



*Fourth Judicial District of the State of Minnesota
Fourth Judicial District Research Division*

Suburban Courts Fairness Study

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Suburban Courts Fairness Study

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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 suburban courts were interviewed just after their case was called before a judge or a prosecutor.
- Two-hundred ninety eight defendants agreed to be interviewed.

Results of Quantitative Analysis

- Overall, respondents were satisfied with how they were treated by the judge or the prosecutor.
- Those who had a high school diploma or less were more likely to be satisfied with their outcome compared to those with more education.
- Women were more likely than men to feel they were treated fairly.
- Whites were more likely than non-whites to report they understood the judge or prosecutor's decision and intended to comply with it. Whites were also more likely than non-whites to hold favorable views of Hennepin County and Minnesota courts.¹
- People who were interviewed in the morning were more likely to have positive views about their outcomes compared to those who were interviewed in the afternoon.
- Those who appeared in court with an attorney (private or Public Defender) were more likely than those without an attorney to feel they were treated fairly; however, those who received a Public Defender held the most negative views of Hennepin County and Minnesota courts compared to those who appeared without an attorney and those who obtained private counsel.

Results of Qualitative Analysis

- Most responses to the open-ended questions were positive and many respondents indicated a high level of satisfaction with both the judges and prosecutors.

¹ Not all racial groups had a large enough sample to conduct analyses among all racial categories so they were combined into a "non-white" group.

- Negative comments mostly had to do with waiting time and hiring additional staff and/or opening more courtrooms.

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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 judge 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, and Housing Court. This particular report documents the results of the Suburban Courts Study in the three locations: Brookdale, Ridgedale, and Southdale.

Background of Suburban Courts Fairness Study

The decision to study the suburban criminal calendar came out of a request from the criminal division. This study took the form of a “customer satisfaction” survey, as well as an assessment of fairness related to the Suburban Court process.

The Suburban Court Process

Cases are assigned to the Suburban Court calendars based on the location where the offense occurred, and include non-felony cases (petty misdemeanors, common misdemeanors, and gross misdemeanors). Felony offenses, regardless of offense location, are handled at the downtown location (See Appendix E for a list of each suburban location and their corresponding communities). Most often the Criminal Judge Calendar includes cases at all non-felony levels; whereas, the Petty Prosecutor Calendar only handles petty misdemeanor cases, particularly traffic violations. Cases end up at the Suburban Courts via three different routes: (1) *Citations*, where defendants can pay the fine or call the court to schedule a court date if they wish to dispute the charge, (2) *Tab Charges*², where defendants are arrested and booked into jail, and which necessitate a court appearance, or (3) *Complaints*³ which are filed by a prosecutor and also require a court appearance.

Judge Calendar All defendants scheduled to appear before a judge are told to be in court by 8:30am. Defendants are called before the judge, one case at a time. These cases include criminal offenses (e.g., Disorderly Conduct, Check Forgery, and Trespassing), Domestic Assaults, and traffic offenses (e.g., DWI, Driving without Insurance).

Petty Prosecutor Calendar When this research was conducted during the spring of 2004, the Petty Prosecutor calendar was held at the Southdale location every Tuesday at 1:30 and the first Thursday of every month at the Ridgedale location. Brookdale did not have designated days where prosecutors handle cases; however, the prosecutors handle cases before and after cases on the judge calendar.⁴ Most of the people on these calendars have already visited the Hearing Office about their traffic violation and would like to contest the matter in court. A small percentage of defendants are heard on the Petty Prosecutor calendar after calling the court and scheduling a court date. Cases on the Petty Prosecutor Calendar include traffic offenses such as speeding, not obeying traffic signs, or not obeying traffic lights. Defendants on the Petty Prosecutor calendar are heard one at a time. Defendants can plead guilty and pay a fine, be given diversion (where the charge will be removed from their record if they comply with orders of the prosecutor for a stated amount of time), or their case can be dismissed.

The Suburban Courts handle approximately 37,893 cases per year. Across the three locations, percentages of guilty pleas range from 54% to 77%, cases that are placed on diversion

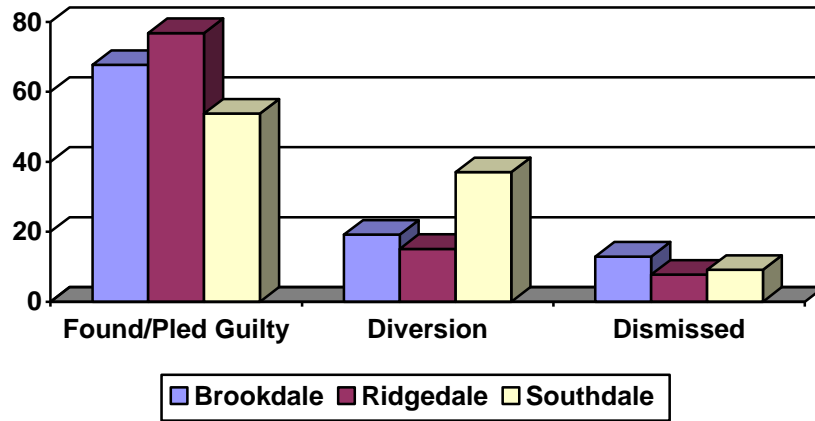
² Tab charges require defendants to be fingerprinted and booked at the local jail and are charged by a police officer. Defendants are released if there is no bail required or if they have posted their bail. Upon release they are given a court date for their first appearance, if they cannot post bail, they remain in custody until their first appearance.

³ Complaints are charged by the prosecutor and signed by the judge, prosecutor, and police officer for Probable Cause. Defendants are either arrested or after the complaint is filed, the court date is mailed to the defendant.

⁴ Since the completion of this study, all cases that would be handled on the Petty Prosecutor Calendar are now handled on the Judge Calendar for that suburban location.

range from 15% to 37%, and a small percentage of cases are dismissed (8% to 13%). The chart below depicts the case outcomes for each location.

Case Outcomes (Percentages)



The Survey Process

Research staff members conducted surveys over a five week period. For cases on the judge calendar, researchers waited in the courtroom and approached individuals after their cases were complete. For cases on the petty prosecutor calendar, interviewers waited right outside the courtroom and approached individuals as they came out of the courtroom. After verifying that their case was complete and they had met with a judge or prosecutor, the surveyors asked these individuals if they would like to complete a brief survey about their experience and provide feedback for the courts.

The survey was administered out loud by the research staff person, usually seated at a table either next to or across from the survey respondent, or sometimes standing next to him/her. The person being surveyed was usually able to read the questions as they were being read aloud. Each survey lasted no more than five minutes. (See Appendix A for a copy of the survey instrument).

The survey began with some basic demographic information about the respondent. This section also included a question about what type of representation they had (pro se, private attorney, or Public Defender). For those who indicated they represented themselves or had a public defender, we asked them to tell us in their own words why they did not hire a private attorney. Much of the remainder of the survey consisted of questions regarding fairness, asking survey respondents to rate their level of agreement with each statement based on a 9 point scale. A rating of 1 indicated strong disagreement with the statement, a rating of 9 indicated strong agreement with the statement, and a rating of 5 indicated a neutral feeling about the statement. These questions all addressed how respondents felt they were treated by judges or prosecutors and perceptions of the Fourth Judicial District court system in general. Finally, the last four questions were “open-ended” and respondents were asked to provide their opinions of the court

process, suggestions for improvement, what expectations they had before coming to court, and whether what happened during their visit was similar or different than their expectations.

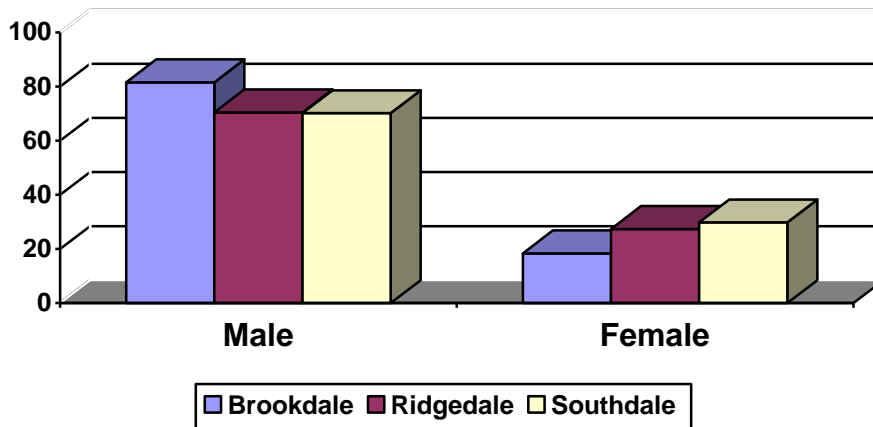
We interviewed 98 people from Brookdale, 95 from Ridgedale, and 104 from Southdale, totaling 298 individuals who agreed to speak with us regarding their experience with the suburban courts.

Results of Quantitative Data Analysis

Demographics

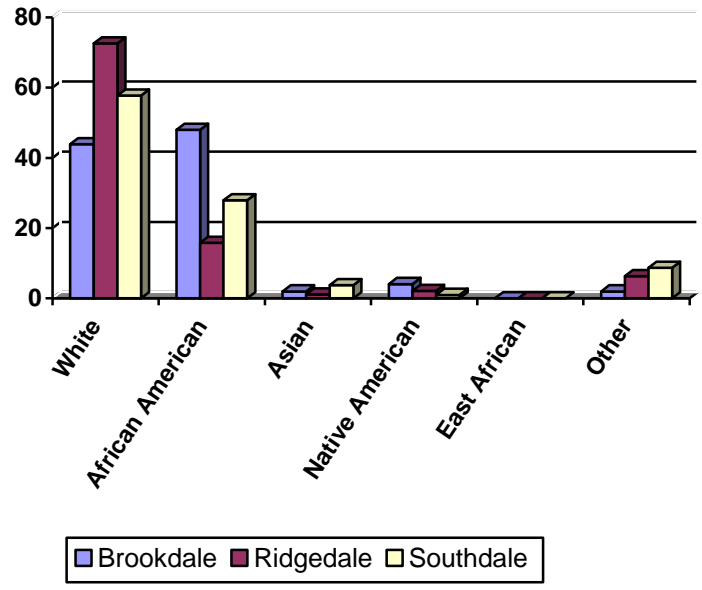
Nearly 75% (221) of the people we interviewed were male, and 25% (75) were female. This gender breakdown is very similar across all suburban locations. Individual breakdowns for each location are listed in the graph on the following page.

Gender of Survey Respondents (Percentages)



Over half (58%) of those we interviewed from all suburban locations were white and nearly one-third (31%) were African American. These demographics are relatively similar across all suburban locations; however, Ridgedale seemed to have the largest numbers of whites (73%) and Brookdale had the largest number of African Americans (48%). Regardless of race, 3.4 % (10) of the individuals we talked to told us they were of Hispanic descent.

Race of Survey Respondents (Percentages)

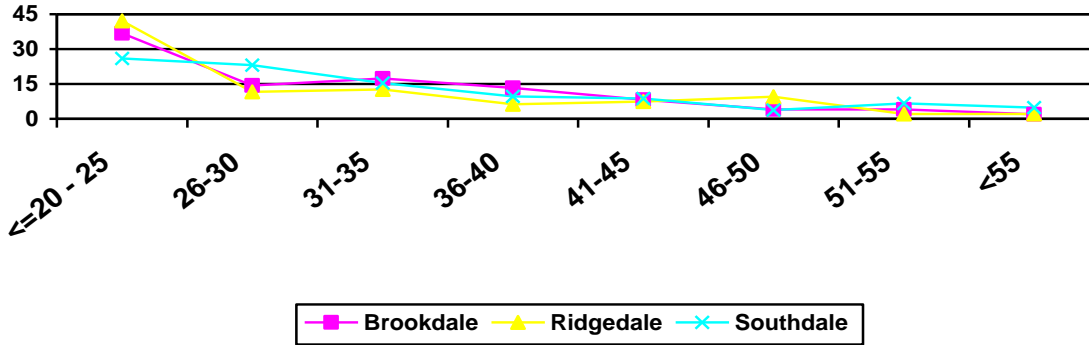


Race of Survey Respondents

	White	Asian	American Indian	Black/African-American	East African	Other	Total
Brookdale	43 43.9%	2 2.0%	4 4.1%	47 48.0%	0 0%	2 2.0%	98 100%
Ridgedale	69 72.6%	1 1.1%	2 2.1%	15 15.8%	0 0%	6 6.3%	95 100%
Southdale	60 57.7%	4 3.8%	1 1.0%	29 27.9%	0 0%	9 8.7%	104 100%

The population of those visiting the suburban courts, regardless of location, were disproportionately young. About half (53%) of those interviewed at the suburban locations were thirty years old or younger. Nearly 25% (74) were between the ages of 31 and 40, and the remaining 21% (63) were over the age of 40.

Age Distribution of Survey Respondents (Percentages)



Across all suburban locations, more than 25% (78) of the survey respondents were college educated. Many (22%) reported having attended some college. Most (67%) were employed at the time we interviewed them and more than half (54%) of those who were employed reported having a full-time permanent job. Those on the Petty Prosecutor Calendar were twice as likely to report completing a college degree (45%) than those on the Judge Calendar (20%). Compared with Hennepin County as a whole, those who visited the suburban courts were less educated and less likely to have a job. About 82% of the Hennepin County adult residents were employed in the 2000 Census and 54% had some college but had not received a degree.

Education Level of Survey Respondents (Percentages)

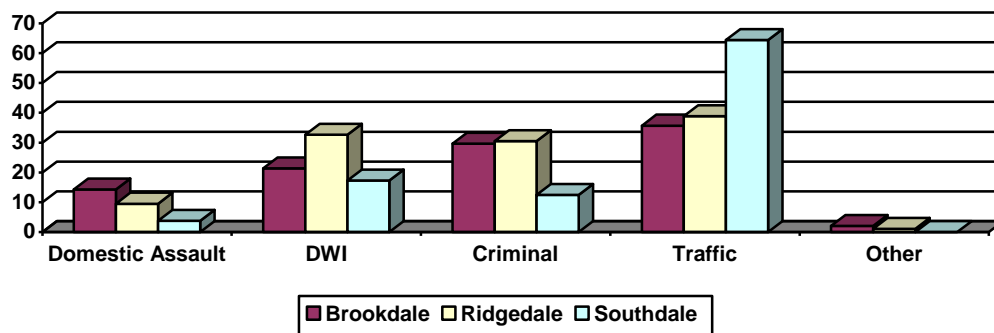
	Brookdale	Ridgedale	Southdale
<i>Less than high school</i>	10 10.2%	1 1.1%	1 1.0%
<i>Some high school</i>	7 7.1%	14 14.7%	5 4.8%
<i>Earned diploma or GED</i>	44 44.9%	32 33.7%	25 24.0%
<i>Trade school</i>	5 5.1%	3 3.2%	8 7.7%
<i>Some college</i>	22 22.4%	20 21.1%	22 21.2%
<i>Finished college degree</i>	10 10.2%	25 26.3%	43 41.3%

Court Related Data

The majority of the people we interviewed came to the suburban courts for a traffic violation (44%). An additional one-quarter of them were in court for a DWI (24%) and another 24% for a criminal matter. A smaller number of respondents were in court for domestic assault (9%). The case types in our study are relatively similar to the percentages of case types handled in the Suburban Courts over the last year; however, the objective data report a greater percentage of traffic offenses and fewer criminal cases.

Most defendants appeared in court for only one charge (91%), and a much smaller percentage were in court for two charges (6%) or three charges (less than 1%).

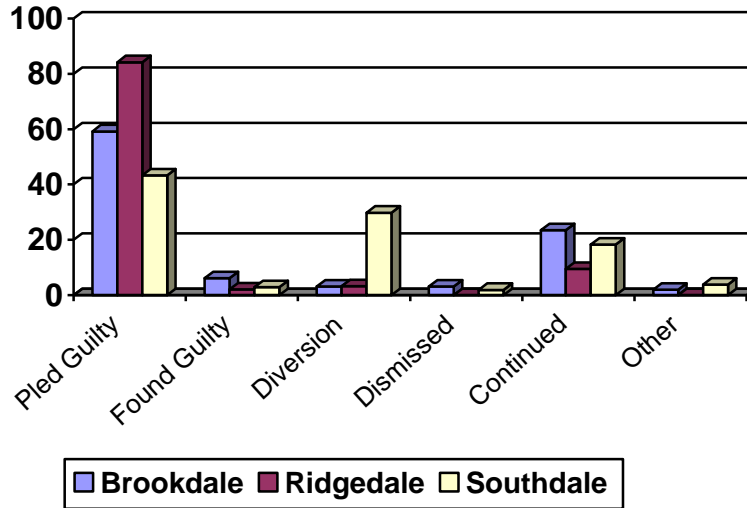
Types of Cases for Survey Respondents (Percentages)



Most of the people we interviewed indicated that they pled guilty (61%). People who visited the Ridgedale location were more likely to have pled guilty compared to the other two suburban locations. The graph below includes all cases (Petty Prosecutor and Judge Calendars); however, if we look at outcomes for the Judge calendar only, Ridgedale still has a greater percentage of those who plead guilty (89%) compared to Southdale (64%) and Brookdale (60%).⁵

⁵ The percentages for those who plead guilty are higher compared to the objective data that reports all Suburban Court cases over the last year. This is because defendants whose cases are dismissed are less likely to appear in court and we only interviewed those who were required to make a court appearance.

Types of Reported Outcomes for Their Case (Percentages)

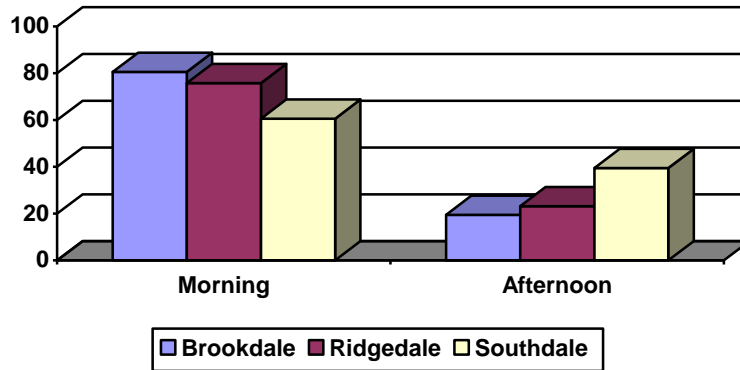


Types of Reported Outcomes for Based on Case Type (Percentages)

	Domestic Assault	DWI	Other Criminal	Other Traffic
<i>Plead Guilty</i>	9 (33.3%)	59 (84.3%)	50 (70.4%)	78 (55.7)
<i>Found Guilty</i>	1 (3.7%)	1 (1.4%)	1 (1.4%)	8 (5.7%)
<i>Diversion⁶</i>	1 (3.7%)	0 (0%)	3 (4.2%)	32 (22.9%)
<i>Dismissed</i>	1 (3.7%)	1 (1.4%)	2 (2.8%)	1 (0.7%)
<i>Continued for another date</i>	13 (48.1%)	8 (11.4%)	13 (18.3)	17 (12.1%)
<i>Other</i>	1 (3.7%)	1 (1.4%)	1 (1.4%)	3 (2.1%)

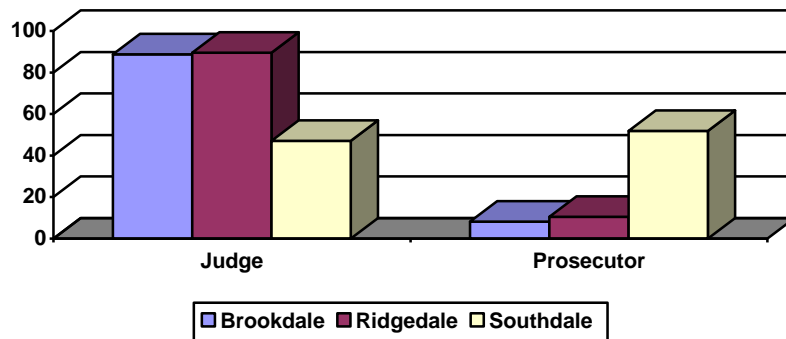
⁶ Diversion means the charge will be removed from the defendant's record if they comply with orders of the court for a stated amount of time.

Time of Day when Visitors were Interviewed (Percentages)



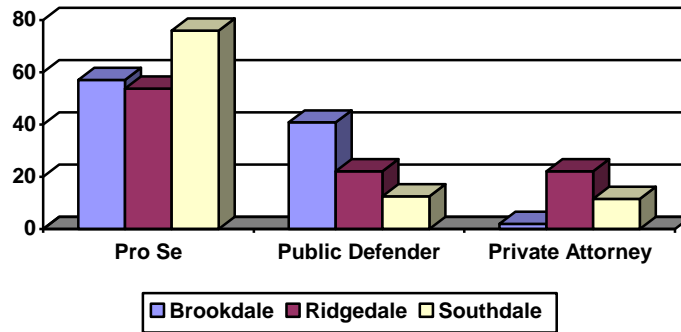
Most of the people we interviewed were from the judge calendar. The only exception is the Southdale location. Southdale has a Petty Prosecutor calendar once a week; therefore, we were able to interview more people who saw the prosecutor at Southdale compared to other locations.

Type of Calendar for Survey Respondents (Percentages)



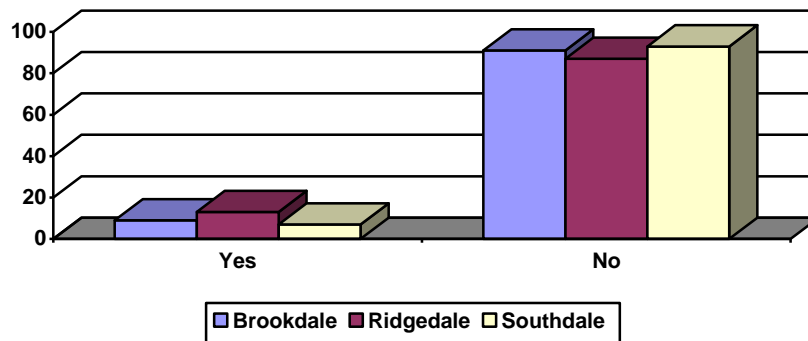
Sixty-two percent (186) of the people we interviewed indicated they did not have an attorney representing them in court. This was especially true for those on the Petty Prosecutor calendar (97%) than those on the Judge Calendar (54%). Regardless of case type, the respondents at Brookdale (41%) were more likely to have a Public Defender compared to other locations. Additionally, those we interviewed from Ridgedale (22%) were more likely to have a private attorney compared to those from Southdale and Brookdale.

Type of Representation for Defendants (Percentages)



If individuals reported that they hired a private attorney or appeared without an attorney, we asked them if they applied for a Public Defender. Across all three locations, most respondents (65%) indicated they did not apply for a Public Defender.

Did Defendants Apply for a Public Defender if They Did Not Appear with an Attorney? (Percentages)



We asked litigants to answer the following question in their own words: “*what prevented you from hiring a private attorney*”

The three most common response categories to this question were:

- “*Money*” 52%
- “*Didn’t need one.*” 17%
- “*Case wasn’t a big deal.*” 15%

Other comments included that they did not have time to obtain a lawyer, they had no job, or they knew they were guilty.

Assessments of Fairness and Customer Satisfaction

The survey included 24 separate indicators of fairness that have all been asked in our other studies. However, two additional questions were added about visitors’ satisfaction with the

service they received at the check-in counter and their knowledge of who everyone was in the courtroom (i.e., did they understand who the Public Defender was? who the Prosecutor was? who the Court Clerk was?).

Most of the indicators were worded positively (e.g., “The judge/prosecutor treated me fairly”) whereas some were worded negatively (e.g., “The judge/prosecutor did not explain his/her decision to me”). For the purposes of analysis, the responses on the negatively worded statements were reverse coded to make them positive. In other words, the higher the score on any statement, the more positive the litigant felt about the court experience. Another way of saying this is that the closer the averages for each individual indicator get to 9, the more fair litigants perceive the judge or the prosecutor.

Univariate Analysis

Before grouping the fairness indicators into logical theoretical constructs so that we could conduct bivariate analysis (i.e., did individuals of one group give higher or lower fairness ratings than individuals of another group?), we ran simple univariate analysis to get a sense of how the judges and prosecutors were rated by people who met with them during this time frame.

Perhaps the most undisputable outcome of the entire study is that individuals gave mostly positive ratings to the behavior of the judges and prosecutors. 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 between 7 and 8. Some examples are provided below:

<i>Survey Statement</i>	<i>Brookdale</i>	<i>Ridgedale</i>	<i>Southdale</i>
<i>The judge treated me with respect.</i>	8.38	8.13	7.67
<i>The prosecutor treated me with respect.</i>	8.17	8.20	8.22
<i>The judge behaved very fairly toward me in this case.</i>	8.17	7.80	7.72
<i>The prosecutor behaved very fairly toward me in this case.</i>	8.17	7.40	7.70
<i>The judge seemed to be a caring person.</i>	7.64	7.32	6.35
<i>The prosecutor seemed to be a caring person.</i>	7.67	7.00	7.35
<i>The judge treated me fairly.</i>	8.16	7.80	7.38
<i>The prosecutor treated me fairly.</i>	7.67	6.50	7.49

The items that had the lowest average scores had to do with the courts in general:

<i>Survey Statement</i>	<i>Brookdale</i>	<i>Ridgedale</i>	<i>Southdale</i>
<i>The courts in Hennepin County are excellent.</i>	5.37	5.51	5.18
<i>The courts in this state guarantee everyone a fair trial.</i>	5.67	5.69	5.63
<i>I am confident in the courts in this state.</i>	5.93	5.84	5.73

Factor Analysis

Analysts typically try to find ways to reduce their data when they have as many independent indicators as we did in these data. Data reduction makes the data more useful, by consolidating a large number of separate statements into a few theoretical constructs. To do this, we ran a statistical procedure known as factor analysis, which shows how the indicators “cluster” with other indicators. The results of the factor analysis were used to consolidate the 22⁷ statements into four different theoretical constructs for the purposes of analysis. (See Appendix C for a complete list of all the indicators that formed each theoretical construct.) In short, the 22 fairness indicators consolidated into scales which represented the following four concepts:

1. ***Procedural fairness*** or the extent to which the survey respondent felt that their case was dealt with fairly and the extent to which they felt they were treated fairly by the judge or prosecutor.
2. ***Distributive fairness*** or the extent to which the survey respondent felt they were satisfied with the outcome of their case.
3. ***Understanding and compliance*** or issues pertaining to how well they understood the judge or prosecutor and their willingness to follow the judge’s or prosecutor’s orders.
4. ***Satisfaction with the Courts*** or the extent to which the survey respondent has faith in the 4th judicial district courts and courts in Minnesota.

The remainder of statistical analysis employed these four constructs as representations of fairness.

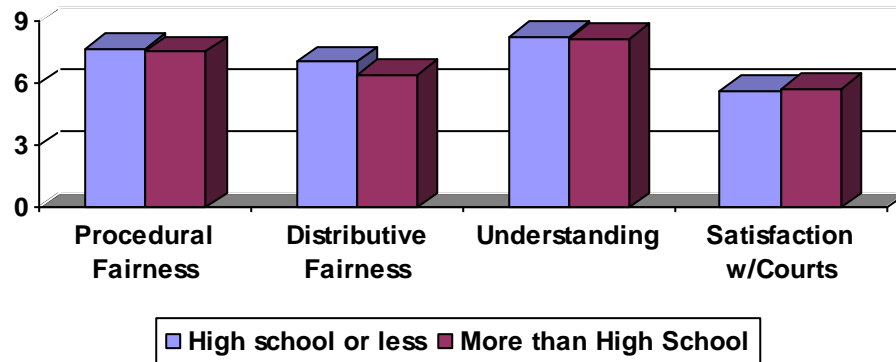
Bivariate Analysis

Average Fairness Ratings based on Education

We found significant differences between those who had a high school education or less and those who had more than a high school education only with regard to distributive fairness. Those who had a high school diploma or less had higher ratings of fairness, specifically questions about their outcome, compared to those with more education. Below we present the average scores for each of the four theoretical constructs listed above, by whether the survey respondent had a high school education or less or more than a high school education.

⁷ The factor analysis did not include the two questions added to the survey regarding knowledge of courtroom staff and satisfaction with the check-in counter.

Average Fairness Ratings based on Education



Average scores for each scale (on a scale of 1-9):

	<i>Procedural Fairness</i>	<i>Distributive Fairness</i>	<i>Understanding</i>	<i>Satisfaction w/courts</i>
High school or less	7.71	7.06	8.26	5.67
More than high school	7.55	6.43	8.17	5.76
Statistical significance	ns	*	ns	ns

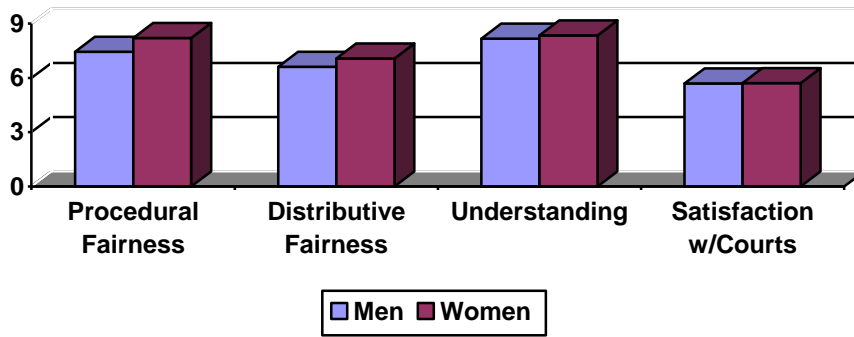
*Significance levels: ns=not significant *p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001*

The differences between levels of education on the fairness scales are statistically significant at the $p < .05$ margin. This means that there is less than a 5% probability that the observed differences occurred by chance. The differences between the averages on the other scales were not statistically significant.

Average Fairness Ratings between Male and Female Visitors to the Suburban Courts

We found significant differences between male and female respondents only with regard to their opinions regarding the procedural fairness construct. Below we present the average scores for each of the five theoretical constructs listed above, by whether the survey respondent was a man or a woman.

Average Fairness Ratings between Men and Women



Average scores for each scale (on a scale of 1-9):

	<i>Procedural Fairness</i>	<i>Distributive Fairness</i>	<i>Understanding</i>	<i>Satisfaction w/courts</i>
Men	7.45	6.62	8.17	5.70
Women	8.20	7.08	8.35	5.71
Statistical significance	***	ns	ns	ns

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

Average Fairness Ratings between White and Non-White Defendants

White defendants were more likely than non-whites to indicate they understood the judge or prosecutor’s decision and were also more willing to comply with the judge’s or prosecutor’s decision. Whites also reported more favorable views of the courts in Minnesota as compared to non-whites.

Average Fairness Ratings between Whites and Non-Whites



Average scores for each scale (on a scale of 1-9):

	<i>Procedural Fairness</i>	<i>Distributive Fairness</i>	<i>Understanding</i>	<i>Satisfaction w/courts</i>
Whites	7.71	6.67	8.34	6.19
Non-Whites	7.52	6.83	8.04	5.00
Statistical significance	ns	ns	*	***

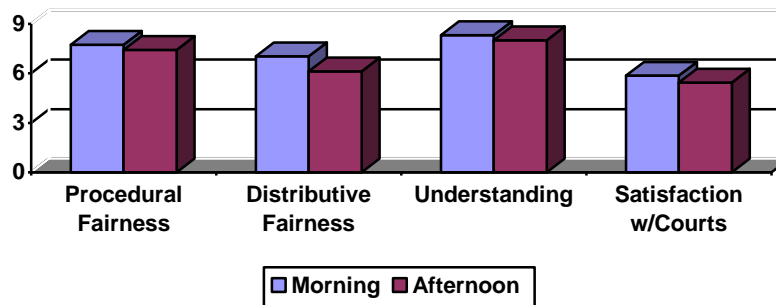
Significance levels: ns=not significant * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Average Fairness Ratings based on Time of Day

We found significant differences for the distributive fairness indicator based on the time of day the defendants were interviewed. Those who were interviewed in the morning were more likely to be satisfied with their outcome compared to those we interviewed in the afternoon. They were also more likely to report that they understood the judge’s or prosecutor’s decision and more likely to say they would comply with the decision. Those interviewed in the afternoon were defendants from the Petty Prosecutor calendar as well as those on the Judge Calendar whose cases were called at the very end; therefore, it is understandable that those who appeared in court at 8:30 a.m. and were not seen by the judge till the afternoon might be less satisfied with their outcome than those who were interviewed that morning. The table below notes the lower means for defendants on the Judge Calendar in the afternoon compared to those in the morning.

	<i>Procedural Fairness</i>	<i>Distributive Fairness</i>	<i>Understanding</i>	<i>Satisfaction w/courts</i>
Morning Judge (n=167)	7.75	7.07	8.34	5.86
Morning Prosecutor (n=3)	8.72	7.50	8.60	6.67
Afternoon Judge (n=29)	7.34	5.59	7.98	5.49
Afternoon Prosecutor (n=59)	7.48	6.45	8.02	5.42

Average Fairness Ratings based on Time of Day



Average scores for each scale (on a scale of 1-9):

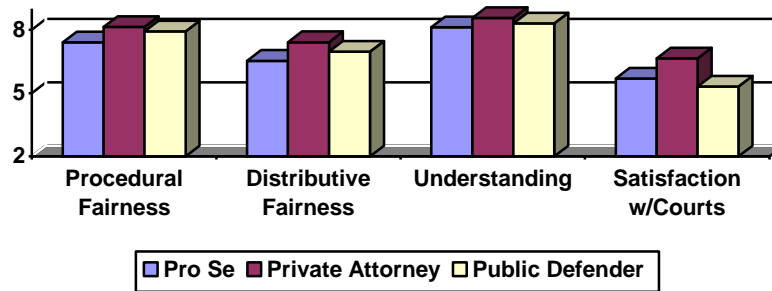
	<i>Procedural Fairness</i>	<i>Distributive Fairness</i>	<i>Understanding</i>	<i>Satisfaction w/courts</i>
Morning	7.73	7.04	8.32	5.86
Afternoon	7.43	6.13	8.00	5.45
Statistical significance	ns	**	*	ns

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

Fairness. There were significant differences on the procedural fairness indicator between those who appeared without an attorney and those who had an attorney (private or Public Defender). The difference between those who had a private attorney and those who received a Public Defender was not significantly different. Those most satisfied with the outcome they received were represented by private defense attorneys.

Courts. Those who appeared in court with a private defense attorney were significantly more likely to hold positive views about the court compared to those with a Public Defender or who were self-represented.

Average Fairness Ratings based on Type of Representation



Average scores for each scale (on a scale of 1-9):

	<i>Procedural Fairness</i>	<i>Distributive Fairness</i>	<i>Understanding</i>	<i>Satisfaction w/courts</i>
<i>Pro Se</i>	7.40	6.53	8.11	5.69
<i>Private Attorney</i>	8.13	7.41	8.56	6.65
<i>Public Defender</i>	7.92	6.96	8.30	5.31
<i>Statistical Significance</i>	*	ns	ns	*

The differences on procedural fairness and satisfaction with courts were significant at least at the .05 level.

Additional Analyses

There were other demographic indicators that did not produce statistically significant results. For example, the age of survey respondents does not appear to be related to assessments

of fairness, nor does one's employment status. Whether the defendant appeared before a judge or a prosecutor did not influence defendants' perceptions of fairness. And finally, there were no differences on the fairness ratings among the three suburban locations.

Summary of Quantitative Analysis

For defendants at the Suburban Courts, perceptions of fairness appeared to differ by some demographic characteristics (e.g., gender, education, and race) and not others (age and employment status). There were also differences between those who visited the Suburban Courts in the morning and those who visited the Suburban Courts in the afternoon, with more favorable views from those who saw the judge or prosecutor in the morning. The type of attorney defendants had also influenced their views of their court experience. Those who did not have an attorney representing them (either Public Defender or private attorney) were less likely to feel they were treated fairly. Those who received Public Defenders, as well as those who appeared without an attorney expressed greater dissatisfaction with the Minnesota and Hennepin County Courts.

Results of Qualitative Analysis

At the end of the survey, we included four questions which allowed litigants to tell us, in their own words, about their experience at the Suburban Courts. This section of the report summarizes those results.

The first open-ended question read as follows:

What expectations did you have before coming to court today?

The three most common response categories to this question were:

“None” 21%
“Get it taken care of” 13%
“Have my charges dropped” 13%⁸

Other comments included positive expectations, such as being treated fairly and having the courts work with the defendants. Others expected to pay a higher fine or to receive some or more jail time.

The second open-ended question read as follows:

Was your experience similar or different than what you expected? How so?

The three most common response categories to this question were:

“Similar” 45%
“Different” 33%
No Jail Time 29%

Defendants also mentioned that they had been there before and knew what to expect, or that they had gone online to learn what to expect. Court visitors (10) also reported that their case went better than they had expected.

The third open-ended question read as follows:

Say you had a friend who was coming to court before this judicial officer or prosecutor. What would you tell your friend?

The top three responses to this question were:

Judge/Prosecutor—positive comments 19%
“Be honest” 13%

⁸ Many of the responses for the open-ended questions fell into the “other” category, meaning that their responses did not fit into any category; however, these responses were too varied to create additional categories. For exemplars of all categories, please see Appendix D.

“Judge/Prosecutor was fair” 12%

Other comments included advice such as cooperating with the court, not to worry, and to tell one’s side of the story or explain to the judge or prosecutor what happened.

The fourth and final question read as follows:

Is there anything else you think we can do to improve ___dale court?

The top three responses to this question were:

“No” 65%

“Speed it up” 29%

Overall positive comments 10%

Defendants also mentioned improvements such as having better signs to let people know where to go. People also noted they had difficulty getting information over the phone. Some defendants expressed dissatisfaction with the Public Defenders, indicating they did not feel the Public Defenders were there to help them or assist them in understanding the process. Comments irrelevant to the court process included the need for waiting area improvements, such as better chairs and vending machines.

Summary of Qualitative Analysis

Survey respondents provided much positive feedback about their experience in the Suburban Courts. When asked about what expectations they had before coming to court and whether their experience was similar or different, many defendants indicated their case had gone just as they expected and very few reported that their case was handled differently than they expected. By far, the most negative comments had to do with the wait time. Speeding up the court process was the second most common suggested improvement. Additionally, defendants requested more staff and more courtrooms—an improvement that could reduce the amount of time defendants wait to have their case called. Defendants also commented that the courts could be improved if calendars started on time so defendants would not have to wait so long to be seen by a judge or prosecutor.

Overall Conclusions and Report Summary

Overall, defendants were satisfied with their experience at the Suburban Courts and the treatment they received from either the judge or the prosecutor. This was demonstrated by the high scores on at least three of the four fairness scales.⁹ Additionally, the majority of open-ended responses were overwhelmingly positive. Many defendants reported that the judge or prosecutor was fair, was nice, and did a good job. The most common complaint from defendants was that they felt they waited too long or that the process took too long.

⁹ The satisfaction with courts scale scores were typically lower than the others, but this taps into survey respondents’ experiences with other areas of the court besides the Suburban Courts. We have found lower ratings on these statements across all of the courts where we have measured fairness and outside of Hennepin County.

Appendix A: Suburban Court Survey (on the following pages)

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

Visitors were read the following statements and asked to indicate 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, standard deviations in parentheses, and number of responses based on whether they saw a judge or prosecutor, as well as what suburb location they visited, as well as the means for the data from all courts combined.¹⁰

The judge/prosecutor used words I understood.

	Brookdale	Ridgedale	Southdale	All responses
Judge	8.38 (1.63) n = 89	8.54 (1.00) n = 83	7.92 (2.15) n = 50	8.34 (1.58) n = 223
Prosecutor	9.00 (0.00) n = 6	8.00 (1.49) n = 10	8.38 (1.51) n = 53	8.38 (1.45) n = 69
All responses	8.28 (1.88) n = 98	8.48 (1.07) n = 93	8.16 (1.84) n = 104	8.30 (1.65) n = 296

The judge/prosecutor gave reasons for his or her decision.

	Brookdale	Ridgedale	Southdale	All responses
Judge	7.60 (2.43) n = 88	6.94 (2.68) n = 80	6.46 (2.97) n = 48	7.11 (2.67) n = 217
Prosecutor	6.33 (4.13) n = 6	6.60 (2.91) n = 10	7.80 (1.81) n = 50	7.48 (2.30) n = 66
All responses	7.57 (2.53) n = 97	6.90 (2.69) n = 90	7.12 (2.52) n = 99	7.21 (2.58) n = 287

The judge/prosecutor made sure I understood the decision.

	Brookdale	Ridgedale	Southdale	All responses
Judge	8.17 (2.00) n = 88	8.15 (1.91) n = 82	7.76 (2.22) n = 50	8.07 (2.01) n = 221
Prosecutor	9.00 (0.00) n = 6	7.60 (1.43) n = 10	8.29 (1.53) n = 52	8.25 (1.47) n = 68
All responses	8.17 (2.06) n = 96	8.09 (1.87) n = 92	8.04 (1.90) n = 103	8.10 (1.94) n = 292

The judge/prosecutor seemed to be a caring person.

	Brookdale	Ridgedale	Southdale	All responses
Judge	7.64 (1.93) n = 89	7.32 (2.23) n = 84	6.35 (2.70) n = 49	7.24 (2.27) n = 223
Prosecutor	7.67 (3.27) n = 6	7.00 (1.89) n = 10	7.35 (2.51) n = 52	7.32 (2.47) n = 68
All responses	7.59 (2.11) n = 97	7.29 (2.19) n = 94	6.84 (2.64) n = 102	7.24 (2.34) n = 294

¹⁰ Some of the totals in each grid may be higher than what is reported for either the calendar type or court location because court location and calendar type were not recorded on all of the surveys.

The judge/prosecutor was impolite. (Reverse coded to indicate the judge/prosecutor *was* polite.)

	Brookdale	Ridgedale	Southdale	All responses
Judge	8.54 (1.37) n = 89	8.37 (1.57) n = 84	7.96 (2.25) n = 49	8.35 (1.67) n = 223
Prosecutor	8.33 (1.63) n = 6	8.40 (1.26) n = 10	8.25 (1.73) n = 51	8.28 (1.64) n = 67
All responses	8.39 (1.68) n = 98	8.37 (1.53) n = 94	8.12 (1.99) n = 101	8.29 (1.75) n = 294

The judge/prosecutor treated me with respect.

	Brookdale	Ridgedale	Southdale	All responses
Judge	8.38 (1.42) n = 89	8.13 (1.61) n = 83	7.67 (2.24) n = 49	8.14 (1.71) n = 222
Prosecutor	8.17 (2.04) n = 6	8.20 (1.23) n = 10	8.22 (1.77) n = 51	8.21 (1.70) n = 67
All responses	8.31 (1.61) n = 98	8.14 (1.56) n = 93	7.96 (2.01) n = 101	8.14 (1.75) n = 293

I agree with the judge/prosecutor's decision.

	Brookdale	Ridgedale	Southdale	All responses
Judge	7.36 (2.66) n = 89	7.17 (2.59) n = 82	6.31 (3.20) n = 48	7.07 (2.78) n = 220
Prosecutor	8.83 (0.41) n = 6	4.90 (2.96) n = 10	7.23 (2.49) n = 48	7.02 (2.64) n = 64
All responses	7.34 (2.73) n = 98	6.92 (2.71) n = 92	6.75 (2.88) n = 97	7.01 (2.77) n = 288

The judge/prosecutor did not explain his or her decision to me. (Reverse coded to indicate the judge/prosecutor *did* explain the decision.)

	Brookdale	Ridgedale	Southdale	All responses
Judge	8.08 (2.25) n = 88	7.46 (2.73) n = 83	7.02 (3.04) n = 49	7.62 (2.64) n = 221
Prosecutor	8.00 (2.45) n = 6	5.80 (3.08) n = 10	7.33 (2.71) n = 49	7.15 (2.77) n = 65
All responses	8.03 (2.30) n = 97	7.28 (2.81) n = 93	7.15 (2.86) n = 99	7.49 (2.68) n = 290

The judge/prosecutor cared about my welfare.

	Brookdale	Ridgedale	Southdale	All responses
Judge	6.79 (2.75) n = 87	6.88 (2.60) n = 82	5.13 (2.74) n = 45	6.49 (2.76) n = 215
Prosecutor	6.83 (3.25) n = 6	6.11 (2.71) n = 9	6.24 (2.16) n = 50	6.28 (2.32) n = 65
All responses	6.78 (2.80) n = 96	6.80 (2.60) n = 91	5.71 (2.49) n = 96	6.43 (2.68) n = 284

The judge/prosecutor treated me fairly.

	Brookdale	Ridgedale	Southdale	All responses
Judge	8.16 (1.77) n = 87	7.80 (1.90) n = 84	7.38 (2.15) n = 47	7.86 (1.92) n = 221
Prosecutor	7.67 (3.27) n = 6	6.50 (2.51) n = 10	7.49 (2.17) n = 51	7.36 (2.31) n = 67
All responses	8.07 (1.99) n = 98	7.66 (2.00) n = 94	7.41 (2.15) n = 99	7.72 (2.06) n = 292

The outcome I received was worse than I deserved. (Reverse coded to indicate the outcome was not worse than he/she deserved.)

	Brookdale	Ridgedale	Southdale	All responses
Judge	6.64 (3.09) n = 89	6.46 (3.12) n = 80	6.36 (2.91) n = 47	6.53 (3.05) n = 217
Prosecutor	7.50 (3.21) n = 6	6.40 (2.37) n = 10	6.30 (3.09) n = 50	6.42 (2.98) n = 66
All responses	6.52 (3.19) n = 98	6.46 (3.04) n = 90	6.32 (2.97) n = 98	6.44 (3.06) n = 287

My case was completed in a timely fashion.

	Brookdale	Ridgedale	Southdale	All responses
Judge	6.09 (3.32) n = 89	5.95 (3.37) n = 83	5.67 (3.27) n = 46	5.96 (3.32) n = 219
Prosecutor	6.17 (4.02) n = 6	7.30 (2.41) n = 10	6.20 (2.85) n = 51	6.36 (2.89) n = 67
All responses	6.14 (3.32) n = 98	6.10 (3.30) n = 93	5.98 (3.05) n = 98	6.08 (3.21) n = 290

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

	Brookdale	Ridgedale	Southdale	All responses
Judge	6.92 (2.90) n = 88	6.85 (2.75) n = 81	6.20 (2.93) n = 46	6.75 (2.85) n = 216
Prosecutor	7.67 (3.27) n = 6	4.00 (3.13) n = 10	6.31 (2.97) n = 49	6.08 (3.12) n = 65
All responses	6.95 (2.95) n = 97	6.54 (2.91) n = 91	6.24 (2.92) n = 96	6.59 (2.93) n = 285

The outcome of my case was fair.

	Brookdale	Ridgedale	Southdale	All responses
Judge	7.08 (2.80) n = 86	7.06 (2.64) n = 81	6.26 (2.96) n = 46	6.91 (2.78) n = 214
Prosecutor	6.33 (4.13) n = 6	6.20 (2.04) n = 10	6.34 (2.91) n = 50	6.32 (2.88) n = 66
All responses	6.98 (2.92) n = 94	6.97 (2.58) n = 91	6.27 (2.92) n = 97	6.74 (2.83) n = 283

I am confused by the judge/prosecutor's decision. (Reverse coded to indicate he/she was not confused by the decision.)

	Brookdale	Ridgedale	Southdale	All responses
Judge	7.95 (2.28) n = 88	8.11 (1.97) n = 81	7.30 (2.83) n = 47	7.88 (2.31) n = 217
Prosecutor	9.00 (0.00) n = 6	7.60 (2.32) n = 10	8.02 (1.82) n = 50	8.03 (1.83) n = 66
All responses	7.89 (2.41) n = 97	8.05 (2.01) n = 91	7.67 (2.37) n = 98	7.87 (2.27) n = 287

I will try to follow the judge/prosecutor's order in this case.

	Brookdale	Ridgedale	Southdale	All responses
Judge	8.63 (1.30) n = 89	8.88 (0.53) n = 82	8.72 (0.89) n = 46	8.74 (0.98) n = 218
Prosecutor	9.00 (0.00) n = 6	7.80 (2.20) n = 10	8.27 (1.60) n = 51	8.27 (1.64) n = 67
All responses	8.58 (1.46) n = 98	8.76 (0.92) n = 92	8.49 (1.32) n = 98	8.61 (1.26) n = 289

I understand what is required of me in order to comply with the judge/prosecutor's decision.

	Brookdale	Ridgedale	Southdale	All responses
Judge	8.74 (0.98) n = 88	8.38 (1.71) n = 82	8.64 (0.93) n = 45	8.58 (1.30) n = 216
Prosecutor	8.67 (0.82) n = 6	8.22 (0.97) n = 9	8.28 (1.88) n = 50	8.31 (1.70) n = 65
All responses	8.74 (0.95) n = 96	8.36 (1.65) n = 91	8.46 (1.51) n = 96	8.52 (1.40) n = 284

The judge/prosecutor behaved very fairly toward me in this case.

	Brookdale	Ridgedale	Southdale	All responses
Judge	8.17 (1.99) n = 85	7.80 (2.17) n = 81	7.72 (1.91) n = 46	7.94 (2.04) n = 215
Prosecutor	8.17 (2.04) n = 6	7.40 (1.71) n = 10	7.70 (2.22) n = 50	7.70 (2.12) n = 66
All responses	8.11 (2.09) n = 96	7.76 (2.12) n = 91	7.72 (2.06) n = 97	7.87 (2.09) n = 285

I felt knowledgeable about who everyone is in the courtroom and what their role is (e.g., defense attorney, prosecutor, clerks, etc.).

	Brookdale	Ridgedale	Southdale	All responses
Judge	7.78 (2.14) n = 87	6.77 (2.92) n = 82	6.41 (2.84) n = 46	7.11 (2.66) n = 216
Prosecutor	6.17 (3.71) n = 6	5.50 (2.80) n = 10	7.08 (2.72) n = 50	6.76 (2.85) n = 66
All responses	7.62 (2.36) n = 95	6.63 (2.92) n = 92	6.76 (2.79) n = 96	7.01 (2.72) n = 284

I was satisfied with the service I received at the check in counter.¹¹

	Brookdale	Ridgedale	Southdale	All responses
Judge	8.05 (1.94) n = 61	7.78 (2.08) n = 59	6.40 (2.98) n = 30	7.61 (2.30) n = 150
Prosecutor	8.33 (1.63) n = 6	7.71 (1.38) n = 7	6.78 (3.05) n = 46	7.05 (2.82) n = 59
All responses	8.00 (2.06) n = 70	7.77 (2.01) n = 66	6.63 (3.01) n = 76	7.44 (2.49) n = 212

The courts in Hennepin County are excellent.

	Brookdale	Ridgedale	Southdale	All responses
Judge	5.41 (2.86) n = 87	5.54 (2.74) n = 79	5.09 (2.68) n = 43	5.40 (2.77) n = 210
Prosecutor	4.83 (3.37) n = 6	5.22 (2.59) n = 9	5.27 (2.40) n = 49	5.23 (2.48) n = 64
All responses	5.37 (2.91) n = 95	5.51 (2.72) n = 88	5.18 (2.51) n = 93	5.35 (2.71) n = 277

The courts in this state guarantee everyone a fair trial.

	Brookdale	Ridgedale	Southdale	All responses
Judge	5.83 (2.83) n = 87	5.73 (3.01) n = 73	5.81 (2.96) n = 42	5.76 (2.92) n = 203
Prosecutor	3.67 (4.13) n = 6	5.22 (2.59) n = 9	5.48 (2.95) n = 48	5.29 (2.97) n = 62
All responses	5.67 (2.97) n = 95	5.69 (2.91) n = 81	5.63 (2.92) n = 91	5.65 (2.94) n = 268

¹¹ Many people indicated they did not go to the check-in counter; therefore, the response rate for this question is much lower compared to the other questions.

Overall, I think judges/prosecutors in this state are treating people unfairly. (Reverse coded to indicate that judges/prosecutors *are* treating people fairly).

	Brookdale	Ridgedale	Southdale	All responses
Judge	6.17 (2.77) n = 87	6.42 (2.60) n = 77	6.09 (2.41) n = 43	6.26 (2.63) n = 208
Prosecutor	5.83 (2.99) n = 6	6.25 (1.75) n = 8	5.69 (2.54) n = 48	5.77 (2.47) n = 62
All responses	6.07 (2.84) n = 96	6.40 (2.53) n = 85	5.88 (2.47) n = 91	6.12 (2.62) n = 273

I am confident in the courts in this state.

	Brookdale	Ridgedale	Southdale	All responses
Judge	6.07 (2.74) n = 88	5.88 (2.82) n = 80	5.77 (2.38) n = 43	5.93 (2.69) n = 212
Prosecutor	4.17 (2.64) n = 6	5.60 (2.72) n = 10	5.71 (2.94) n = 49	5.55 (2.88) n = 65
All responses	5.93 (2.80) n = 96	5.84 (2.79) n = 90	5.73 (2.67) n = 93	5.83 (2.74) n = 280

Appendix C: List of Indicators for Each Construct

Procedural Fairness

	Brookdale	Ridgedale	Southdale	All responses
Judge	7.90 (1.54) n = 84	7.78 (1.68) n = 78	7.08 (1.87) n = 44	7.69 (1.69) n = 207
Prosecutor	7.92 (2.26) n = 6	7.20 (1.68) n = 9	7.56 (1.71) n = 48	7.54 (1.73) n = 63
All responses	7.84 (1.73) n = 92	7.72 (1.68) n = 87	7.33 (1.78) n = 93	7.63 (1.74) n = 273

- The judge or prosecutor made sure I understood the decision.
- The judge or prosecutor seemed to be a caring person.
- The judge or prosecutor treated me with respect.
- The judge or prosecutor cared about my welfare.
- The judge or prosecutor treated me fairly.
- The judge or prosecutor behaved very fairly toward me in this case.

Distributive Fairness

	Brookdale	Ridgedale	Southdale	All responses
Judge	7.03 (2.48) n = 85	6.85 (2.52) n = 78	6.42 (2.55) n = 44	6.84 (2.51) n = 208
Prosecutor	7.58 (2.10) n = 6	5.38 (2.15) n = 10	6.60 (2.42) n = 48	6.50 (2.39) n = 64
All responses	7.00 (2.51) n = 93	6.68 (2.51) n = 88	6.49 (2.47) n = 93	6.73 (2.49) n = 275

- I agree with the judge or prosecutor's decision.
- The outcome I received was worse than I deserved.
- I am satisfied with the judge or prosecutor's decision.
- The outcome of my case was fair.

Understanding and Compliance

	Brookdale	Ridgedale	Southdale	All responses
Judge	8.39 (1.03) n = 86	8.30 (.092) n = 80	8.02 (1.22) n = 45	8.28 (1.04) n = 212
Prosecutor	8.73 (.048) n = 6	7.64 (1.31) n = 9	8.04 (1.51) n = 49	8.05 (1.43) n = 64
All responses	8.38 (1.08) n = 94	8.23 (0.98) n = 89	8.03 (1.36) n = 95	8.22 (1.16) n = 279

- The judge or prosecutor used words I understood.
- The judge or prosecutor did not explain his or her decision to me.
- I am confused by the judge or prosecutor's decision.
- I will try to follow the judge or prosecutor's order in this case.
- I understand what is required of me in order to comply with the judge or prosecutor's decision.

Satisfaction with the Courts

	Brookdale	Ridgedale	Southdale	All responses
Judge	5.86 (2.34) n = 85	5.77 (2.45) n = 71	5.69 (2.00) n = 40	5.79 (2.30) n = 197
Prosecutor	4.63 (2.97) n = 6	5.66 (2.04) n = 8	5.56 (2.34) n = 48	5.48 (2.34) n = 62
All responses	5.77 (2.43) n = 93	5.77 (2.40) n = 79	5.62 (2.18) n = 88	5.71 (3.23) n = 261

- Overall, I think judges in this state are treating people unfairly.
- The courts in Hennepin County are excellent.
- The courts in this state guarantee everyone a fair trial.
- I am confident in the courts in this state.

Appendix D: Frequencies of the Open-Ended Responses

What prevented you from hiring a private attorney?

Coding Agreement: .92

Number of perfect agreements: 203 (67%)

229 Responses

Top Three Comments:

Money (119) “Money” “Financial difficulties.”

Didn’t need one (40) “Didn’t see the need for it today.” “Wasn’t necessary.”

Case wasn’t a big deal (34) “Wasn’t a serious matter” “It wasn’t that big of a deal.”

I could take care of it (11) “Felt he could handle it himself.” “Seemed to be a case I could handle myself.”

Didn’t have time (7) “Not enough time to find one.” “It would take too long.”

I was guilty (6) “Pled guilty.” “I felt guilty so I didn’t want to go through that.”

Didn’t want one (4) “I didn’t want to pay anybody.” “Wasn’t worth it.”

No Job (4) “Don’t have a job.” “Unemployed”

Other (38) “Just wanted to wait and see how things went today.” “Wanted to get it over with.”

Uncodeable (17) “No comment” “Some paperwork”

What expectations did you have before coming to court today?

Coding Agreement: .88

Number of perfect agreements: 234 (83%)

282 Responses

Top Three Comments:

Didn't have any (70) "None really" "Didn't have any."

Get matter resolved (30) "Get all my tickets taken care of." "To get the matter solved."

To have charges dropped (20) "I thought they would throw it out."

Don't know (15) "I didn't know what to think." "Don't know"

Thought it would be worse (4) "Thought it would be a lot worse sentence." "Thought it would be worse."

Thought it would be better (6) "Hoping for lesser charge than reckless driving." "I expected to be given a lenient sentence given the state of my case."

To plead guilty (7) "I expected to plead guilty." "I expected to plead guilty and take responsibility for my actions and accept their punishment."

To plead not guilty (5) "Expected to plead not guilty and get a trial date." "Come to plead not guilty before a judge."

Long wait (6) "Thought it would take longer." "Thought I was going to be in here for a few hours."

That it would be faster (16) "I thought it would be quicker." "To get out faster."

To explain my side (13) "I thought they would hear my side of the story." "Chance to explain himself."

Get a higher fine (3) "Thought would pay big fine." "Higher fine"

Lower fine (6) "To get my fine reduced." "Expected not to pay highest cost."

No fine (3) "Didn't think I was going to have to pay a fee." "I wasn't expecting to pay anything."

Pay a fine (12) "I would probably be fined." "They would give me a fine."

Jail time (12) "Going to jail" "Thought three months of jail."

No jail time (3) "Not go to jail."

Same as what happened (12) "the same" "Pretty much what I got."

Different than what happened (2) "not the same as what came" "ticket will be dropped"

Charge dropped (20) "I thought they would throw it out." "Hoping the charges would've been dropped."

Get it off record (3) "Basically to have it wiped off of my record." "No record"

Get a CWOP (5) "Expected to receive a continued dismissal." "I expected to have continued for dismissal."

Positive (16) "Get a fair trial." "I expected them to work with me."

Negative (5) "Thought the judge wouldn't listen to him." "That I would lose my license for 30 days."

Get released (15) "That I would get out." "Get released from jail."

Other (89) "plea bargain" "Went online and that helped."

Uncodeable (6) "Was going to look for a job." "Straight to the judge."

Was your experience similar or different than what you expected? How so?

Coding Agreement: .85

Number of perfect agreements: 173 (71%)

245 Responses

Top Three Comments:

Similar (95) “similar” “everything went the way I expected”

Different (86) “thought the outcome would be better” “expected to be able to argue why I shouldn’t be charged with an offense”

No jail (70) “I thought I was going to go to jail.” “Not having to go to jail.”

Didn’t know what to expect (11) “Didn’t know what to expect” “1st time don’t know”

No expectations (12) “I have been here like ten times so I don’t expect anything.” “No expectations.”

Got what I expected (32) “Anticipated the sentence I got.” “Went as planned.”

Not what I expected (9) “Hoping for a different outcome” “Didn’t expect to pay.”

Fine reduced (6) “The fine was less than I thought it would be.” “Well I expected to get ticket dropped and that’s what happened.”

Dismissal (3) “Drop three charges and stayed one.” “Wanted to be dismissed today but it is continued to be dismissed.”

No Dismissal (6) “They didn’t throw it out, I have to do probation.” “Wasn’t dropped, going to trial.”

Jail (5) “He thought they would make him sweat by sitting in jail.” “I figured I was going to get sentenced to a couple days in jail and probation.”

Worse than I expected (4) “Thought the outcome would be better.” “Found guilty.”

Better than expected (10) “Got a better deal than I thought (fine instead of workhouse).” “Didn’t expect outcome to be so lenient was DA don’t think it was court system”

Was fair (4) “They were more fair than I expected.” “Also handled fairly—took into account situation.”

Resolved (8) “Getting all the stuff done.” “Made a plea agreement.”

It was quick (8) “Slightly timelier fashion.” “Got out faster.”

Took a long time (7) “Time waiting was far greater than expected.” “Was here a long time”

Read before (10) “I looked at my case and the statutes.” “The info I got online was close with sentencing guidelines.”

Negative comments (24) “Treated poorly in custody.” “Medical treatment not given.” “Talked to you like you were not human.” “They didn’t really listen to my story.”

Pay fine (9) “Made a deal and paid fine.” “Walking through the process and give them the money.”

Been here before (8) “Been here a month ago.” “Been in plenty of times before.”

Don’t know (6) “Don’t know.”

Court Process (14) “Have to stand in front of someone.” “Just because it was in a courtroom instead of small office.”

To be released (7) “I expected to get out.” “He was released.”

In custody (3) “Has to stay one more day.” “Because he knows he would remain in custody.”

Other (101) “I don’t know why I had to come today.” “This is what court is.”

Uncodeable (8) “They said they can’t do it.” “boring”

Say you had a friend who was coming to court before this judge or prosecutor, what would you tell your friend?

Coding Agreement: .77

Number of perfect agreements: 189 (70%)

271 Responses

Top Three Comments:

Judge/Prosecutor positive (52) “She was nice.” “Good judge.”

Be honest (34) “Be honest.” “Tell the truth.”

Judge/Prosecutor Fair (32) “The judge is pretty fair.” “He’s fair.”

Nothing (19) “Nothing” “None”

Don’t know (23) “I don’t know.” “Wouldn’t know what to say.”

Tell your side of the story (13) “Explain yourself.” “Tell them how things go so they could make their decision.”

Good luck (9) “Good luck.”

Cooperate (16) “Do what the judge tells you to do the first time.” “Follow the rules of judge.”

Hire attorney (11) “Hire an attorney.” “Try to raise some money for an attorney.”

Bring something to do/read (3) “Bring a book to read.” “Bring a magazine.”

Long wait (6) “Be prepared to sit and wait with no direction.” “long wait”

Went Quickly (3) “Quick” “Straight to the point.”

Don’t worry (19) “You should be alright.” “Don’t worry about it.”

Plead Not Guilty (2) “Plead not guilty.”

Plead Guilty (4) “Plead guilty” “Admit to it.”

Judge/Prosecutor negative (4) “Judge isn’t good.” “I wouldn’t say he’s a good judge.”

Judge/Prosecutor neutral (6) “Don’t know the judge well enough.” “He’s okay.”

Don’t go (8) “Go somewhere else.” “Not to go to court at all.”

Bring evidence (4) “Make sure you have proof of insurance.” “If you have any evidence bring it with you.”

Positive comment (10) “Hope they get the same person as I did.” “You’ll be treated good.”

Neutral comment (4) “Wasn’t that bad.” “What they recommend isn’t that bad.”

Negative comment (8) “You will not be treated fairly.” “Even if you’re not guilty you’ll be found guilty.”

Stay out of trouble (9) “Don’t get no tickets.” “Stay out of trouble.”

Be polite (22) “Be polite” “Be respectful”

Other (81) “Talk to somebody about your case.” “Hope for the best.”

Uncodeable (24) “Be honest with God ultimate judge.” “No medical attention.”

Is there anything else you think we can do to improve ___dale court?

Coding Agreement: .85

Number of perfect agreements: 140 (73%)

193 Responses

Top Three Comments:

No (125) “No”

Speed it up (56) “Don’t make it take so long.” “Maybe split the schedule.”

Positive Comments (22) “Everything was pretty smooth.” “Pretty satisfied.”

Don’t know (12) “No idea.” “I don’t know.”

Negative Comments (20) “Extremely difficult to call through to the service desk and get any information.” “Can’t do anything because the courts don’t care.”

Neutral Comments (17) “I think it is fine.” “Seems pretty compliant.”

More staff (7) “More Public Defenders to sit and talk with people.” “Have more than one prosecutor.”

Courtrooms (6) “Open up more courtrooms.” “More courtrooms, it’s cramped.”

Start on time (8) “Everyone had to be here at 1:30 but we waited so long” “Saying to be in at 8:30 and not be seen until noon.”

Doing good (3) He felt that he has always been treated pretty well. “Everything is pretty good.”

Waiting area improvements (17) “Put backrests on the chairs in the lobby.” “vending machines”

It was quick (5) “Took care of things quickly.” “Things moved pretty quickly.”

Speak to attorney (4) “More Public Defenders to sit and talk with people.” “Allow people to use the phone if they need to contact a lawyer.”

Interpreter issues (4) “Have interpreter on staff.” “Hearing impaired people should have an interpreter.”

Alphabetical order (6) “Start cases other than “A” I’m an “S” so I had to wait.” “Take respondents in order they came in rather than alphabetically.”

Public Defender issues (12) “Get better Public Defenders, ones that will stand up for you.” “Get better Public Defenders that don’t try and confuse you.”

Better signs/information (16) “It was difficult to figure out where I was supposed to be.” “No directions on what to do and how to proceed and we sat in the wrong area.”

Other (92) “Not have me come in until the day I have to be seen.” “Screening/investigating cases a bit better.”

Uncodeable (2) “Hang a picture of me in the hallway or court room.” “Intersection outside blocks view of vehicles (while walking to parking spots) a pedestrian crosswalk would be cool because of the urgency people feel to get in here.”

Appendix E: Criminal Courts Communities List

Brookdale (Division II)

- Brooklyn Center
- Brooklyn Park
- Champlin
- Corcoran
- Crystal
- Dayton
- Greenfield
- Hanover
- Hassan
- New Hope
- Robbinsdale
- Rockford
- Rogers

Ridgedale (Division III)

- Deephaven
- Excelsior
- Golden Valley
- Greenwood
- Hopkins
- Independence
- LMCD
- Long Lake
- Loretto
- Maple Grove
- Maple Plain
- Medina
- Minnetonka
- Minnetonka Beach
- Minnetrista
- Mound
- Orono
- Plymouth
- Shorewood
- Spring Park
- St. Bonifacius
- Tonka Bay
- Wayzata
- Woodland

Southdale (Division IV)

- Airport (MAC)
- Bloomington
- Eden Prairie
- Edina
- Metropolitan Airports Commission
- Richfield
- St. Louis Park

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