fairness are dynamic, and should be studied with methods that allow for analysis beyond simple correlations.

The Fourth Judicial District of Minnesota: Different Fairness Studies

To measure fairness in the courts, the Research Division of the Fourth Judicial District developed litigant surveys, in conjunction with Heuer, Tyler, and Penrod, to be used in several different areas of the court: Drug Court, the Traffic and Violations Bureau Hearing Office (both in our downtown location and three suburban locations), the Domestic Abuse calendar in Family Court, Delinquency calendars in Juvenile Court, non-felony calendars in our three suburban locations, Housing Court, the Payable Traffic Calendar, the Serious Traffic Calendar, and Conciliation Court. This particular report documents the results of the Probate/Mental Health Court Study.

Background of Probate/Mental Health Court Fairness Study

The decision to study the Probate/Mental Health calendar came out of a request from the Probate/Mental Health Court. This study took the form of a “customer satisfaction” survey, as well as an assessment of fairness related to the Probate/Mental Health Court process.

Probate Court Process

Guardianship/Conservatorship Cases. These are cases where a person is coming to court to obtain authority over a minor child or an incapacitated adult. Guardianship pertains to decisions related to the person—their living arrangements or medical and personal care. Conservatorships pertain to decisions regarding assets—investments, bank accounts, or selling one’s real estate. Hearings are held in Probate Court to determine if the respondent needs a guardian and/or conservator, and who will be appointed. A guardian or conservator may be a family member or a professional guardian/conservator.

If a conservator is appointed, annual accounts must be filed with the court. A hearing is held for the allowance of the first annual account. Hearings are then scheduled every three years on the subsequent accounts. Real estate cannot be sold without a hearing on a petition to sell the real estate.

Trust Cases. These are cases where a person (either living or deceased) or an organization has set up a distribution of assets to certain parties on an ongoing basis. Often times the last will and testament of a decedent is the trust instrument. The majority of established trusts never come before the court. In the event that there is a change in trustees (i.e., the person/s who distribute and manage the assets) a petition may be filed with the court to confirm the appointment of the successor trustee/s. Many trust petitions are filed and scheduled for hearings to clarify specific issues within trusts with no ongoing court jurisdiction. If a trust is under court jurisdiction, annual accounts must be filed and a hearing must be held every five years.

Formal Estate Cases. Once a person is deceased, any assets over the amount of \$20,000 and real estate (regardless of dollar amount) that is not in joint tenancy is handled in Probate Court as an estate case. These cases may have a will (testate) or may not have a will (intestate). After the hearing and formal appointment of the personal representative, formal estate cases can either be unsupervised by the courts or can be supervised and under the court’s jurisdiction. There can be subsequent petitions filed with the court and hearings held in both unsupervised and supervised cases. A decree of distribution is issued in summary estates, descents, and in supervised estates.

Informal Estate Cases. Probate Registrars handle informal estate cases. Once the person arrives at his/her appointment, the probate registrar reviews the application and makes a determination as to whether the estate can proceed informally. If the estate is appropriate for an informal administration, the probate registrar makes a determination and drafts a statement for informal probate.

Mental Health Court Process

Commitment Cases. Cases that are heard in the Mental Health Court involve petitioners who are concerned parties (e.g., family members, social workers, physicians) who believe the person (the respondent) is a threat to him/herself or others. The concerned parties come to court to file a civil commitment so the respondent can go to a treatment facility. These facilities can be community providers or state run facilities (e.g., St. Peter Regional Treatment Center). The types of classifications for committed individuals include: mentally ill, mentally retarded, chemically dependant, sexual psychopath, sexually dangerous, as well as a combination of these. All commitment cases are handled by the County Attorneys' office who represents the concerned parties. The first step after filing a civil commitment is obtaining a 72 hour emergency hold on the person. During this time the person is held at a treatment facility and a pre-placement screening committee evaluates the respondent. This evaluation is reviewed with an in-house panel to make a recommendation to the County Attorney. The County Attorney can then petition for the respondent to be committed, even if the pre-petition screener has not recommended a commitment. A hearing is held in Mental Health Court to determine if the respondent needs to be committed or should receive treatment for their mental health issues.

There are four referees and one judge assigned to Probate/Mental Health Court. Two of the referees handle the commitment cases with the exception of cases involving sexually dangerous persons (SDP) and sexual psychopathic personalities (SPP) cases. These two types of cases are handled by the Probate/Mental Health Court judge. This judge also hears the general commitment hearings, and will provide back-up on probate and trust hearings without the cases being assigned to him. If the attorneys request a judge on any probate, trust, or commitment case, the case is then assigned to the judge. The other two referees hear all estate, guardianship, conservatorship, and trust cases; they also back-up the mental health referees by hearing commitment cases (except for SDP and SPP). There are also two probate registrars who handle informal estate cases.

The Survey Process

From the beginning of April and through July, after their hearings were complete, parties were asked to complete the surveys and place them in a sealed box located in the back of the courtroom. People who had appointments with the probate registrar were also asked to complete surveys. There were also sealed boxes located at the front counter of the Probate/Mental Health Court and right outside the probate registrar's office to ensure participants' anonymity. The survey took about two minutes to complete. Previous fairness studies in the Fourth Judicial District involved court visitors being interviewed by court staff after their hearings were complete and they had left the courtroom. In this court, visitors completed the surveys themselves at the conclusion of their hearings and placed the completed surveys in the sealed boxes.

Two surveys were created for this study. One was for those appearing in court before a judicial officer. The other survey was created for those who visited the probate registrar. The questions were the same for both surveys with the exception that those who appeared before a judicial officer were asked about their experiences with judicial officer and those who met with the probate registrar were asked about their experiences with the probate registrar. The first section of the survey consisted of demographic questions, case type, and survey respondent's

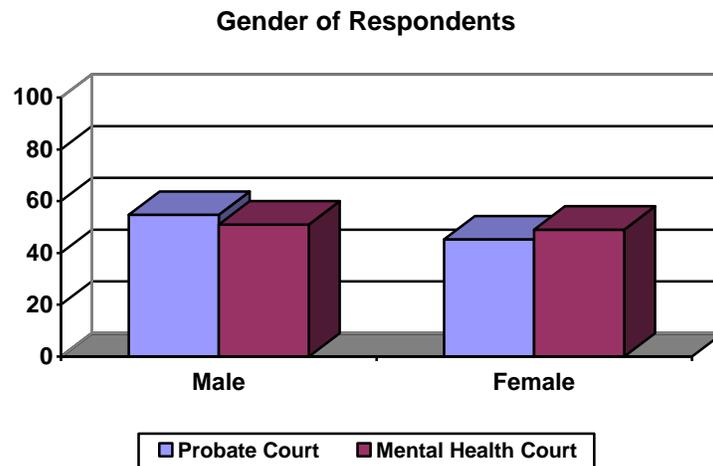
role in the case. The second section addressed issues of fairness. These questions addressed how court visitors felt the judicial officer or probate registrar treated them, (e.g., if they felt they were listened to and treated fairly, and how satisfied they were with the judicial officer’s or probate registrar’s decision) and how satisfied they were with the check-in counter staff. The last two questions were “open-ended,” and visitors were asked to provide their opinions of the court process and their suggestions for improvement. (See Appendix A for a complete copy of the survey.)

Six hundred ninety-six surveys (696) were conducted in Probate/Mental Health Court. The survey participants included petitioners, respondents, and Probate/Mental Health Court professionals (e.g., social workers, psychologists, and attorneys). Participants who visited Probate/Mental Health Court multiple times only completed one survey. The graphs below represent the demographics for both courts. Those who completed a survey for the probate registrar are included with the Probate Court data.

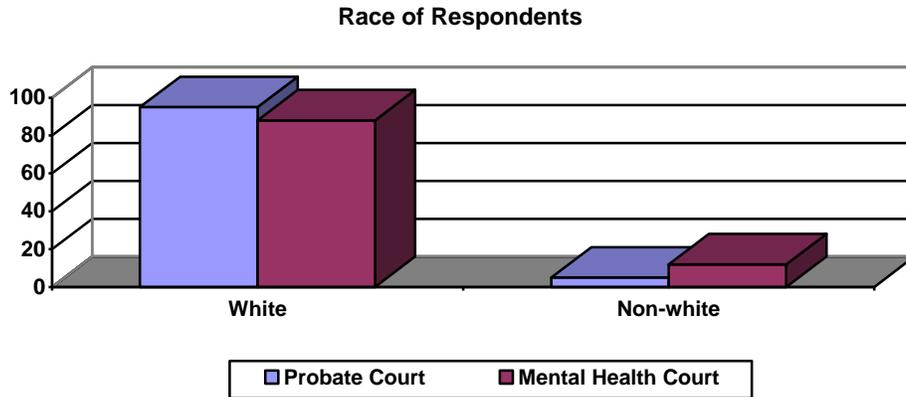
Results of Quantitative Data Analysis

Demographics

As noted above, 696 individuals completed our survey. There were slightly more men in this study 54% (368) than women 46% (316). This gender difference continues when comparing Probate Court (Males 55%; Females 45%) and Mental Health Court (Males 51%, Females 49%), as shown in the graph below.



Nearly everyone who completed a survey was White (93%). Since other racial groups appeared in such low numbers, they were collapsed into a “non-white” category. The races in this category included African Americans, East Africans, Native Americans, Asians, and Hispanics. These percentages do not differ when examining race based on whether one is appearing in Probate Court or Mental Health Court.



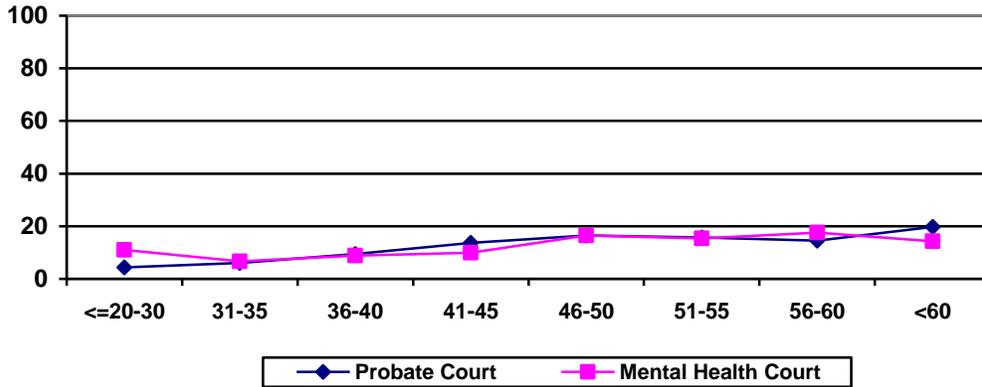
More than half of the survey respondents (69%) had completed their college degree while another 18% had completed some college.

Education Level of Survey Respondents (Percentages)

| | Probate | Mental Health |
|---------------------------------------|--------------|---------------|
| <i>Did not complete high school</i> | 9 0.16% | 1 1.0% |
| <i>Earned diploma or GED</i> | 64 11.4% | 7 6.9% |
| <i>Some College/Some Trade school</i> | 104 18.5% | 16 15.8% |
| <i>Finished college degree</i> | 384 68.4% | 77 76.2% |

The age of those we interviewed ranged from 14 years to 92 years, with an average of 51 years. There were no differences in age between the two courts.

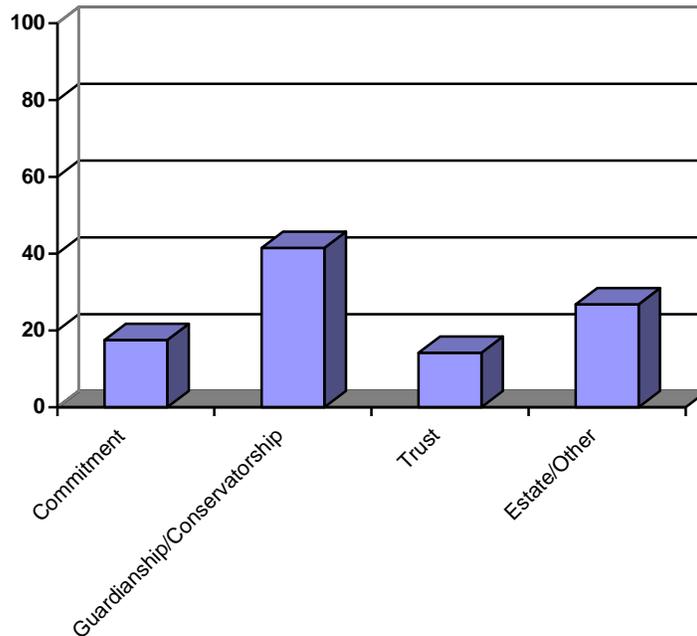
Age Distribution of Survey Respondents (Percentages)



Court Related Data

Most of the people who completed a survey were from Probate Court (85%) compared with Mental Health Court (15%). Between these two courts, most cases were Guardianship/Conservatorships (42%), followed by Estates (27%), Commitments (18%), and Trusts (14%). When examining the percentages of cases handled recently in Probate/Mental Health Court, most cases were Estates (51%) followed by Commitments (30%), Guardianship/Conservatorships (14%), and trusts (5%).

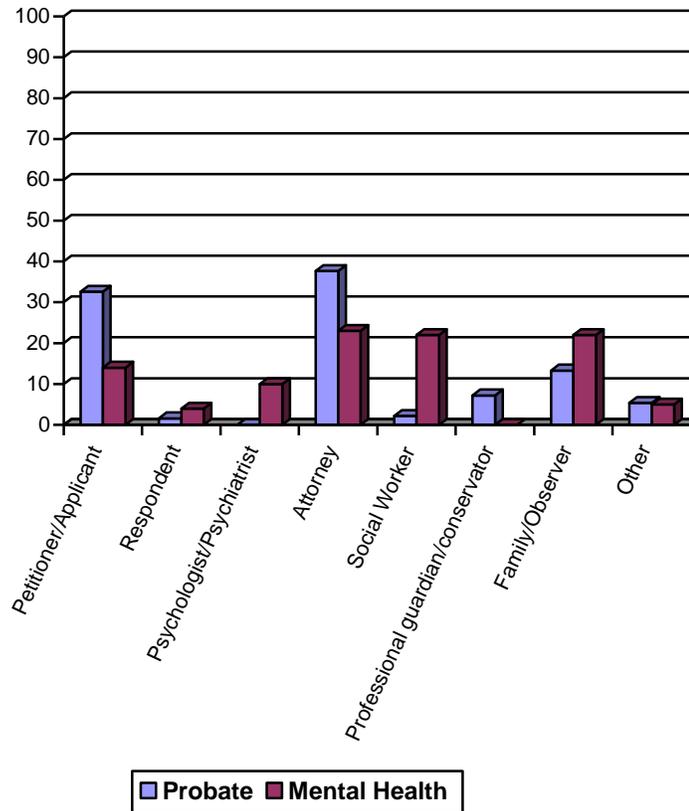
Case Types for Individuals in Probate/Mental Health Court (Percentages)



Most of the people who completed a survey in Probate/Mental Health Court were attorneys (34%) followed by petitioners (30%). A smaller percentage of the visitors were family members (15%), professional guardians (6%), social workers (5%), respondents (2%) psychologists (2%) or other (6%) (e.g., friend, witness, paralegal, case manager). The low

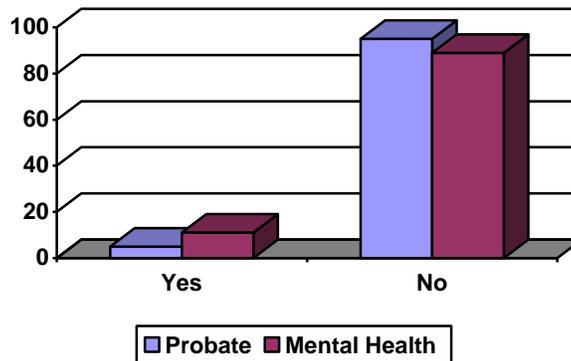
number of respondents is because most of them were in custody and were not able to complete the survey.

Individuals' Roles in the Probate/Mental Health Case (Percentages)



The average wait time for all individuals was 13 minutes. Those who came to court for a Probate case reported to wait fewer minutes (11 minutes) compared to those who came to court for a Mental Health case (22 minutes). However, most individuals (94%), did not feel that they waited too long regardless of the court they were visiting.

Did you feel the time you had to wait was too long?



Assessments of Fairness and Customer Satisfaction

The survey included 5 separate indicators of fairness and 2 questions regarding the service from the counter staff. (See Appendix A for a copy of the survey.) Many of these questions are the same fairness questions that we have asked in other courts (e.g., Family Court, Juvenile Court, and Criminal Court). Survey respondents were asked to rate their levels of agreement with each of the seven statements on a nine point scale, where a 1 indicated strong disagreement, a 9 indicated strong agreement, and a rating of 5 indicated a neutral/no opinion rating. Visitors were encouraged to choose any number on the scale from 1 to 9 (i.e., not simply 1 or 9).¹

Univariate Analysis

Before conducting bivariate analyses (i.e., did individuals of one group give higher or lower fairness ratings than individuals of another group?), we ran simple univariate analyses to get a sense of how the judicial officers and probate registrars were rated by people who met with them during the course of the study.

Perhaps the most undisputable outcome of the entire study is that individuals gave mostly positive ratings to the behavior of the judicial officers and probate registrars. On the 1 to 9 scales described above, where 9 would be a perfect score (meaning every respondent “strongly agreed” to any given question), most average scores were above 8 for both Probate Court and Mental Health Court.

Some examples are provided below:

| <i>Survey Statement</i> | <i>Probate</i> | <i>Mental Health</i> |
|--|----------------|----------------------|
| <i>The judge/referee treated me fairly.</i> | 8.45 | 8.29 |
| <i>The judge/referee listened carefully to what I (or my lawyer) had to say.</i> | 8.53 | 8.35 |
| <i>I am satisfied with the judge/referee’s decision.</i> | 8.49 | 8.28 |

Bivariate Analysis

We analyzed the differences between groups for each of the seven statements. The graphs indicate the means for each group we are comparing and the following statements were given the following labels:

Procedural Justice

Fairness: The judge/referee treated me fairly.

Understanding: I understand what occurred in court today.

Listening: The judge/referee listened carefully to what I (or my lawyer) had to say in this case.

Satisfaction: I am satisfied with the judge/referee’s decision.

Efficiency: My case was completed in a timely fashion.

¹ Although the fairness questions in this report use the term “judicial officer,” responses from those who met with the probate registrar are also included with the Probate Court data.

Satisfaction with counter staff: I was satisfied with how the counter staff treated me.

Information from counter staff: I received all the information I needed from the check-in counter staff.

Average Fairness Ratings based on Level of Education

Those who completed college were more likely than those who did not complete college to report that they understood what had occurred in court. There were no significant differences based on education for the other fairness questions or questions about the check-in counter staff. This is because more than half of the people in our study who had a college degree (55%) were also court professionals (e.g., psychologists, attorneys, social workers) who regularly visit the court and therefore, have a greater understanding of the process.

Fairness Ratings based on Level of Education

| | Less than college | College degree | Statistical significance |
|--|--------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------|
| Fairness | 8.33 | 8.49 | ns |
| Understanding | 8.30 | 8.58 | * |
| Listening | 8.40 | 8.57 | ns |
| Satisfaction | 8.36 | 8.53 | ns |
| Efficiency | 8.25 | 8.45 | ns |
| Satisfaction with counter staff | 8.33 | 8.45 | ns |
| Information from counter staff | 8.24 | 8.41 | ns |

Significance levels: ns=not significant * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Average Fairness Ratings based on Perceived Wait Time

Individuals who did not feel they waited too long for their hearing to begin were significantly more likely than those who did feel they waited too long to indicate that their cases were completed in a timely fashion. These individuals were also more satisfied with the check-in counter staff.

Fairness Ratings based on Perceived Wait Time

| | Too long | Not too long | Statistical significance |
|--|-----------------|---------------------|---------------------------------|
| Fairness | 7.97 | 8.46 | ns |
| Understanding | 8.00 | 8.52 | ns |
| Listening | 8.10 | 8.53 | ns |
| Satisfaction | 8.16 | 8.49 | ns |
| Efficiency | 7.21 | 8.45 | ** |
| Satisfaction with counter staff | 7.57 | 8.46 | * |
| Information from counter staff | 7.59 | 8.40 | * |

Significance levels: ns=not significant * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Average Fairness Ratings based on Survey Respondents' Roles in the Case

Regardless of the individuals' roles in the case, the fairness ratings were very high. Petitioners and attorneys had the highest ratings; however, those who had "lower" ratings were still very high (above 7). Since certain groups of survey participants (e.g., respondents, psychologists) had a small number of completed surveys, significant differences between these groups compared to others were not found. Below is a summary of the fairness ratings comparing these different groups of individuals:

Fairness: Petitioners and attorneys were significantly more likely than social workers and professional guardians to report they felt the judge/referee treated them fairly.

Efficiency: Similar to the question regarding fairness, petitioners and attorneys were significantly more likely than social workers and professional guardians to indicate that they felt their cases were completed in a timely fashion.

Satisfaction with counter staff: Petitioners were more likely than social workers and family members to feel satisfied with how the check-in counter staff had treated them. Attorneys were also more likely than social workers to rate the counter staff favorably.

Information from counter staff: Petitioners were significantly more likely than social workers and family members to report that they received the information they needed from the check-in counter staff. Attorneys were also more likely than social workers, professional guardians, and family members to feel that they received needed information from the check-in counter staff.

Fairness Ratings based on Survey Respondents' Roles in the Case

(Scale is 1-9, where 1 is the lowest and 9 is the highest rating, the number of completed surveys for each group is in parentheses)

| Total Sample | Petitioner/ Applicant | Respondent | Psychologist/ Psychiatrist | Attorney | Social Worker | Professional Guardian | Family Observer | Statistical significance |
|--|--------------------------|------------|-------------------------------|----------|------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------|
| (696) | (205) | (13) | (10) | (232) | (34) | (42) | (103) | |
| Fairness | 8.55 | 7.92 | 8.90 | 8.61 | 7.94 | 8.00 | 8.20 | * |
| Understanding | 8.54 | 8.38 | 9.00 | 8.66 | 7.84 | 8.14 | 8.28 | ns |
| Listening | 8.59 | 8.08 | 8.90 | 8.64 | 7.97 | 8.15 | 8.33 | ns |
| Satisfaction | 8.60 | 8.08 | 9.00 | 8.54 | 8.18 | 8.05 | 8.24 | ns |
| Efficiency | 8.53 | 8.08 | 8.90 | 8.51 | 7.69 | 7.79 | 8.22 | * |
| Satisfaction with counter staff | 8.57 | 7.80 | 9.00 | 8.51 | 7.67 | 8.03 | 8.08 | * |
| Information from counter staff | 8.47 | 7.89 | 8.83 | 8.60 | 7.41 | 7.89 | 7.94 | ** |

Significance levels: ns=not significant * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Additional Analyses

In the previous section, we only reported on the independent variables that have a statistically significant relationship with the fairness constructs. We ran additional analyses which did not produce statistically significant results. For example, many demographic variables such as age, gender, and race were not related to perceptions of fairness. Opinions of the court did not differ based on the case type or based on whether the case was heard in Probate or Mental Health Court.

Summary of Quantitative Analysis

Visitors to Probate/Mental Health Court reported very high levels of satisfaction, fairness, and the perception that judicial officers listened to them. There were no differences in fairness ratings according to age, gender, or race. Individuals who had obtained a college degree were more likely than those who had not received a college degree to report that they understood the court proceedings. Court visitors who felt they waited too long were more likely to indicate that their case was not handled in a timely manner and were also less satisfied with the check-in counter staff. However, compared to other fairness studies, few participants (6%) in this study felt that they waited too long. In other courts where fairness studies have been conducted the percentage has ranged from 30-44% of court visitors indicating they waited too long. Finally, petitioners and attorneys were more likely than social workers and professional guardians to feel that they were treated fairly and that their cases were handled efficiently. Petitioners and attorneys were also more satisfied than social workers and family members with the service they received from the check-in counter.

Results of Qualitative Analysis

At the end of the survey, we included two questions which allowed court visitors to tell us, in their own words, about their experiences in Probate/Mental Health Court or their visits with the probate registrar. This section of the report summarizes those results.

The first open-ended question read as follows:

If you had a friend who was coming to Probate/Mental Health Court for the same reason you just came, what would you tell your friend about your experience?

The three most common response categories to this question were:

Process was fair 28%
Positive comments 13% (Such as, "I was satisfied")
It was a good experience 11%

Other responses included positive comments, such as the court being helpful, excellent service from both the staff and judicial officers, and that the process was quick and timely.

The second open-ended question read as follows:

Is there anything that you think we can do to improve Probate/Mental Health Court?

The three most common response categories to this question were:

“No or nothing” 61%
It was a good experience 10%
Improvements to the courtroom 6%

Other comments included providing court visitors with more information ahead of time in order to better prepare them for the experience, speeding up the process, and starting on time.

Summary of Qualitative Analysis

Survey respondents provided much positive feedback about their experiences in Probate/Mental Health Court. Many court visitors had positive comments about the judicial officer and reported that they felt the judicial officer listened to them and was respectful. When asked what the courts could do to improve the Probate/Mental Health Court many court visitors reported that no improvements were needed. Many also had other positive things to say about their experiences. Some litigants suggested making the process more efficient, as well as starting court on time. Frustration with the waiting time is a common criticism that we have seen in the fairness studies we have completed in other areas of the court.

Overall Conclusions and Report Summary

Overall, visitors to the Probate/Mental Health Court and the probate registrar were satisfied with their experiences in Probate/Mental Health Court and the treatment they received from both the judicial officers and probate registrars. This was demonstrated by the high agreement on all of the statements pertaining to the Probate/Mental Health Court judicial officer treating everyone fairly and listening to the litigants. Along with rating the judicial officers and probate registrars very highly, all survey participants indicated a high level of satisfaction with the check-in counter staff.

The majority of open-ended responses were overwhelmingly positive. Many visitors to Probate/Mental Health Court reported that they felt the judicial officer was fair, helpful, and did an excellent job. When asked what the courts could do to improve Probate/Mental Health Court many individuals reported that no improvements were needed and many had positive things to say about their experiences. Negative comments pertained mostly to clarifying the procedures in Probate/Mental Health Court and issues associated with the wait time.

Appendix A: Probate/Mental Health Court Survey (on the following pages)

Appendix B: The Averages of Visitors' Responses to Survey Items

Visitors were read the following statements and indicated their agreement or disagreement with each statement by providing the interviewer with a number ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 9 (strongly agree), with the mid-point being 5 (neutral). Below are the statements, followed by the means, and standard deviations based on whether they were appearing for Probate Court or Mental Health Court as well as the total responses from everyone.

The judge/referee treated me fairly.

| Probate | Mental Health | All responses |
|----------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| 8.45 (1.58) | 8.29 (1.76) | 8.43 (1.6) |

I am satisfied with the judge/referee's decision.

| Probate | Mental Health | All responses |
|----------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| 8.49 (1.61) | 8.28 (1.93) | 8.47 (1.65) |

My case was completed in a timely fashion.

| Probate | Mental Health | All responses |
|----------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| 8.42 (1.65) | 8.15 (1.92) | 8.38 (1.71) |

I understand what occurred in court today.

| Probate | Mental Health | All responses |
|----------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| 8.50 (1.58) | 8.36 (1.61) | 8.48 (1.57) |

The judge/referee listened carefully to what I (or my lawyer) had to say.

| Probate | Mental Health | All responses |
|----------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| 8.53 (1.58) | 8.35 (1.73) | 8.51 (1.59) |

I was satisfied with how the counter staff treated me.

| Probate | Mental Health | All responses |
|----------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| 8.46 (1.65) | 7.97 (1.96) | 8.40 (1.69) |

I received all the information I needed from the check-in counter staff.

| Probate | Mental Health | All responses |
|----------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| 8.39 (1.65) | 8.00 (1.93) | 8.35 (1.71) |

Appendix C: Frequencies of the Open-Ended Responses

First, if you had a friend who was coming to Probate/Mental Health Court for the same reason you just came, what would you tell your friend about your experience?

Top three comments:

The Proceedings Were Fair (137)

“He is fair” “You will be treated fairly” “Seemed fair”

Positive Comments (65)

“I was completely satisfied” “I agreed with everything the judge had to do” “He made it fun”

Good Experience/Judge did a good job (52)

“Very good experience” “It went well” “It was a good one” “A good judge”

Process was Quick/Timely (45)

“Very timely” “Prompt” “The process was brief”

Friendly (38)

“She was friendly” “He was very friendly” “Court people were friendly”

Listened (34)

“He listens” “The judge listened to people” “listens carefully”

Excellent/Wonderful/Great (32)

“Excellent” “Wonderful” “Great”

Helpful (30)

“He was helpful” “You will have strong guidance from the court” “Staff are more than willing to help”

Don't Worry (30)

“Don't worry” “It isn't scary and to be calm”

Courteous (27)

“Courteous” “Polite” “Cordial”

Thorough (27)

“The referee was intent on hearing all points” “Thorough” “Comprehensive”

Respectful (26)

“Referee is respectful” “He is respectful” “You would be treated respectfully”

Knowledgeable (26)

“She is very knowledgeable” “He has knowledge”

Experience was Comfortable (24)

“He relaxed me” “Relaxed atmosphere” “Very comfortable”

Professional (23)

“He was professional” “The judge is professional”

Smooth process (22)

“Smooth” “No problems” “Painless”

Good Sense of Humor (22)

“Funny guy” “Humorous” “Be prepared to laugh”

Pleasant (20)

“Registrar is pleasant” “Referee is pleasant”

Be Prepared (16)

“Process goes more smoothly if applicant is prepared” “Do your homework” “Have your ducks in a row”

Positive experience (16)

“It was a positive experience” “I’ve always had positive experiences”

Negative Comments (16)

“Boring” “At times unpredictable” “He could use a larger courtroom” “Court moves slowly”

Helped Explain Things (15)

“She will explain the process clearly” “The judicial officer makes sure the respondents and families understand the proceedings”

Straightforward (14)

“He was direct and to the point” “He conducts his business in a straightforward manner”

Fine (14)

“Fine” “A-OK”

Understanding (14)

“He was understanding” “He understood the problems”

Intelligent (13)

“The referee is highly intelligent” “He is very sharp” “He’s a bright guy”

Attentive (12)

“He stayed on task” “Referee is attentive” “Focused”

Kind (12)

“He is kind” “Kind”

The Process Was Easy (12)

“It was easy” “An easy...experience”

Nice (11)

“He was nice” “A nice judge”

Answer Questions as Well as Possible (10)

“Don’t be stumped by hard questions” “Answer truthfully” “Answer all questions to the best of your knowledge”

Competent (10)

“Competent” “He was competent”

Reasonable (10)

“He is reasonable”

The Judicial Officer Will Ask Questions (10)

“He may ask a few questions” “The judge asks mostly applicable questions”

It Is Not Threatening/Intimidating (9)

“Non-threatening” “Non-threatening/intimidating”

Clear (9)

“Clear” “It was very clear what she was telling you”

Uncodeable (8)

“The office is accommodating, within reason” “The referee is an outstanding heavily officer”

The Hearing Was Informative (8)

“Very informative” “The judge was willing to provide information”

Compassionate (7)

“He is compassionate” “Compassionate referee”

Considerate (7)

“He is considerate” “considerate”

Honest (6)

“He was honest”

Well-Prepared (6)

“Well-prepared” “He had read the file ahead of time”

Thoughtful (6)

“Thoughtful” “Well-reasoned ideas”

Personable (6)

“Personable” “He is serious but personable”

Serious (5)

“Serious” “He is serious”

Easy To Work With (5)

“Easy to work with” “She is...easy to work with”

Pay Attention/Listen (6)

“Listen carefully” “Take lots of notes” “Listen to the referee”

Patient (5)

“Was patient” “Judge is patient”

Have Their Paperwork Ready (5)

“Be sure to show your documents” “Be prepared with supporting documents”

Don't be Nervous (5)

“Not to be nervous” “I would tell a friend not to be nervous”

The Hearing/Process Was Interesting (5)

“Very interesting” “The referee made the hearing very interesting”

Caring (4)

“Caring” “He is caring”

Great attention to details (4)

“Very detailed” “Great attention to detail”

Be Punctual (4)

“Be on time” “Show up on time”

Appropriate (4)

“He is appropriate” “The referee is very appropriate”

Neutral Remarks (20)

“Firm” “Informal process” “He is practical” “He has his quirks”

Advice on what to do (14)

“Hire an attorney” “Don't be afraid to ask for assistance” “Listen to the referee”

Is there anything that you think we can do to improve Probate/Mental Health Court?

No/nothing (228)

“Nothing I can think of.” “I have no suggestions for improvement.”

Good experience (36)

“Good job!” “Continue the great work.”

Improve facility’s aesthetics/comfort (21)

“Air quality and temperature could be improved.” “Maybe change the décor in the courtrooms- it seems very dreary.

Make process easier/more efficient (19)

“Put hearing schedule in two places: by elevator and outside court rooms.” “It would have been useful to me to have the forms for Probate available online.”

More information (18)

“A “what to expect” pamphlet would be helpful.” “Provide documents and written directions on how to complete them, i.e. examples.”

Stay on time (14)

“Be on time.” “Try your best to be on time for special needs cases- it was difficult for my son to wait.”

Court is working well/efficient (14)

“The system works well.” “Things seem pretty user friendly at this time.”

Schedule cases faster/make appointments (11)

“The first available appointment with registrar was over 2 weeks from time we called in.”

“Schedule cases on 15 minute intervals.”

Positive comments (7)

“This court does a fine job in helping the public understand what is happening during hearings.”

“This seemed to be taken more seriously with more appropriate demeanor than prior cases, which was very appreciated.”

Probate Registrar-- positive comments (7)

“Make more registrars like this one.” “Give her a nicer office.”

Better than other courts in the state (7)

“You do a much better job than any other county.” “No, hearings are handled here vastly better than other areas of District Court and other judicial districts/counties.”

Don’t know (6)

“Unsure.” “Uncertain at this time.”

Quick (5)

“I was very pleased with the speed of our case.” “This matter was resolved quickly and without delay.”

Negative comments (5)

“The rest of the commitment/guardianship procedure needs a lot of help!” “We question whether an attorney needed to be appointed-- a guardian is clearly needed and the report shall have been sufficient under the circumstances.”

Judicial officer comments (5)

“Add more personnel-- referees.” “Probate and Mental Health are very different and it is my experience that Probate referee’s do not adequately understand mental health cases.”

Staff should be friendlier (4)

“Make sure the people who answer the phones do not seem in too big of a rush, but are patient and helpful and understand this is intimidating for the public to call the court.” “Be more attentive to respondent.”

Other (13)

“Yes, listen to her birth children.” “As happened today, it best to keep superfluous comments out of court hearing.”

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